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## **Marketable Heterotopias**

Heterotopias are, no doubt, marketable commodities. Michel Foucault himself makes a case for their demand. In our “epoch of simultaneity”, he says, we yearn for an “accumulation of time in an immobile place” (Foucault 1, 6). If nineteenth century architecture dominated history by recreating it at whim<sup>1</sup>, the current information age emphasizes accessibility and prefers to juxtapose historical artifact alongside the modern. Zeynep Kezer criticizes this, blaming the commoditization of the Sultanahmet prison-turned-Four Seasons hotel for degrading the square’s historical presence (Kezer 214). But one could argue otherwise, that historical significance is inseparable from—and in fact dependent upon—modern function and economic viability. The narrative of heterotopic spaces from decrepit city space to fixtures of urban identity necessarily involves an architectural dialogue of past and present. In this essay, I will explore how adaptive reuse buildings can, as marketable heterotopias, revitalize urban space.

The Roman Museum of the Crypta Balbi exhibits the role of archaeology in creating a marketable heterotopia. The museum’s site on the Via delle Botteghe Oscure was, until recently, an urban wasteland. Demolition projects in the 1930s—though intended to pave the way for commercialization—instead ushered in an era of abandonment. As with the Sultanahmet Square’s period of disrepair, this transitional moment welcomed experimentation of urban meaning. Archaeologists, now unhindered by surface buildings, stepped in to excavate the block’s urban stratigraphy. They

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<sup>1</sup> Note the popularity of classic and Gothic Revival styles, as well as more eclectic Eastern aesthetics in nineteenth century architecture.

discovered layers rich with history: an ancient pagan worship ground, a medieval monastery, and evidence of early modern commercial and residential life. Most notably, the Roman Theater and Crypt of Balbus sparked a widespread public interest in the area, eventually culminating in the construction of the museum in 2000 and subsequent nearby development.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the historical significance of the Museum of the Crypta Balbi hinges on its public reception. Though the adaptive reuse museum is more symbol than catalyst of collective urban memory, its continued marketability verifies its role in Rome's modern urban identity. That is, insofar as the public, not the esoteric scholar, is responsible for a city's overall identity, the economic vitality of the Museum of the Crypta Balbi (its visitorship) and the surrounding local development confirms its significance. Had the excavated city block not found modern fruition in a museum, its archaeological importance might never have been realized and certainly not been publicly accessible. However, since it was converted into a museum, a marketable heterotopia, it earns its place in Rome's complex, constantly evolving urban identity.

Providence presents similar case studies of marketable heterotopias. The successful development of industrial warehouses for luxury condominiums and multi-use spaces prove adaptive reuse architecture's ability to recast historical buildings for modern functions. As with the Museum of the Crypta Balbi, these local heterotopias create a fuller urban identity, incorporating rather than ignoring the past for present uses. The nineteenth century Brown and Sharpe plant, the Foundry, was recently remodeled as the Promenade, a luxury apartment building. Simultaneously an artifact of Providence's

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<sup>2</sup> Daniele Manacorda, *Museo Nazionale Romano: Crypta Balbi* (Rome: Ministero per I Beni e le Attività Culturali Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma, 2004).

industrial working class history and marker of modern wealth, of the city's decline and current renaissance, it is no doubt an "irreducible" heterotopia (Foucault 3). Nevertheless, by compressing the city's past and present into a single spatial experience it fosters a comprehensive identity. As with the Museum of the Crypta Balbi, the marketability of Providence's industrial heterotopia is paramount to its public significance. Though the abandonment of the Foundry initially rendered a decrepit urban landscape, its redevelopment as the Promenade has now secured its presence on the modern cityscape. Though Kezer might argue that the modern Promenade reduces the historical, industrialized meaning of the Foundry, it is perhaps only *because* of this newfangled meaning that the building is preserved at all. Thus, the adaptive reuse building—the marketable heterotopia—requires a viable modern purpose to gain urban significance, much less to spur total revitalization.

The abandoned Crook Point area hangs in the moment of transition that both the Roman museum and Foundry experienced before emerging as heterotopias. Without current historical significance, the bridge and railroad tracks await judgment of their modern purpose. Should they gain a marketable function, perhaps as part of a waterfront development, Crook Point could secure its position in Providence's urban identity. On the other hand, it runs the risk of being demolished for other purposes. Until Crook Point discovers its heterotopic marketability, it will remain in its purgatorial state of disrepair. Here, the heterotopia's dialogue of past and present—and the overriding contingent of economic viability—gains salience. Only the marketable heterotopia survives.