

Danyelle King
Urbanism in the Archeological Record
Professor Harmansah
Monday, November 26, 2007

Crook Point Bridge: Observations on its Function as a Heterotopic Space

The suspended quality of the Crook Point area maintains a congruency to the timeless character we, as people, ascribe to the land we inhabit. "People use place in ways contrary to the neoclassical assumptions of how commodities are purchased and consumed. We do not dispose of place after it has been bought and used. Places have a certain *preciousness* for their users that is not part of the conventional concept of commodity." (Logan, 17) Therefore, even though cities shun stasis and impede progression, human activity dictates the design of the city, and as such, urban space must always yield to the needs of the people. (Lecture, 10-??-07) Crook Point, and more specifically, the Scherzer Rolling Lift Bridge, proceed from that basic tenant; the space's characteristics are never innate, we dictate their use and that use may alter over time. Being a ruin, the bridge strikes against the surrounding area, providing a contrast in safety and aesthetic quality so that its purpose has (logically) changed from the original. This makes for interesting exchanges in the push and pull between the 'normal' space (Crook Point) and this 'abnormal' one (the Rolling Lift Bridge). As Tim Edensor acknowledges, what makes Crook Point an acceptable space is its conformity to an omnipresent set of social criteria, and conversely, the bridge is unacceptable due to its deviance. However, Edensor believes we need to question whether that criteria A) is justified and B) exists without our compliance.

"I am particularly concerned with the challenging prevailing forms of spatial organization, specifically via the production of order through distributing objects, functions, and people through the enforcement and habitual repetition of performative habits in particular places, and through the aesthetic encoding which produces normative visual conventions across space. As dis-ordered and messy sites, ruins provide a contrast to the increasingly smooth, highly regulated spaces of the city. Occurring in the back roads and interstices of the urban fabric, ruins deride ideals which champion the virtues of seamlessness." (Edensor, 53)

Tim Webmoor's account of collaborative architecture asserts that in order for a city to have a regularized plan, everyone in the city must subscribe to the same doctrine. However, when sites of contestation emerge or people dissent in their views (throws a wrench) in the (plan). (Lecture, 10-??-07) Therefore, because sites don't have an expiration date and people are always interacting with the space, we must question what happens when the usage changes- does it become everyone's or no one's

property? How, then, may we determine the Crook Point neighborhood as a social interaction with the people of East Providence?

The Saturday afternoon that I visit the bridge, these questions are on my mind. The weather forecast has lied. It is not bright, as promised, but even the weather it self is deceptive: the overcast sky doesn't yield the expected chill. Nevertheless, there are few people. Without sports or barbeques, the fields lie dormant against their intended purposes, the garden sits unattended, and the parking lot is naked without cars. I imagine the unreliable weather is responsible for this, because the area itself flows nicely from the main street, Gano. Crook Point emerges behind a small grocery, Gano Mart, and unfolds as a series of parking lots connected by one expanse of pavement, which becomes a dead-end. Flanking the parking areas are small spheres of activity.

Crook Point Facing Schertzer Rolling Lift Bridge From Entrance



On the walk over, I've kept a keen eye toward Providence's mastery at the seamless integration of spaces, seemingly unrelated. Communal and residential areas interact as small sectors of gathering emerge along trails of homes. Wayland and Richmond Squares, Thayer and Wickenden Streets, among

others, serve as spaces away from downtown Providence that foster social and cultural exchange on a scale congruent with their surroundings. Offering tastes of local curiosities, they become venues for distinct areas of artistry and action. Everything is available on-foot, and subsequently, Providence begins to feel as if it is a very large small-town.

Crook Point maintains many of the same qualities as these organically emerging districts of action. The broader area depicted in the sketch is unassuming in proportion, it does not upset the surrounding spatial accord. The area seems to be planned, with consideration to parking, accessibility, waste management, its general usefulness to the community, and its integration with the neighborhood. Its use seems to mainly lie in the green space it provides. Interestingly, Crook Point is opposite another park, however that park lacks marked spaces for physical activity, and therefore seems to be used less.

Entering, the paved trail/ road brings us to a dead-end, intended to stop pedestrian traffic from entering the space beyond FIELD C. This implicit command is reinforced by the discontinuance of the pavement, building D, field C, a small hill, a broken fence, two big trees, and overgrown brush. Continuing toward the bridge, a large pile of trash and more overgrown brush attempt to stop access to the bridge. This brings us to our first understanding of the bridge as a heterotopias: the halt of its usage. Physical restrictions imply the desire (of a governing body?) for the discontinuance of the space's use, while a worn footpath signals former usage. Once a continuance of space, serving as a connection from one place to another, the Bridge is now a dead-end, juxtaposing its built purpose against its current exemplifies how the space maintains two uses that are incompatible, embodying the third of Foucault's principles. The river itself has replaced the bridge as a connection.

Facing The Bridge From Prohibited Area, Standing On Hill



Furthermore, the bridge's decay, itself, displays its implicit non-use. Causing us to question how the relationship to the bridge is mediated by a screening system. In a very short area two distinct spaces may be described: the used, which covers the area before the fence, and the prohibited, which remains so

because not only is there no prescribed purpose for being there, but it also has been made clear through physical attributes we understand we are not supposed to be there. In the hour I've been here, seven people have kayaked on the river and many more have shopped at the Gano-mart or played on the field, whereas only three people visited the bridge. The usual social structure is handicapped on the heterotopic Crook Point bridge, because people can no longer say "I am here, this is my function here, and this is how I fit into the social hierarchy," as they would at a school, parliamentary building, or any other place of known use. In this way, the third principle of heterotopia is extended beyond what has been discussed, the juxtaposition of multiple possible uses, without a structure through which to carry out each use, creates a situation in which no use is inherent. Instead of people using the bridge solely for transportation, they can use it for anything (graffiti, drunken games, photography, exploration) and therefore people shy away. Bringing us back to Edensor's argument, an attraction to the space does, however, emerge. People would like to experience the forbidden.

"Despite the frantic impulse to smooth and encode, the longing for less regulated spaces continues to shape urban space. Popular desires for the contingent fragmentary and ever changing aspects of the carnival...produce spaces to promise a cornucopia but offer a 'controlled diversity' rather than a realm of 'unconstrained social differences'... Moreover, the modern counter-tendency to seek the contingent and unregulated is aptly served by continual change. " (Edensor, 59, 61)

More in question, is how this site functions within Foucault's sixth principle. How does the bridge retain a meaningful relationship to its surroundings? Providing a backdrop for the Fox Point neighborhood, the fifth principle of heterotopias emerges to answer the question posed. "A system of opening and closing that both isolates and makes the area penetrable," is developed, not only with the physical difficulty in reaching the bridge, but also the confusion surrounding what to do once there. This system is as mentally reinforced as it is physically, because although we may get to the field, our minds stop us from doing so. It reinforces the way in place, though fixed and stable in location, is constantly moving in what its relationship is to us; once the bridge served as a way for people to move from one point to another, now it is a dead-end. Subsequently, the governing body feels the space has been wasted, and cites new uses for the so called "Crook-Point Waterfront Sub-District," which reorganizes resources, ranging from economically driven to leisure based activity.

"A fundamental goal of the Plan is to ensure that the currently underutilized properties of the waterfront once again become vital economic resources for the State and City and that these revitalized properties remain sustainable over time."

“Through land use regulations, promote a *mix* of commercial, office, housing, institutional, civic, and recreational uses that should remain self-sustaining over time... Encourage development that will create a “destination” for East Providence residents and that will draw visitors, businesses and investors from beyond East Providence. The waterfront must provide jobs, residences, products and services that command a regional interest so as to ensure a stable market demand.”

Facing Crook Point From Gano Street, Dense Urban Residential & Light Commercial Area Surround



In speaking of heterotopia, we have questioned the social impact on land use and the relationship that maintains with our perception of space. To put that relationship in perspective we have viewed the situation through multiple lenses: our own cultural and physical interactions with the space, governmental interest in regulating the space, and finally, economic opportunities for the space. An interest in maintaining the bridge's contrast to the rest of the area developed as we saw the ways in which that contrast was appreciated by the community. This was not only defended by Edensor, but also Foucault's description of heterotopic space.

Works Cited

Logan, John, et. al. 1988. Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place. Berkeley, University of California Press

Edensor, Tim. 2005. Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, and Materiality. Oxford; New York, Berg

Foucault, Michel. 1967. 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias'. *Architecture/Movement/Continuite* (October 1984)

East Providence Waterfront Special Development District Plan

<http://www.eastprovidenceri.net/documents/EPWaterfront_Special_Development_District.pdf.>

Pictures

Archibald, Gordon, et. al. 'Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management: Evaluation of Alternative sites for Fishing Management, Site # 2 Gano Street Recreation Area.' (February 2006)