

Monuments of Everyday Practice

Living Memorials to Gandhi SAROSH ANKLESARIA

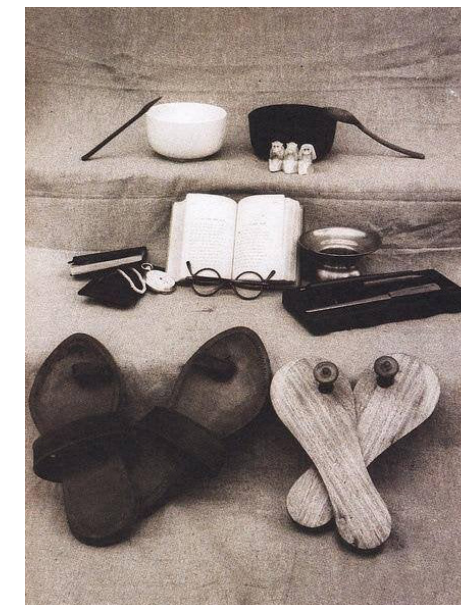
“He (Gandhi) has much to say about the issues that make our present moment so volatile: inequality, resentment, the rise of demagoguery, and the breakdown of democratic governance...”

- Pankaj Mishra, Gandhi For the Post-Truth Age.



Why Gandhi Matters

Gandhi remains one of the most prolific and important thinkers of our time. His life and work bear essential critiques for the model of social life that has come to define our age—variously described through capitalism, modernity, neoliberalism, anthropocentrism, egotism, and rationalism. His legacy lies not only in the context of the nonviolent struggle for Indian independence but in his inspiration to globally revered figures—Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, and Albert Einstein among others. More so it remains prescient in the continuance of civil disobedience as a mode of empowerment for climate and social justice struggles across the world today. The Just Transition movements of our times are rooted in an essentially Gandhian ethos that insists upon both social and ecological justice.



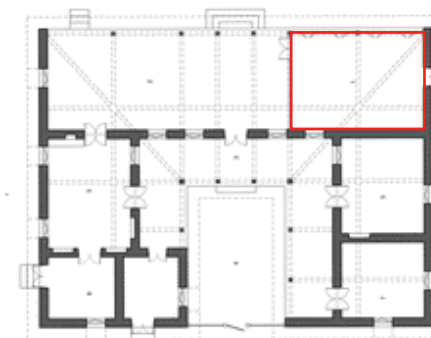
Above: Gandhi's personal belongings at the time of his death are themselves a critique of the consumption of our present times -- Two wooden bowls; A wooden formk and spoon; Two pairs of sandals; Statue of porcelain monkeys (see-hear and speak no evil); A Diary; A Prayer book; A watch; A spittoon; Letter Openers; and Glasses.

Worldmaking

The studio will ask how architecture might participate in “Worldmaking as praxis” through the making of living memorials at Gandhi Ashram. These will serve as an ecological critique of the present day material culture of extraction, consumption, and waste, as well as of a social critique of inequality and intolerance.

Context

The Gandhi Ashram at Sabarmati in Ahmedabad was the home of M.K. Gandhi during a pivotal twelve years of the Indian Independence Movement. A complex of residences and a productive campus, it occupies a vastly important place for imagining an alternative to the mainstream neoliberal politics of our contemporary times. However, the ashram precinct is currently mired in nationalist politics through a highly controversial Sabarmati Redevelopment Plan, to turn the site into a “World class memorial”. The plan proposes an inordinately expensive expansion of the Ashram campus with no public process regarding the development plans. It also proposes the relocation of about 250 Dalit families that were brought to the Ashram by Gandhi. The plan has been heavily criticized as a “second assassination of Gandhi”, “a theme park to Gandhi”, “a takeover of Gandhian Institutions by the government” and the ashram’s commercialization into an “international tourism destination”



Above: Plan of Hriday Kunj, Gandhi's residence in the Ashram. The box in red indicates his study.

Left: Gandhi's study in Hriday Kunj from where he waged Satyagraha against British Imperialism.

Instead of proposing an alternative masterplan students will work on a series of discrete sites across the Ashram complex to propose various programs that will serve as monuments of everyday life. These will privilege the idea of everyday practice and renewal as memory. Projects might engage various conditions of the ashram such as: Blurring the “boundary wall” and discrete edge of the Ashram; Producing programs that work actively in everyday conflict resolution; or various programs that engage with and contribute to the ecology of the ashram - its various cycles of food, consumption and waste. These will be in keeping with a Gandhian interest both in labor as well as bodily rituals (such as bathing and toilets).

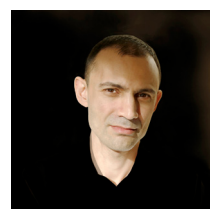
Program

The design studio will ask what a “living memorial” or a “living museum”, to Gandhi would look like; where architecture would participate in the renewal of practices of conflict resolution and the making of pluriversal publics, to borrow a term from Arturo Escobar. There is a long tradition of the Ashram serving as a place for refuge from conflict, and even a “safe haven” for activists during the riots of Ahmedabad. Also located in Ahmedabad, The Conflictorium for example is a good precedent for the kind of project we might be inspired by. Additionally, a second inquiry for the studio is inspired by the Gandhian interest in a “material practice”. We will interrogate this by asking the value of a “material practice” for our current milieu — the (post)anthropocene — considering for instance Circular logics of material flows, the ritualization of labor, repair, and maintenance, the critique of newness, the role of embodied material energy, and material proximities in practices of making in the context of the existing programs and life of the Ashram. This will be further examined through material investigations in rammed earth, adobe and loam.



Learning Outcomes

1. To critically examine architecture’s role in the making and re-enactment of public practice and public memory.
2. To understand the role of ideology in the shaping of architecture, its materiality and representations.
3. To understand architecture as a non-extractive practice engaging with materials like rammed earth and loam to produce circular, decarbonized material flows that problematize labor and worldmaking.
4. To gain familiarity with the scholarship on Gandhi, as well as contemporary conversations on Just Transitions and Pluriversal thinking. We will also examine various entrenched critiques of Gandhianism.



Right: Textiles drying on the Sabarmati River. Photo by Brian Brake. “India Series: Drying Textiles, Ahmadabad” Collection: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa



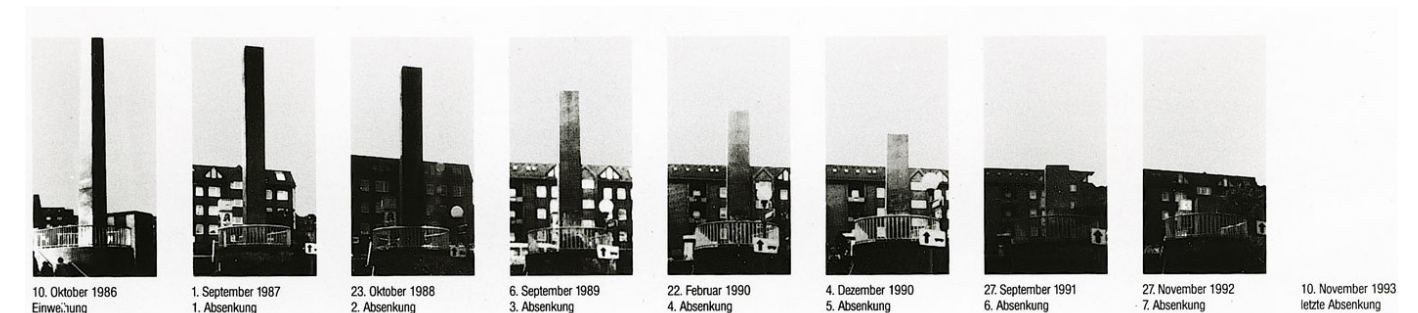
Top Right: Gandhi weaving the famous Charkha. For Gandhi the material practice of weaving was both symbolic of self empowerment as well as a practical effort to starve the British imports of foreign cloth. Khadi weaving thus became also a act of resistance practiced by millions.



Far Right: The METI Handmade School in Rudrapur, Bangladesh by Anna Herringer, is an example of a recent material practice that engages with Adobe Architecture.



Left: Sabarmati Ashram Gandhi Memorial, by Charles Correa Associates. 1963. Photo by Mi Chenxing.



Above: The Monument Against Fascism by Esther Schalev-Grez and Jochen Grez. 1986-1993. The artists produced a living participatory memorial, by way of a 12 meter high column that was designed to be gradually lowered into the ground, allowing visitors to etch into its entire surface as it sunk within reach and eventually disappeared.

Format

Considering the limitations imposed by the pandemic, the studio will not be travelling to Ahmedabad. Instead we will take advantage of the zoom format to bring in various critics and scholars from India who will give lectures on the subject and participate in studio crits. In order to facilitate this, it is important that students are available at select times in the evenings or mornings each week. The final schedule will be arrived upon with the consultation of students. A symposium and/or joint studio involving students from other schools in India is also likely.

The studio is committed to draw heavily from a majority of female, subaltern, and postcolonial practices, including projects, critical texts, and precedents from the Global South.