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Nostalgia for the Future

Memories are incredibly malleable, yet we still hold them in high regard. In a post-internet society, people are drawn to the ruins of buildings from the industrial era. But why do we hold on to the past and idealize it in a way we cannot do with present architecture? Is it, in part, as Huyssen believes, that “We are nostalgic for the ruins of modernity because they still seem to hold a promise that has vanished from our own age: the promise of an alternative future”? In many instances, this nostalgia is a product of false memory, a memory that has been polluted by time.

Set in the ruins of the Archibald Mill in Dundas, Minnesota, this project consists of a gallery, artist residence, and studio. The residence is set in a pre-existing historical engine house, which resides on the main road near local businesses. The gallery is set in the mill ruins, superimposing the new and old architecture. A bridge emerges from the gallery connecting to the studio space which resides on an island within the Cannon River. By creating a local, accessible retreat for artists, where the history of industrial ruins are mixed with the future of art, the goal is to restore artists within their practice so that they are able to be a part of our changing future.

Originally built in 1860, the grain mill was known for the high-quality flour made from the technology being used (National Register of Historic Places). It was the epitome of success in rural America during the industrial revolution. The ruins, however, are not an accurate representation of this era of success. What remains on the site is actually from when the mill was rebuilt in 1914. The original mill was built on the east bank of the Cannon River in 1857 before high water from the river created a second channel that created an island of the original mill location. The mill on the west bank wasn't built until 1870. Both mills burned twenty-two years later. The mill located on the current west bank ruin site was rebuilt but burned again a year later. The mill was again rebuilt in 1914 but in 1930 the roof was removed and the building was abandoned; these are the ruins seen currently. The engine house which was built in 1879 near the west bank mill has two of the original walls remaining; however, it was built upon to create a space that is currently occupied by a local sports equipment company. While both the Archibald mill ruins and engine house are from the same site with a similar history, why is one given such importance and the other becomes glossed over in memory?

Many historic buildings have importance placed on to them through a collective memory held by a community. However, the instability of memory is cause for further evaluation of that importance. Connerton addresses this notion and how emotion changes our recalling of the past in *How Societies Remember*. The action of recalling our memories can be considered performative as they are about the present as much as they are about the past. A similar view is presented by Halbwachs in *On Collective*

Memory, in which memory is part of a collective context and thus it reflects the sentiment of the group that holds it. A historical event may be remembered differently depending on which group is remembering it and the criteria they use to determine items significant enough to remember.

Site plays a crucial role in collective memory as a means to preserve history in the physical domain. *On Collective Memory* advocates “People select their memories; and the objects once selected then fashion the ideas and actions of those who have done the selecting”. Having a physical exemplar of memory can create a larger impact on society, as compared to a solely psychological memory. Architectural ruins are an example of how a site can be considered the sole means for carrying memory. The Archibald mill ruins, although not the original site or building, still embodies the feeling of prosperity in a small town. *Nostalgia for the Future* is looking at how to embody that perception that the ruins possess. Building upon ruins is meant to celebrate history by creating new spaces that further the perception of the site.

This site exists as a palimpsest of what was there, what is currently standing, and the false memory of both. The false memory of the site is what connects the three buildings that exist or once existed on this site: the engine house, the mill ruins, and the ghost of the original mill. The physical manifestation of this idea comes in the form of an arbitrary line drawn from one corner of the residence (engine house), bisecting the gallery and mill ruins, ending at the far corner of the studio on the island where the original mill once was.

This line of false memory was used to create the forms for the buildings. Starting with rectilinear forms: wherever the line intersected the building was pulled up six feet, creating asymmetrical pitched roof lines. From here, the line perforates through the buildings in a gradual manner. Starting with the residence, the line cuts through the roof creating a linear skylight. The line continues to push down as it enters the gallery, piercing through the walls to create a pathway that ends with an opening that leads to the bridge. The bridge is a continuation of the line which connects to the studio, slicing completely through the ground plan and slicing the building in two (see fig.1 and fig. 2).

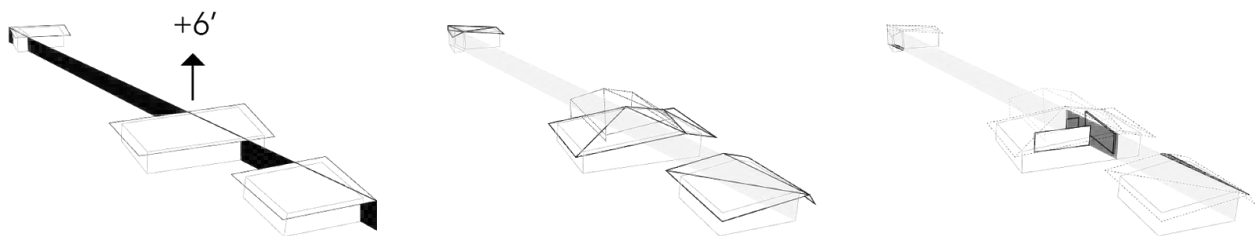


Fig. 1. Diagrams showing the progression of form-finding based on the line of false memory.



Fig. 2. An exterior view shows the forms of all three buildings as a result of diagramming.

The importance of materiality in this site was to show the truths of the site's history. Materiality chosen for this project was based upon the ruins as they stand currently and historical information from the National Register of Historic Places. The ruins are mostly built of limestone, however, upon closer examination, there are moments with concrete layered on top of the stone (see fig. 3).

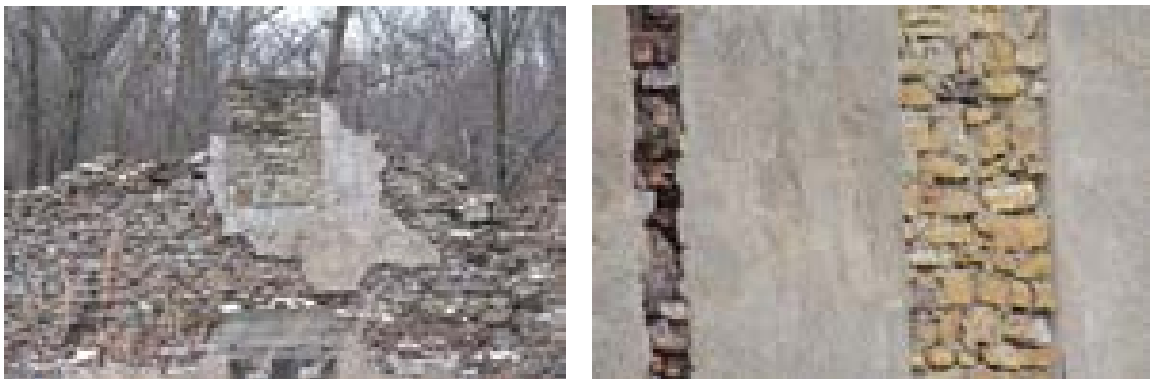


Fig. 3. Images of the site materiality. Concrete is used in conjunction with the limestone.

The concrete holds up the stone in the areas that need the most structure. As this project builds upon these materials of the ruins, the interaction of materiality was of utmost importance. By using concrete as the main materiality for all three buildings, the material becomes the mechanism that connects the past to the present.

The interior space intends to blend the past and present but relies more on the documentation of the interiors as they have not existed for more than a hundred years. The National Register of Historic Places reports that the interior was “finished with black walnut and butternut lumber”. The use of wood in the interiors of the buildings is

a way to warm the mostly concrete structure. Both the kitchen of the residence and the built-in storage and desk in the studio utilize walnut as their main material (see fig.4).



Fig. 4. Render of the studio interior shows the use of white walnut (butternut lumber) used as built-in storage and workspace that runs along the wall.

The gallery, residence, and studio are all deliberate in their use of minimal interiors. Creating a space meant for artists and their work means that room must be left anticipating the future while still evoking a creative mindset. The furnishings chosen have a sculptural quality to them, pieces that were deliberately designed to a point where they may be seen as art. Every element of design on this site is intended to fuse the past and present while leaving space for the future. *Nostalgia for the Future* views the human interaction of creativity within the site as the future, and simultaneously the creativity found will lead the way toward that of an unpredicted future.

While memory is fickle, unreliable, and malleable, its function in site and design can act as a crucial element. Collective memory can serve as a unifier for a site and the

community. Where false memories are evident, tangled within a site's history, it is important not to disqualify their role in the site. *Nostalgia for the Future* manifested the false memories of the Archibald Mill in a physical form bringing them to the same importance as the past history of the site. Architectural ruins are not a pure form of preservation by many as they exist in an ongoing state of deterioration; however, shifting the paradigm of “ruin” as an element anticipating future creativity, celebrates nostalgia and gives the site renewed purpose.

Works Cited

Connerton, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Connerton was a social anthropologist during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This work explores the idea of collective memory, specifically with historical events. Events occur in history but become distorted in the retelling of them as it is filtered through the lens of memory. As a culture, we practice the retelling and celebration of these memories through our actions which legitimizes the distorted memory of the event. These ideas translate to my project which is looking at projected importance on historic ruins and how to build upon those memories to transform the meaning of the space.

Frearson, Amy. "Ageing Stone Walls Frame Concrete Structure of E/C House by SAMI Arquitectos." *Dezeen*, Dezeen, 15 June 2015, <https://www.dezeen.com/2015/01/07/ec-house-sami-arquitectos-pico-island-ageing-stone-walls-concrete/>.

Frearson is an editor at Dezeen, an architecture and design magazine, who has a degree in architecture and masters in Architectural History. This article explains the design process behind a home designed and set in ruins. Quotes from the designers illuminate the process of building new within the old and how to make a cohesive design. Their design process may inform my project as it speaks to keeping within the original parameters of the ruins versus when to break the mold and create new relationships between the old and new. This

source gives an example of how designers have approached a similar idea previously which many of the other sources do not look at.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Translated by Lewis A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Maurice Halbwachs was a philosopher and sociologist who developed the idea of collective memory. Collective memory is defined as a shared collection of memories between a group that gives them an identity. This relates to how a landmark in a small town can create the town's identity. This allows me to gauge how changing a preserved site impacts the city.

Huysen, Andreas. "Nostalgia for Ruins." *Grey Room*, no. 23, 2006, pp. 6–21. *The MIT Press*, www.jstor.org/stable/20442718.

Huysen is a Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, his work has spanned across many topics including cultural memory, modernism and postmodernism, and urban culture. In this work, Huysen examines what causes our Nostalgia for ruins in the 21st century. People crave ruins of modernity as they speak to a time when we could imagine creating a new future for ourselves. This article helps answer the question of *Why this site?* It illuminates humanity's fascination with the past and creating relics. This work was the most informative to my current project and finding reasoning behind my decisions.

Huysen, Andreas. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. Taylor and Francis, 2012.

A Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, Huyseen looks at collective memory and its relevance in a postmodern society. Memory is a reflection of an event which has been altered due to the filter of time and context. Our reaction to the emergence of technology is to look to the past as we are cautious about the implications technology has on our memories and their temporality. This book offers a look into why we are anxious about forgetting and how this turmoil affects how we view our future. The present dismay of past memories blocks us from viewing our future.

Martin, Frank Edgerton. "The Necessity for Ruins." *Landscape Architecture*, vol. 93, no. 4, 2003, pp. 36–44. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44675028.

Martin studies Cultural Landscape Preservation and has worked with many Universities in preserving historical landmarks. This article explains the process of creating a park within the historic Mill City Ruins in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This is a reference point for a similar vernacular that has already been used in Minnesota and is part of its identity. This source is much more information on the process of how designers worked with the city to create a public space within a historical site.

National Register of Historic Places, Archibald Mill, Dundas, Rice, Minnesota, 76001071.

This is the original nomination form for the Archibald Mill to be considered a part of the National Register of Historic Places. The article explains the history of the site including the ownership, rebuilds, general dimensions, materiality, and use

of the site. All of this information can be used to inform the current design and how

much to reference the past and history of the building within the new design.

This is the only document that references the specific site and its history.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Ricoeur was a French hermeneutic phenomenologist in the 20th century.

Memory, History, Forgetting examines how our consciousness creates memories, if history can be told without the influence of memories, and if it is necessary to forget things in order to keep the memory of others. This work exemplifies the importance of forgetting in order to create an impactful change in our memory which solidifies why I chose to disrupt the preserved ruins.

Rossi, Aldo. *The Architecture of the City*. The MIT Press, 1982.

Rossi was a 20th-century designer who focused on architectural theory. He views the city as something that is constantly changing. In this work, it is stated that a city and its architecture are inseparable, form is permanent yet can be adapted for different uses, and that monuments create memory and structure within a city. The importance of architecture and monuments in a city remind me of the importance to keep the character of the preserved site alive while the idea that a space can be reused with new programming is important to my programming.

Shearn, Amy. "The Utopian Roots of the Artists' Retreat." JSTOR, JSTOR, 7 June 2016, <https://daily.jstor.org/utopian-roots-artists-retreat/>.

Shearn is the assistant editor at JSTOR Daily and has written many fiction novels. In this writing, Shearn explains the history of artists retreats in relation to one of the first to happen in America. This article is a reference for the history of artists retreat and their use in society. This source is not as dense as the others and will need other sources to complete the timeline from the first artist retreat to what it is like present day.