

**A Case for Openness:  
ethical and aesthetic intentions in the design of MASS MoCA**

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America, you have it better  
Than our old continent;  
You have no ruined castles  
And no primordial stones.  
Your soul, your inner life  
Remain untroubled by  
Useless memory  
And wasted strife.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe<sup>1</sup>

Goethe's mythical impression of a forever-new America without the burden of a past is a pervasive part of the American psyche. And yet, although in contemporary American culture the desire for "the new" is evident in everything from the planned obsolescence of consumer goods to suburban sprawl, there is also a contradictory desire for continuity, stability, and shared memory. The growing phenomenon of re-conceptualizing nineteenth and twentieth century, private industrial sites into cultural spaces for public use is an opportunity for these seemingly oppositional desires—the old and new—to co-exist. Much has been written about the privatization of public space, but little scholarly work has studied the opposite condition. The lack of writing on the subject expresses a *need* if not an urgency for this analysis. In answer to the question: How is it possible to change a place without denying its past life and inhibiting its future destiny?, this essay argues for a practice of architectural reuse that is gratifying both ethically and aesthetically—one that embraces openness to the past and future on multiple levels. Accepting that all conscious acts, including the making of architecture are based on intentions, this essay also considers the broader question: How can one create an architecture of ethical intention while leaving room for openness to reception and interpretation, time, use, art, economy and memory.

Numerous vacant American manufacturing facilities have been formally and functionally transformed into cultural sites, ranging from the Lowell National Historic Park and the Old Slater Mill, to Museum complexes such as the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA).<sup>2</sup> While this tendency is evident in

European projects such as the Tate Modern, the Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen, and Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord,<sup>3</sup> this essay focuses on the American condition and specific case of MASS MoCA. The formerly derelict, thirteen-acre Arnold Print Works in North Adams, Massachusetts, listed on the National Historic Register, has been re-imagined and physically reconfigured into MASS MoCA—a place of interrelated art production, exhibition, and performance. My direct involvement as MASS MoCA project manager and design architect with Bruner/Cott & Associates<sup>4</sup> affords an insider's view of the design intentions and physical strategies employed in the transformation, while the passage of time provides a critical distance. During the professional design process, underlying ethical positions are rarely directly examined. Conflicts between client and architect, or within the design team itself usually rest on unspoken philosophical differences embodied in stylistic or functional considerations. The aesthetics of MASS MoCA were generated from an interrelated set of ethical intentions for the transformation of the discarded materials and vacant architecture of the derelict industrial site. The material, spatial, functional, cultural, social, and economic aspects were addressed from a pragmatist point of departure based on the specifics of the particular place. In this way, the ethical intentions were not based on a priori or universalized positions or morals, but embedded in an understanding of the situation and ethos of North Adams. Ultimately this essay is a case study into the complex relationship between ethical intentions and aesthetic outcomes striving for a multivalent openness able to sustain the specifics of place embodied within a historically significant industrial site, while shifting the buildings and landscape to contemporary cultural uses and unimagined future activities.

### **Economic and Social Catalyst**

Sited in 1860 at the confluence of two branches of the Hoosic River, the extensive collection of red brick and heavy timber mill buildings was erected over a forty-year period to house specific activities of the mechanized fabric printing process. The Arnold Print Works became the single largest employer in North Adams, and its site constitutes nearly one-third of the downtown. It was sold in 1942 to the Sprague Electric Company, which occupied the mill buildings with thousands of workers producing electronic components. The strong and open architecture did not require significant modification to support the new industrial processes within. Sprague was the region's largest employer during the 1970s, when over 4,000 people worked for the company in a town of just 18,000. When Sprague vacated the site in 1985, the

town's economic base disappeared and unemployment in North Adams reached fourteen percent at the time of MASS MoCA's conception in 1986.<sup>5</sup> Funded by a combination of public and private sources from the State of Massachusetts and the non-profit MASS MoCA Foundation, the project was conceived as an economic catalyst to revitalize North Adams, a means to preserve an historically significant and beautiful nineteenth-century mill complex, and a new laboratory for contemporary visual and performing art. Since the project opened in 1999 it has had a positive economic impact locally and has become a significant social and cultural center within the largely working-class town.<sup>6</sup> Rather than become a bastion of high art removed from the ethos of North Adams, MASS MoCA offers computer classes, free Internet access, and job training, in addition to films, dances, and other cultural events. Local involvement is reflected in MASS MoCA's membership—50 percent of which is comprised of local residents. The diverse range of community activities harkens back to Sprague's heyday, when the mill "had its own radio station, orchestra, vocational school, research library, day-care center, clinic, cooperative grocery store, sports teams, and even a gun club with a shooting range on the premises."<sup>7</sup> The new "museum" still serves as a social condenser for the community—both physically and conceptually. The link between town and architectural artifacts, and hence the art contained within, is not eradicated but transformed. From initial idea to MASS MoCA's opening in 1999, the thirteen-year transformational process was long and complicated.

### **The Importance of Process**

Like many projects that re-inhabit vacant industrial architecture with a new use, the existing conditions inspired a design process open to all types of contingency. Many design processes begin with a singular and willful "big idea" that controls project development, leaving little room for revelations along the way. In the case of MASS MoCA, discoveries on site during demolition and construction significantly impacted the aesthetic outcome. The process concerned the experience of making and ultimately inhabiting the place, rather than focus on creating an architectural object. The "big idea" was not formal or programmatic, but primarily about remaining open to the found place—in order to create an environment that promotes multivalent openness. Such a process-oriented approach is consistent with the idea that objects themselves are not ethical, but are generated by ethical intentions and actions on the part of the maker and inhabitant. This position is related to Richard Shusterman's

conception of Pragmatist Aesthetics, when he writes, “The idea that art and aesthetic judgment should be seen as totally distinct from ethical considerations and sociopolitical factors is no longer very useful or credible.”<sup>8</sup> This statement is more immediately evident for architecture than the other arts, since it must support purposeful action by human inhabitants, as well as disinterested contemplation. The Kantian opposition between ethics and aesthetics, or the practical and the purposeless, is rarely beneficial to architecture.

### **Open to Reception and Interpretation**

At MASS MoCA the primary conceptual and physical design challenge was how to convert the architectural remains of the Arnold Print Works to support a contemporary cultural use, while simultaneously preserving their historic integrity and encouraging future possibilities. Embedded within this problem is the necessity for openness—a condition that allows a place or an artifact to be available for reception and interpretation. Umberto Eco, along with Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and others, have considered ways that art might activate the viewer. In *The Open Work*, Eco claimed that modern art has exploited the possibility for each work to produce an infinite number of readings, although he also acknowledged that art has always been potentially open.<sup>9</sup> The open reception he advocates is different from the literal interaction between artist and viewer espoused as Relational Aesthetics by Nicolas Bourriaud,<sup>10</sup> or the infinite openness due to the impossibility of artistic intentionality theorized by Post-structuralists. It is possible to relate the visual, literary and performance art considered by Eco, and a built work of architecture. Because architecture supports human inhabitation through spatial and formal means, the reception or engagement of the inhabitant is necessarily direct. The specific design, however, can heighten that engagement and strive toward a contingent and improvisatory architectural experience. This may be achieved by intentionally remaining open to time, use and memory.

We are all familiar with buildings or places that have become closed to interpretation, either due to overzealous physical restoration or the return to a frozen “themed” moment in time. For example, Colonial Williamsburg transports us back to an idealized eighteenth century. Williamsburg possesses two forms of closedness: its purified architecture and staged period inhabitants bear no trace of the intervening time since the town’s formative years between 1699 and 1780, and its restoration

begun in 1926. Isolated from the passage of time, Williamsburg's presence in the world is denied. Arguing against this type of building fabric-centered approach, preservationist Randall Mason insists, "Historic preservation theories and tools need to reflect the notion that culture is an ongoing process, at once evolutionary and inventive—not a static set of practices and things."<sup>11</sup> The preservation strategy employed at MASS MoCA embraced the idea that as culture changes, so too does architecture and the significance invested in those artifacts. Although the buildings were originally constructed and functioned as the Arnold Print Works, current North Adams residents have known the complex as Sprague Electric since 1942. Except for the oldest residents, their desire to physically preserve the place is guided by memories of life associated with the Sprague factory. Arbitrarily restoring the architecture to the early twentieth century heyday of the Arnold Print Works would not address the layers of significance and collective memory attached to the place in its various incarnations, including recent events and experiences generated at MASS MoCA.

### **Open to Time**

The mill sat vacant and neglected for fourteen years. Vulnerable to natural forces of water, wind and sun, and human acts of vandalism and theft, the thirteen-acre site was slowly transformed into a massive, powerful ruin. In the essay "Causality: Ruin Time and Ruins," Florence Hetzler defines a ruin as "the disjunctive product of the intrusion of nature upon an edifice without loss of the unity produced by the human builders. Ruin time, proposed as the principal cause of ruin, serves also to unify the ruin. In a ruin the edifice, the human-made part, and nature are one and inseparable; an edifice separated from its natural setting is no longer part of a ruin since it has lost its time, space and place. A ruin has a signification different from something merely human-made. It is like no other work of art and its time is unlike any other time."<sup>12</sup> Sprague Electric displayed these characteristics prior to the transformational process, and portions still do. The Sprague buildings, however, were ruined not just by nature and the passage of time, but by economic circumstances and social consequences. These premature ruins attest to the passing of an industrial age and the town's previous way of life.<sup>13</sup> The architects and museum director Joseph Thompson were intrigued by the simultaneous sense of absence and presence—of programmatic transience and physical persistence on the site. The design dilemma was the

conflicting desire for both a new engaged cultural program and a continuation of the processes of decay and temporal change.

The 4,800 tons of construction debris removed from the site provides a sense of the extensive transformational process that included the removal of internal walls and floors and the complete demolition of one severely damaged building. Nineteen of the twenty-six structures remain in varying states of ruin, thereby providing a direct connection with the previous condition of the place and awaiting inhabitation as MASS MoCA expands. Undoubtedly, some of these buildings will be ruined beyond repair, slowly overwhelmed by natural forces.<sup>14</sup> MASS MOCA's architects attempted to make visible a history in the process of disappearing, and along with it the loss of a way of life. Layers of peeling paint—demarking the location of previous administrative offices in institutional green or bathrooms in pink and blue—record past inhabitation. As at Pompeii, time arrested suggests a strange immortality.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the fixed state of Pompeii, however, new layers continue to accumulate as contemporary needs evolve. Each visitor will read and interpret these layers differently, based on their knowledge of the place and their individual experiences past and present. The specific interpretation is not crucial to the success of the architecture; rather, the architecture provokes an open reception and interpretation, a questioning of what might have been and what might be.

John Ruskin considered historical authenticity and interpretive openness in "The Lamp of Memory," when he described architectural *restoration* as "the most total destruction which a building can suffer."<sup>16</sup> Ruskin elaborated on the importance of age for architecture. "For, indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity."<sup>17</sup> The productive changes induced by physical weathering are lost when the "golden stain of time" is washed away. Marks of time are often understood in both restorations and new architecture as a debasement of the initial state of architectural perfection.<sup>18</sup> The past is erased and the future is precluded to the detriment of both. The architects of MASS MoCA retained the signs of physical weathering and traces left behind by previous inhabitants both inside and outside the buildings. Given the significance of the place and its history to the North Adams community, a complete erasure, or

whitewash, of the architectural surfaces was not an appropriate ethical or aesthetic decision at MASS MoCA. Instead, a range of galleries were designed that either retained found surfaces or added plaster and white paint to create a new temporal layer suited to particular art display. These decisions were made in relation to volumetric and natural light intentions, as well as conditions revealed as demolition progressed. For example, new spaces created by the removal of floors and interior walls were examined to determine what surfaces were beautiful and might be retained. Aesthetic decisions for each gallery were contingent on what the architecture offered, rather than a preconceived ideal. In that way the architects worked with an ethical attitude that was open and opportunistic to real world conditions. This openness to material change was an attempt to achieve two things: to allow the past history of the building to be visible in the new museum, and to position the present changes as just another phase in the ever-changing transformations of a building. Architectural imperfection suggests an ongoing process of enrichment and accretion. The natural and cultural forces at MASS MoCA will continue to impact the buildings, as each installation leaves some new trace. If enough time passes, however, excessive weathering becomes ruin—a condition that much of the Arnold Print Works reached prior to MASS MoCA's creation.

### **Open to Use**

When first encountered by the architects, the abandoned site was like many places of past industrial activity that possess a powerful and poetic aura. Writing about such environments, Alberto Ferlenga notes, "the progressive or traumatic depletion of a building is accompanied by a dual process of liberation: from the temporal conventions that linked it to a given epoch, and from the functional conventions that linked it to a given use. As it is exhausted the building puts its forms, parts, meanings back in circulation, laying the groundwork for a possible rebirth, as long as conservationists are not allowed, with their taxidermic practices, to stifle the life of forms and the force of spaces."<sup>19</sup> The architects had the desire to leave the sublime ruin alone for the pleasure of occasional explorers, but the reality of rotted floors, falling bricks, broken windows, and ruptured plumbing meant that the buildings were legally uninhabitable and physically unsuitable for the making and exhibiting of art. This conundrum prompted a strategy to emphasize the layered and ambiguous spatial quality found on the site, thereby promoting the physical exploration and psychological release that the architects found so compelling. By occupying just seven buildings and leaving the

remaining nineteen for future inhabitation, the site is not consumed by use but left open for discovery. Visitors may freely roam about the labyrinthine site and encounter buildings in various states of decay and transformation. Alberto Pérez-Gómez eloquently articulates the existential connections possible in such *spaces in-between*. "Openness is key, but this is the nature of the works of imagination, open enough to invite participation, but engaging a critical view on the hegemony of technology and its systems of domination. There are alternatives to the voyeuristic conceptions of experience that are best exemplified in a place like Walt Disney World."<sup>20</sup> Great effort was made to avoid "themeing" MASS MoCA as a quasi-industrial *experience*. Some authentic industrial artifacts were retained, others were removed as necessitated by museum uses, and new interventions were identified through their design. The process of making distinctions between old and new worked at many levels. For example, the black box theater volume was created by placing a new steel structure inside, yet visibly free of, the existing masonry walls. The exposed structure's diagonal bracing intentionally crosses and is in formal contrast to the double hung windows and their single story logic. Heavy floor to ceiling curtains create another spatial layer and modulate natural light. A tension is created between the original building scale, composition, and material, and the new long span steel structure. Although each visitor may not understand the complexity of these aesthetic decisions, the disjuncture between old and new preclude a closed reading and open possibilities for interpretation, and even use. The moveable and retractable, tiered seating provides flexibility for a range of performances and spatial orientations. Most exterior and interior spaces were designed to be open to diverse uses in this way, with a balance between specificity and changeability. For instance, Courtyard B is loosely configured for film projection, performances, parties, outdoor dining and random exploration. The steel frame of a demolished boiler house was retained to support art installations, theatrical lighting and other activities that might utilize its physical qualities.

Here it is important to distinguish between function and "program" in the architectural sense—the human actions that a place can physically support, and cultural "programming"—what specific exhibitions and events are staged at that place. When a building is conceived too tightly around a specific function, the closed physical form often cannot house unintended events. Buildings may be designed, however, to offer opportunities for diverse actions without dissolving into formless flows and contrived

mechanical or digital changeability. In the case of art museums, both architectural openness to use and diverse cultural programming is sometimes seen as distancing the architecture and institution too far from the “temple of art” model. In his essay, “The Museum as Fun House,” Roger Kimball critiques many art museums since the 1960s, including MASS MoCA, as “all-purpose cultural emporia” where quantity outweighs quality, and notoriety, political programs or coffee bars replace aesthetic excellence.<sup>21</sup> Conversely, museum director Joseph Thompson writes “If conventional museums are boxes, MASS MoCA is an open platform—a welcoming place that encourages dynamic interchange between making and presenting, between the visual and performing arts, and between our extraordinary historic factory campus and the patrons, workers and tenants who again inhabit it.”<sup>22</sup> It would be enlightening to debate whether any art museum *should* be a “cultural factory” or “open platform” based on the Marxist view of art as cultural production, but a more relevant question for this inquiry is: how can the specific architecture support and interact with the art created, performed and displayed within?

### **Open to Art and Architecture Interactions**

An intertwined openness to temporal and programmatic change generated galleries and courtyard spaces whose design encouraged distinct and diverse interactions between the art and architecture. Since the rich history and provocative existing conditions necessitated a strong ethical and aesthetic voice for the place, uniform “white wall” galleries were rejected. When the site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1985, the nomination report noted its “integrity, location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with North Adam’s late nineteenth century industrial heyday.” The cited “feeling and association” would have been lost if the buildings had been subjected to a radical cleansing process or homogenous plaster surfacing. Since the architecture is not neutral, but a powerfully evocative presence, artists and curators must envision ways in which the art may meaningfully interact with its context. One compelling example of interactivity was the installation of a Robert Morris sculpture in Building 5, a large gallery designed with operable windows and industrial exhaust fans for ventilation. Positioning the sculpture in relation to the exhaust fans created a new visual and spatial condition, while the strange similarities between the forms, regular disposition and steel material of the fans and sculpture encouraged an interpretive dialogue. Beyond temporary installation encounters, the process of making visual and performing art on site will

incrementally change the architecture and surrounding landscape. This type of serendipitous interaction has already occurred in exterior spaces such as Courtyard A, where the artist Natalie Jeremijenko incorporated the foundation of demolished Building 1 into her sculpture, *Tree Logic*. Although the architects did not know how the building foundation would eventually be used, it was retained for future reuse such as this.

### **Open to Alchemy**

Another type of openness grew from an environmental conviction and economic necessity to retain and creatively reuse material, thereby minimizing waste, reducing human labor, and limiting the need for new construction material. We discovered the ethical and aesthetic beauty of doing very little to create so much—an alchemy of sorts that takes unremarkable found conditions and magically transforms them. In this way, an aesthetic and ecological agenda was simultaneously pursued, and what resulted was an overlap of the two, each maintaining distinct intentions and taking precedence at times, but ultimately creating new possibilities. Examples of this alchemy can be found in the seemingly haphazard assembly of buildings, bridges, and resulting outdoor courtyards. Both the Arnold Print Works and Sprague Electric Company added new buildings to the intricate assemblage as their production requirements changed and, in so doing, inadvertently recorded the passage of time in architectural form. At MASS MoCA these courtyards are retained and used in quite different ways than originally intended. A former loading area becomes an outdoor cinema through the addition of an immense projection screen. Sometimes art and architecture work together to give new meaning to a space with no material change, such as the narrow light and air shaft that is now filled with the voices of past workers recalling their experiences in that place long ago. The sound artist Ron Kuivila's 1999 installation, *Visitations*, compiles oral interviews, readings, radio broadcasts, Sprague advertising soundtracks, industrial sounds, and computer generated noises to comment on the complex relationship of past, present and future in our daily lives. The ephemeral addition of recorded sound is radically transformative.

In other cases, the architecture itself has undergone significant physical changes in support of new use. These changes are sometimes unseen by visitors, though the architects went to great lengths to convey the precise action taken. For instance, the original multi-story mill buildings were stacked, single-story spaces with a tight

column grid to support the short spans of heavy timber construction. The low and column-filled spaces did not provide the open floor areas and double and triple-story volumes desired for museum galleries. To create these spaces large floor areas were subtracted within the existing mill buildings, thereby uncovering and intentionally revealing layers of building construction. Rather than replacing the heavy timber frame in multi-story galleries, kingpost trusses were created by using steel cables and plates to structurally transform the existing timber beams and truncated columns. At a detail level, the column's history is accentuated by the exposed cut that reveals the untreated wood within, in contrast to the industrial-era paint retained on its surface. In this way, layers of constructed time—echoes of industrial production and ongoing cultural production—harmonize in the buildings.

Judging by their comments, many visitors to MASS MoCA understand the architects' intentions. One visitor wrote, "It is an old habit to think of a museum as the silent, blank walls that allow painting and sculpture to be heard in their full voice, undisturbed by anything but the sounds of visitors walking by. MASS MoCA turns that old habit inside out. You cannot walk through it without thinking of the countless gestures, some meant, some unmeant, that turned the blank brick of those factory buildings into the cumulative life's work of the many thousands of North Adams residents who toiled on this site for two centuries. This is a museum designed to honor the labor of artists, but one that inevitably honors the labor of the townspeople in whose midst it has been set."<sup>23</sup>

### **Open to Memory**

Architecture, more than most human artifacts, records experience and evokes memories in palpable ways. Architectural historian Sandy Isenstadt has termed this phenomenon "symbolic persistence," in that "works of architecture possess the power to remain meaningful long after their creators are dead...I do not mean that any one particular meaning survives across time, but that a work of architecture retains its ability to prompt interpretation for generations beyond its creation."<sup>24</sup> In discussing the ability of architecture either to promote interpretation or to explain, he claims "symbolic persistence resides in this interpretive imperative, in the ability of a building or structure to move us to see and hear ourselves and our place in the world."<sup>25</sup> The physical presence of the Arnold Print Works complex plays this role for both visitors and residents of North Adams, compelling them to pause, reflect, and remember a

past to which they may or may not have a direct connection. The demolition of many historically significant mills has been justified by the explanation that previous employees did not want to be reminded of their past labors, however, interviews with former workers in the largely destroyed Amoskeag Mill found the opposite. "Industrial laborers are no more likely to see their own backgrounds as having been degraded than are any other societal groups. Identification of the mills with a degrading existence just does not fit their perception of their own past, irrespective of any particular hardship."<sup>26</sup>

This position is supported by interviews with a number of past Sprague Electric employees when questioned about MASS MoCA. They discussed the exact places within the complex where they and their family members worked, fondly reminisced about the company dinners and parties, and complained about the long hours and low pay.<sup>27</sup> They chiefly remembered the experiences that they had shared with so many others. In *American Ruins*, sociologist and photographer Camilo José Vergara found related but often more pessimistic sentiments in his travels to ruined industrial areas around the United States. He frequently heard former employees talk about "how nothing is made here now" and the profound sense of loss and meaning that has resulted. Vergara observes, "A powerful longing for the city of smokestacks and paychecks lingers among those old enough to remember. People recite like an incantation the names of nearby abandoned factories and the products they used to make."<sup>28</sup> Perhaps because most of Vergara's fieldwork was done in the severely distressed cities of Detroit and Newark, loss and hopelessness for the future was commonly expressed. Although not possible, it would be telling to compare current interviews with what past employees had to say about the Sprague Electric site after the 1985 closing and before the creation of MASS MoCA. Would they have expressed the same despair for the future and nostalgia for the past? In either case, such sentiments do not fully explain the current proliferation of cultural sites that appropriate and commemorate places of industrial production. Discussing the inescapable presence of the past in our lives, historian David Lowenthal writes, "The past remains integral to us all, individually and collectively. We must concede the ancients their place... but their past is not simply back there, in a separate and foreign country, it is assimilated in ourselves and resurrected in an ever-changing present."<sup>29</sup>

## **Industrial Site and Cultural Space**

There are at least three major explanations for why the abandoned Sprague Electric site was transformed into MASS MoCA. The most practical reason and initial inspiration for the project is extensive and economical space. After visiting a German factory turned museum near Cologne, MASS MoCA instigator Thomas Krens was struck by the spatial benefits of industrial architecture for contemporary art display. Since the inherited museum form could no longer contain the immensity of minimalist art, gigantic industrial spaces offered optimum architectural conditions.<sup>30</sup> The Sprague Electric complex was ideal, with over 720,000 square feet of interior space and a single building as long as a football field. Since many industrial sites are contaminated and negatively perceived both socially and physically, companies and communities are willing to sell such sites cheaply—an important incentive for non-profit cultural institutions.<sup>31</sup> In addition, while private landscapes of labor are undesirable when abandoned, public sites of culture hold the potential to generate jobs and revenue, to upgrade a community's image and self-respect, to visually enhance the environment, and to promote social interaction in a new type of public cultural park. In speaking of MASS MoCA, the artist Robert Rauschenberg said, "What's so great about it is it was a totally useless space, except maybe for history. And now it's filled with activity. Incredible activity."<sup>32</sup> And yet, despite these practical benefits, a more significant explanation may be found in the longing for a lost industrial life in an information age.

In a time of synthetic, themed places that substitute spectacle for the real, MASS MoCA serves not only as a museum but also as a cultural metaphor. Beneath its practical use lies a story—made visible—of how a place has changed from the production of textiles to electronic components to art. The persistence of collective memory and architecture, as well as the transience of culture, is recognizable here. Contemporary art and sophisticated communication systems are overlaid on a palimpsest of accumulated structures, memories and toils.<sup>33</sup> It is perhaps this simultaneous absence and presence, the coexistence and interdependence of the concrete and the abstract that makes the factory turned museum real for both visitors and residents of North Adams. While this landscape is clearly legible as a place of former industrial production, it has not been ossified or embalmed as such. It continues to be part of the world at large, participating in the ever-changing realm of ideas and their production.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Den Vereinigten Staaten," in idem, *Goethes Werke: I. Abteilung, 5 Band* (Tokyo: Sansyusya, 1975): 137.

<sup>2</sup> A survey of historic mills reveals two major categories of cultural reuse. In the first case, the original function of the building is maintained as a museum with industrial machinery demonstrations and historical interpretations. The building is removed from the productive life of the city and serves a didactic purpose. For example, the Lowell National Historic Park in Lowell, Massachusetts, maintains "working" looms and commemorates the history of America's Industrial Revolution in physical form. A second type of conversion retains the historical buildings, but converts them to another use. The Amoskeag Mills in Manchester, New Hampshire, once the world's largest textile producer, now contain the Manchester Historic Association Millyard Museum, the University of New Hampshire-Manchester, and various commercial uses. MASS MoCA is another example of this second type of reuse.

<sup>3</sup> Built in London between 1947 and 1963, the Bankside Power Plant by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott was reopened in 2000 as the Tate Modern. Transformed into a contemporary art museum by the Swiss architects, Herzog & de Meuron, the Tate Modern retains the perimeter brick shell and introduces a new steel structure, spatial configuration and material palette within. The boiler house of the Zeche Zollverein colliery, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Essen, was converted by Foster and Partners into the Design Zentrum Nordrhein Westfalen. The design retains significant aspects of the boiler house, while introducing a new material language and cultural program. Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord is a former Thyssen Krup AG steel mill converted into a park by Latz+Partner.

<sup>4</sup> The Bruner/Cott & Associates architecture project team included: Simeon Bruner, Henry Moss, Phoebe Crisman, Maria Raber and Kim Markert.

<sup>5</sup> For accounts of MASS MoCA's beginnings, see Jennifer Trainer, ed. *MASS MoCA: From Mill to Museum* (North Adams: MASS MoCA Publications, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> The economic benefit is achieved by encouraging tourism and by renting office and studio space within the MASS MoCA site. "Local unemployment has been reduced from 25 percent to just under 5 percent since the museum opened in 1998," according to Mark Johnson, "Brownfields are Looking Greener," *Planning* (June 2002): 14-19. For a detailed and regularly updated description of economic regeneration intentions and statistical results, see <http://www.massmoca.org>.

<sup>7</sup> John Heon, "History and Change at the Marshall Street Complex," *MASS MoCA: From Mill to Museum* (North Adams: MASS MoCA Publications, 2000): 11.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1992) and in this volume, "The Convergence of Ethics and Aesthetics: A Genealogical, Pragmatist Perspective."

<sup>9</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> See Nicolas Bourriaud's collection of essays, *Esthétique Relationnel* (1997). For an illuminating critique of this position, see Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* (v.110, fall 2004): 51-79.

<sup>11</sup> Randall Mason, "Fixing Historic Preservation: A Constructive Critique of 'significance'," *Places* (v.16, no.1): 70.

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<sup>12</sup> Florence M. Hetzler, "Causality: Ruin Time and Ruins," *Leonardo* (vol. 21, no.1, 1988): 51. Also see Brigette Desrochers, "Ruins Revisited: Modern Conceptions of Heritage," *The Journal of Architecture* (v.5, spring 2000): 35-45. For a relevant discussion of *art-value* and *age-value*, read Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25 (1982, originally published in 1903): 21-51. Alan Colquhoun analyzes the aforementioned essay in "Thoughts on Riegl," *Oppositions* 25 (1982): 78-83.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of ruins created by forces other than nature, such as cataclysmic political or economic events, see Michael S. Roth, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1997): 1-23.

<sup>14</sup> Since MASS MoCA's opening in 1999, three buildings have been renovated and two ruined buildings have been demolished.

<sup>15</sup> For a compelling analysis of Pompeii and the history of ruins, see Charles Merewether, "Traces of Loss," in Michael S. Roth, ed., *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1997): 25-40.

<sup>16</sup> John Ruskin, "The Lamp of Memory," *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (4<sup>th</sup> edition, Kent: George Allen: 1883): 194.

<sup>17</sup> Ruskin, 186.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of modern architects' attitudes toward weathering, see Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993): 86.

<sup>19</sup> Alberto Ferlenga, "Separazioni/Separations," *Casabella* (v.67, December 03/January 04): 175.

<sup>20</sup> Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Spaces In-between," *Present and Futures: Architecture in Cities*, Ignasi de Solà-Morales, ed. (Barcelona: Actar, 1996): 278.

<sup>21</sup> Roger Kimball, "The museum as fun house," *The New Criterion* (February 2001): 5-11.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Thompson, "What we do and why we do it...," MASS MoCA website (July 12, 2005), <http://www.massmoca.org>.

<sup>23</sup> Verlyn Klinkenborg, "Contemporary Art in a Factory Setting," *The New York Times* (June 5, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Sandy Isenstadt, "The Interpretative Imperative: Architecture and the Perfectibility of Memory," *Harvard Design Magazine* (Fall 1997): 58.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>26</sup> Randolph Langenbach, "Amoskeag Millyard remembered," *Historic Preservation* (July-Sept. 1975, v.27, n.3): 28.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Watson, "A Unique Home for Cutting Edge Art," *Smithsonian Magazine* (March 2000): 119.

<sup>28</sup> Camilo José Vergara, *American Ruins* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999): 99. For another discussion of the ways that people have reacted to enormous economic and social dislocations

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wrought by late twentieth century deindustrialization, see Lizabeth Cohen, "What kind of world have we lost? Workers' lives and deindustrialization in the museum." *American Quarterly* (v.41, n.4, December 1989): 670-681.

<sup>29</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Watson, 117.

<sup>31</sup> MASS MoCA was constructed for approximately \$70 per square foot, while the Guggenheim Bilbao cost \$300 per square foot, the NYC Museum of Modern Art addition is projected at \$600, and the Getty Museum required \$1,000 per square foot (in 1999 dollars). For additional cost information, see Charles Giuliano, "MASS MoCA: The Phoenix Rises in North Adams," *Art New England* (vol.21, no.1, December 1999/January 2000): 82.

<sup>32</sup> For the interview with Robert Rauschenberg, see Craig Wilson, "MASS MoCA: Not your run-of-the-mill museum," *USA Today* (May 21,1999): 8D.

<sup>33</sup> MASS MoCA's historic brick buildings incorporate state of the art digital and fiber optic networks, as well as new media technologies for making and performing art. These systems are not concealed, but visibly layered on the existing conditions.

## **FIGURES**

All photographs by Phoebe Crisman and Michael Petrus unless noted otherwise.

Figures 2, 3 and 11 courtesy of the North Adams Historical Society.

Figure 8 Permission to include photograph of artwork by Robert Morris. *Untitled*, 1967. Steel. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection, 1991.