

# OBSOLESCENCE

Exploring Praxis, Material Cultures, and Labor in South Asia

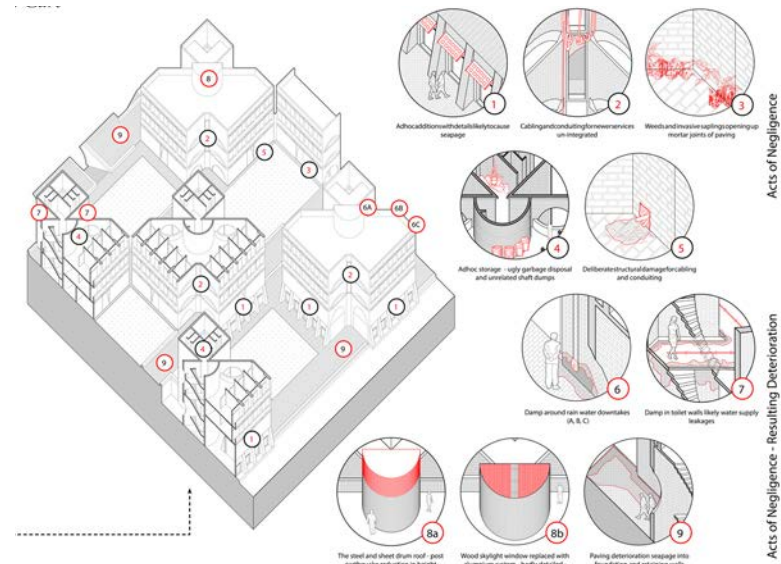
Sarosh Anklesaria

## QUESTIONS

Obsolescence is a world-wide phenomenon, woven into the very DNA of capitalist production. The vast amounts of resources consumed by buildings, including the extraction of material and labor, makes the systemic planned obsolescence and demolition of buildings particularly wasteful. Demolitions often represent not only the destruction of material edifices but also ideological ones, of histories being rewritten and memories erased. How can architecture offer tools of resistance against this planned obsolescence? What architectural tools can the designer be equipped with to make buildings that counter obsolescence, that consider questions of longevity and time? How can the relationship between form and function be upended to include the unprecedented rates of social and technological change that buildings cope with during an extended period of time?

## PROMPT

If the promise of modernism was to bring design to a vast multitude of people, it has been asserted across various disciplines, that European modernity was aided and abetted through extractivism in the colonies. Conversely, modernity—and modernism as its cultural articulation—was also embraced as a powerful tool in the process of decolonization by local architects working across the Global South, particularly in South Asia. This is manifest in the ways in which it embodied and expressed the collective social aspirations of the region's newly independent nations. Acts of institution building were intrinsic to architecture practices in the decades following Indian Independence, and reinforced the values a democratic socialism. Today, as neoliberalism and laissez-faire capitalism continue to erode the values of syncretic socialism, we see an overwhelming distrust in public institutions across the globe. This corresponds to a worldwide decline of the legacy of the modern movement, its structures and the concomitant ideologies of its time. The buildings of the modern movement in India are now 40-70 years old. This is the most vulnerable age for almost any building in almost any culture. They are too new to be considered historic and old enough to require extensive maintenance.



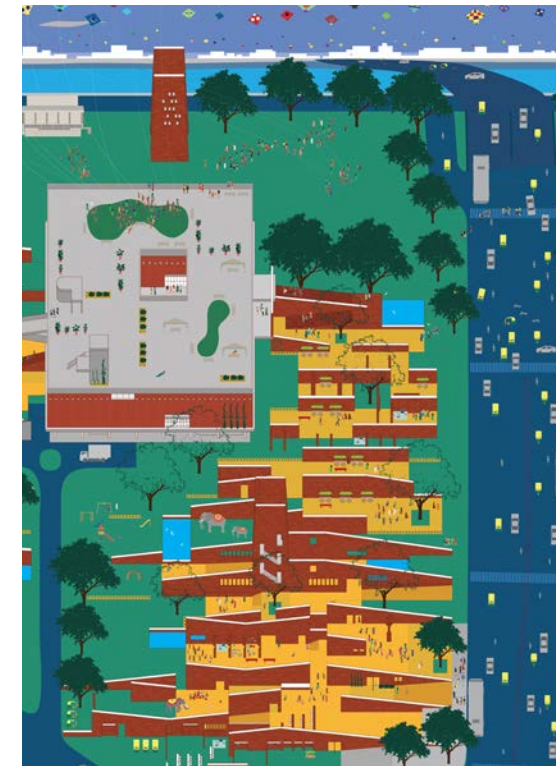
Shariq Shah, Part Detail, IIMA The call for Maintenance and Care, 2021



Demolition of the Hall of Nations by Raj Rewal, April 2017



Edward Burtynsky, Shipbreaking #11, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2000, from the series Shipbreaking



Chris Yi & Iris Ma, Arsenal of Operative Practices, Ahmedabad Expanded Practices Studio with Lily Chi, 2018

"Everything that bourgeois society builds is built to be torn down. All that is solid—from the clothes on our backs to the looms and mills that weave them, to the men and women who work the machines, to the houses and neighborhoods the workers live in, to the firms and corporations that exploit the workers, to the towns and cities and whole regions and even nations that embrace them all—all these are made to be broken tomorrow, smashed or shredded or pulverized or dissolved, so they can be recycled or replaced next week, and the whole process can go on again and again, hopefully forever, in ever more profitable forms."

- Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air* — *The Experience of Modernity*.



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## CONTEXT

The term conservation implies a certain restoration of the formal registers of the building, a freezing in time and history. Acts of care, maintenance, adaptation, and repair can, on the contrary, generate new visual and material cultures and in doing so renew collective memory. The temporal architectures of the subcontinent will also serve as an inspiration for rituals of building, that while transient, engage with various publics and practices of the Indian city.

## PROGRAM

The studio will consider aging modernisms of the Global South, particularly in the context of western India as a site for intervention and study. Projects will address questions of loose-fit program and the notion of everyday praxis and material cultures to consider additions, alternations and new construction. Concurrently the studio will relate to the ongoing CMU SoA Public Programs theme for the semester — Materiality and Extraction. We will also follow and partake in the ongoing collaborative project, "Conservation in a Shifting Landscape: The future of Modern Architecture in South Asia" at the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

## READINGS/ REFERENCES

- Daniel Abrahamson, *Obsolescence*, 2016.
- Shannon Mattern, *Maintenance and Care*, 2018.
- Charles Correa, *A Place in the Shade*, 2010.
- Rahul Mehrotra, Martino Stierli, Kathleen James-Chakraborty, *Conservation in a Shifting Landscape: The future of Modern Architecture in South Asia*, 2022.
- Martino Stierli, Anoma Pieris, and Sean Anderson, *The Project of Independence: Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia, 1947–1985*, 2022.
- Sarosh Anklesaria, Shubhra Raje, Riyaz Tayyibji, *Thoughts on Ecology, Empathy and Re-membering*, 2021.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of this studio you should be able;

1. to apply design thinking that actively engages with questions of time, extraction and obsolescence of buildings.
2. to understand the role of ideology in the shaping of architecture, its materiality and forms of representation.
3. to understand architecture as a non-extractive practice engaging, engaged in material cultures that consider labor as a form of social empowerment, and also consider, circular thinking and decarbonization.
4. to demonstrate familiarity with architectures and building practices of the Global South particularly the Indian subcontinent.