

# Material as Method: New Histories of the Built Environment

## Organizers

██████████ (Columbia University),

██████████ (Cornell University)

## Abstract

This symposium will bring into conversation scholars who approach the production of the built environment in South Asia through an interdisciplinary understanding of its materiality. Contemporary exhibitions and publications about postcolonial architecture in South Asia have drawn attention to the use of materials such as concrete and steel in postcolonial state-building. Indeed, whether as material things or wish-images, building materials mediated different political and economic approaches to development, postcolonial sovereignty, and the modernization of everyday life. By contrast, emerging scholarship centers environmental and social questions that scale differently than the temporal and spatial extents of the nation state and the relentless solutionism of corporate globalism. Contemporary research attends to how the visual aesthetics and meanings of materials are inextricably entangled in the unequal geographies of extraction, manufacturing, construction, maintenance, and wasting of resources. These entanglements enfold the complex histories and unequal geographies of colonialism and postcolonial world-making. How might an analysis of material worlds draw attention to enduring inequalities in the production of the built environment? How might it also show their contestation?

Symposium panels will address these histories and their political and social entanglements. Paper topics may include, but are not limited to, themes such as labor conditions, ecological impacts, extractive industries, and experimental practices. Papers may attend to the relentless drive to produce new and modern architectural materials; the toxic environments created by material production; the new spatial geographies and institutional dynamics emerging from the regulation and management of industries; the pressure to produce an aesthetics of natural and sustainable materials; the managerial language around pollution and safety standards, among other topics.

## Why it should be a symposium:

This symposium will provide a foundation for a new collaborative, interdisciplinary research project that sits at the intersection of South Asian History and Architectural

History. The aim of the symposium is to discuss innovative methodological frameworks for investigating the material history of South Asia's built environment and underscore methods to bridge architecture's history with the generative academic work attending to the climate emergency. The multi-panel format will allow for more interdisciplinary topics than a single or double panel format. Panel topics would include the materiality of colonial economies; the constitution of laboring subjectivities and populations around material extraction and production; the material histories of urban geographies; the eternal present of material futures. This format will also make it possible to bring students in conversation with senior scholars in the field, which will work towards cementing the research goal of building a material-environmental body of work within architectural history.

## Schedule

### **Materials as Method: New Histories of the Built Environment**

Full Day, 8:30–5:30

Organizers: [REDACTED], Visiting Critic, Cornell University  
[REDACTED], Assistant Professor, Columbia University

8:30–9:00                      Introductions and Thematic Overview

9:00–10:15                      Panel 1. Colonial Materialisms  
Chair & Discussant: TBD

Presenter: [REDACTED] (Christ University, Bangalore, Professor)  
Presenter: [REDACTED] (CEPT, Ahmedabad, Associate Professor)  
Presenter: [REDACTED] (UCLA, PhD candidate)  
Presenters: [REDACTED] (Aarhus School of Architecture, PhD Fellow and [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] (Steedman Fellow, Washington University)

10:15–10:30                      Break

10:30–12:15                      Panel 2. Material Ecologies  
Chair & Discussant: TBD

Presenter: [REDACTED] (Bowdoin College, Associate Professor)  
Presenter: [REDACTED] (Columbia University, Assistant Professor)  
Presenter: [REDACTED] (UW Madison, PhD candidate)

Presenter: [REDACTED] (UC Berkeley, PhD candidate)

12:15–1:45 pm                      Lunch

1:45–3:30                              Panel 3. Material Labors  
Chair & Discussant: TBD

Presenter: [REDACTED] (Visiting Critic, Cornell University)

Presenter: [REDACTED] (Associate Professor, University of Pittsburgh)

Presenter: [REDACTED] (UCLA, PhD candidate)

Presenter: [REDACTED] (University of Kansas, Associate Professor)

3:30–3:45                              Break

3:45–5:30                              Roundtable

Discussant: [REDACTED] (Rhode Island School of Design, Associate Professor)

Discussant: [REDACTED] (University of Minnesota, Associate Professor)