Abstract

A large portion of New York City consists of parkland, and as such, the narratives contained within these parks affect the city as a whole. The historical structure is one narrative vector that can be found in many different parks. In addition to preserving knowledge of the location’s functionality prior to its becoming a park, these structures can often be fit into larger social narratives. I argue that through the selective preservation of vestigial structures, New York City park designers have preserved and by extension normalized a narrative of social, technological, and military progress and achievement, while erasing any aberration or challenge to said account. Using a theoretical framework developed from the works historical, social, aesthetic, and urban writers such as David E. Nye, William Cronon, Ellen Stroud, Galen Cranz, and Luke Morgan, I analyze historical structures in several different parks and unpack their visual and historical qualities. The second and third chapters will be devoted to developing the analytical framework for the paper as well as providing some background information. The fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters will focus on case studies. I draw the conclusion that the narratives support a hegemony that legitimizes the balance of power in New York society.
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Chapter I: Introduction

The Old Putnam Railroad Trail runs through the center of Van Cortlandt Park in the northwestern Bronx, continuing over the county line into the neighboring city of Yonkers. Van Cortlandt is a park of many trails, but this one is different. As its name suggests, it was built as a train line in the 1870s, and until the 1980s it still functioned as such (Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy, n.d.). Though trains have long since disappeared, the infrastructure that channeled them through the park and towards Manhattan still exists in part. Underfoot and often partially submerged into the soil or vegetation are the Putnam Railroad’s train track ties left to decay. (Image 1.1). To one side of the trail-way periodically appear what used to be electrical line posts, also left to the will of nature. (Image 1.2). And near the trailhead stands what used to be a train station, now a rusting oddity left to puzzle park goers. (Images 1.3)

These structures all reference the former uses of the parkland and introduce this material past into the present through their continued existence. They are the physical manifestations of history and stories that remain despite loss of their original function. The public’s reaction to these remains can be contradictory. To some viewers, the associations attached to these remnants can embody the strength of technology and tenacity of American ingenuity. To others the aesthetics of the weathered relics may evoke the power of nature to overcome human’s works. The tracks, electrical poles, and station are the reminiscent of the final stage of Thomas Cole’s painting, The Course of Empire (1836), often
referred to as *Desolation*, a prophecy of a doom to come (Explore Thomas Cole, 2015). The fact that remnants of a railroad line are strewn along the recreational and nature trail that replaced it is not, however, uncommon, even in Van Cortlandt Park.

No park was born a park. Often, what was farmland has been reforested to create seemingly natural parkland, or a stand of virgin forest has been carved into a landscape architect’s idealized vision. In New York City, among many other cities, these former uses often interrupt the pastoral present in the form of vestigial structures. Such structures range from fully inhabitable buildings to the remnants of railroad ties on paths. And for every existing structure, others have, through time or intention, been erased. Hence the central question of this thesis: *viewed through the lenses of both American aesthetic theories and conceptions of urban and natural landscape, what kind of historical and social narratives*
do the historical structures in New York City’s urban parks carry into the present, and which do they not? I argue that through the selective preservation of vestigial structures, New York City park designers have preserved and by extension normalized a narrative of social, technological, and military progress and achievement, while erasing any aberration or challenge to said account.

This argument stems from visual and historical investigations of intact and lost historical structures paired with coeval conceptualizations of American aesthetics. It must also take into account changing agency and stakeholders: the original builders, the designers and politicians behind parks, and generations of diverse users in the public. Ultimately, it is my hope that this investigation may shed further light upon the stories and achievements that New York’s governance wishes to preserve.

I will refer to the objects of study as variations of the term “historical structure” and “accidental folly,” as in the title. One concerned with the precise use of language might challenge the use of “folly.” “Folly” traditionally refers to buildings “purpose built” to be purely ornamental, and contain “an element of fakery in their construction” (Jones, 1974, p.1). My historical structures do not fit this category, as they were built to be functional. Furthermore, some of the structures, such as the former machinery in Concrete Plant Park, were never intended as buildings. I agree that they are not traditional follies, but they have transitioned, if “accidentally,” to serve an analogous function, pure but evocative ornament.
This paper does not confront traditional follies, such as Central Park’s Belvedere Castle, given that such structures function differently and are less common in New York City.

After reading this introduction, some will ask, “but why should I care?” Almost 20% of New York City is devoted to parkland; therefore, if one is interested in studying the City of New York, the narratives present in roughly one fifth of its land area become valuable information (The Trust for Public Land, 2010, p.1). Secondly, parks are intended to be open to the public. Histories displayed in parks are readily available for the general populace and hence able to influence a wide range of the city’s inhabitants.

Following a contextual and methodology discussion, I will introduce the theoretical foundation for analysis. Other conceptual issues will arise in the course of argument, but the primary themes will be established in the second and third chapters. To focus my argument, I devote analytical chapters to two folly typologies, “Technological” structures and “Military” structures, and then I will conclude with an analysis of notable absences. These sections will consist of reflections on the physical and historical nature of specific case studies and the conclusions and synthetic connections that arise.

**Framing Follies: A Review of Literature**

The existing literature on historical structures in New York City parks is limited. There is, however, a clear body of work exploring the application of aesthetic and social principles to the analysis of constructed green spaces and historic structures. The work most relevant to my topic is Anthony J. Fassi’s article, “Industrial Ruins, Urban Exploring, and the Postindustrial Picturesque” (2010). Opening with a discussion of the remains of New York’s Old Croton Aqueduct as being a part of a narrative of American technological
success and example of David Nye’s theory of the American technological sublime (1994), Fassi attempts to understand the nature of urban exploration of ruins in United States (2010). As he attempts to nuance the exploration the author provides examples of the salubrious and damaging perspectives that urban explorers bring to discussions of urban ruin. For example, while at the same time promoting important criticism of urban built forms they also “describe industrial ruins according to picturesque principles,” a perspective that “obscure[s] the plight of former industrial workers” (Fassi, 2010, pp. 147, 149). Fassi concludes that despite the shortcomings of many urban explorers’ epistemologies, the overall results are important portraits of America’s relationship with industry. Fassi helps establish a paradigm of analyzing abandoned historical structures using a specific set of aesthetic theories, such as those of David Nye, in order to understand the narratives that are either reinforced or eliminated. It is this technique that I will be employing through my thesis.

Fassi’s work led me to David E. Nye’s American Technological Sublime (1994). This book examines the cultural role that technology has played throughout history through the study of different technological advancements such as railroads and electricity. Nye argues that his conception of the “technological sublime” is an example of the “the continual redeployment of the sublime itself, as a preferred American trope” which is “a defining ideal, helping to bind together [America’s] multicultural society” (1994, p. xiv). The concept of the technological sublime provides a theoretical keystone for my chapter on technological remnant follies and plays an important role in the analysis of other kinds of structures.
Another work that functions within the same dynamic of theoretical and physical, albeit on a different subjects, is Luke Morgan’s *The Monster in the Garden* (2016). This book discusses the role of fear, the grotesque, and or disgust–inducing artwork within Renaissance gardens. The author seeks to understand the reasoning behind the prevalence of these works and the 16th century social and aesthetic reception and experience. After establishing a Foucaultian conception of landscape as a space able to induce both pleasure and fear, Morgan examines the different forms that grotesque artwork can take (2016). Through this examination and an investigation of reactions to these garden features, Morgan concludes that “the pleasures of the sixteenth-century garden… may have resembled those of the sublime” that would later be described by Burke, Kant, and Longinus (2016, p.168). The temporal distance spanned between the referenced philosophers and the Renaissance, suggests that the theory has longevity. This conclusion arguably helps extend Nye’s concept of the technological sublime to non-technological structures.

A space’s visual impact on a viewer is a key element of the successful synthesis of this paper and the proper integration of theoretical themes. A park-goer’s response to a historical structure links the object to the narrative it contains and promotes. Although the other referenced texts, especially Morgan’s, also speak to this linkage, John D. Hunt’s *The Afterlife of Gardens* (2004) provides a more direct exploration of the topic. This book attempts to promote discussions of the human response to landscape architecture and gardens. In addition to providing a historiography of the subject, the author discusses several different understandings of gardens’ and landscape architecture’s effects on their viewers. The book concludes with the idea of the “Implied Visitor [which is] borrowed from
literary reception theory” that stresses the importance of human experience in both “historical study” and “historical preservation” (Hunt, 2004, p.8-9).

This paper also seeks to ascertain a conception of landscape, and thus I consult books that have treated that subject in depth. William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis* (1992) elucidates the different environmental, economic, and social factors that spurred the city of Chicago’s rise to prominence in the American Midwest, during the 19th Century and the consequences of said dominance. Cronon discusses the role of transportation, lumber, grain, meat, and capital exchange in shaping both Chicago and its surrounding landscape (1992). In addition to describing the aforementioned industries, Cronon uses economic data from bankruptcies and mortalities in order to trace patterns of capital geographically (1992). He arrives at the conclusion that the metropolis, Chicago, and its economic and environmental hinterland created one another, and this dynamic along with political decisions allowed for Chicago’s rise to prominence in the American Midwest. The relevance of Cronon’s work is twofold, its description of human’s relationship with industrial technology and its description of the Marxian dynamic between first and second nature that allows transportation technology to become a part of landscapes. Although the primary argument is not completely relevant to this thesis, these supporting details and concepts provide a treatment of some of the thesis’ key themes.

Written partially in response to Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis’s* claim that major cities inherently consume and destroy their economic and environmental hinterlands, Ellen Stroud’s *Nature Next Door* (2012) studies the reforestation of the American Northeast despite its being the hinterland of several major metropolitan areas. Stroud concluded that

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1. The differences and relationship between first and second nature will be explained in Chapter III.
Cronon’s city-hinterland dynamic is not universal to the formation of economically and socially prominent cities. In her supporting arguments, Stroud proposes the idea that one must consider natural landscapes and urban landscapes to be a part of the same system and that their connection is fully integrated, a concept that contributes to my understanding of the relationship between historical structures and the American landscape. (2012).

**Research Methodology**

The research process that uncovered the data and theories in this paper can be divided into three distinct phases: the collection of visual data directly from the subjects of study, the investigation of historical information about said subjects, and the synthesis of historically and contextually appropriate aesthetic and social theories with which to analyze the collected data. This combination of both visual and theoretical positions allows the paper to be theoretical while still grounded in a physical reality. The history and structures were not chosen to fit the theories; the theories were identified from trends in American thought at the time of the parks’ creation and repeated visual themes found in the structures.

I began the first phase of research by identifying and locating multiple historical structures. Roughly half were chosen based on pre-existing knowledge of New York City Parks gained through residence in New York City and while working for the Parks Department in the summer of 2014. These items were ones I had seen or heard about prior to embarking on this paper. The remaining subjects were identified through either the New
York City Parks Department website or through websites identifying historical and visual points of interest in parks.

In choosing which structures to analyze, I attempted to organize them into several categories that expressed repeated patterns of origin, form, use or even destruction. While this thesis is not a synthesis of all the structures found throughout New York City Parks, it is meant to be a guide to a diverse grouping of subjects from an equally diverse selection of parks. The chosen parks vary from the internationally renowned Central Park in Manhattan to the little known Seton Park in the Bronx, looking at structures ranging from former private homes to military bases and hospitals.

Upon locating a structure of interest, I performed a visual inspection, photographing the object from multiple angles for later study and comparison to other objects. If the object of interest was easily and legally enterable, I would perform an inspection of the interior as well. If observing an un-enterable locality with windows, interior photos would be collected through said building's windows. Preceding or following this visual inspection, historical information was collected through either the Parks Department website and external historical research, through the use of historical maps and newspaper articles. If possible, historical photographs or images were also collected for comparison to the existing structures. Similar historical research was used to identify structures, such as Seneca Village, that had been completely lost or destroyed through the creation of the park or subsequent events.

Many follies residing in New York City parks do not appear in this study but do, in fact, share the characteristics of the presented follies. Many of the exclusions are based in the lack of historical data, making narrative observations difficult. Furthermore, one may
notice that few, if any, of the structures are currently in use for other purposes other than adding to the park experience. For example, the Bronx’ Jerome Reservoir has not been analyzed, primarily because it has regained its original function. While these structures may have rich histories, they are not follies. Their continued function eliminates the need to explain their preservation. Moreover, my paper displays a bias towards parks in the Bronx, given the borough’s percentage of parkland and high concentration of follies. Staten Island shares these characteristics, but the borough was far less geographically accessible to me than its northern counterpart.

The third phase consisted of consulting multiple databases, including JSTOR, Web of Science, and ProQuest as well as Haverford College’s and Bryn Mawr College’s libraries. These searches focused primarily on the ideas of abandonment, ruin, historical and social narratives, technology, and concepts of landscape in relationship to urban environments. Synthesizing the results lead to the foundation of a theoretical framework that was applicable to the already collected visual and historical data.

The next chapter is a historical analysis of the development of the New York City parks, defining the parameters of what will be considered a park. The third chapter concerns the theories employed in this paper. The thesis has been structured around the examination of two broad categories of structures with more specified subcategories. I will begin by explaining the role that remnants of technological structures play in preserving a narrative of technological success. The second category is the military folly that I will use to expand upon themes found in technological structures. I will end with the introduction of a counter example to my analysis and discuss the implications of disappearance. Finally, I will state my conclusions and propositions for further research.
Chapter II: What is a Park? A Historical Exploration

The previous chapter stated that no park was born a park. Though I stand by this statement, it is meaningless if the term park is left nebulous or untethered to reality. As I am working in New York City, this section will briefly trace the development of the City’s parks within its history in order to arrive at a working definition of what a park has been in the New York City context. I have chosen to use a historically based definition specifically as I am working with historical structures, and one must be conscious of what was and was not considered a park during the folly’s functional period.

The municipality itself consists of five individual and partially autonomous boroughs, Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, the Bronx, and Staten Island, which, were consolidated into a single, larger city in 1898 (New York City Parks, n.d., p.4). Today New York is also known for its ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity and well as a well-developed business sector. Possibly a result of the combination of these forces, the city is also known for great class disparity, with the homeless and impoverished living alongside the world’s largest population of billionaires (Gibson, 2016). The park, being open to the public, becomes a meeting ground for a society so sharply divided by class, place of potential harmony or conflict.

Though the first continuous settlement that would eventually grow to become New York City was founded by the Dutch in the early 1600’s as a part of New Netherlands; “England seized [the area] in 1664” under threat of military action and “renamed both the province and its capital New York in honor of [its] new proprietor... [the] Duke of York” (Archdeacon, 1976, pp. 32, 37). From its very historical namesake, a theme of military and
economic triumph, in this case British over Dutch colonialism, has been integrated into the core narrative of New York City.

The first parks of what would become New York City consisted primarily of small, unused areas of land in what is now Lower Manhattan. The first city administered park was “Bowling Green Park” which “was established and named by a resolution of the Common Council on March 12, 1733” from a “parade ground” that was put under the control of the city government along with multiple other “vacant” areas through the 1686 “Dongan Charter” (New York City Parks, n.d., p.2). As there were no formal parks from the Dutch period, only diminishing public and private green space, the Bowling Green also established the method for creation of parks until the end of the British Colonial period. The government appropriated previously unoccupied spaces for public use, a function that if present in the Dutch period was de facto and not de jure. In theory, land was now being specifically designated as available to all, regardless of social status.

By 1783, the governance of New York City had changed once again with the culmination of the American Revolution’s ending of British colonial control over thirteen of the empire’s colonies along the Eastern Seaboard. Following the end of British rule “New York was made the first capital of New York State and of the United States in 1784,” a title that would soon be transferred to different cities in the state and country respectively (New York City Parks, n.d., p.2). Despite or possibly because of this loss of direct political power, New York was by 1790 was, and remains, the largest city in the United States (C. Gibson & Population Division, 1998).

Possibly related to continued population growth, the city of New York began to purchase lands to expand its parks system. For example, 1797 saw purchases of the land
that would become Lower Manhattan’s “Duane Street Park” and land owned by Trinity Church (New York City Parks, n.d., p.2). Now that the government was acquiring properties that had previously had other functions in order to build parks, it was forced to confront structures that already existed on the land. At the same time, parks no longer filled only the interstices in the urban fabric; they were now able to take prominent positions throughout the city. The opening of private land to the public indicated that connections to the owner were no longer needed for entry.

The newfound ability of parks to expand into occupied spaces became more important with the establishment of 1811 Commissioners' Plan that “designated little open space for New York,” and eventually created a need for new public spaces (New York City Parks, n.d., p.2). Because of its dearth of planned open green space, the Commissioners' Plan ensured that when a new park was to be built in Manhattan (at that point the entire city of New York), there would be conflict of ownership between the city government and private landowners. When the general public would eventually want a park, they could potentially encounter resistance from residents and nonresident owners of the proposed location. Said dynamic was a threat to those less able to resist because of other structural disadvantages, such as class or race. Likely as a result of the Commissioners' Plan and the conflicts it induced, parks were limited to “small squares, parade grounds, markets, and sites for reservoirs,” resulting in parks such as Madison Square Park and what would become Bryant Park by 1847, while none achieved the size of later parks like Van Cortlandt and Pelham Bay parks; the parks planned in the nearby City of Brooklyn during the period following its incorporation in 1834 took on a similar form, largely green public squares and parade grounds (New York City Parks, n.d., p. 3).
The first substantial urban green space in what now constitutes New York City was developed in Brooklyn. The “Green-Wood Cemetery” was privately owned but contained “478 landscaped acres and 20 miles of pedestrian paths open to the public”; the New York Parks department now credits the Cemetery with introducing “the public to the amenities of the landscaped ‘pleasure ground’” (New York City Parks, n.d., p.3). It was this kind of space that set the stage for park developments at the scale of Central Park, which, combined with government’s ability to acquire land, engendered possible land ownership conflicts between private and public to arise. As the government saw the desire for larger parks, it became more willing acquire land, potentially forcing it to compete with New Yorkers’ living spaces. The tendency to take the path of least resistance led this conflict to more harshly affect communities with less social and economic clout, such as areas with high densities of immigrants and African Americans. A notable example of this is Seneca Village, which will be explored later on in this study. The use of Green-Wood Cemetery as a park can also be linked to the later public use of other private green spaces, such as Wave Hill and the Botanical Gardens in The Bronx.

The public desire for larger parks led to the idea of Central Park in 1850 and its segmented opening beginning in 1858 (New York City Parks, n.d., p.3). Central Park was placed in roughly the geographic center of the island of Manhattan, and designed through the vision of landscape architect/designers Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux. Central Park houses some of the structures examined in this paper. According to historians Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig in their book, *The Park and the People*, “The influence of Central Park...spans the country” as seen in Olmsted and Olmsted inspired-works stretching from Boston to Chicago to Seattle (1992, p.1). Central Park has influenced
both future parks in New York City, such as Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, and parks throughout the country. Most parks designed after Central Park necessarily respond to it, leading to the inclusion or explicit rejection of its design to parks throughout the country. Additionally, Olmsted’s social ideal of Central Park would become a defining characteristic of the concept of parks. Olmsted viewed the park as a democratizing space, open to all for interaction and mixing. In his celebratory description of Central Park he said, “you may thus often see vast numbers of persons brought closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile” (2011, p.325). Central Park was intended to unite disparate parts of society, something that parks in the future would strive to do. The success of Central and later Prospect Parks would spur the rise to prominence of the Olmsted family in the field of urban park design.

As the parks system in New York grew within a more complex city of immigrants, it needed a central body to manage and maintain it. In a 19th century dominated by political machines, the Tammany-based politician “William ‘Boss’ Tweed” created this new body by force, “abruptly replac[ing] the Board of Commissioners of Central Park with a new city agency, the Department of Public Parks” in 1870, and in 1871, the original Board of Commissioners of Central Park retook their positions in the now expanded agency (New York City Parks, n.d., p.4). This change in park governance created a political organ able to exert agency over multiple parks in the city, rather than simply Central Park, putting these other parks under the same ideological umbrella during their design and creation. The parks department would take its present form as the “Department of Parks of the City of New York” following the incorporation of the five boroughs in 1898; the establishment of a
single parks department for all five of the boroughs came with the powerful figure of Robert Moses in 1934 (New York City Parks, n.d., pp.4, 6).

The annexation of parts of what is now the Bronx, however, would lead to the birth of another kind of park typology, the estate park. In 1888, “following the recommendation of a ‘New Park Commission,’” the city of New York purchased 3,495 acres of land from estates in The Bronx (New York City Parks, n.d., p.4). This purchase, a transfer of power over land from wealth to governance, provides this paper with another source of structures, as many fragments and structures on the former estates survived the conversion of private land to Van Cortlandt Park and others. This action in the Bronx eventually saw a parallel movement in other boroughs. For example, in the expanding Queens and Staten Island, in response to “anticipating intense residential development” in the 1920s, large bodies of largely undeveloped land were converted to parks in order to preserve the existing open space (New York City Parks, n.d., p.5). The importance of this development lies in the overt connection between park creation and natural preservation. Although it may not apply to all other parks, this connection does indicate that in at least certain circumstances, parks were formed with the expressed interest of preserving what already existed in the location. Such a concept will become important when trying to understand what is considered to be acceptable in a natural landscape.

Urban planner Robert Moses would become the largest expander and the most forceful shaper of the New York City Parks Department system. By Moses’ retirement in 1960, New York City’s “park acreage had increased from 14,000 acres to 34,673 acres” (New York City Parks, n.d., p.6). The explosive growth of parkland under Moses forced greater citywide significance in the Parks Department’s choices. As many more city
residents had access to parks, the Parks Department’s actions would therefore affect a much larger social and geographic landscape. Moses’ ability to effect great change was likely related to his assembling “1,800 designers and engineers drawing up plans for the expansion, rehabilitation and modernization of New York’s parks” from Coney Island to the Grand Concourse Parkway (New York City Parks, n.d., p.6). Ultimately, Moses’ team established the Parks Department as force capable of effecting change in the city; the department’s decisions concerning the preservation or destruction of narratives in New York City parks became decisions about the narratives existing in the city as a whole.

From this history, one can draw a rough definition of what a park is in New York City. I argue that parks have been ‘open spaces’ that have been set aside for public use but may or may not be owned by the City of New York. ‘Open space’ refers to a location such as a recreational lawn or vacant lot that is not dominated by infrastructure such as streets or buildings. A recreational lawn is more likely to be a park than a vacant, but owned, lot, as it is more likely to be open to public use. “Public use” refers to the idea that the owners of the land (be they the city or a private owner) allow for individuals unconnected to the ownership of the land to make use of the space, either passively or actively. The city government owns Bowling Green Park, but does not regulate one’s ability to use Bowling Green. With this definition in mind, I will only work with structures that are found within spaces that meet the above definition of a park.3

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2 This is true regardless of whether or not one is charged an entry fee for use of the open space. Although an entry fee is prohibitive to some people in society, it does not discriminate based on familiarity to the owner. It should be noted that the line between publicly used private properties is, ultimately, however, a nebulous one, and spaces often shift between these different states.

3 Furthermore, for future reference, I will define landscape as the sum total of all naturally occurring and human-made objects, what Cronon will call first and second nature, in a given area. The landscape of Midtown Manhattan would include skyscrapers and sidewalks while the landscape of Central Park, trees and rocks.
Chapter III: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper draws on the ideas of writers from multiple different fields of academia, including environmental history, art history, and social theory. Although there are other theoretical elements that will be introduced later on in the work, the primary lens through which I will be studying the follies will be constructed in this chapter.

Part I: Nature

Given that parks are generally considered related to the concept of nature, I will first discuss said relationship. In Galen Cranz’s The Politics of Park Design (1982), the author establishes parks as entities in the American context. Drawing from theories of influential park designers, such as New York’s Fredrick Law Olmsted, Cranz argues, “American parks [] were conceived as great pleasure grounds meant to be pieces of the country” and that “the simple benefits of the country had come to be popularly associated with nature itself” (1982, pp. 3-5, 7). Cranz constructs a rough syllogism suggesting that parks within popular perception were intended to have the qualities of nature despite their removal from “natural” settings.

Cranz further describes park designers before 1900 as striving toward the picturesque, an attempt in landscape architecture to “heighten the idea of naturalness” in a landscape “with forms suggested by nature” that were in reality “artificial” (1982, pp. 24, 26). The existence of a folly within a park designed in this manner would seem to ruin the illusion of “naturalness” the picturesque design theories promoted. A strand of abandoned train tracks or a rotting electrical pole may indicate to the viewer that the “nature” he or
she stands within is constructed. According to other sources, however, from a picturesque perspective, follies are permissible alterations to, acceptable intrusions upon, or encouraged elements of natural spaces. For example, designers Girardin and Rousseau “consecrated an unfinished temple to the heroes of the rise of reason in France” in their picturesque inspired works (Darnall, 1983, p.250). The relationship between structure preservation and the picturesque in New York City’s parks has precedent. In at least one landmark decision, the term “picturesque” arises as a positive feature (Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1967, Water Tower). In order to reconcile this apparent contradiction within the picturesque, we must establish that the works of humans can be considered “forms suggested by” or at least heightening nature. We must expand our concept of what is and is not natural, especially to those designing parks, a point to which I will return.

For the parks I am studying created after 1965, Cranz cites a different body of design theory. “The Design Revolution,” was started by New York City Mayor John Lindsay, who “recognized that parks do not need to be conservative, stereotyped, or dull” and valued “creativity and experimentation,” leading to the idea of the “adventure playground” meant for youth amusement (Cranz, 1982, p.147). As we will see, the preservation of follies may attempt to add interest to recreational spaces. While some parks following 1965 strove to fight vapidity in design, returning to nature, some began preservation efforts.

Cranz refers to a parallel design theory that arose around the same time period that continues the theme of the relationship between parks and nature. She argues that parks of this period are “bits and pieces of the city saved from the usual fate of urban land … [such as] natural sites for preservation and, by extension, for not tampering with” (Cranz, 1982,
Although different from the simulated nature described in the pre-1900 parks, the final aesthetic result mirrors what would be called “apparent nature.” The major difference in intentionality is that nature would be considered preserved and simulated or improved. Thus, a folly allowed to remain in a post-1965 preservationist park, as described by Cranz, is connected to nature to an even greater degree than one in a late 19th century picturesque parks, as it resides in literal and not simulated nature.

In his *Nature’s Metropolis*, William Cronon adapted the concept of first and second nature to an American context, a useful method of expanding our concept of natural. Noted in my literature review, Cronon explores the rise of the city of Chicago and its relation to its economic and social hinterland. Throughout his book, Cronon uses the Marxist derived terms “first nature” and “second nature” to describe two kinds of features in the American landscape that helped contribute to Chicago’s eventual success. He writes, in reference to the creation of roads, canals, harbors, and railroads that become a “second nature,” a kind of nature “designed by people and ‘improved’ toward human ends [which] gradually emerged atop the original landscape” or “first nature”; he justifies the use of nature for what is called “second nature” by saying that writers “often forgot the distinction between” these two landscape elements (Cronon, 1991, p.56). Cronon illustrates the prevalence of human works becoming accepted as parts of natural landscapes within American urban and environmental discourse, even if they themselves are not literally considered nature. Utility and desirability seem to aid the transition from disruptive to integrated into nature,

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4 For future reference, there are three different similarly spelled words within this paper that will frequently occur. These are Cronon, Croton, and Crotona. Cronon is an American environmental historian, Croton is an aqueduct in New York City, and Crotona is a park in the South Bronx.
and thus something that has become a part of a “natural landscape” likely serves some desirable purpose.

Cronon portrays normalized cultural systems conducive to human desires as being able to integrate intrusive forms of second nature, such as the train. The train was integral to “the new capitalist geography” that strengthened Chicago, a fact that Cronon argues led promoters of Chicago, “boosters,” to liken “the railroads to a force of nature” despite the fact that they were in reality “a powerful force upon nature” (1991, pp. 92-93). Forms of second nature whose only interaction with first nature is degradation and destruction are still capable of becoming a part of a natural landscape if they fit a favored, dominant narrative and power structure. Locomotives polluted the air, destroyed vegetation, disturbed wildlife, and bore no resemblance to what is traditionally considered nature. Nonetheless, given the circumstances of their popularization, trains were taken to be part of the causal forces acting in the environment. The sum of Cronon’s ideas suggests follies are capable of acceptance into perceived nature. Additionally, if they are accepted, it is likely that they serve some purpose to a dominant social force or system, or those preserving them.

An objection to my application of Cronon’s second nature is geographical location. Often first nature surrounds Cronon’s technological advancements or amendments to natural landscapes. Although urban parks are a kind of landscape, they are within cities and not a traditionally true nature. In Von Thünen’s theory of the “Isolated State,” which establishes the hypothetical development of cities and their hinterlands, a park would lie in the central “City,” but second nature, as Cronon describes, seems to become accepted in the outer zones (1991, p. 49). Therefore, it might be incorrect to talk about follies becoming
non-intrusive if they are not surrounded by first nature. Moreover, the Renaissance concept of the garden or park as being a distinct “third nature,” neither “nature of the cultural landscape” nor “unmediated nature,” further amplifies the objection (Hunt, 2004, p.42). Viewing a park as “third nature” may make it more difficult to act as a space for naturalization.

Ellen Stroud’s understanding of the relationship between Northeastern cities and their natural hinterlands in her book *Nature Next Door* (2012) contains a solution. The primary focus of the book is the social and political factors behind the reforestation of the American Northeast, and the reforested lands’ relationships with neighboring major metropolises (referencing but not focusing on New York City). In an anecdote concerning the annual cross-regional journeys of Pennsylvania lawyer Herbert Welsh, Stroud argues, “twentieth-century northeastern farms, forests, agriculture, industry, nature, and culture had become part of a single transformed regional landscape” (2012, p.5). In the Northeast, city and hinterland became inseparable from one another in continuity, growth, and development. Elements of a city thus begin taking on features of its hinterlands. One sees this mentality in the previously noted post–1965 shift in park theory toward the preservation of natural spaces within New York, rather than picturesque simulation. Designers and planers recognized the existence of first nature within the city and sought to prevent its destruction.

Stroud exemplifies with a description of the normalization of coyote sightings in New York City. She states “many wild animals that wander through the landscape... often turn up on the other side of a boundary that only humans discern” (Stroud, 2012, p.157). The causal forces in first nature, in the above case animals’ survival needs, ignore the
separation of city and hinterland. First nature can integrate into the urban fabrics themselves, a near inversion of the above-described process. Follies located in urban parks are surrounded by both city and country. Cranz’s idea of American picturesque parks being designed as “pieces of the country” within urban contexts compounds follies’ existing in the presence of the country. If a folly requires a natural context to become permissible, then I would argue the city-country integration found in the Northeast, paired with the simulation of nature through the picturesque, is a sufficient natural context.

In summary, it has been argued that a major element of the American urban park design tradition is based in the ideas incorporating or simulating elements of nature within city contexts. This line of reasoning indicates that the existing follies may be considered non-intrusive to a “natural” landscape. Historical cases of the portrayal of elements of second nature as being accepted in, even if destructive to first nature, could indicate a method through which follies come to be permitted within a simulated natural landscape. As functions and narratives beneficial to socially dominant interests are strongly linked to the second nature’s integration process, follies likely benefit those choosing to preserve them.

**Part II: Intentionality and Agency**

The question of intentionality is another key element of the story of historical structures in New York City parks. One may ask about the possibility that the structures have been preserved through pure inertia, only existing by accident and lack any agency in preservation. I would argue that such a possibility is predicated on the idea of “right to abandonment.” Legal scholar Eduardo Peñalver states “the law is said to empower owners
of chattels to abandon them by unambiguously manifesting the intent to do so” (2010, p. 192). If this is true, the legal owner of the structure may have the right to simply leave their structure intact while unilaterally forfeiting their rights to it. A park could be designed around the folly without any formal decision’s being made about its existence.

There are two major issues with this interpretation, however. Firstly, it is likely that many of the follies, being buildings, can be seen as real property and not chattel property. Real property concerns land and associated fixed structures. Chattel property tends to refer to owned objects that can be moved away from a location. All of the follies I have encountered are fixed to the land they occupy. Thus, they would not be subject to this law of abandonment. Secondly, in his *The Illusory Right To Abandon* Peñalver argues, “the (prospective) right to abandon virtually any form of tangible property, even chattels, is an illusion” and not legally supported (2010, p. 191). If abandonment is not a right, then the follies are not merely abandoned, suggesting that there was a legal choice on the part of the landscape architect or another actor to leave the historical structure intact. While this potentiality does not reveal anything about the nature of said agent, it does suggest that preservation by inertia does not legally exist and any preservation is, de jure, a legal decision.

Given the varied methods of park creation outlined above, there are likely equally varied agents behind the de jure preservation. In parks that landscape architects designed extensively, such as Fredrick L. Olmsted and Calvert Vaux’ Central and Prospect Parks, these designers likely played a role in the choice of structure preservation. Because the periods’ park agencies approved of and implemented the designs, they also made some of
the choices allowing historical structures to survive. We can see this in the preservation of the Arsenal and its eventual conversion to the Parks Department Headquarters.⁵

The conversion of large estates and private properties to parks also gave some preservation influential to the original owner. For example, Mary Alice Dyckman Dean and Fannie Fredericka Dyckman Welch donated the Dyckman House to the city of New York as a museum within a park “in 1915 to ensure its preservation” and preserve their family history (Dyckman Farmhouse Museum Alliance, 2016). (Image 3.1). In cases such as the Dyckman Farmhouse, the interests of the original owner become the determiner of the narrative preserved. Furthermore, an owner’s preservation agency can be seen as the inverse of de facto abandonment, not utilizing the house while retaining ownership.⁶ Barring eminent domain, a truly abandoned structure could not arrive in a park; it would remain under the control of the title–holder. Any structure found within a park was thus given to the city through agency of the owner or obtained via eminent domain.

When considering these choices, we should keep in mind the idea of the “implied visitor” that John D. Hunt presents in his The Afterlife of Gardens. Hunt argues that historically, when design choices were made in parks, they were often done so mindful of an impact upon a viewer (2004, p. 194). The exact nature of these effects will be explored in the next section, but given the relationship between acceptance and benefit, it is likely that these effects promote the agent’s interests, for example, the preservation of the historical legacy of the Dyckman family. Although those with agency and those who benefit may change with time, the initial agents and beneficiaries are arguably the most significant.

⁵ The Arsenal was going to be discussed later on in this thesis, but it was removed from the final draft.
⁶ As we saw above, the legal relinquishing of ownership requires a new owner.
Post-destruction preservation is a contradiction, and a preserved structure may gain an inertia that would prevent its destruction regardless of the social climate.

Part III: Aesthetics

In the second chapter of Nature Next Door, Ellen Stroud demonstrates the power of visual experience. She demonstrates that “for the summer residents [of New Hampshire], the forest preservation campaign had been about preserving an aesthetic ideal,” a campaign partially responsible for the return of trees to deforested areas of the state (Stroud, 2012, p.77). Aesthetics can prompt action, especially to protect that which is considered to be pleasing. This kind of motivation is found in many kinds of preservation, and may be used to achieve non-aesthetic goals. For example, in the field of biological preservation, “flagship” or “charismatic” animals are used “to anchor a conservation campaign because it arouses public interest and sympathy, [even though] a flagship need not be a good indicator or umbrella” (Ducarme et al., 2013, pp.1-2). Given the power of aesthetics, it would not be inconceivable that a preservation agent would appeal to aesthetic desires in order to assist in the preservation of landscape and a folly. We must therefore, understand the manner in which the aesthetics function in follies.

Technology, for example, is featured heavily in the historical structures that exist throughout New York. Referenced in my literature review, David Nye established a theory about the American aesthetic relationship with technology that may be applicable, the American Technological Sublime. Nye defines the concept as something that “taps into fundamental hopes and fears.... it is an essentially religious feeling, aroused by the
confrontation with impressive objects” (1994, xiii). The best example of this motif resides in Cronon’s description of the public’s reaction to the Chicago grain industry. He references tourists’ becoming mesmerized by the motions of grain through a grain elevator, a clear illustration of the American reverence toward technology (Cronon, 1991). Nye sees this cultural trend as a part of the aforementioned “continual redeployment of the sublime itself, as a preferred American trope” which is “a defining ideal, helping to bind together [America’s] multicultural society.” (See Literature review). In addition to having intrinsic, immediate significance, the technological sublime is a part of a normalized cultural pattern of sublimities that permeates, and Nye argues holds intact, American life. Given the history to which they link, technological follies can act as sublime icons, even if they no longer inspire an immediate sense of amazement.

It seems that this sublime is a dominant American narrative in and of itself. The inspired awe is the promotion of the power and grandeur of the United States and its achievements. Writer Anthony Fassi reads Nye as stating “that in a physical world ‘increasingly desacralized, the sublime represents a way to reinvest the landscape and works of men with transcendent significance” (2010, p. 142-143). Through the acknowledgements of these technological achievements, Americans draw meaning from their landscape and environment. The technological sublime and the American sublime in general could act as vectors of meaning and a narrative framework unifying the country.

Regardless of whether or not they are technological, many of the follies cited in this paper also take the form of ruins, often buildings in various states of decay. Luke Morgan incorporates ruin into his analysis of grotesque imagery in Renaissance gardens as being a part of the aesthetically appealing proto-sublime found in certain gardens. (see literature
review). Morgan argues, “in fact, the ruin... might be seen as epitomizing the grotesque” as “Ruins, then, like living bodies, are imperfect expressions of mortality, of temporality and, consequently, of the grotesque” (2016, pp. 159-160). The organic visuals and temporal associations of ruins contribute to a combination of fear and enjoyment. An example of the attraction of fear in a park within an American context can be seen in the case of ruins on Roosevelt Island on the East River. (Image 3.2). "Residents of Sutton Place, who can look across the river from the Manhattan side and see the hospital, originally paid for the spotlights that now light the structure up at night” (Parco, 2015). The circumstances of the structure’s illumination indicate that a ruin’s appearance can be considered desirable enough to increase its visibility. Potentially, the grotesque aesthetic can bring non-technological items into “the continual redeployment” that David Nye describes.

Just as utility to the capitalist system supporting of Chicago crafted the train’s image, the desire to aesthetically feed into the American relationship with sublime could catalyze the acceptance of historical structures in parks. Nye’s association between the sublime and nature bolsters my conclusion. Nye quotes the idea of writer Marjorie Hope Nicolson that “English writers on the sublime” during the American colonial period, “agreed that the most important ‘stimulus to the Sublime lay in vast objects of Nature’” (1994, p.2). From its inception and popularization in an American context, the sublime has been associated with nature. Thus, if some technology is associated with the sublime, it is possible that said technology becomes linked to nature, fitting it into an existing, dominant, if not vital, narrative.

Image 3.2: Hospital on Roosevelt Island, Manhattan (photograph by author)
It may seem contrived to read sublimity into the designs of New York City’s parks. There is, however, evidence that suggests the sublime was on the mind Fredrick Law Olmsted, given the sublime’s relationship with the picturesque. The picturesque Olmsted promoted and spread to pre-1900 park design strove for “the right synthesis of the beautiful and the sublime: an overall composition of smoothness, harmony, serenity, and order with an occasional reminder of the awesome grandeur of a mountain” or other sublime feature (Cranz, 1982, p. 24). The inclusion of a sublime structure within a simulated natural setting, the natural being an analog of “the beautiful,” can complete the aesthetic balance that is the picturesque. John D. Hunt exemplifies this concept, arguing Olmsted “fabricates a world of impressive natural features” containing in Central Park, for example, “vertiginous cliffs stripped of their vegetation in order to enhance their sublimity” (2004, p.48). Olmsted’s work juxtaposes the “beautiful” soft aesthetics with harsher sublime ones. Furthermore, the excitement and reverence associated with the sublime can also be seen as a tool in the post-1965 fight against park ‘vapidity,’ as a source of visual and emotional stimulus.

Aesthetics serve another integral purpose in this paper, the link between physical object and social narrative. Hunt describes multiple thinkers who arrive at the sentiment that visual elements of gardens “stimulate the mind to recall stories that require verbal articulation” (2004, p.90). The sensory experiences of a garden can link a person to other ideas or knowledge. Hunt exemplifies this by quoting writers Claude-Henri Watelet and Abbé Delille who speak about a visitor to a picturesque garden seeing a “spring or a stream” recalling “similar effects from” their novels (2004, p.92). Applied to follies, specific visual characteristics will determine the links formed.
Hunt’s ideas can be linked to those of Michel-Rolf Trouillot, who conceptualizes the relationship between physical objects and memory by arguing that “one of many reasons why not any fiction can pass for history” is “the materiality of the sociohistorical process” that exists when what “happened leaves traces” (1995, p. 29). What physically exists in the world shapes and controls what narratives can be drawn and not immediately disproven. The visual presence of an object can support or defy narratives. Hence, it is not inconceivable that those in power will attempt to control the historical evidence that survives. If the sublime is a preserving feature, the object containing that sublime may be integrated into a general narrative and said sublime may form the basis of intellectual connections. As we will eventually see, the linked to narratives themselves may be a factor in the final decision to include or remove a structure.

In summary, multiple aesthetics of follies have potential to affect their preservation. Said potential is strongly related to the general ideals employed by park designers at the time of the park’s creation. Additionally, these visual cues are capable of linking parks to external ideas, adding an additional layer to the preservation calculation.

**Hegemony and Conclusions**

Lastly, we must confront the hinted at undercurrents of power and hegemony and the role these ideas’ play in preservation. The specific concept of hegemony in this paper derives from the ideas of Antonio Gramsci via the authors J.V. Femia and E. Colin Ruggero. Hegemony is defined as a social construction established by the group in power, “in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour (sic)” (Ruggero, n.d.). Essentially, hegemony is the social preeminence of certain
narratives over all others as dictated and normalized by the social group in power. Furthermore, hegemony is enforced through the creation in the populous of “behaviour and expectations consistent with the hegemonic social order” via social institutions and other societal features (Ruggero, n.d.). Once established, hegemony must be perpetuated, and thus must conform the people under it to its needs. An example of hegemony at work is the aforementioned portrayal of trains as “forces of nature.” The need to normalized and maintain a capitalistic system bolstering Chicago as an accepted reality encouraged the use of such rhetoric.

If we view parks and follies through the lens of hegemony, the park designers and Parks Department likely function as the social institutions used to establish the hegemonic reality within the populous, the visitors of the park. The tools of hegemony are the previous three theoretical categories. Decisions about what relationship parks are to have with nature, what is acceptable in parks, who or what decides what will remain in parks, and which aesthetic profiles, such as the sublime, exist in follies all affect the narratives a park promotes, and thus may be controlled to conform to a desired reality. Moreover, the narrative of a preserved structure, if it is the only one presented in the park, becomes de facto normalized and hegemonic.

In this chapter I worked through several conceptual elements dealing with issues pertaining to theories of nature, agency, aesthetics, and hegemony. In the next chapter I will apply this framework to the study of follies in The Bronx’ Van Cortlandt Park, High Bridge Park, and Concrete Parks as well as several parks in Manhattan.

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7 This conclusion was drawn with aid of Gary W. McDonogh (advisor to the thesis)
Chapter IV: Technology

This chapter will discuss the multiple follies that are related to technology. The two major cases with which I am working are the Old Croton Aqueduct, found throughout multiple parks in New York and the historical structures in and around the Bronx’ Concrete Plant Park. I will argue that they both display elements of the technological sublime and the grotesque, connecting them to David Nye’s theory of general American sublimity, which may be related to the structures’ preservation. After this argument, I will explaining the narrative that these cases represent.

The Old Croton Aqueduct: Introduction

Remains of the Old Croton Aqueduct can be found primarily in the boroughs of The Bronx and Manhattan, as well as in Westchester County. Started in 1837 and completed in 1842 in order to transport water from rural New York to New York City, the aqueduct was built to mitigate the destructiveness of fires and prevalence of sickness attributed to a lack of readily available fresh water (Friends of the Old Croton Aqueduct, n.d.). Today, the aqueduct survives as multiple physical relics of water transportation infrastructure and as several paths in Bronx parks. I argue that desirable aesthetics and narrative have preserved of the remains of the Old Croton Aqueduct and thus the normalized and proliferated said narrative.

The Old Croton Aqueduct: Sublime Aesthetics

Most of the follies of the Croton Aqueduct do not meld into natural landscapes, appearing in clear contrast to the simulated nature many New York park designers strove
for before 1900. They do, however, remain. I argue that they are supporting evidence for
the claim that features, both aesthetic and narrative, related to the sublime allow for the
preservation, if not naturalization, of structures. Some will contend that the appeal of
preserving history is enough to justify the structures preservation without the need of
sublime aesthetics. While I entertain this as a possibility, I argue that it is also true that the
structures fit into the desired aesthetic concerns of the studied time periods and are
capable of promoting specific narratives.

The Croton Aqueduct Weir stands to one side of the Old Croton Aqueduct trail in
Van Cortlandt Park. The building stands roughly 25 feet and is made of rusticated stone
blocks that age and freeze-thaw cycles have weathered. (Image 4.1). The weir accumulates
graffiti that is periodically painted over with blue and white paint. The corniced roof
supports plant life at some points during the year, though this was not the case during the
winter of late 2015 when the building was photographed. The weir is no longer an
enterable space, though it was at one point, as the existence of a sealed door on one of its
sides suggests. (Image 4.2). Thus, the analysis only concerns the exterior. Though the
potential forms of decaying workings of aqueduct infrastructure held within the weir may
be further evidence of my overall project, to discuss it would be pure speculation.
Nonetheless, the aesthetic of both the technological sublime and the grotesque manifest
themselves in the scale and façade of the weir.

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8 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a weir is a water structure that is meant to “raise or divert the
water” in a canal or river (Weir, n.d. 2016). I do not, however, know the specific purpose of the one found in
Van Cortlandt Park.
Luke Morgan discusses the concept of the *giant* in his aforementioned work. He studies examples of the giant as a motif throughout gardens, concluding that concept of the colossal “expresses the dramatic duality between pleasure and fear” (Morgan, 2015, p. 134). Although the majority of Morgan’s examples are figural and or anthropomorphic pieces, I argue that the primary “fear” is derives from scale and external decay, making the weir an appropriate comparison. The weir is not the tallest object one encounters on the Old Croton Aqueduct trail. Many of the trees dwarf it because of their actual height or their position on the slope of the hill. This contrast does not, however, prevent the weir from achieving imposing size. Firstly, the weir contrasts with its surroundings. While a tall tree may meld with others in a field of vision, the weir stands out. As it is thrice as tall as any
human, one can consider it to be of imposing scale. The structure’s girth magnifies this possible imposition. (Image 4.3). The structure is wider than any other vertical object in the forest. The fact that vegetation, even during leafless periods, often conceals the structure, causing it to come into view suddenly, further increases the imposingness of its height and width. In the words of the writer Jane Forsey, a sublime is an experience is when “we become aware of our limitations” (2007, p.382). Though a person likely would not fear for his or her safety when confronting the weir, one might be forced to confront one’s personal spatial insignificance in the face of a larger object. Given the man-made nature of the weir, one can see this expression of the grotesque as intertwined with the technological sublime as well, a work of machinery causing a kind of awe. Additionally, from an intellectual standpoint, one reflecting on imposition of “giant scale” technology into perceived nature can arguably evoke a form of Nye’s technological sublime, human’s dominion over the landscape.
The weir is a ruin. It at one point served a function but now has been left to decay in the elements. The pockmarks on the door, the cracking in its foundation, and the continual vandalism are testament to its loss of utility and failing physical integrity. Morgan also includes the concept of the ruin in his garden analyses. He considers them to be the clearest manifestation of the grotesque proto-sublime, given their ability to function as a “metaphor for the passing of time” and as a visual analogue of “organic decay” (Morgan, 2015, pp.158-159). Of the two mental connections that ruins are argued to form, the weir better embodies the former. Its visible obsolescence is a sudden demonstration of the mercurial nature of utility and functionality, potentially forcing one to reflect upon their own mortality or fragility. This challenge to self-assurance is the heart of the sublime. As the sublime is an integral facet of the picturesque ideals at work during pre-1900’s park design,
it is understandable that the weir was preserved. The simulated nature surrounding the weir provides the “beauty” to the weir’s sublimity.

An element completely divergent from, but sharing many aesthetic characteristics with the weir is the aforementioned High Bridge and Water Tower. (Image 4.4). These pieces of the Old Croton Aqueduct reside in the appropriately named Highbridge Park in Manhattan, with an annex across the Harlem River in the Bronx. Like the weir, both structures are clearly separate from the foliage and vegetation that surround them. Unlike the weir, however, neither structure is visually a ruin, thus their sublimity comes primarily from their scales. As can be seen image 4.4, the Water Tower dwarfs any object, natural or otherwise in its immediate vicinity. Any emotion the weir’s size induced might be felt equally if not more so at the Water Tower. This being said, being on the island of Manhattan, one has more ready access to tall buildings than in the Bronx, so the structure may not, out of its immediate context, be impressive.

When in the park itself, the High Bridge is often seen from elevated vantages. Thus, the sublime aesthetics it evokes are not felt until after one is standing on the bridge itself. During the process of being landmarked, the bridge was described as being “magnificent and lofty” (Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1970, p.1). This statement indicates that the aesthetics of scale were considered during the decision to officially preserve the bridge. Furthermore, a person walking over where the aqueduct had carried water is provided with a view of the Manhattan skyline. (Image 4.5). This view-shed can be connected to what
David Nye calls “the geometric sublime” of “bridges and skyscrapers,” which can be summarized as a breed of the technological sublime “induced by seeing a vast panorama of man-made objects” (1994, p.77). Looking towards Manhattan, one sees a completely constructed landscape of roads and buildings. This feeling on the High Bridge is amplified both by one’s necessarily having emerged from area of greenery and one’s visually being on the local equivalent of a skyscraper, over 100 feet above the river and highways below.

Old Croton Aqueduct: Narrative

Arguably the remains of the old Croton Aqueduct were preserved in part because of their aesthetics’ functioning as a “deployment” of the general American sublime. In addition to conjuring what Nye describes as an advancement of the oft-championed ideal of the American democratic identity through the sublime, the remains of the Old Croton Aqueduct preserve the story of the aqueduct’s creation in physical form (Fassi, 2010, p. 143). In addition to having a story combining David Nye’s “dynamic” and “geometric” breeds of American technological sublime, the historiography of the Old Croton Aqueduct reveals a consistent portrayal of the aqueduct as a technological success. One can fit this specific narrative of the Old Croton Aqueduct into a greater one intended to highlight New York’s technological progress and achievement.

Despite Nye’s contrasting the “dynamic” and “geometrical” American technological sublimes, I argue that the aqueduct is capable of embodying both into one narrative. Nye argues that the dynamic “emphasized the movement” of human wants “across the natural
landscape,” “the geometrical sublime was static and appeared to dominate nature” (1994, p.77). In terms of dynamism, the aqueduct moved water across an otherwise obstructive landscape. The developed technology allowed New York to overcome a geographic barrier that impeded its access to clean water. As the view the High Bridge affords has already been discussed in terms of the “geometrical sublime,” one can argue that the physical edifices that constitute the remains of the old Croton Aqueduct embody a narrative of power positing human dominance over a perceived natural environment.

The writer Anthony J. Fassi proposes a similar analysis to mine in his “Industrial Ruins, Urban Exploring, and the Postindustrial Picturesque” as mentioned in my literature review. The author links the aqueduct to the technological sublime by tracing the Aqueduct’s historical reception from completion to modern day ruination. He begins by citing the fact that “the city’s newspapers described the celebration” surrounding the completion of the aqueduct “as the largest since Independence Day,” moving on to say that “one can argue that in its very ruination the aqueduct remains an icon of American technological achievement" allowing the “Old Croton Aqueduct remains an important symbol in a heroic narrative of technological history” (Fassi, 2010, pp. 141, 143-144). Evaluation of these claims in relation to Nye’s ideas suggests the argument is valid a priori and is in line with my own. The described scale of the celebration indicates that the aqueduct was highly valued as an achievement following its completion, on par with the remembrance of the liberation of a nation. Although the comparison to “independence day” is likely hyperbole, it does indicate that the country’s media saw the feat of technology as a historical milestone worthy of reverence, a classic characteristic of the American Technological sublime and the American sublime tendency in general. Moreover, to Fassi, if
what was considered such a feat of technological prowess can be allowed to go to ruin without detriment to the city, the implication is that the New York and the United States have developed superior technology (2010). Proof of obsolescence furthers the narrative of linear technological improvement; I refer to this effect as “celebrated obsolescence.” While vital to a successful argument, validity does not imply soundness. For that, we must look at the existing facts, namely the media portrayal of the completion.

It is impossible to verify the actual nature of the celebrations that occurred at the completion of the Croton Aqueduct. Fassi does, however, provide us with a media image “published by J.F. Atwill” called “Croton Water Celebration 1842” (2010, p.142). (Image 4.6). The image depicts crowds of people completely filling the streets leading up to a centrally located fountain of what is presumably Croton-sourced water. The feat of technology is shown to have the power to emotionally affect people to the point that individuality is lost, arguably a kind of sublimation. Other images chose to focus less on the celebration as a whole and more on the opening of certain Croton-based fountains. The fountains themselves are shown to dwarf the on-lookers, a possible demonstration of the power of technology. (Image 4.7) Even if these are not accurate visual representations of the celebration or the fountains, they are the surviving and therefore established narrative. In this regard, the recorded history of the reception suggests the accuracy of Fassi’s application of the technological sublime to the public’s reaction, celebration of the power and achievement of the aqueduct.

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9 Note: The website from which I am drawing this observation, is, on its own, not a source of information that is provably trustworthy, as it is a blog. This being said, the author does provide an investigable, if not formal, citation for the provided image.
Historians of New York and the American environment have continued to highlight the importance of the aqueduct’s existence beyond the initial reaction to its creation. Firstly, the aqueduct has been seen as the first steps towards the eventual overcoming of the cholera in New York City, first striking in 1832 and then again in 1849 and 1866 (Rosenberg, 1962, pp. ix-x). From our vantage, though not completely realized at the time, the aqueduct had the potential to mitigate cholera by providing fresh water to replace the cholera contaminated water. The source of cholera at the time of the aqueduct’s completion, however, was not known and was as a result, more difficult to adequately prevent. This being said, within the traditional understanding of the to aqueduct, as quoted towards the beginning of this chapter, marks it as the solution to “fires and epidemics.” Even if said relationship was not ontologically true, it is the enduring historical narrative.
The Aqueduct shows up in analyses of other cities as well. For example, Stroud indirectly references the Old Croton Aqueduct as being “able to offer [the] residents [of New York City] unfiltered drinking water” a feat that the city of Philadelphia was unable to replicate (2012, p.25). This portrayal suggests that the choice on the part of the City of New York to build the Croton Aqueduct was an act of innovation over the technological prowess of other cities. As such, the aqueduct can be linked to a theme of New York being able to support and take care of its citizens through the power of technology.

Other writers, such as L. Lankton have suggested a direct connection between the improvement of New York City public life and health. For example, Lankton wrote an article titled “1842 - Old Croton Aqueduct Brings Water, Rescues Manhattan From Fire, Disease” for the journal Civil Engineering (1977, p.92). The fact that said article was written
in an engineering journal, further indicates the perception of the Aqueduct as being a technological achievement. The engineering community deemed its results and undertaking to be relevant and article worthy over 130 years after its completion, also an indication of the penetration of the Croton Aqueduct’s story outside of historical circles.

In addition to the historical and historiographical reception to the Aqueduct, there is direct evidence that the landmark designations of the High Bridge and the Water Tower were influenced by the narrative of the technical prowess required in its construction and the sanitary role the Aqueduct played. The Landmarks Commission declared their decision to landmark the High Bridge because it “is a triumph of 19th Century engineering skill” and “that it assured an ample supply of pure Croton Water to the city” (Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1970, p.3). The celebration of “engineering skill” appears to be a manifestation of Nye’s technological sublime, something the bridge’s aesthetic features corroborate. The Water Tower is also valued as a historical object. The commission for its landmark designation argued, “it stands as a reminder of our City’s remarkable water supply system” (Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1967, Water Tower). The preservers’ statements corroborate my claim that an object’s link to a narrative of technical achievement can be a feature of responsible preservation, and that the links to narratives become attached to the physical structures. Lastly, one sees similar language used as part of the justification of the preservation of the 119th Street Gatehouse; it was preserved for its contribution to the water system of the Old Croton Aqueduct, which benefited the city as “New York’s first significant supply of fresh water” (Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2000, p. 6). These statements reveal that the narrative of the Aqueduct’s being a boon to city life’s being connect to the follies was an integral part of their preservation. These
Parallels in Concrete Plant Park:

Concrete Plant Park is situated between the Bronx River and rail lines in the South Bronx. It contains multiple pieces of former industrial equipment that belonged to “Transit Mix Concrete Corporation” which operated a “concrete batch mix plant” at the location until 1987 (NYC Parks, n.d., Concrete Plant Park). (Image 4.8.). While the history behind these structures is less prominent than that of the Aqueduct, we do see parallel concerns with regards to connections to the American sublime, albeit stemming from a different design mentality.

Given the date of Concrete Plant Park’s construction and the fact that it is not a piece of preserved nature, one could argue the park is subject to the aforementioned post-1965 anti-vapidity movement that took hold of park design in New York City. Said movement, mentioned in my settings chapter, lead to the conceptualization of the American iteration “adventure playground” and other recreational landscape features. (See Chapter III). Given the fact that the designed space of Concrete Park lacks any interactive features, one could argue that a passive supplement to the desired “adventure” elements is required. A park’s inspiring awe or even morbid interest could be that supplement.

The media-portrayed functionality of the follies supports the above sentiment. The Daily News, reporting around the time of the park’s opening, declares the “silos from the old
concrete plant remain as sculptural elements and reminders of the site’s history” (Samuels, 2009). Describing the machinery as being sculptural indicates that they are valued for their aesthetic properties. David Nye refers to the technological sublime related to factories and their infrastructure as the industrial sublime, stemming from reverence of having “conquered and resigned leviathans[] to do his bidding” (1994, p.134). The “resigned leviathan” aspect presents itself in the above valued visuals as the follies’ scales, rising from a flat surface to dwarf the viewer similarly to the weir, albeit lacking the backdrop of taller trees.

The narrative described as linked to the follies of Concrete Plant Park is abstracter than that behind the Old Croton Aqueduct. The website “Open House New York” encapsulates the importance of history through an explanation behind the parks creation as “to celebrate the industrial heritage of the lower Bronx River” (Open House New York, n.d.). While a lack of a specifically famous history prevents the objects from linking to formative stories in the New York or American past, it does allow the existing structures to represent a general “industrial heritage” and the age in which that was relevant.

The celebration of the silos exists despite their obsolescence. Thus, one can view the described celebration as that of progression past the industrial epoch, similar to some of the significance mentioned in Fassi’s analysis of the Old Croton Aqueduct. The resigned leviathans of Concrete Plant Park at one point “tame[d] nature, extracting power from ‘useless’ raw materials” but are no longer needed for that purpose (Nye, 1994, p.134). Today, they are symbols that American technology has found superior methods of “extracting power” and maintaining dominance over nature.
Students of post-industrialism might object the celebrating of industry’s decline, viewing it as a source of pain rather than pride. The industrial photographs of Jose Vergara, for example, “bear witness to the negative forces of deindustrialization: the demise of the urban, working class and the plight of homeless residents living among the abandoned centers of American industry” (Fassi, 2010, p.145). Viewed through such a lens, the follies of Concrete Plant Park are sorrowful memorials rather than celebratory monuments. While a mournful interpretation is clearly possible, I argue that the preservation and display of the machinery without context and as abstract representations of industrial heritage acts to “obscure the plight of former industrial workers beneath aesthetic concerns” rather than highlight it (Fassi, 2010, p. 149). The negative reality is lost in a counter-reality of sublime reverence. Despite the tragedy that the decline of the industry left, lack of a need for certain forms of industry in the United States can be celebrated in the abstract as the increase of technological prowess, often associated with social and economic progress. Lacking a direct representation of the counter-narrative, the triumphant becomes normalized.

Conclusions:

Synthesizing the above findings can nuance our understanding of both the American Technological Sublime and the folly’s relationship with narrative. It appears that the American Technological Sublime has two aspects, a visual and an intellectual. The visual sublime refers to observed aesthetics such as grand size or technical complexity. I have argued that this visible has been a factor in the preservation of the follies, whether by appealing to picturesque design theory, the tastes of landmark designators, or attempts to fight vapidity in design. The intellectual sublime is a reverence drawn not from what the
folly’s appearance, but what it represents, its narrative. In addition to eliciting awe from their relative scale, the machines of Concrete Plant Park also carry a reverence within the aforementioned narrative of American industry. The leviathan itself (visual), that man controlled said leviathan (intellectual), and the implied power of said leviathan (intellectual) all awe the one-looker. The narrative of celebrated obsolesce seen above is a corollary to the intellectual sublime, being the awe of the surpassing of an intellectual sublime. I hypothesize that the grotesque is related to narrative obsolescence, possibly its visual counterpart. Ultimately, application to case studies suggests that sublime aesthetics are inseparably part of the narratives they house.

Reflecting on the discussed narratives, however, it is clear that they are not limited to the intellectual sublime. A folly can link to opposing narratives. One sees said opposition in diverging but explored interpretations of Concrete Plant Park’s abstract representation of historic industrialism. While I argued for the celebratory reading via the technological sublime, the other also holds weight. Possible duality in historical understanding must be entertained in further analyses. Because the more prominent story is likely that empowering the preserving agent, it can be considered a part of the accepted hegemony. These nuances should be held in mind for the coming chapters concerning the role of military structures in the next chapter.
Chapter V: Military Remnants

Structures are often left behind during the conversion from military installation to park, follies in many ways conforming to previously explore aesthetic and narrative concerns. I will argue that these structures, as with the technological follies, preserve American narratives of military readiness and innovation. For this chapter I will investigate Governor’s Island, with briefer references to Fort Totten and the Blockhouse.

The conversion of historic military installations into parks is often relatively seamless. They often have parade grounds that provide existing greenery, and “semi-public” service buildings and public restrooms can be converted from military housing or administration areas. And lastly, military bases often have historical significance, luring military tourists and historians alike. Conversion, however, poses the risk of treading on cultural icons and sites of memory. Through the subsequent combination of a need for infrastructure, the promotion of historicism, and a fear of cultural erasure, military bases play host to a multitude of follies.

Governor’s Island

Governor’s Island sits off of the tip of Manhattan and coast of Brooklyn, accessible via a two-dollar ferry ride. Although the New York City Parks department does not operate it and payment is required for admission, I still consider Governor’s Island to be a park. It
offers a variety of open spaces; offers artistic, culinary, musical and cultural events; and does not restrict access based on familiarity of the intended guest.

Governor’s Island’s martial history predates the founding of the United States. According to the National Parks Service, Governor’s Island hosted a “colonial militia in 1755” and remained a kind of military or coast guard instillation until 1996, eventually opening in part to the public in 2003 (National Parks Service, n.d.). This length of history has contributed to the Island’s building stock, which contains buildings from different eras, ranging from historic forts to relatively modern officer’s quarters housing. Eventually the Island played host to the “Military Division of the Atlantic and Department of the East, responsible for coordinating army activities for the Eastern United States,” a change credited with introducing many of the more modern pieces of architecture (National Parks Service, n.d.). Although no longer a functioning military instillation, stories and prestige still linger in the buildings and ruins that cover the island.

Many of the historical structures on Governor’s Island have been reused, serving administrative purposes or becoming museums and independent art galleries. Others have been completely closed to the public. The majority of façades found on the Island remain intact, even those of restricted buildings. The interiors of even many of the accessible spaces, however, have been allowed to decay to varying extents. I will be focusing primarily on inaccessible buildings, as they tend to function more in the manner of the follies that I have been already discussing.

The largest of the abandoned structures and one sharing characteristics with many on the island, is referred to as “Building 400” in the Landmark Commission report about the Island and separates the more structure–rich northern third of the island from the
pastoralized southern two thirds (Hansen & Pearson, 1996, p. 157). (Image 5.1). This building stands three stories high and is made primarily of red brick with smaller grey concrete and painted white wood elements. 400's scale is referenced in its Landmark report with the authors noting that it “was the first Army building designed to house an entire regiment” and that “it remains one of the largest army buildings in the world” (Hansen & Pearson, 1996, p. 158). Using such language within a case for preservation may indicate that impressive size is an important trait, potentially indicating a trace of the geometric technological sublime appealing to the preservers.

In addition to having several accessible courtyards and an archway, Building 400 has multiple doorways with overhanging terraces. All of the doors are, however, locked, sealing the building’s interior, barring acts of vandalism. Viewed solely from the exterior, any claims about the building’s being grotesque would be questionable and any claim of its being a ruin would be doubly dubious. The interior, however, is arguably grotesque and in a state of partial ruin. (Image 5.2). While Building 400 cannot be entered, looking through its windows reveals a neglected, decaying space. While the basic infrastructure appears to be intact, the rooms appear to lack any kind of functionality or standard of cleanliness. The contrast between exterior and interior can be seen as revealing a celebrated obsolescence similar to what we see in the Old Croton Aqueduct and Concrete Plant Park. Although Building 400 was an achievement of scale at the time of its creation, it is no longer worth maintaining its interior. A similar analysis can be drawn about the officer’s houses and
military administration buildings that litter the northern third. While the exterior has been, in some cases restored, the interior has been neglected.

The military has intrinsic ties to violence and war. Although he does not mention war specifically as a form of the grotesque in gardens, Morgan does draw some partial connections. For example, he claims that the fact that “even the apparently harmless” water fountains called “giochi d’acqua ... were understood in military terms” is example of the inclusion of fear in gardens (Morgan, 2016, p.3). The violence and fear generated through associations with the military may thus lend some sublimity to the relics of the military’s past, especially those that have been externally well preserved. It is in this morbid element of the military that we see the ability for narrative duality, a celebration of the armed forces and a fear of their work. Given the treatment of the buildings in the landmark reports, however, it is likely that the former remains the dominant narrative.

Outside of the sublime, one could connect the preservation of the buildings on Governor’s Island to a trend that Galen Cranz describes arising in the 1970s. Cranz describes the creation of “urban cultural parks” that were “intended to preserve an important part of the nation’s industrial and economic history for educational and recreational purposes” (1982, p.141). At a certain point in park design history, cultured preservation became a widespread practice. I argue that military histories can be seen as analogous to “industrial and economic” ones, as they are in many cases inseparable. The military requires resources from and often bolsters or depresses the growth of a country’s
industry and economy. The designers of the Governor's Island may have intended to capture this narrative within the ruins they preserved.

The story promoted through the existence of Governor's Island's military infrastructure is one of military readiness and longevity. The Landmarks Commission, which marked the buildings of the island for preservation, argues "that the island [...] is significant as a major military post, a role...which is illustrated by a range of historical structures dating from the nineteenth century to the 1930s" (Hansen & Pearson, 1996, p.197). This statement provides a clear link between the narrative behind the buildings and their preservation. Thus, it is important to understand this narrative. According to the National Parks Service's description of the island, "New York's coastal defenses underscored the importance that a unified system of fortifications could ensure the safety and livelihood of a community and ultimately, a nation" (National Parks Service, n.d.). Such language posits Governor's Island, and the military establishment that it represents, as being integral to the history and survival of the nation. It seems to suggest that these sites inherently contain a kind of heroism in their physicality. Moreover, of the two possible interpretations of military structures, the National Parks Service seems to lend hegemony to the heroic over the fearful one.

One sees similar normalization of heroism in the treatment of specific structures on the island. The preservation of "prototypical circular fortification...known as Castle Williams" that stands on the northwest of the island further bolsters such a hypothesis (National Parks Service, n.d.). (Image 5.3). Having the prototype of fort design encapsulates the idea that Governor's Island was not only militarily central to the survival of the nation but also technologically innovative. One can see the workings of the intellectual
technological sublime in the language the Landmarks Commission used in describing the technical details related to “lines of fire” behind the innovative nature of the fort (Hansen & Pearson, 1996, p.184). Part of the evidence for the building’s worthiness for preservation is portrayed in the article as its preservation of historical engineering novelty. As such, one can connect Nye’s technological sublime with the power the military contains.

Technological advancement has become linked to military innovation. Following the praise of its innovation, the Commission indicates, “due to advances in weaponry technology... the fortifications at Governors (sic) Island were quickly obsolete” (Hansen & Pearson, 1996, p.185). Castle Williams and the Island as a whole epitomizes both advances at the time of construction and the later improvements upon those advancements. The displaying of obsolesces and partial ruination of Governor’s Island implies that, as a whole, the United States military progresses such that formerly vital assets have become outdated, further normalization of progress.

**Image 5.3: Governor’s Island – Castle Williams (photograph by author)**

**Fort Totten**

Fort Totten is a park controlled by the New York City Parks Department that resembles Governor’s Island. Located in the borough of Queens, it is a military base turned park that features multiple partially decayed and partially intact military and civilian structures. As the New York City Parks Department does not control Governor’s Island, Fort Totten and the other parks I have studied are subject to different administrative forces than Governor’s Island. If Governor’s Island bears enough resemblance to Fort Totten, it is
likely that Governor’s is comparable to other parks controlled by the New York City Parks Department regardless of administrative differences. In this section I will demonstrate that the New York Parks department has undertaken preservation actions in Fort Totten similar to those I have observed in Governor’s Island, indicating that my above analysis of Governor’s Island is appropriate.

A typical example of a structure comparable to Building 400 or the houses on Governor’s Island is Fort Totten’s “Building 635,” which appears to be a former military house. (Image 5.4). The house is visible through a screen of trees from one the multiple roads that run through Fort Totten. As with multiple of the buildings on Governor’s island, 635 is not enterable to the best of my knowledge, though it has a door and a non-empty interior. Building 635’s elements of decay are not visible from a distance. Further inspection, however, reveals at least superficial decay, as seen with interior of Building 400. (Image 5.5). Multiple wooden elements and metal elements have begun to show signs of rot and rust, and the building’s paint has been partially weathered away. Building 635 displays many of the now familiar signs associated with Morgan’s grotesque as vector of the sublime much in the same way that one finds on Governor’s Island.

Both Fort Totten and Governor’s Island also share similar narratives of continued military presence. The Landmark Preservation Commission cites the “structures from various phases of development” found in the fort as “vividly depicting the changing role of military technology and defense strategy between the Civil War and World War II” also noting that “Fort Totten is a tangible reminder of New York City’s once powerful harbor
defense system” (Pearson, 1999, p. 189). As with Governor’s Island and its Castle Williams, we see the valuing of the buildings’ abilities to capture both the strength of the military, and the transition of technology. Those who make choices concerning landmark allocations have demonstrated a proclivity for certain features of the military something that might affect their choices about whether or not to preserve a structure. As I have argued previously, one can view said tendency as being a marker of the American technological sublime. Furthermore, the fact that many of Fort Totten’s structures, such as 635 are decaying into the grotesque, indicates that the “once powerful harbor defense system” of New York is now outdated, a familiar motif enforcing the hegemony of progress over stasis.

Moreover, although previously inhabited, Fort Totten first became a military instillation during American Civil War, during which it served as a location for "casualty support and hospital care" (NYC Parks, n.d., Fort Totten). While the fort did not see actual combat, much like Governor’s Island, it did play an active supporting role in the Civil War, one that helped preserve lives rather than take them. Just as Governor’s Island has been partially credited with ensuring “the safety and livelihood of... [the] nation,” Fort Totten can analogously be credited with contributing to the maintaining of said nation when threatened by internal strife. Governor’s Island embodies the story of a “liberated” United States, Fort Totten a preserved one.10 Furthermore, given that neither structure saw actual combat, the tragic associations of conflict that are connected to military objects are avoidable. The

10 I understand that there are multiple problems with referring the end of the Revolutionary War as “liberation,” but they are not immediately relevant to this paper.
buildings’ lack of attachment to bloodshed helps eschew this element in favor of normalizing an otherwise celebratory or triumphant history. Beyond these large-scale military installations, one can also find isolated military structures in New York City parks.

**Military in Central Park**

Central Park is New York City’s best-known park and is arguably the most influential space in and for New York City’s parks as a whole. Within its picturesque, simulated natural landscape, lie remembrances of its martial history that are rarely topics of serious analysis. I argue that the military follies found in Central Park can be seen further proof of the celebration of the military that saturates many New York City parks. In this section, I make an example of only the Blockhouse, though another would be the Arsenal.

The Blockhouse stands on a hill in located in northwestern Central Park. This folly is a rectangular cuboid consisting of a rusticated stone blocks, with plant growth spanning its full height. (Image 5.6). The interior, locked to the public using a bar-grate door, is overgrown with plant life. (Image 5.7a, 5.7b). Of all the military structures discussed, the Blockhouse is the most ruin-like as it is visibly succumbing to nature, through both weathering and plant-life. The grotesque aesthetics we have associated with ruins, therefore, result from the building's literal physical degradation, indicating the structure has ceased to serve its purpose.
There is little reliable information on the history of the Blockhouse. The Central Park Conservancy states that the Blockhouse is “Central Park’s oldest building, [and] ... the only remaining fortification of the many built in 1814 to defend against the British” during the War of 1812 (2015). The Blockhouse is, like Governor’s Island and Fort Totten, a symbol of a network of national defense in and for the city of New York and the nation as a whole. The non-academic website “Forgotten New York” claims the installment of the Blockhouse was a defensive response to the British assault on the Connecticut town of Stonington (n.d.). This explanation, regardless of historicity, supports the idea that New York as a city was taking steps to defend its citizens, further feeding the omnipresent reverence of the military. Moreover, the building’s origin in a specific conflict is also significant, as it brings into the present an identifiable moment in American history that was, in this case, a United States military victory. Though specificity may allow for negative
connotations of the military, the Blockhouse’s historiographical thinness allows for it to become abstracted, allowing a more general history of victory rise take prominence.

**Conclusions:**

The follies of military history I have touched on in this chapter represent a fraction of those that exist. Found in all of the boroughs, many have elements of ruination. In the Bronx, one can find the Van Cortlandt Estate, in which George Washington briefly stayed and used as part of military tactics during the Revolutionary War (NYC Parks, n.d., Van Cortlandt Park). Today the house stands as a museum with a set of grand weathered stairs and the remains of a former Dutch Garden. (Image 5.8a,b). Brooklyn is home to Floyd Bennett Field, a former Naval Air Base (New York Harbor Parks, n.d.). In addition to containing the paved remains of runways, the park is home to the ruins of several plane hangers. (Image 5.9). On Staten Island, one finds the ruins of Fort Wadsworth, a British Fort in the Revolutionary war that was converted to American use during the War of 1812 (National Parks Service, n.d., tailed History of Fort Wadsworth). One could argue that this is the best example of military triumph, the conversion of an opponent’s infrastructure into one’s own.

**Image 5.8 a&b: Van Cortlandt House, Stairs, and Gardens, Bronx (photograph by author)**

These examples illustrate that aesthetic and narrative connections can be found across different kinds of follies. Although a weir has very little in common with a house on a military, base or a machine from a concrete factory, they all produce visual experiences
that contribute to feelings of the sublime and act as icons for the narrative of the lineage of societal progress. These follies, despite their differences, are physical evidence that the United States has been able to provide for, construct, and defend its nation. It seems, however, that the sublime elements related to the military tend to be *intellectual* rather than *visual*. The story the folly tells is one of impressiveness or complexity, rather than the building itself inspiring awe or fear. Such a difference suggests that it is possible sublime or positive narrative, confirming the normalized mindset of progress, could aid preservation without the accompanying visuals.

**Image 5.9: Floyd Bennett Field Hanger, Brooklyn (photograph by author)**
Chapter VI: What Is Lost

Before there was Central Park, there was Seneca Village. So far we have seen preservation to varying degrees. While Building 400 has been preserved entirely, other follies consist only of trace remembrances, such as the remains of Putnam Railroad. All of these cases, however, share existence, a physical presence in the world. Seneca Village does not.

Seneca Village was a mid-nineteenth century village on the Island of Manhattan that sat within what is now Central Park. By 1855, Seneca Village had a population of 264, consisting primarily of African Americans with smaller populations of Irish and German immigrants (Blackmar and Rosenzweig, 1992, p.66). The village had a disproportionately high number of landowning African Americans. This fact is especially visible in the historical record due to land–based voting laws that created a situation in Seneca Village where black “residents were several times more likely to have voting privileges than black New Yorkers in general” (Blackmar and Rosenzweig, 1992, p.72). In short, this village can be seen as an example of limited minority elevation in the face of the ubiquitous adversity of the Antebellum United States.

The creation of Central Park destroyed Seneca Village. The government acquired the rights to the land in Seneca Village “through a judicial procedure and only after payment of suitable compensation” (Blackmar and Rosenzweig, 1992, p. 59). The compensation was, however, monetary and the benefits of life in Seneca Village were based on real property. African Americans who lost their land to eminent domain also lost voting privileges. In theory, the monetary compensation could have been used to purchase new land and new
In practice, many of the African American landowners had been driven to Seneca Village due to “informal racial bars on land sales[] and the high price of downtown Manhattan real estate” (Blackmar and Rosenzweig, 1992, p.70). The land was affordable and ‘racially’ accessible in Seneca Village, but the same was not true for other locations throughout the New York. Thus, even with financial compensation, acquiring land and by extension voting privileges would be difficult. This conclusion will become relevant later.

A modern investigation of the former location of Seneca Village reveals that there is no physical indication of the existence of the town. Placard added in the 2000s discussing the destruction of the village does exist, but there is no remnant of the physical village itself. Seneca Village has produced no folly in its passing. I argue that a folly from Seneca Village would have multiple common characteristics that exist in structures throughout New York City.

In order to prove this, one must indulge in a thought experiment. Suppose that one or several of the buildings constituting Seneca Village were, as with the Blockhouse, preserved. Firstly, as is seen on Governor’s Island, they could have been repurposed as administrative buildings. If there were an aversion to using a formerly private home for administrative purposes, one of Seneca Village’s churches, such as the All Angels Church or African Methodist Episcopal Church could have been adapted for civil service (Alexander, 2008, pp. 155, 159). The aesthetic characteristics of the buildings in Seneca would also have fit into the established aesthetics that run through New York’s follies. Observers of the village in its heyday “described the humble dwellings of Seneca Village residents as ‘shanties,’” a term that historians R. Rosenzweig and E. Blackmar consider to be partially accurate (1992, p.68). A partly decaying, vacant former residence that could arguably be
viewed as a “shanty,” would likely evoke the grotesque ruin in some capacity. Given the previously expressed desire to include sublime elements in Central Park, grotesque follies would not be out of place.

A church or private home could have, like the Van Cortlandt Mansion or Dyckman House, become a museum for the public. This would be especially pertinent given that Seneca contained some of the more successful minority figures in New York City. Long time landowners whose land is converted to parkland often receive some kind of recognition in the park. This recognition may occur even without any physical preservation. For example, when “the estate of the eminent John Ewen” was converted into a “small, sloping park,” the park took his name (Tieck, 1968, p.83). This idea is not to suggest Central Park could have been named for a resident of Seneca, but rather that an attribution to an important Seneca Village figure was not impossible.

Despite the likely parallels between potential Seneca Village follies and remembrances and others we have seen, none seem to exist. Moreover, an analysis of the merits of parks that F. L. Olmsted promotes following the creation of Central Park, suggests

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11 The author Michelle Young from the website “Untapped Cities” claimed in 2013 that there is, in fact, a remembrance of Seneca Village. The author further provided photographic evidence of what was claimed to be “the only remaining visible foundation from Seneca Village” citing as a source “City Connections Realty.” (Young, 2013). This claim made again on the blog “This Hidden City” written and photographed by Adel Souto as well as by Joel Sobel from the blog Park Odyssey (Souto, 2016). (Sobel, 2014). While I do not doubt that this remnant exists as it is photographed, despite my not being able to locate it when at the location, I am dubious as to the factuality of the claim that it is a remnant of Seneca Village. There is no academic or official source that references this specific foundation’s existence, including the records provided by the archeological team that excavated and unearthed artifacts from Seneca Village in 2011. (Copeland et al., 2011). Thus, I am willing function as though the claimed remnant of Seneca Village is in fact not a part of the original structures that existed. Furthermore, assuming that the foundation is in fact a folly of Seneca Village, I argue that it is unable to function in the same way as other follies I have studied, as they have all maintained some kind of obvious visibility. Even the railroad ties of the Old Putnam Railroad Trail that I referenced in my introduction are often readily visible. This foundation, on the other hand, remained unseen even after several visits to the site.
a simultaneous attempt to erase and justify the leveling of Seneca Village.\textsuperscript{12} Quoted in Chapter II, in his 1870 address, “Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns,” Olmsted talks about the importance of the recently completed Central Park as a democratizing space in which vast numbers of people brought [are brought] closely together, poor and rich, young and old, Jew and Gentile” (2011, p. 325). In expressing this idea, Olmsted was attempting to portray Central Park as a location open and available to all people. The destruction of Seneca Village, however, was an act of exclusion from the park, a direct contradiction of Olmsted’s proposal. There are four ways to reconcile Olmsted’s praise with reality. Firstly, Olmsted was not aware or had forgotten of the existence of Seneca Village, and thus made no conscious contradiction. Secondly, Olmsted believed that the benefits arising from creating a park over the site of Seneca Village was an act of inclusion so great that it negated the initial act of exclusion. Thirdly, Seneca Village is implied to not exist. Or lastly, it is implied that the people who lived in Seneca Village were not people. Although it is impossible to know which of these possibilities, if any, are correct, this speech helps erase Seneca Village from New York’s mental landscape, mirroring what has occurred in the physical. The story of Central Park is being written excluding the village.

Without mentioning the Village itself, Olmsted justifies its destruction. He posits the park also acts as a way to increase a city’s physical and moral health. He declares that “foliage... acts mechanically to purify the air by screening it” and that a lack of such purification can “seriously affect[] [the] health and morals” of society. (Olmsted, 2011, p. 323). One could extend this idea to the morality of building a park in order to eliminate a

\textsuperscript{12} The following section concerning the ideas of F.L. Olmsted is a derivative of a previous work of mine: Trebach, S. I., Tran, A., Harbor, E., & Schurtz, S. (2015). Seneca Village: A People, A Space, A Defiant History. 20th Century Urban Environmental History.
concentration of unsanitary conditions. The first-hand descriptions of Seneca Village by other New York residents should be consulted, looking through the lens of this conclusion. For example, the residents of the village were said to be “living off the refuse of the city” and “gathering ‘rubbish of all descriptions’” (Blackmar and Rosenzweig, 1992, p.69). Although Blackmar and Rosenzweig do not consider these statements to be an accurate reflection of the reality of Seneca Village, they are a representation of the public mentality concerning the town. Therefore, Olmsted has indirectly defined the replacement of a village “living off the refuse of the city” with a park to be a moral and healthful imperative.

A final erasure of Seneca Village can be seen in Olmsted’s discussions of planning the then City of Brooklyn’s Prospect Park. The author Matthew W. Klingle describes his planning as an attempt to “mesh with the local environment and not against it” (2007, p. 125). In the distinction between first and second nature, the residences within the park boundaries could have been viewed as a part of the second nature environment of Central Park. That they were flattened and then replaced with an imitated natural environment implies that the village was not a part of the accepted landscape. Even if this conclusion was not intentional, it is a possible interpretation opened for the informed observer and further removal of Seneca Village from the historical narrative of Central Park.

Why would this total mental and physical erasure occur? One hypothesis could be that the actions of the village violated the American sense of pastoralism expressed by Leo Marx. By creating what could be perceived as deformations or damage to the environment, the residents of Seneca Village could have been treading on the pastoral ideal of undisturbed nature is alive in “the lower plane of [American] collective fantasy life” (Marx, 1964, p.6). Any closer scrutiny negates this idea, given that this paper centers on
interruptions in the pastoral ideal. It is interruptions that evoke the sublime and fearful aesthetics that appear in many of the preserved follies.

Instead, we must confront Trouillot’s aforementioned ideas of memory and physical objects. In today’s historiography, one cannot deny the existence of Seneca Village given the amount and diversity of proof that has been compiled for its existence. In addition to maps and anecdotes, archeological evidence found by the University of Columbia in 2011 acts as proof that there was, at one point, a settlement in that location (Wall & Rothschild, n.d.). But before the archeological work and the compiling of disparate evidence, one could argue that there had never been an actual Seneca Village, especially if one draws conclusions about Central Park from Olmsted’s rhetoric. To the average park goer, the total destruction of the Village’s buildings meant its removal from public consciousness.

As has already been established, Seneca Village was an oddity for its time. It was a village of minorities who were able to gain uncommon political agency and subsist more successfully than other clusters of the same minorities. Minority, especially racial minority, success would be inconceivable to the makers of the park and the New York general population. Trouillot argues that the “worldview [] widely shared by whites in Europe and the Americas” during periods when slavery existed, was that the “decedents” of “enslaved Africans...could not envision freedom” (1995, p.73). The fact that a village of landowning, potentially voting decedents of “enslaved Africans” sat in the country’s largest city defied the perceived reality of the existing hegemony promoted. One can see the white population’s reaction as a precursor to the “race suicide” theory of the “turn-of-the-century elites” which consisted of “the fear that the birthrate among non-white or catholic immigrants would dilute the racial stock of native-born white Protestant Americans”
Seneca Village indicated that such fears were in fact a possibility. "Non-white or catholic" populations would not only establish themselves but also thrive and gain political power. Both of these possibilities present challenges to the established hegemonic dynamic, the enforcement of a reality or narrative that benefits those in power. One possible symptom of this threat to hegemony is the consistent references to the Village's unsanitary or impermanent nature, despite this portrayal's being contrary to fact.

Trouillot argues, "when reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs" (1995, p.72). The destruction and total erasure of Seneca Village from the visual and ideological landscape that became Central Park may be a physical manifestation of "forc[ing] reality with the scope of [one's] beliefs." As Seneca Village did not conform to the prevailing social mentality of minority poverty and weakness, the reality needed to be corrected and hegemonic narrative restored. As we have seen throughout this paper, even ruins of historical objects can convey their stories; therefore, all physical evidence was destroyed and the village's existence forgotten.

One can also see this mentality as employing Olmsted's ideology that "poor, debased places tended to produce poor, debased people, and vice versa. Changing the land would thus change the people" (Klingel, 2007, p.131). The persistent existence of Seneca Village could be seen not only as a threat to narrative, but also as a corrupting force in society as a whole. Thoroughly eliminating Seneca Village would eliminate the negative influence of the

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13 One should note that this theory was prevalent decades after the destruction of Seneca Village. Given the racial mentalities of the Antebellum United States, however, such racial fears and perceptions would likely have been relatable if not applicable. This being said, I acknowledge this may be anachronistic.
anomaly. The undesirable influence or element of the landscape was destroyed, and first nature was fabricated to cement this erasure of second nature.

Another narrative hypothesis is the possibility that the replacement of Seneca Village with simulated nature inverted a core feature of the American technological sublime, man’s triumph over nature. In many instances of the American technological sublime, humans have overcome obstacles the terrain has imposed on them. For example, Nye cites the train’s ability to move at a greater speed than previously experienced as human’s ability to counter the temporal and spatial limitations of large distances (Nye, 1994). In this case, what has the physical appearance of first nature is forcing the removal of second nature, an inverse of the hegemonic “concept of reality.” This differs from the cases in which estates were voluntarily sold or donated to the city, as the transfer was in the case of Seneca an involuntary relinquishing of property.

A folly from Seneca Village would be one with contradictory narratives. The relic could be interpreted either as a remembrance of minority success or as the conquering of first over second nature. The first of these narratives was unthinkable, the second a counter to the idea of American technological and social progress. Potential danger to the established order overshadows any aesthetic value that may act as incentive for preservation.

We can see the erasure as an attempt to completely excise the story of Seneca Village from the narrative of New York City and its parks. One could argue against generalizing this nuance in the narrative manipulation from a single example, proposing that Seneca Village is the only example of this kind of behavior. I would then point to the cases of Crotona Park and North Brother Island.
Crotona Park has already been mentioned as being an estate in what is now the South Bronx that the city bought and converted into a park. While this is the same origin as Van Cortlandt Park and Ewen Park, Crotona Park was not acquired from the “Crotona” family. The land was acquired from the Bathgate family but “a dispute with the family led a Parks Department engineer to name it after Croton, an ancient Greek colony” in tribute to athleticism and the Old Croton Aqueduct; the only “historical” reference now being a later, Robert Moses-era playground named for the family (NYC Parks, n.d., Crotona Park). No remnant of the estate remains within the park, and the name of the playground came from a different designer than the original planner. This suggests that the original intent of the “Parks Department engineer” was to erase any connection to the Bathgate family, leaving no monument and or proof of existence.

The fate of the nearby Claremont Mansion in Claremont Park casts doubt upon claims against the practicality of maintaining remnants of an estate on a park premises. In the Claremont case, a smooth transition from the owners “Elliott and Anna Zborowski de Montsaulain” helped lead to the Parks Department’s preservation and repurposing of the mansion; “the Claremont Mansion was razed in 1938 and replaced with a gazebo” in an area now known as “Zborowski Point” (NYC Parks, n.d., Claremont Park). While both of these conversions occur in the same geographic area, they have different outcomes. The creators and subsequent modifiers of the park were willing to preserve the Claremont legacy, even beyond events that necessitated the destruction of a historical structure. The difference between Claremont and Crotona/Bathgate is the difference of peace versus conflict. Conflict is often perceived as a negative and likely was therefore erased, peace a positive and therefore preserved. Ultimately, the Crotona conflict acts as a split between
two dominant forces in society, the government and the wealthy, threatening to cause ruptures in the established hegemony, a state that needed to be corrected. A similar pairing of erased and preserved can be found in the treatment of North Brother Island.

North Brother Island, skirting the line between folly and erasure, is the site of a failed hospital in decaying ruins. New York City Parks Department currently controls and restricts the island, located between the Bronx and Queens (Kirby, 2016). The only members of the general public able to visit the island regularly are trespassing urban explorers, who have photographed the island extensively, allowing us to understand its aesthetics (Kirby, 2016).

Although the ruins, which fit all of the categories we have discussed, do currently exist within Parks Department controlled land, I argue that they are not follies. As they are not generally available for direct public viewing and do not function as part of the city as a whole. In addition to the safety hazards associated with structural decay of buildings, the isolation of these structures may be out of historical disappointment. The North Brother Island underwent multiple, predominantly medical uses, including a “drug rehab (sic) center for heroin-addicted teens” before its final closure and abandonment, none of which saw any lasting success or sustained subsistence (Kirby, 2016). The preservation of this history in the form of accessible follies would be the preservation of a failure to provide lasting medical treatment for the New York citizenry, especially its drug-addicted youth.

The element of erasure is more prevalent when one notices that other hospitals have been preserved in ways that are open to the public. A clear but little known example of this is the case of Seton Park in the Bronx. Seton Park was home to a hospital until the year 1955, when most of the building “was demolished” (NYC Parks, n.d., Seton Park).
Today one can still find follies the hospital has left. For example, in a patch of woodland in the western end of the park, one can find the remains of the hospital’s pool and south of the park’s tennis courts, an old chapel. (Image 6.1-6.2). The Seton Hospital does not have a well-documented history of failure, and thus, despite its demolition, is likely not looked upon as an failure in social progress. Writer Camila Sotomayor in her “Landscapes of the Living Dead” argues that “where the present is already in ruins and we project a romantic and nostalgic version of the past” (Sotomayor, 2012, p.52). As the ruins of Seton Hospital have little history attached to them, one may project upon them the idea that either the hospital was no longer needed, a sign of progress, or that it was a force for good in the neighborhood. Sotomayor’s projection effect can likely be applied to multiple of the follies analyzed in this paper. North Brother Island’s association with repeated failure likely prevents this idealizing nostalgia from taking hold. Providing no narrative benefit, the Island, therefore, must be isolated.

Image 6.1: Seton Hospital–Pool, Bronx (photograph by author)
Conclusions:

The conspicuous absence of follies in the above cases seems to challenge my previous assertions of the importance of aesthetics while at the same time confirming my assertions of narrative. It appears as though the aesthetics of the sublime and ruin are not sufficient to preserve a folly. A historical structure must also bring into the present a history conforming to society’s hegemonic narrative. Consciously or unconsciously, the landscape architect and other stakeholders rely on selective preservation of history to manipulate the storylines readily available to the public, a form of social engineering intended to point towards progress. This conclusion does not mean, however, that ideas of aesthetics should be abandoned. Many of the desired effects can be transmitted through
folio’s sublime and or grotesque visual aspects. Being able to find a pattern in the appearance of what is preserved can inform our knowledge of the histories being permitted, the manner of their expressions, and how to identify other follies when we encounter them. As was said at the end of Chapter IV, the visual is closely bound to the intellectual. One must understand that the final goal of the preservation is not, however, the aesthetics but rather the connection to and manipulation of perceptions of the past.

Despite these physical erasures, it is important to note that the Parks Department has in many ways resurrected stories, albeit in textual and not physical form. A large portion of the information in this chapter originated on the Parks Department official website. Central Park now has a plaque to Seneca Village, Crotona Park has its Bathgate Playground, and the article concerning North Brother Island above was focused primarily on the possibility of the island’s becoming a park (Kirby, 2016). The Parks Department taking responsibility and sharing the history of these destroyed or isolated sites indicates a possible shift in the attitude of the Department, as it currently exists. While older versions of the Parks Department were willing to craft history to their desires, the ones in recent years have begun to provide a more complete picture of their parks. Ultimately, however, the lack of physical remnants removes more than words can replace. In the “materiality of the sociohistorical process” Trouillot argues for is torn in the racially charged destruction of villages or the isolation of a failed hospital from the public’s view. Words can mitigate the damage but cannot fix the loss nor amend its genesis.

Conclusions and Reflections:
In this thesis, I have investigated both the physical features and histories of the historic technological and military structures that punctuate New York City Parks, analyzing them through a lens of aesthetic and narrative theoretical concerns. As I have suggested, these follies are not inertial vestiges whose preservation stems from ignorance or removal inability. Instead, my findings have shown that although we perceive parks as being a part of what William Cronon would call first nature, the idea of social and technological progress permeates much of the preserved landscape, whether in aesthetics or in narratives. At the same time, histories and their physical manifestations challenging the validity of these ideas have been excised through either physical erasure or isolation. In these cases, such as Seneca Village’s removal for the creation of New York’s prized Central Park, the realities surrounding issues of class and race come into conflict with the society’s dominant beliefs.

I have concluded that the quiddity of this historical narrative of progress is ultimately physical and social power in the abstract. This power is expressed as manifestations of the sublime as I have shown in the visual and intellectual aspects of Nye’s American Technological Sublime and in Morgan’s grotesque proto-sublime. The sublimities found in follies reflect the “vast objects of nature,” spoken of as “the most important stimulus to the Sublime” (Nye, 1994, p.2). In the Old Croton Aqueduct, one sees man’s power to overcome distance, technological limitations, sickness, and fire through continual progress. In the silos of Concrete Plant Park, the might of industry humbles the viewer, who also acknowledges the human role in their creation. And in these structures’ grotesqueries we see obsolesces, our surpassing of the sublime we have created.
Likewise, in the preserved structures of the military, we see the development of the power to defend ourselves and to preserve our other sublimities from harm. The relics of hospitals, only briefly mentioned in this paper and worthy of more study, carry a similar message of narrative of community care. As has already been stated, these narratives are open to the public and thus able to spread icons of power throughout the city.

The celebrated power in this hegemonic system is ultimately sourced and maintained outside of the frame of the park. This source would likely be the classes, in Marxian terms, that hold structural power or “control over [the means] which [allow] them to substantially shape society” in both “socio-cultural and political-economic” domains (Glassman, 2003, p.268). As such, those who strive to maintain structural power, focus on not only acquiring political office or material assets to affirm and cement control in the “political-economic” sphere, but also, establishing a hegemonic vision of public space and nature that glorifies and monumentalizes power. Such a vision legitimizes, in “socio-cultural” sphere, the hierarchal systems from which they benefit.

Therefore, it makes sense that the preservers of the follies I have studied are linked to the power centers of society, the shapers and maintainers of the hegemony. These agents include wealthy, estate-owning families such as the Van Cortlandts and the Dyckmans, the holders of economic power wishing to secure their socio-cultural footholds through both celebrated legacies and hegemonic legitimations. Other such agents are those involved in governance of both the city and park system, whose power in the political sphere shelters in justification built from the correct past. Without accusation of intentionality, it is understandable that the aesthetic ideals benefiting from inclusion of the sublime would take hold in multiple epochs of park design. They were born around people who were in
contact with or owned the sublime across various realms such as: the physical dynamism of trains, the sensory ideals of Romanticism’s art and poetry, or the visual impact of certain travel locations containing the aforementioned sublime “vast objects of nature.” These forces were a kind of analog in the socio-cultural sphere to political and economic clout. If harnessed, this analog could normalize in the city’s fabric its political-economic counterpart.

When one reflects on erasures in light of the above proposition, the nature of narrative and agency seems to hold even more truth. Seneca Village presented a challenge to the hegemonic view of the reality of urban elite expansion. African Americans owning land and voting challenged the power bound to the structural societal racism that forced their initial settlement in the Village. Moreover, the space the village occupied, challenged the normalized entitlement to greenery, bolstered in part by Olmsted’s aforementioned rhetoric of cleanliness as societal progress required a park not a neighborhood. The dispute between the Bathgate Family and the Parks Department engineer that lead to the name “Crotona Park” was a breakdown in the power alliance of the wealthy and the government, a rift among elites that did not disrupt hegemony. And the grotesque found in North Brother Island is an unintended obsolescence, progress unable to overcome nature and societal shortcomings.

Unlike even the most fragmentary of remains, once an object has been erased, much of its narrative power is lost. A reconstruction of what would otherwise have been a folly cannot corroborate a history, as it is a fabrication, proof of nothing except the desire to tell a story. A replica of a historical structure holds more in common with a true folly than an accidental one.
At the edge of Manhattan’s Chinatown sits Columbus Park. At the northernmost end of the park, an over 110-year-old building, apply named the “Columbus Park Pavilion” reopened after closure in 2007 (Shapiro, 2007). (Image 7.1). At the time of my investigation, the largely Chinese and Chinese–American community had put it and the square in front of it to use. Given its current status, although it is a historical structure, the Columbus Park Pavilion would likely not fit the definition of an accidental folly. Cities are dynamic spaces, the community that makes use of the pavilion may fade, and the park may expand. Given these possibilities, the temptation to remove the Columbus Park Pavilion may arise. If destroyed, the meanings and history with which the community imbued the building would be erased.

It is with the above reflections in mind that I advocate for the expansion of the preservation of accidental follies, not to maintain the past or current hegemonies, but to dilute them. The preservation of structures such as the Columbus Park Pavilion could
diversify the historical narratives present in New York City’s parks by enfoldling stories of struggle and hardship alongside joy and belonging, such as that of the Chinese immigrant and Chinese–American communal experiences. The normalization of narratives such as these could challenge the hegemonic discourse that celebrates power and demands linear progress while at the same time contributing to a richer understanding of the New York City’s collective past.
## Appendix: Parks Studied

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