

Material Meditations

There stands a wall in a clearing. No name to the place or its maker, it stands unassuming and unfettered. The brick in the wall is laid bare, patina peeling, conceding to the forces of nature. Frankly, unremarkable at first glance. However, to the right observer, the modest brick reveals the layers of time it has accumulated. It narrates the story of the land it was made from and the story of the hands that moulded it. It recounts the history of an entire civilisation that was built upon it and the transformation of its people. There stands a brick wall in a clearing.

Built environments are sites of endurance and transformation. The fabrication of human settlements has always been impelled by the aspiration for a sense of permanence. This continues to determine the nature of the interaction between humankind and material culture: a preoccupied fascination for that which can embody longevity. The Brick is a consequence of this pursuit, and In its evolution, the pursuit finds continuity.

This is expounded by the parallels; the genesis of baked bricks draws on the conception of other technologies typifying the Characteristics of a city as opposed to a more primitive settlement. A brick module, through its specific qualities, records its origins in a particular time and place in history, a unique set of technologies and knowledge and the societal structures it has been witness to. And so, the nine-thousand-year-long journey shared by brick-making and place-making in India allows us as active participants, to imagine for a moment that our encounter with the material is always a confrontation with the past. It gives us room to wonder how individual and/or cultural memory feeds into the meaning of materials.

The enduring interaction of brick with the multitude of built environment narratives over time has allowed its meaning to be determined by information and associations from the past. At the same time, it mediates collective and individual memory. by transmitting meanings, information and attitudes about the past and present in important ways. At each moment in time, as designers and architects, we face the paradox of continuing these narratives while writing our own. Here, Brick itself becomes the medium of exploration as eight individual lines of inquiry are set in motion in an attempt to navigate

these perplexities. At this junction, we urge you, dear seekers, to look for continuities or discontinuities in these narratives and in doing so, allow these explorations to reveal themselves to you.

“We never look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between the thing and ourselves”.

— John Berger

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