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“They’re Tryin’ to Wash Us Away”: Performance, Urban Adaptation, and the New New Orleans

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Weston Twardowski

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ABSTRACT:

In the wake of environmental catastrophe, active intervention is needed to heal trauma, resist erasure, and navigate changing communities. Focusing on New Orleans after the federal levee failures following Hurricane Katrina, this dissertation looks across a diverse mix of case studies to theorize how communities utilize performance to navigate mass trauma and shape new civic identities. Since 2005, a new New Orleans has emerged. This new city is one fundamentally transformed by an influx of newcomers, alongside a massive neoliberal restructuring of public services and economic policies. These changes have only further marginalized already vulnerable communities, disproportionately forcing them into the city's economically outsized but notoriously low-paying tourism industry. In this environment performance is increasingly essential to economic and political survival, as well as a sense of belonging and spiritual connection to home within New Orleans. Performance is a means of generating civic discourse; of drawing attention to undiscussed and buried traumas; of highlighting inequity and demanding equity; of calling for sustained investment and environmental protection; of memorializing what was lost in disaster; and, above all, of navigating tempestuous shifts to understand where we live and what it means to belong to place—to call somewhere home. Across four chapters I build a theory of adaptation through performance that unites theatre and performance theory with memory studies, trauma theory, and African American studies (particularly Black feminism and Black geography) through the site of New Orleans.

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Prelude: “Oh, Katrina, what have you done?”

I am New Orleans—
Queen City of the South;
As fabulous—as fantastic and unreal as the cities of the
Arabian Nights.

—Marcus B. Christian, “I Am New Orleans”¹

On the twelfth floor of Ochsner Medical Center, I walked down the linoleum tiled hallway to get back to the room my mother and I were occupying. My father was tending to patients on the floor. He was on the nurses’ “A” team: the group that stayed during the storm until it passed and would be relieved by the “B” team. My mother, already unable to move without the assistance of an electric wheelchair, was largely confined to the hospital bed we were borrowing throughout the storm’s duration (my father had arranged this specially for us as we were stranded without him). I was told to remain on the floor and not wander too far from our room as to remain out of the way of hospital staff. I remember staring down the end of the corridor. Our room was at the end of the wing, on the right-hand side of a window that would normally look out onto the rest of the medical complex. But during the storm the window had been boarded up with three quarter inch plywood, nailed to the interior in case of strong winds or flying debris. As I made my way down the hallway, I noticed water accumulating near the window. I saw it leaking in from the edges of the board, besides the nails that had either been neglected when the plywood was installed or else knocked out of the wood by the force of the wind. I remember the thunder as I approached our room and the flashes of light that leaked in from the cracks of the sides of wood. And more than anything, I remember watching the wood straining as the wind pushed against it, buckling and threatening to yield to the storm raging outside. And I remember, for the first time in my life, feeling terrified by weather.

I was 7 years old when Hurricane Georges hit. It was a strong storm, peaking as a Category

4 major storm, and did extensive damage (killing over 600, and costing nearly \$14 billion) in the Caribbean. Despite this, the US mainland was spared the worst of the hurricane, and, resultantly, Georges is largely forgotten in public memory. Yet it remains emblazoned in mine. I still remember the bizarre experience of driving *into* a city most were evacuating from. I grew up in a suburb a half-hour north of the French Quarter. To get into New Orleans we drove over the twenty-two-mile Lake Pontchartrain Causeway bridge. Driving over the Causeway we were the only car entering the city—although there was bumper-to-bumper traffic leaving New Orleans. When we were heading to Ochsner it appeared Georges was on a direct collision course for New Orleans, and new emergency plans were going into effect (notably, this was the first time the Superdome would be used as a “shelter of last resort”). In many ways, Georges helps explain the strange relationship Gulf Southerners hold with hurricanes. Hurricanes are a regular part of life, and locals are well aware of the duality with which they are treated. Minor storms are so frequent that time off from work for one is often referred to as a “Hurrication.” It is easy to become complacent towards hurricanes, to believe the storm will miss you, just as the last one did. Yet every hurricane season brings the possibility of catastrophe.

This dissertation unquestionably grew out of my own time growing up in and around New Orleans, and especially my own experience with Katrina. However, my focus in this project is far less on individual experiences—especially my own—but rather on the multi-vocal nature of the city. While all places change over time, those struck by calamity must reconcile their identity in rapid, public ways. Though this project focuses on New Orleans and the city post-Katrina, my aim is not only to understand how New Orleans has evolved, but rather to provide a framework for understanding how places navigate sudden, overwhelming change and the subsequent identity crises that arise in their aftermath. As the global climate crisis intensifies, the sad but certain reality

is that more frequent and severe natural disasters are sure to unfold in the decades to come. At the time of writing, of the five most expensive disasters in US history, four occurred in the last decade (the fifth was Katrina). Wildfires are consuming large parts of the American West, and Louisiana is reeling from its third direct hit by a major hurricane in two years. For Americans, and arguably for the West, Katrina remains the Ur-disaster of what will likely become a century of catastrophes across the globe. In turning to Katrina, I seek to understand how cities change and adapt in response to disaster. I offer performance as a key means by which changing populations navigate the rough transition, especially for those who seek to preserve a semblance of place and understanding of history. Finally, I work to provide strategies for how we can adapt—even in the most decimated of places.

Introduction: “It Doesn’t Leave You Just ‘Cause You Leave Town”

Jazz actually arose from the dead. The real music came from the grave. That’s why it brings people to life.

-Louis Armstrong²

The dead roam ready to haunt
an already haunted city
for the rest of its natural and
unnatural days.

-Quo Vadis Gex-Greaux, “Waterlogged, Nomadic Katrina Songs”³

On 9 October 2005, the nine members of the Hot 8 band met together at Pampy’s Creole Kitchen at the corner of North Broad and St. Bernard on the western edge of the 7th ward—a spot that had been underwater a month before. Each brought a donated instrument they had only recently acquired. Most had traveled hours from their temporary refuges across the Southeast: Baton Rouge, Houston, Atlanta.⁴ Now back in New Orleans, the devastation that had driven them from their homes was inescapable. Besides from the visible reminders (waterlines, homes with haunting X’s spray painted on the doors, a man removing dead animal carcasses, the pervasive smell in the air of mold and decay), there were the constant reminders of absence in the form of the people who were missing from the ritual. As the city’s population was less than 35% of what it had been before the storm, there was an absence of audience members. There was an absence of key performers, as none of the traditional Mardi Gras Indians, with their usual dynamic costumes, appeared, and multiple members of the band were missing.⁵ Finally, there was the absence of the body of Austin Leslie, the acclaimed creole chef, who had died less than two weeks after the storm from the stress of evacuating to Atlanta.⁶ His passing was the reason the Hot 8 had reassembled but Leslie’s cremated remains were still in Georgia, waiting to be returned New Orleans. Despite the absence of these core elements, the Hot 8 gathered to hold the first Jazz Funeral since Katrina had made landfall six weeks earlier.

New Orleans' jazz funerals serve as the junction of a series of customs and rituals steeped in religion, history, memory, and community. Often pointed to as one of the foundational elements of modern jazz, the funeral ceremony emerged in the nineteenth century as a combination of West African Yoruba customs, mixed with Haitian Voodoo, and both Catholic and Black Protestant traditions.⁷ As Richard Brent Turner argues, the jazz funeral is a unique musical expression of communal healing.⁸ The jazz funeral's influence on the development of jazz is unmistakable. Jazz funerals are an essential component of the cultural memory and identity of the Crescent City. In the years since Katrina, they have served not only as a source of catharsis for grieving communities, but also as sites of protest and reinvigoration for a population who were dramatically confronted with national neglect and often disdain. After Katrina, early reports wondered if the tradition would survive the damage to the city and the overwhelming loss of performers who either died or were forced out of the city by the disaster.⁹ In the years following Katrina, the ritual was threatened by newcomers who failed to understand its historical and cultural significance. Despite these challenges, the ceremony endures, often adapting to changing conditions in New Orleans but remaining a cultural touchstone that inspires countless remembrance services, artistic projects, and activist campaigns.

Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate how performance allows the citizens of New Orleans to navigate the tempestuous shifts in understanding where they live and what it means to belong to a place—to call somewhere home. I view performance as both aesthetic forms such as theatre and performance art, as well as broader embodied experiences wherein an event or setting converts interlocutors to audiences or participant/actors. This role of performance in generating embodied engagement across various publics makes it critical to recognizing how New Orleans has adapted since the disaster. I delineate the ways performance has informed the evolution of

New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent Federal Levee Failures of 2005. This is due both to New Orleans' long ties to important autochthonous cultural forms (most famously jazz music and Carnival parades), but also to the reality that, following Katrina, the city faced competing visions of what it was and should be. As understandings of place shifted, placemaking practices became essential to articulating both the history and present of the city. Further, placemaking became an essential part of how communities rebuilt across myriad facets of civic life. Indeed, placemaking performances have become critical to how leaders assert their claim to belonging within New Orleans and articulate their visions for its future across political, environmental, community, artistic, business, religious, and activist spheres (among others). My case studies reveal how populations utilize performance to generate civic discourse, to draw attention to undiscussed and buried traumas, to highlight inequity and demand equity, to call for sustained investment in environmental protections, and to memorialize what was lost in disaster.

I begin this introduction with the jazz funeral of Austin Leslie as an example of how communities turn to performance to process change, assert themselves, and understand—as well as shape—the places they inhabit. Throughout this project I argue that performance is essential to how inhabitants and outsiders understand cities, making and preserving connections to place across time—something jazz funerals powerfully demonstrate. Jazz funerals operate as memory machines that, in the words of performance theorist Joseph Roach, mobilize a “ghostly power to insinuate memory between the lines, in the spaces between the words... [and so] by such means, the dead remain among the living.”¹⁰ Roach centered his seminal work *Cities of the Dead* on the performance traditions in New Orleans that allow for memory to be “surrogated” across time.¹¹ Katrina certainly disrupted these traditions, but also proved their longevity and staying power. My turn to post-Katrina New Orleans is motivated by many of the same spirits that fascinate Roach,

however my interest in the city as a case study is due less to its unique cultural traditions and more because of the city's value as a model of adaptation amidst environmental devastation. While all cities change over time, the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent levee failures demanded remarkable change exceptionally fast. Further, while the memory of Katrina is still strong, especially at the national and local levels, sufficient time has passed so that public understandings of the event have shifted. In conducting research, I found that locals still have strong memories of many aspects of the storm (especially those stories that became a kind of personal canon of the event), yet specifics and details—especially of the recovery and slow rebuilding—were hazy, absent, or inaccurate. Given this natural deterioration of memory, coupled with many civic leaders from the era having already passed away, there is a need for preserving stories of individuals involved in the rebuilding of network development systems that enabled the city's recovery. Finally, while New Orleans and the disaster of 2005 are well studied across a range of disciplines, surprisingly little attention is paid to the impacts of Katrina on culture, or New Orleans' use of culture to navigate the legacy of Katrina.¹²

Across this project, I am attentive to the politics of place and the myriad expressions of belonging that shape multi-vocal communities. Performances hold cultural and spiritual significance to those living within a given place, but they are also used to advance economic and political agendas. Given this, performance becomes a powerful means not only of group expression, but also political activism, resistance, resilience, rebellion, and revolution. This ability of performance to challenge prevailing narratives often prompts those in power to engage in censorious acts against performance, as well as generate their own performances to undergird their authority. The attachments that individuals and communities hold to place are real and powerful. Beyond a desire to maintain existence within a place, residents also wish for others (both

newcomers and outsiders) to recognize the value of the histories, memories, and stories of specific places. In particular, I am attentive to sites of performance that help communities process the 2005 disaster through individual and collective acts of mourning. Echoing theorists like Fred Moten, I view mourning as a political act—one with potentially revolutionary consequences. Public mourning is a critical strategy marginalized groups utilize to make public the ongoing ramifications of Katrina, government neglect, pervasive environmental racism, and the public's erasure of Black contributions to New Orleans.¹³

Performance encourages audiences to move outside the role of passive viewer and into active participant. In this, I view performance as a profoundly democratic medium linked to corporeality, place, and common experience—facets that work to generate empathy, mutual support, the transference of memory, and, ideally, the generation of new social networks. I emphasize the importance of social networks for two reasons. First, there is a robust scholarship (perhaps best represented by gender theorist Miranda Joseph's work) that points to the somewhat nebulous nature of "community" as a term and its limitations regarding strong social ties.¹⁴ Second, following Katrina, the population of New Orleans shrank, at its lowest, to only a few thousand emergency personnel in the city.¹⁵ The long years of bringing back inhabitants (and taking new residents in) meant that all social networks—generally the key element of surviving traumatic incidents—were devastated. This environment demanded the creation of new networks to provide some semblance of support. As this project will demonstrate, the performance works of the early years after the storm were intensely interested in exactly this kind of network creation, and even the projects I engage with that are removed from the storm by over a decade still seek to, sometimes more indirectly, help citizens recognize how their lives are interconnected.

Bound together with adaptation is the need for memorialization. As urban design scholars

Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella argue, “urban resilience, at least in its American form, is inextricably linked to the process of memorialization.”¹⁶ Vale and Campanella argue for the critical work of memorialization both for the inherent value of providing recognition for citizens who died or were displaced, but also point to the ways that spaces of memorialization allow for positive growth (often through commemorative infrastructure such as public monuments or parks) within areas that might otherwise be disinvested in or disregarded. They argue that “the process of rebuilding is a necessary but, by itself, insufficient condition for enabling recovery and resilience.”¹⁷ I read these ideas together as a call for adaptation: a willingness to accept that cities facing catastrophes must reconcile with the ramifications of these events. Memorialization is a key part of what enables adaptation, and, in turn, survival. Throughout the following chapters I demonstrate how performances work through the trauma of Katrina and the complex questions of what a post-Katrina existence means to the citizenry who reside there. I reveal how commemoration and place-based performance practices allow for community formation through the inculcation of newcomers into local traditions, histories, and memories. Finally, I argue that much of the commemorative work that exists around Katrina serves not only to keep the disaster in the public’s eye, but rather to focus attention on the ways Katrina continues to echo into the lives of those who were most disproportionately impacted by the storm—overwhelmingly poor and middle-class Black and Brown New Orleanians. Memory-work is a political act that highlights inequalities and neglect. The continual return to trauma as a productive source for political action is a key strategy of many local artists and activists who continue to warn New Orleanians that Katrina is not only doomed to be repeated if it is forgotten, but that if we do not learn from the disaster and work to make real, long-term sustainable change the city will suffer the fate of 2005 not once but many times to come.

This introduction presents a framework for the remainder of the dissertation. I provide first, an explication of Hurricane Katrina and the causes of the 2005 flood; second, an overview of my thinking on the relationship between memory and performance, especially through race, and how these forces are mobilized through place-making practices; third, an argument for performance as a survival mechanism and what this means for a changing climate; fourth, my definition for the term “civic identity;” and, finally, an overview of the subsequent chapters in the dissertation and the methods used for this study. Throughout, I provide important background into both New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina that is useful for understanding the context of subsequent case studies. I foreground each section of the introduction with details from the funeral of Austin Leslie and jazz funerals in general to both highlight the practice of some of these ideas, as well as to lay a foundation for many of the performances studied in subsequent chapters that draw inspiration from the model of the jazz funeral in some form.

Finally, a note on terminology is necessary: throughout this dissertation I use “Katrina,” following local custom, to mean not only the hurricane itself, but for the federal levee failures and, at times, the months of recovery after the initial disaster. Hurricanes are prolonged events, with days of waiting and watching their path before they land. Following even a minor hurricane recovery generally takes, at a minimum, hours if not days. Major storms typically mean power outages and water quality advisories that last for days or weeks. In this, hurricanes invite a temporality of slowness. Hurricane time is long, has great staying power, and is imagined to be both the period before landfall, the hours or days where the storm physically lasts over a place, and the time that extends after the disaster until the recovery is complete (a complicated idea as two neighbors living side-by-side may have extraordinarily different recovery timelines depending on their levels of physical and mental damage).

New Orleans and Katrina

In the early weeks after the storm, newspapers around the United States ran obituaries of Austin Leslie recounting him as a pioneering creole chef, a deeply loved member of the New Orleans community, and without exception, the inspiration behind the head chef character of Big Arthur on the short lived 1980s TV series *Frank's Place*. Leslie's Katrina story is sadly common of many of those who stayed in the city for the storm. Surviving for two days on the rooftop of his home, Leslie was rescued from the floodwaters and taken to the convention center where, with thousands of other displaced New Orleanians, he was able to take a bus to Atlanta to be with relatives. Leslie had planned to return to New Orleans and reopen his popular restaurant, Pampy's Creole Kitchen, before suffering a fatal heart attack on September 29th.¹⁸ His death was undoubtedly tied to the physical and mental stress of his ordeal during and after the flood. Because he died before October 1st, he was included in the official records of Katrina fatalities: those who died in similar ways to Leslie, but 48 hours later, were not—a point of tension for many who viewed relatives as having died from Katrina only to be informed their losses wouldn't count in the official records.¹⁹ National newspapers ran another spate of articles on Leslie a week after the original obituaries, this time describing his small jazz funeral. The procession would normally have commanded thousands of attendees. Instead, two dozen participants walked through the abandoned, detritus laden streets past Pampy's and, later, the site of the Chez Helene, the restaurant that had made Leslie famous.²⁰

Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005, with winds in excess of 125 miles per hour and storm surges ranging from 12 to 27 feet high in parts of Louisiana and Mississippi. When the storm ultimately reached New Orleans, it would cause overwhelming damage to the

city's flood protection system that resulted in 53 levee breaches. New Orleans, famously described as a bowl, sits beneath sea-level in most places. With the levee failures, a wall of water, in some places greater than 20 feet high, tore through the city. By the time Katrina left the city, some 80% of New Orleans was underwater, covered in a toxic stew—a mix of Lake Pontchartrain, storm water, leaked oil, and chemicals from residences, commercial shops, and oil refineries. Cars, debris, boats, buses, and dead bodies floated through the city's streets. Thousands were left stranded on rooftops with tens-of-thousands more all but abandoned without food, water, or power in the “shelters of last resort” (the Superdome and conference center) in the city's downtown. Images began to flow out of houses submerged in water up to their attics. Images of flattened houses or with cars dropped on top of them circulated widely. Video of rain pouring in from a hole that formed in the roof of the Superdome played on a loop. Above all, there were pictures of anguish: citizens, overwhelmingly Black, abandoned by their governments (city, state, and federal alike), begging to be rescued in a city so damaged it prompted the editorial board of the *Chicago Tribune* to ask “is this America?”²¹ This question foregrounded what would turn into a semantic debate in the months following the storm as Katrina evacuees were regularly declared “refugees” by the press. The fact that citizens were labeled as *refugees*, a term legally denoting a lack of citizenship, instead of *evacuees*, which would have implied temporary displacement from danger, in essence marked the New Orleanians as non-citizens for the crime of being from a flooded city.²² In the weeks after, New Orleans' population fell to an estimated few thousand medical workers, emergency responders, and national guard personnel. It took over two months to fully drain the city of water.²³

While the devastation of New Orleans in 2005 and the subsequent governmental failures were exceptional in their scale, the factors that enabled the calamity were not. Since the immediate

aftermath of the storm there have been groups dedicated to correcting media narratives. The most prominent inaccuracies were the overzealous depictions of primarily Black residents committing violence in the aftermath of the disaster, and the idea that Katrina was an exceptionally strong—almost unimaginably strong—hurricane.²⁴ While Katrina was a major hurricane (a storm rated Category 3 or higher), the storm’s strength was greatly reduced by the time it landed in New Orleans. The actual devastation was made possible through the improper construction and poor maintenance of a flood protection system of levees built and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers.²⁵ It is critical to understand though, even without the shoddy nature of the New Orleans levee system, the city had long been at risk of a major flood event from a hurricane for a variety of human-made environmental reasons. Chief among these human-led causes is the extraordinary coastal erosion overwhelmingly caused by the levee system around the Mississippi River and the dredging of canals in the region. The most prominent of the canals was the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet Canal or “Mr. Go,” a boondoggle project meant to attract new shipping through the port of New Orleans by shortening the route to the Gulf of Mexico. Mr. Go was both a major economic failure and helped direct and strengthen Katrina’s storm surge directly into the city.²⁶ As historian Andy Horowitz demonstrates, Katrina was not merely a chance disaster, but rather the culmination of nearly a century of environmental malpractice, negligence, and economic disinvestment that culminated in making New Orleans extraordinarily vulnerable to even small storms.²⁷

Equally important to recognize is the wealth of scholarship that stresses how New Orleans’s economic and racial disparities, while stark, are in fact common in the United States—a fact that hints at how a Katrina-scale disaster, especially regarding human suffering and government inability to adequately respond, is not a phenomenon only possible in New Orleans. Political scientist Cedric Johnson notes how the hollowing out of government services in New

Orleans (a common trend in US cities) and disaster management at the federal level precipitated the days-long lack of government response.²⁸ This idea is echoed by Black geographer Clyde Woods, who demonstrates how capitalist forces in New Orleans and the greater Mississippi Delta region fought to curtail the political and economic power of Black people. Woods traces the horrific treatment of Black New Orleanians during Hurricane Katrina directly to the willful disregard of Black life that has existed for centuries in the United States and especially in the Gulf South.²⁹ These ideas are echoed in the works of New Orleans scholars such as Thomas Jessen Adams, Matt Sakakeeny, and Vincanne Adams who have powerfully articulated that while New Orleans has traded heavily on its image as a unique global city, in reality the problems and quotidian struggles the city experiences in relationship to politics, crime, economics, and quality of life are direct consequences of the neoliberal reforms that have damaged countless cities across the United States.³⁰

Together, the capitalist approach to environmental deregulation and the privatization of social services within the city culminated to enable the crisis of 2005. In this, Katrina demonstrates philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's conception that "natural catastrophes are no longer separable from their technological, economic, and political implications or repercussions."³¹ Nancy argues that, in today's hyperconnected capitalist economy *there are no natural disasters*. The interconnected nature of disastrous consequences is fundamentally tied to the human systems that are created (and dismantled) by the oppositional force. Given the realities of human-made climate change, these disruptions will only grow more frequent and powerful. As Katrina demonstrates, the most vulnerable will continue to be those who have been historically marginalized.

New Orleans' recognizability, size, and historical importance to the US and especially Southern US economy, meant that Katrina's devastation, and the accompanying lack of

government response, led to prolonged international attention. As literary scholar Anna Hartnell has argued, Katrina serves as “the repudiation of the ideals that animated the mirage of the ‘American Century,’” in effect serving as a dire warning of what the US policies of privatization, decimating of social safety nets, and refusal to address climate change and environmental destruction will garner in the 21st century. This attention has made Katrina certainly the most studied disaster event of the 21st century and among the most studied in history. Despite this, the research has largely centered on the environmental causes, government response, medical consequences, and economic changes incumbent in the city. While some work exists on cultural responses to Katrina—in particular sociologist Ron Eyerman’s link of culture to trauma is useful for thinking through these interrelationships—surprisingly little attention has been paid to how Katrina reshaped New Orleans culture, and even less on Katrina’s long-term impacts on performance.³² While I seek to address this gap, my interest extends further, instead asking how utilizing performance theory helps us to understand recovery over time and see the ways cities adapt.

Race, Place, Memory, and Performance

Todd Higgins stepped out of the procession for Austin Leslie and addressed the media present: “for the press, just to be clear: this is a funeral procession. And there is a clear distinction between a funeral procession and a parade.”³³ Higgins was a member of the Black Men of Labor, one of the many benevolent societies of New Orleans. Black benevolent societies in the city were initially formed in the period after emancipation to provide essential services for the Black residents of the city such as healthcare and funeral expenses. Benevolent societies blend these services with an active social club experience and have served as a pillar of Black life in New

Orleans for over a century.³⁴ Among the most traditional roles of the clubs are organizing and running jazz funerals for deceased members. While the funeral processions are raucous, they blend mourning with joy and serve as an opportunity for the celebration of an individual member of the community—entirely distinct from the parades that precede and unfold on Mardi Gras Day each year to mark Carnival season. The day of Leslie’s funeral, press accounts reported that there were more media present than mourners—a highly unusual and telling phenomena. In reminding the gathered press that the event (while to outsiders perhaps merely appearing to be a party) was in fact a formal local ritual, Higgins was preserving—and delineating—a central aspect of Black life in New Orleans.

While Katrina thrust the deep racial divides in New Orleans into the global spotlight, the storm did not cause the inequities on display but merely unveiled the natural consequence of centuries of oppression. The city had long been majority Black but the disinvestment in the Black citizenry, a theme common to cities throughout the South and United States as a whole, meant that the overwhelming wealth of the city was concentrated in white ownership. That racism has been part and parcel of the city’s history is a matter of national record; it is no coincidence that the court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, that inscribed “separate but equal” as the law of the land emerged from New Orleans, and that the desegregation of southern public schools, helmed by Ruby Bridges and the McDonogh Three (Leona Tate, Tessie Prevost, and Gail Etienne) was started—under court order—in New Orleans. The city’s racial inequity can arguably best be seen through geography. The city experienced the red-lining programs carried out nationally in the United States that were engineered to devalue the neighborhoods of people of color.³⁵ In New Orleans though, geography is shaped by water. The further from the river, the natural high point of New Orleans’ terrain, the more likely flooding is to occur. Black residents were systematically forced into the low-lying

areas of former marshland that was only converted to land in the early 20th century through the invention of a new pumping system.³⁶ This newly settled, converted marshland was overwhelmingly in the Lower 9th Ward and New Orleans East—two predominantly Black neighborhoods. Other majority Black areas, such as the famous Tremé neighborhood, have been historically threatened through the passage of laws (as with the expulsion of Storyville in 1917) or the construction of physical infrastructure (prominently the Claiborne Expressway that erased an important economic and cultural space for Black life on Claiborne Ave when the highway was built over the area).³⁷

New Orleans' history is deeply entwined with the sale of human bodies. The largest slavers port in the nation, New Orleans for centuries maintained convoluted racial structures thanks to its complex history of multiple national rulers. Because of the French “Code Noir” the Black and Creole communities within the city were able to maintain unique positions even under the American regime in the 19th century, such as the formation of the Black marketplace that would come to be known as Congo Square.³⁸ Congo Square has long served as the spiritual heart of Black New Orleans for its central marketplace and musical expressions. Historian Rashauna Johnson has argued for the space as “inextricably bound” to the racism of the city, both serving as a place that “...gave free persons an opportunity to enjoy a curated and contained blackness,” as well as enabling Black residents to, “create a local culture that remains distinctive even today.”³⁹ Congo Square prominently featured traditional Yoruba drums and dancing, components that would ultimately develop into the second half of the jazz funeral practice, the “second line.” The first half, the actual funeral, were a mixture of religious elements converging into one event: the Yoruban and Vodou practices of traveling (walking) prayer, Catholic funeral rites and martyr emblems (also often doubling as icons for Vodou gods), and Black Protestant spirituals sung

solemnly as the funeral procession occurs. These various rituals each combine specific religious practices intended to help the dead cross over to the next life, while allowing the living to express their grief.

The jazz funeral is arguably the most iconic of the local rites that memorialize the dead. Jazz funerals are arranged for members of benevolent societies and occasionally prominent public figures (usually civic or religious leaders). The procession usually begins at a local church or the home of the deceased, which is typically marked with a black wreath.⁴⁰ Upon leaving the home, a community leader might offer a welcome and thanks. During the march to the cemetery, the band plays somberly. Traditional spiritual songs are common, “Amazing Grace,” “Nearer My God to Thee,” “Just a Closer Walk with Thee,” etc.⁴¹ Sometimes the songs are sung by a single singer, but more commonly they are sung by groups or the whole procession, and are thus meant to be recognizable hymns for all to participate in. Then the procession files into the cemetery. Jazz funerals regularly attract hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of participants. Cemeteries within the city limits are typically small. St. Louis no. 1, the most iconic of New Orleans graveyards, is only the size of a single small city block. When the procession arrives, the attendees overwhelm the space. Crowds flood in between the crypts and climb atop the distinctive above ground tombs. As the remains are interred, the priest offers a blessing and speaks to the crowd. Once the ceremony has concluded, the band leads the procession back onto the streets to begin the final march.

The final march is always pre-routed, typically planned along buildings significant to the deceased in their life: their home, place of work, favorite restaurant, etc. Once the band has led the procession a few blocks away from the cemetery, the lead trumpeter plays a two-note alert to his fellow bandmates, cueing the drummer to lay down the beat. With that, the march erupts into a celebration.⁴² Loud, brassy, and bold, the music comes pouring out. Black clothes are replaced by

bright colors as coats are removed and revelers join in the march. Often Mardi Gras Indians join in the festival, donning traditional costumes and demanding space as they join in singing and dancing dramatic, deliberately masculine dances meant to invoke African war ceremonies. Revelers pull out bright parasols and handkerchiefs to add further color to the celebration. This is where the mourning is banished—the music drives out sorrow as the celebration of life springs forth, in the essence of the Louis Armstrong quotation that precedes this introduction.

The jazz funeral is a particularly useful means of understanding the processes that shape much of my theorization of memory transmission through performance. Choreographer and New Orleans arts leader Stephanie McKee-Anderson refers to the jazz funeral form as an “ancient technology” that locals turn to in order to understand their world.⁴³ McKee-Anderson’s comparison to technology hints at the way that rituals and embodied practices serve as both ontological frameworks and mechanisms to cause change (an idea echoed by theatre historian Marvin Carlson, through his conception of theatre as a “memory-machine”).⁴⁴ This conception of embodied practice being essential for memory formation is echoed by philosopher Walter Benjamin:

Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium. It is the medium of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging... In this sense, for authentic memories, it is far less important that the investigator report on them than that he mark, quite precisely, the site where he gained possession of them.⁴⁵

Benjamin’s argument, that memory requires real, embodied acts of engagement with the “scenes” of history—the places wherein collective memory is interrogated, negotiated, and made comprehensible over time—underscores why performance is frequently turned to as a method of engagement. This points to two significant facets within the contestation of memory: first, that place holds tremendous meaning and value for shaping our understanding of the past; and second, that memory transmission and engagement requires *active participation* by the audience. The first

of these ideas has long been recognized by scholars. Pierre Nora's conception of *lieux de mémoire* has had lasting influence on the ways scholarship regards the role of place as connective tissue between identity and temporality.⁴⁶ Michel de Certeau argues that for a place to be livable we must build mythologies and histories around it. He contends that this past constitutes "spirits" that "one can 'invoke' or not," and that, "haunted places are the only ones people can live in."⁴⁷ De Certeau's point, that we may choose to invoke the spirits of history or not, suggests the importance of how spirits are raised and, either collectively or through the coordination of those in power, exorcised. Both of these writers point to the valuable relationship that place holds in the human imaginary. Through deliberate construction, (but also via accident, when the accident is discovered), space is given narrative and becomes place—garnering the power to shift our understanding not only of what has occurred at the location, but of ourselves in the present. Further, our conception of space is formed in how we move in and through it: a small New Orleans graveyard is haunting and lonely when one wanders through its towering carnal houses alone—but with a crowd amassed overtaking the space its timbre changes. Human presence and number changes how we interact with space.

De Certeau's language of spirits and haunting points to the larger role that death plays within the power of place. Sites of death (often imbued with powerful, tangible connections to previous human life) may, depending on their framing, be utilized to instill belief, or a sense of commonality, across time and distance to help join and invite in members to particular imagined communities, to borrow Benedict Anderson's term.⁴⁸ In their explication of dark tourism, John Lennon and Malcom Foley write, "visiting sites which could be said to be connected in some way to death (e.g. murder sites, death sites, battlefields, cemeteries, mausoleums, churchyards, the former homes of now-dead celebrities) is a significant part of tourist experience in many

societies.”⁴⁹ This builds upon the value of place as a central component of memory. Sites of death are preserved through careful acts that mark their importance. For example, cemeteries mark bodies through headstones and mausoleums; ancient cultures often utilized pyramids, crypts, ossuaries, or mounds. The land was physically remade to mark the presence of the dead, but ritual performances kept these places sites of embodied connection to the dead (the pouring of libations or gifts of food are common tributes in many cultures as seen in annual celebrations or events of memorialization such as *Día de los Muertos* in Mexican culture, etc.). The presence of human remains serve as powerful relics that claim connection, but even without tangible remains the knowledge of a site of death holds power in memory (think of the locations where famous figures were assassinated or died, or of the countless ghost stories that connect a hotel or bed and breakfast catering to human morbidity through advertising the presence of a suicidal bride jilted on her wedding day). Death makes history liminal—tangible remains and intangible ghosts linger through stories and performances over places that allow us to feel human connection through space across time.

The ways in which performance is particularly well suited to carrying on spectral histories has been well theorized within theatre and performance studies. Most geographically relevant is Joseph Roach’s work on New Orleans and his theory of “surrogation,” wherein performance genealogies are carried forth through imperfect replacement for the loss of missing objects, traditions, or people.⁵⁰ Similarly, Diana Taylor explored how histories and memories survive across generations not solely through tangible sources (archives), but through intangible, embodied methods that preserve knowledge and traditions as well as encode customs and histories in sometimes subconscious ways (the repertoire).⁵¹ Rebecca Schneider and Freddie Rokem, through theorizations of “performing remains” and “hyper-historians” respectively, explore the ways

performers attempt to connect with the past through their explorations of, in Schneider's case, civil war reenactments and, from Rokem, dramas based in history.⁵² Alice Rayner suggests the cause for the time-traveling quality of theatre is the theatre's ability to summon ghosts: through the awareness of a doubled reality in a theatrical space (the actor as real, the character as false, the collapse between the two creating the potentiality of uncanny questions regarding what is real and what is make-believe).⁵³ Similarly, Marvin Carlson suggests the term "ghosting" to express the multiple ways that theatre invites reflection into previous and doubled meanings (especially through the bodies of actors).⁵⁴ These theories demonstrate the legacy of work within theatre and performance studies focusing on how performance is particularly effective for memory to move across time. What this dissertation advances is that these processes are critical to understanding place and negotiating community, especially in periods of stress or reconstruction. I argue that, following catastrophe, performance becomes an essential means by which groups compete to establish collective identities: at the city level this becomes civic identity.

Given New Orleans' violent history towards its Black population, a history often deliberately romanticized so that the traditional elite could continue to capitalize on Black labor and Black culture, it is critical to recognize the role that race plays in whose memories are selected for remembrance and how those memories are maintained. Black memory practices, emerging from myriad cultural traditions, speak both to the communities from which they arose, but also to oppressive white regimes through resistant cultural forms which seek to reject oppression. As performance theorist Harvey Young writes, arguing for the centrality of the Black body in considerations of history and memory formation processes, "black bodies carry within themselves a history, a memory, and, indeed, a legacy of inequality associated with the 'color line.'"⁵⁵ The real trauma that is carried within the Black population from centuries of slavery, physical and

mental abuse, neglect, and present racism often manifests in memory practices that seek to highlight Black life and experiences. Through this celebratory memory work, Black artists and activists demonstrate their accomplishments and argue that their lives are bedrock to the identity of New Orleans. Philosopher Nietzsche proffers that, “only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory,” a point that cultural studies scholar Marita Sturken reads as critical to understanding the important work that memory plays in the healing of trauma, particularly in terms of embodied experience.⁵⁶ Nietzsche’s claim underscores what many view as essential for keeping a memory living: pain, or at least recognition of it. This idea is complicated by English scholars David L. Eng and David Kazanjian’s suggestion that melancholia is a site “for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future...” so that, “mourning is not possible without melancholia.”⁵⁷ Read in this light, the bringing of painful memories to light, the continual return to a well of trauma, becomes both a personal necessity to communally process as well as a political choice to demand recognition and change.

Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrate how the memory work described above regularly turns to performance as a means of making audiences take on this work for themselves. Rebecca Schneider argues, “When we approach performance not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the act of remaining and a means of re-appearance and ‘reparticipation’...we are almost immediately forced to admit that... performance challenges loss.”⁵⁸ This conception points to the role of performance in preserving traumatic memories, as performance allows participants to navigate complex, often evolving, memories. For instance, a strong example of this embodied connection into “reparticipating” in traumatic memory is Vivian Patraka’s examination of how the US Holocaust Museum attempts to grant audiences entry into a “trace” of the past by having them walk through a Nazi transport train-car.⁵⁹ In moving through

the space of the train, audiences must imaginatively process what had occurred in the train, and what the somatic experience must have been like.

The presence of a body in a particular place, that is, a space where we are made aware of the ghosts that reside within, allows for recognition of the layers of time that occupy the place. What philosopher Jacques Derrida refers to, quoting Hamlet, as time being “out of joint.”⁶⁰ In this, Derrida points to the way that past, present, and future are continually in co-existence, but moments of rupture make the presence of multiple temporalities apparent in ways that are typically overlooked in the day-to-day. Much of the work that experiential, actor-audience based approaches strive for is to break the temporal limits of this communicative memory. Leveraging the power of spaces imbued with powerful historical narratives, performers can encourage audience/actors to engage with multiple temporalities in simultaneity. These performances demonstrate real and imagined pasts, the existing present, and the imaginative futures which might yet be or could have been but were curtailed by Katrina. Through reckoning with place and time, these performances encourage participants to imaginatively understand the ongoing legacies of Katrina—and those most effected by those legacies—in powerful ways through the transmission of memory.

Performance, Survival, and Adaptation

The Hot 8 Brass Band’s decision to return to New Orleans to hold the funeral for Leslie was, undoubtedly, a powerful tribute to his life. For New Orleanians, who, like the bandmembers, were spread out throughout the country, and for the global audience whose attention was focused on New Orleans the band’s return was a pointed message: we can—and will—return. Indeed, bandmember Daniel Jackson remarked during the procession that, “you know what this makes me feel? Like this is going to be something.”⁶¹ Jackson’s suggestion hints at the role many performers

envisioned for themselves in the years following the storm: healers at the vanguard of recovery. Gralen B. Banks, a member of Black Men of Labor, told reporters at the procession that, “this is the first opportunity we had to show the whole spirit of New Orleans.”⁶² For New Orleanians it is impossible to divorce the city’s spirit from its music, rhythms, and choreographies. Through the Black Men of Labor’s bright yellow shirts (emblazoned with prints of African women in traditional garb) and umbrellas, bright color exploded onto the discolored, debris strewn streets. The contrast pointed to how New Orleanians imagine their city to be—alive, full of color, and celebratory against all odds—even amidst the physical detritus arguing the city was dead. Performance is how a city’s intangibilities are made manifest, something culturemakers not only recognize but understand as their responsibility to maintain.

The use of art in navigating traumatic experiences is well established. Art, music, and drama therapy are common methods of working with PTSD survivors. What performance theorists have continually demonstrated is how embodied approaches work to confront traumas that live in the body itself. As trauma and Black studies scholar Jennifer Griffiths writes, “since trauma evades conscious understanding, memory becomes encoded on a bodily level and resurfaces as possession...the survivor relives the original experience through a body memory yet struggles to find words for an experience that exceeds representation.”⁶³ Griffiths argues that the work performance accomplishes for those living with trauma is not complete healing, but rather the opportunity to process and create narrative frameworks for the traumatic event that enable survivors to generate new stories—stories that recognize the experience but aren’t controlled by it. Embodied expressions allow survivors to find non-verbal means of processing trauma, and, simultaneously, allow for those without direct experience of a traumatic incident to garner understanding of the event itself. As media scholar Jill Bennett notes, art has the capacity to

transform spaces and assist in creating “empathic visions” for those seeking to understand the post-traumatic world that is fundamentally broken from its previous state.⁶⁴ These approaches indicate a recognition that embodied experience is important both to the processing of trauma for those who experienced it, but also for the transference of knowledge to those who did not experience the trauma: a key part of rebuilding mutual understanding within (re)forming communities.

I suggest recognizing the value of performance for both audience and performer. Especially in places where the reestablishing of social networks is critical, offering space for both performers and audiences (all active community members) to process grief, confusion, and personal narratives is a critical function of building new ties and networks. Indeed, among the most important roles performance can play within a post-disaster environment is that of network creator.⁶⁵ Following a disaster, especially one so complete as Katrina where the entire city (save a few thousand emergency personnel) was evacuated, network creation is essential to every aspect of life. As psychologist and trauma scholar Jack Saul notes, displacement compounds the difficulty of processing trauma by breaking the general social networks individuals rely on. In the case of Katrina, primary (close friends and family), secondary (work colleagues, occasional friends, etc.), and tertiary (acquaintances and infrequent conversational interlocutors) social networks were broken following the storm.⁶⁶ Among the most critical tasks for the psychological and physical recovery of residents became establishing new social networks to replace these. Saul argues for theatre as a means of addressing communities that have undergone large-scale traumatic events. Saul values theatre’s ability to free the mind and body through performance, while simultaneously building a community between groups of strangers by focusing them on accomplishing a common task: the production.⁶⁷ Both theatre scholars Harry Elam and Erika Fisher-Lichte point to the remarkable power of theatre in generating rituals while serving as a ritual space that allows for the

formation of community.⁶⁸ While psychologists like Saul and Bessel Van der Kolk's predominant interest is in the positive effects of drama therapy for the artists performing (in their research these are typically non-professional community members who are voluntarily making art), these scholars point to the value of theatre's common ritual experiences for the audience.⁶⁹

To understand how a city survives in a post-disaster setting it is not enough to focus solely on the immediate aftermath or even the first few years of recovery. While the focus in urban research has largely centered on making cities resilient to climate and environmental threats, I would argue that the attention to resilience—with an implication of a return or near-return to stasis—falls short of both the demands of the climate crisis and the changes that must be made to adapt for regular, repeated disasters. Instead, I posit that urban survival is predicated on adaptability, or a willingness to change in advance of a changing climate and learn from environmental devastation when it occurs. For instance, Horowitz powerfully argues for a primary cause of loss of life and property in flood-prone communities resting on the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). While originally intended to enable and even motivate those in flood-prone regions to relocate, the program rapidly became an effective subsidy for those in dangerous places to stay put. Given congressional inaction over the decades, a program that was engineered to steer people away from the areas most at risk instead became precisely why they were able to stay.⁷⁰ While climate change has caused some action to be taken addressing these issues, including the 2016 relocation of the entire community of the Louisiana Isle de Jean Charles (a predominantly Native American island of around 80 people who were relocated further inland at a cost of \$48 million) and revised premium levels for the NFIP set by FEMA in 2021, for many these changes come as too little too late.⁷¹ For instance, while Hurricane Ida's 2021 death toll reached over 80 individuals, the vast majority of these were not in Louisiana, where the storm made landfall, but

instead in Northeastern areas where the strong rains caused flooding in historical floodplains.⁷²

Navigating memory is a core component, although an underacknowledged aspect, of urban survival in post-disaster communities. While it may seem that grappling with painful memories is most significant in the immediate aftermath of mass traumas, memory's long evolution over time is also critical to framing destructive events narratively within the collective consciousness. This negotiation over time is crucial to how urban places and urbanites understand their identity and role within a place. For instance, while both the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 and the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 took place outside of living memory, both events are viewed as formative not only to the physical layouts of those cities but to the way citizens understand the history of their home and their identity as residents. Preserving and maintaining this memory is only possible through an ongoing process of choosing (via memorial spaces, public commemorations, and smaller performance acts such as providing tours) to keep these disasters a recognizable part of the city's memory.

How Cities Perform

Three weeks after Austin Leslie's funeral, the Hot 8 were in New York City. From atop a double decker bus roaming the city, and then under a large banner reading, "New Orleans' own Hot 8 Brass Band," in Times Square, the group played classic New Orleans brass songs and explained to assembled listeners why they were performing in the city.⁷³ Over the previous weeks, they had traveled throughout the South to play for evacuees gathered in shelters across the Gulf region.⁷⁴ The band's tour was intended to be a balm for struggling New Orleanians—a taste of home in places that were decidedly not. The band's movement also points to how cities imaginatively project or transmit their identity across space; or, put more directly, how cities travel.

No place has a single identity. Residents of the same place—even those with very similar backgrounds—experience and understand their home differently based on media consumption, lived experience, and personality. However, broad traits come to identify, and be significant markers for both those in and outside of a place. What I stress throughout this project however is that civic identity/ies do not merely happen or develop over time free from human action.⁷⁵ Rather, civic identity is carefully crafted, meticulously preserved, and openly contested depending on who is articulating the differing visions of who and what the city represents or excludes. My conception of civic identity is tied to philosopher Jürgen Habermas’ conception of the public and private sphere in that civic identities exist as both privately held visions and publicly held expressions where those within a place make those visions manifest. It is performance where the private moves to the public and engages fellow citizenry.

New Orleans is a prime example of how places develop and actively refine their identity over time. Beginning in the 1870s, New Orleans began the first concerted efforts at appealing to the fledgling American tourism industry, however it wouldn’t be until the interwar years that the mass tourism industry in the city became a formidable economic force.⁷⁶ By the mid-century, tourism had grown into a major part of the city’s economy. While tourism became a powerful financial engine, the benefits of the tourism economy were highly unequal. New Orleans quickly began investing in tourist centric experiences and venues that emphasized the grand “Old South”—an explicit component of which was a predominantly Black service force. Particularly during and after the civil rights movement, Blackness, most recognizable in New Orleans through Creole food and jazz music, was viewed as a selling point by civic and economic leaders and explicit marketing was created to emphasize these attributes of the city. As African American studies and tourism scholar Lynell L. Thomas argues, “New Orleans’s tourism narrative, then, was part of the

historically paradoxical construction of blackness that acknowledges and celebrates black cultural contributions while simultaneously insisting on black social and cultural inferiority.”⁷⁷ It is critical to note that, in addition to the deep psychological harm inflicted by a tourism industry largely built on selling a vision of Blackness that is connected to servitude, deep economic harm accompanies this. The jobs the tourism industry opens to Black workers are overwhelmingly underpaid: musicians who must work gig-to-gig (often for paltry sums); cooks, waitstaff, and restaurant hosts who spend long hours working for below minimum wage; and hotel valets, doormen, and housekeeping staff. Nearly all these jobs require tips to reach the state minimum wage, one of the lowest in the country (\$5.15 in 2005, it was raised to \$7.25 an hour in 2008—a number that has not changed since).

While my interest in how New Orleanians have adapted to a changing city since Katrina lies with those who live in the city, it is prudent to acknowledge the inescapable role of tourists within the city. As historian Thomas Jessen Adams, urbanist Sue Mobley, and musicologist Matt Sakakeeny argue, “cultural authenticity renders New Orleans exceptional and the city’s exceptionalism renders it authentic.”⁷⁸ This “feedback loop” of authenticity and exceptionalism have lived repercussions for those within the city.⁷⁹ Locals must perform a version of the city (and its rites and customs) that tourists want to see—what they expect to get from New Orleans in their visit. In performing for tourists, local performers must shift towards outward expectations. For instance, while the second line (the celebratory tradition emerging from the Jazz Funeral although now attached to other events such as weddings, celebrations, and ordinary parties) has long been a part of New Orleans life, these were typically reserved for local celebrations and causes. Since Katrina however, a combined need for financial relief, pressure from city leaders to change how and when these events might take place (via tremendous increases in policing fees for the events),

and attention from outsiders has prompted second lines into a hitherto unseen level of ubiquity within the city. This is largely due to allowing second line rentals, enabling outsiders to now pay for their own second line for virtually any event they wish to celebrate. Those with long ties to the city often bemoan this commodification of the second line, just as many did when some Carnival parades in the city opened their ridership to any dues paying person regardless of whether they are residents of the city or even have ties to New Orleans.

These commodifying practices have real, consequential impacts on the way the city's customs and rites are practiced and, in turn, how locals understand and perform their identity as New Orleanians. As anthropologist Helen Regis explains,

“Our visitors project their desires onto a city and population that have undergone a flood of mass media coverage, tourism (including disaster tourism), faith-based missions, service-learning classes, and community-engaged research. These visitors make determinations about which residents they wish to interact with and how. Over time, these encounters have shaped how area residents understand their own identities, whether through affirming, resisting, or confronting the outsider's gaze.”⁸⁰

Regis's argument, that outsider perceptions, and the material need to acquiesce to them, alters how locals understand their own identity is well demonstrated through the ways that New Orleanian identities are performed. The evolution of second-line and Carnival parade culture might be the most prominent examples of outsider influence expressly shifting local customs to meet the needs of outsiders. Throughout this dissertation I attend to performance works intended for distinct, sometimes overlapping, audiences. Nearly all the case studies I present have a mixture of audience members including both permanent residents and temporary visitors, and while a few aim to predominantly attract tourists, the majority of these performances are interested in serving local populations. I attend to these local oriented performances not only because they redirect attention away from a vision of New Orleans that is solely interested in catering to tourists, but because they represent a growing movement within the city to prioritize representation and serving the needs of

the local population—especially the Black and Brown peoples who have historically been marginalized and capitalized upon.

Civic identity goes beyond the image that city leaders seek to project to attract tourism though. Civic identity is lived daily by those who reside within a city; it is the ongoing expression of individuals and communities within a place who seek to craft a home that is representative of their values, traditions, histories, cultures, and spirits. As a city grows and changes (thanks to the constant influx and outflux of new residents), a renegotiation of what it means to belong to the city takes place. It is what performance scholars Kim Solga, D.J. Hopkins, and Shelley Orr describe as, “taking part in the rehearsal of a community, its rebuilding via its collective restaging.”⁸¹ This staging of the city is conducted through performances across the city, led by different—often competing—interests.

Performances offer insight into not only how we live in a place, but the distinct hopes groups and individuals hold for its future. The performance of place is highly contestable and the performances that emerge from the contestations can be violent. For instance, while the four white supremacist monuments in New Orleans that were removed in 2017 set off a national media frenzy, their presence had, for decades, broadcast a message to those who had to navigate the public spaces they occupied. Just as their takedown (and the violent protests surrounding these takedowns) were performances, so was their stoic command of the public squares from where they looked down on those below. These monuments occupied public spaces and caused tangible shifts in the ways people moved and experienced daily life in the city—or what performance theorist SanSan Kwan identifies as the choreography of cities.⁸² Kwan argues that “choreography... [is] a mutual process: bodies choreograph space; space choreographs bodies.”⁸³ In this Kwan points to how both mobile and immobile forces within cities choreograph the experience of those living within them, but,

simultaneously, bodies find ways to resist these choreographies or invent new ones. For instance, in the example of the jazz funeral the funeral leaders choose the route of the celebration. While this choreography is constrained by certain parts of the city (where buildings and freeways are and cannot be readily crossed through), the movement resists the city's layout in other ways: a group of thousands has a way of occupying the streets and forcing traffic—both pedestrian and automotive—to find alternative paths, or else join in the party.

Methods

Because I focus on a diverse range of case studies, I likewise use a mixed methods approach (fieldwork and archival research) to obtain data in each chapter. Between the summer of 2017 and the winter of 2021, I visited New Orleans sixteen times in trips ranging from one week to three months long. During my visits, I conducted over 100 hours of formal interviews with 35 individual artists, advocates, and thought and cultural leaders. Additionally, I held scores of informal interviews and conversations with participants at sites and people I encountered in and around my case studies. These particularly shaped my understanding of the various publics for distinct sites—for instance, it taught me that locals were unlikely to know of or visit the Hurricane Katrina Memorial. On the other hand, talking to a docent at the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum revealed how well-informed community members were about museums with similar aims (and their opinions of other museums that educate publics about Katrina), something that informed the way I interacted with other house museums during visits.

Site visitation was another major component of my research process. I visited each site in this dissertation multiple times—generally trying to experience them not only at different times of day, but during different seasons. Visiting during different seasons was particularly important as

tourism is affected by the time of year (during Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest New Orleans sites typically swell with tourists and in the heat of August numbers tend to be at the lowest levels). During a site visit, I would spend hours walking through the site, the adjacent area, and write thick descriptions that reflected my impressions of the site, the surrounding area, my experience walking through the site, and other ways the design of the space choreographs movement throughout. I also noted how many other people I saw, and, if they were willing to speak with me, what had brought them there, where they were from, and what impact the site had on them. At sites like the Flooded House Museum where large groups of tourists were present, I listened in on conversations and noticed how the tourists conversed about what they were seeing and experiencing. Throughout these visits I took copious photos, as well as video and audio recordings where permissible.

Archival sources also feature prominently throughout this work. The bulk of these are from online newspaper, magazine, and website archives from the years preceding and immediately after the storm. Because websites change regularly and newspapers and magazines remove content from their pages, I relied on databases such as Newsbank and the Internet Archive to find and confirm contemporaneous accounts and determine how local sources covered events. While the local paper of record, *The Times Picayune*, provides the most detailed coverage, I also explored local magazines such as the *NOLA Defender* and *Gambit*, in addition to national sources such as the *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, National Public Radio, and *American Theatre*, all of which provided detailed coverage of the aftermath of Katrina, especially in the first year after the disaster. Beyond news sources, I visited multiple archival collections in New Orleans where I was able to obtain company records, draft manuscripts, unpublished reports, occasional performance recordings (particularly strong audio recordings exist for Jazz Fest at their archives and for ArtSpot productions), and ephemera from events. This material was relevant to

my knowledge of the history of Junebug Theatre Company (and its predecessor the Free Southern Theatre), jazz funeral traditions (largely informed by my visits to personal archives and house museums), the founding of Levees.org (the non-profit that runs the Flooded House Museum), the creation of the Presbytère's Hurricane Katrina exhibit, and the monuments and memorials that run throughout the final chapter. I was also able to collect digital materials from the personal archives of several artists I interviewed, and many allowed me to visit their personal archives and gave me tours of their work from throughout their careers and especially since Katrina.

Case Studies

Across the various case studies of this project, I demonstrate how catastrophe forces a rapid renegotiation of what it means to belong to a place, and who is included and excluded from this sense of belonging. By bringing these cases into conversation together I reveal a city that has found ways of communicating history and memory to newcomers, preserved cherished traditions for spiritual and economic survival, and passionately demanded change to better protect vulnerable residents from marginalization and especially environmental threat.

Chapter one begins by picking up two terms regularly used to describe the 2005 disaster: tragedy and catastrophe. Arguing for the inherent theatrical nature of these ideas, I build on a legacy of feminist classicists and theatre scholars who promote a conception of tragedy that is rooted in community and the processing of ontological breakages. I proffer tragedy as a form intended to create myth *for* the polis, and in turn, a structure that enables the construction of communal healing spaces and collective identity formation. Using the case study of John Biguenet's *Rising Water Trilogy*, I argue his three plays serve this civic function of tragedy and work to create and maintain dialogues within the city about the process of healing—both the

physical city, as well as the mental state of those who live within it.

Chapter two uses a Black feminist framework to demonstrate the long-term impacts of community-engaged, site specific theatre and performance work in the post-Katrina landscape. Using two case studies, the multi-disciplinary art project entitled *Home: New Orleans? (HNO?)* and the *Homecoming Project* of Junebug Theatre Company (the oldest and largest Black theatre company in New Orleans), I reveal the ways art and artists responded not only to the immediate aftermath of the storm, but the ongoing threats the long recovery posed: most prominently, gentrification and the economic and cultural marginalization of Black citizens. In the case of *HNO?*, I note how the project was engineered to create new artistic collaborations that focused on artistic process. This process-led method allowed for a powerfully creative set of performances that developed into permanent artistic partnerships—many of which endured over 15 years after Katrina. With *Homecoming Project*, I explore how ritual performance helped create awareness and community engagement among traditional residents of the historically Black Tremé neighborhood amidst white newcomers. Across the chapter, I work to show how Black feminist thought influenced these productions—despite Black women leaders often not receiving credit—and mobilize Toni Morrison’s concept of “rememory” to explore what I view as the “embodied rememory work” artists sought to create in the disaster’s aftermath.

In chapter three, I turn to the role of memory and memorialization of the storm within New Orleans. Economic pressures led to numerous attempts to quickly place the catastrophe in the realm of the past/memory rather than engage with the long, ongoing ramifications of the devastation. This chapter explores how the devastation was directly capitalized on by the death tourism of the early post-storm years, and how this eventually evolved into “recovery” tourism. The three sites I investigate are the Presbytère Museum (which houses a permanent Mardi Gras

exhibit and a “Living with Hurricanes: Katrina and Beyond” exhibit), the Hurricane Katrina Memorial, and the Flooded House Museum. I argue that government projects like the Presbytère deliberately present a teleologic view of the storm to create a state-approved (and state endorsing) message of recovery and safety. Conversely, local museums that were established by communities for the purpose of showing the long-lasting ramifications of Katrina—often tied to site specific locations within neighborhoods—challenge the government narrative that “Katrina” ever ended or that the city recovered. These museums serve as powerful sites to change audience understandings of Katrina and demonstrate the responsibility of government actors towards precarious lives. Further, they serve as mobilization sites to politically engage publics towards environmental action in both New Orleans and tourists’ own communities.

My final chapter works across a series of memorials and monuments in the city to understand the ongoing evolution of the city’s memoryscape. I first turn to several Katrina memorials that were constructed entirely by local groups to honor the dead (sometimes by literally burying them) and preserve the memory of the catastrophe (typically without government support). Next, I explore how monuments that continue to be erected some 15 years after the storm often reference or are, in part, tributes to the fundamental changes the storm created. Throughout, I argue that these memorials center individuals and communities above the traditional depictions of monuments in New Orleans (US and Confederate leaders, foreign dignitaries, etc.). In this, I demonstrate that the memoryscape has shifted from a desire to reflect an “old world” or “old South” view of New Orleans (that tourism scholars note as fundamental to the appeal of the city) and towards a recognition of the historically marginalized populations and people who make up New Orleans’ past and present.

Chapter 1 – “If Ever I Cease to Love”

As New Orleans approaches the tenth year after Katrina, the city feels caught between preserving a culture created pre-Internet (in an environment that often felt hermetically sealed and resistant to change) and embracing an influx of post-Katrina money, residents, and ideas.

—Lisa D’Amour, *Airline Highway*⁸⁴

Sometimes talk is the best therapy.

—Ann Maloney, “Meet Me Under an Old Oak”⁸⁵

Maybe it’s not the end of the world that’s going on outside. Maybe it could be for us a new world just beginning.

—John Biguenet, *Rising Water*⁸⁶

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, new words and phrases crept into the public vernacular. Time was binary: pre-Katrina and post-Katrina. Following the popular Times-Picayune columnist Chris Rose’s example, many residents began avoiding saying the name of the storm altogether, instead referring to it as, “The Thing.”⁸⁷ Still others became determined to excise “Katrina” from conversation and instead focus attention on the failures of the Army Corps of Engineers and the levee failures. Groups like Levees.org organized campaigns against media use of the phrase “natural disaster” and consistently refer to the disaster as “The Federal Floods.”⁸⁸ In his oft-cited essay, “A Katrina Lexicon,” New Orleans geographer Richard Campanella argues “our speech grows even more trenchant during the recovery and rebuilding phases, as grievances are addressed, restitutions (if any) are negotiated, claims to victimhood are laid (or questioned), and players maneuver for position in a supposed zero-sum game... [yielding] a vocabulary of names, idioms, metaphors, acronyms, jargon, rhetorical devices, and narratives — few of them universally shared and many ferociously contested even years later.”⁸⁹ Language itself had, since 2005, come to reflect the constant renegotiation and contestation over the post-Katrina experience and the deep emotional and tangible ramifications for those in New Orleans.

Theatre presents a unique avenue to confront ongoing civic changes. As Campanella’s

essay articulates, Katrina prompted change so extreme that language itself was forced to evolve—often uncomfortably and with disagreement. Theatre is a venue that fundamentally interrogates language and is thus a natural site for navigating this linguistic turmoil. Theatre’s key attribute of bringing audiences together into a common space at the same time represents a powerful possibility for traumatized communities.⁹⁰ Community building takes many forms: while one aspect of this process is direct person-to-person connections, another is the much more amorphous network of linkages that are built through common experiences.⁹¹ Theatrical productions that play to a consistent audience are able, over a course of time, to strategically challenge and grow their audiences’ viewpoints on local issues via productions and conversation. In this way, community exists not only as direct interpersonal encounters, but collectively through groups of people who are joined through common shared experiences, such as processing productions (much like academics of a similar discipline who have never met but research related topics might understand themselves to be a community). Singular productions can have outsized impacts for a community, resonating widely and becoming powerful sites of support. Indeed, in places where social networks have been severed, theatre represents a means of cross-community discussion and network development.

In this chapter I explore post-Katrina theatre in New Orleans through the form of tragedy. I focus on *The Rising Water Trilogy*, a tragic cycle written about Katrina and the early years after the storm, to understand how professional theatre makers sought to understand Katrina and their role in navigating the post-disaster city. I utilize different methods to evidence these claims, not only drawing from the text of *Rising Water*, but on artist and audience interviews, contemporary news reviews and advertisements, and ephemera related to the production like programs, promotional materials, and photographs.

I am drawn to tragedy for three reasons. First, I view tragedy as an ancient form that has long allowed communities to navigate civic turbulence. Tragedy has, since the era of Athenian drama, been viewed as a means of reaching out to and building community. It is critical to note that, while tragedy has been viewed as a means of reaching the entire polis, it has always been an exclusionary form. Artists today who turn to tragedy as a means of reaching the polis often hold lofty ideals of its potential of reach audiences that wholly represent their locales: something they will nearly uniformly fail to do. The case study here is no exception, it neither drew in the whole population of New Orleans nor was its audience representational of the races, genders, or classes of those within the city. However, productions with large audiences, especially those performed in succession over time, still have outsized power in navigating civic disruption as the *Rising Water Trilogy* demonstrates. In this, I articulate a definition of tragedy that, echoing feminist scholars such as Jennifer Wallace, embraces a more communitarian view of tragedy than that of a genre interested in heroes and hamartia. Second, I turn to tragedy for its relationship to the formation and presentation of myth. The creation of mythologies following tragic experiences is a means for publics to distance themselves from *living events* to instead engage with *mythical stories*. This relationship to myth serves as an important means of imagining the city and its ongoing struggles for audiences who are living through the phenomena in real time. Third, my examination of *tragedy* seeks to complicate how we imagine the *tragic*, especially in places visited by “catastrophe”—a term with its own complex history. There is a robust scholarship delineating *tragedy* (the dramatic or poetic genre) from the *tragic* (a vernacular term meaning something shocking or immensely painful). It is undeniable that the devastation of 2005 was tragic.⁹² However, I resist narrating the disaster and its aftermath as a modern tragedy—meaning I do not aim to rework the flood neatly into a dramatic structure or map how it mirrors the generic pillars

of theatrical tragedy.⁹³ Rather, I build on the relationship between tragedy and catastrophe, invoking the historic role of tragedy as a tool of the polis (here meaning the city and those who call it home) for self-reflection and understanding. In this I argue for tragedy as a tool of the post-catastrophe city for navigating the ongoing changes to the polis' identity. Key to this argument is how theatre became a site for *audience narrativization*, a critical tool for processing the very real trauma affecting audiences.

Tragedy, Catastrophe, and Mythology

In the early days after the storm, news headlines were quick to name the disaster a tragedy or catastrophe. Then President George W. Bush echoed this in his national address on Katrina some sixteen days after the storm made landfall. Speaking in front of Jackson Square, arguably the most familiar backdrop in the city, Bush said, “in the aftermath we have seen fellow citizens left stunned and uprooted, searching for loved ones and grieving for the dead, and looking for meaning in a tragedy that seems so blind and random.”⁹⁴ Bush would later refer to the event as a “national catastrophe” in his 2010 memoir.⁹⁵ In both cases, Bush invoked the common vernacular meanings for the words tragedy and catastrophe: events of great sorrow and destruction for individuals and communities. While those who use these terms rarely mean to invoke their theatrical legacies, theatre scholars recognize it is difficult to ignore the doubled—or, to borrow theatre scholar Marvin Carlson’s term, ghostly—meanings behind these words.⁹⁶

Tragedy, as a form, has been interpreted and reinterpreted over the centuries. While in common parlance tragedy denotes an event of great sorrow, the word itself emerges from the Greek τραγῳδία, formed by the roots tragos (goat) and aeidein (ode)—terms literally describing the prize awarded to the winning performers, a goat, and their means of performance, song.⁹⁷ Catastrophe

similarly comes from Greek, *καταστροφή*, which is a compound of *kata* (down) and *strophē* (turn/turning) to mean a sudden downturn or shift—it is worth noting literary scholars have long sought to remind readers that catastrophe is on its own, in both the etymological and dramaturgical sense, not exclusively negative.⁹⁸ Rather, catastrophe may simply result in a new, possibly positive, outcome (for this reason the term has periodically been reinterpreted as “conclusion,” “denouement,” or even Tolkien’s “eucatastrophe”—wherein he sought to explicitly note the positive sudden change). While tragedy and catastrophe’s understanding in the vernacular have frequently lost their connotations to dramatic structure, they still hold onto elements: tragedy in particular has long been tied to sorrow, but also to lamentation—another component related directly to Greek tragic structure.⁹⁹ Yet from a theatrical perspective this language is linked in meaning to a particular tragic epistemology, one in which catastrophic and tragic moments are recognized as a moments of rupture (or “breaks” to echo performance theorist Fred Moten).¹⁰⁰ Catastrophe is, as English scholar Wai Chee Dimock argues, “not something we can anticipate, calculate, or wrap our minds around: its radius seems broader than human cognition itself.”¹⁰¹ In this, these moments of shift are representative of ontological breaks where individuals and communities collectively recognize the end of a worldview and must begin to reconcile with their new reality.

I turn to tragedy as a means of navigating this ontological break specifically because of the form’s connection to mythology. As philosopher Roland Barthes notes, “*myth is depoliticized speech*. One must naturally understand *political* in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power of making the world... Myth does not deny things, on the contrary... it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact,” (emphasis Barthes).¹⁰² Part of my turn to the ancient model of tragedy is

because of its clear connection to and emergence from myth. Tragedy was the site where myth could be interpreted, reinterpreted, and mobilized to speak to the city (*polis*) on the pressing issues of the day through broadly familiar, and collectively recognized, stories. Further, the ancient tragedy, unlike the tragedies since the middle ages, recognized the possibility of positive outcomes—tragedy was not limited to the realm of misery but, over the course of a tragic cycle, might posit hope and growth for the figures involved.¹⁰³ Thus tragedy represents possibilities of many kinds: possibilities of futurity, but also possibilities of interpretation.

The disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina and the federal levee breakages was, in all senses of the word, a catastrophe. In the early period after the storm, when the city was unrecognizable, it is hard to posit a more abrupt or absolute break in understanding of what a place is and where those who claim that place—now so completely different—belong in the world. In navigating this rupture, tragedy becomes a powerful tool. Barthes argues that myth arises solely from history, that myth is “chosen by history.”¹⁰⁴ With the historical understanding/s of New Orleans in shambles, citizens turn to myth to make sense of the world. To do so, they rely on common histories from which they may form new mythologies that explicate how and why the world is changing. Tragedies, like catastrophes, are painful to navigate but not guaranteed sorrowful endings. Tragedy is “the attempt to impose a temporary form on the inevitable transformation of the world,” political scientist Joshua Foa Dienstag argues, making it a tool for communities in the midst of these radical changes.¹⁰⁵ In stepping back to mythologize the painful catastrophe being experienced, we are given the essential reminder of the possibility of futurity, of survival, and, while not a return to the pre-catastrophe state, of a new existence that brings with it a new way of life. The hope of catastrophe is that his new world may recognize, address, and atone for the sins of the old.

Tragedy: Theatre's Role in Understanding the Polis

I argue for the role of tragedy as an enterprise vested in the civic good. Tragedy brings into sharp relief the *polis's* contemporary struggles and provides an opportunity to engage with these issues in a safe way. Artistic representation provides a measure of distance from traumatic subject matter, while opening opportunities for collaborative discussions and community building. I view tragedy as a deeply rooted call for realizable action, much in the way cultural theorist Raymond Williams argued that tragedy “restores an affective relationship with the past that has the potential to loosen blockages and release energies for future projects of social and political transformation.”¹⁰⁶ In the classic Aristotelian understanding, catharsis is significant in that a purgation of emotion is provided not just to the individual audience members but the collective audience, in effect, the city. As tragedy theorist Jennifer Wallace writes, “the purpose of watching tragedy is... to gain relief, in a licensed space, so that the city can function more effectively... it might also make us better witnesses to injustice, vengeance and expressions of grief in the wider world.”¹⁰⁷ Wallace’s point speaks to the underlying value of expanding empathy and understanding to others after a crisis. It has long been understood that tragedy is a negotiation with change, especially on an epistemic level. Playwright Arthur Miller describes tragedy as intrinsically connected to “the fear of being displaced, the disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world.”¹⁰⁸ While Miller understood this function as existing on an individual level (that of the “common man”), the same implications apply for a collective audience—especially one has been displaced and is thus reevaluating collective identities.¹⁰⁹

To make the example explicit, for a post-Katrina audience, the value of tragedy is that, through viewing the disaster that is being experienced, audiences are called to act holistically; both

working collaboratively to process traumatic emotions as well as to see themselves as part of something larger (a reconceptualization of the polis and their place within it). One of the goals of tragedy is to assist the city in reckoning with periods of tremendous change. These two ideas have natural benefits when executed in tandem: compassionate treatment and empathy towards struggling neighbors helps to rebuild more cohesive and inclusive communities for all those living within the city. This view of tragedy bears much in common with performance scholar Jill Dolan's conception of utopian performatives, wherein performance operates to allow for community imaginings of how the world might be better.¹¹⁰ Throughout these conceptions, there is an attention to *action*, that the performance event should, through affective release, bond audiences and make them cognizant of the emotional and political blockages that have stymied them. In effect—tragedy reminds us viscerally of our interconnectedness and civic bonds.

In turning to tragedy I, following Williams, move to collapse the line between the academic classification of tragedy (a distinct theatrical and literary form) from the common vernacular and instead highlight how colloquial understandings of “the tragic”—along with “disaster” and “catastrophe”—serve to reveal powerful facets of contemporary life through theatrical models.¹¹¹ Whereas the meaning of tragedy (or tragic) we most hear in contemporary life is that of an unexpected and heartbreaking occurrence (e.g.- a *tragic* death, a *tragic* accident), the dramatic form of tragedy has fluid yet recognizable characteristics that date back to Ancient Greece. Chief among them for my purposes are first, that the form holds a connection to mythic and/or ritualistic components. Myth and ritual are accepted forms of making meaning of the world and particularly critical tools for understanding shifting norms and realities. The second key is that tragedy reveals a shattered worldview by its conclusion—paving the way for new comprehension. Tragedy is not merely the affective sensation of *sadness*: in fact, the material or story need not necessarily be sad

to be tragic. However, the material should reveal that the way of understanding the world the protagonist (which might be a character, characters, or society at large) is inaccurate. This awareness of a fallen ontology might be a consequence of shifting knowledge systems, time, or simply be understood as out of step from the beginning of the play. These two components, a mythic/ritual structure and a recognition of entirely a new comprehension of the world, are tremendously useful structures for a society in turmoil to turn to as it attempts to navigate its own shifting reality.

I argue that tragedy is a powerful means of confronting collective trauma through communal trust and support, particularly in places where civic and government leaders advocate messages of unity and recovery without acknowledging the ongoing pain and devastation. Tragedy can be utilized by any group, for a variety of purposes, however my attention here looks to how tragedy encourages publics to collectively work through ongoing suffering. In the case of New Orleans, given the disparities across race and class experienced by the city's residents, this always includes some reckoning with how people are marginalized, and the ways in which Katrina furthered that marginalization. Classicist Nicole Loraux argued for this role of tragedy in bringing the grief of the city to the stage: through tragedy, and the sounds of mourning, the subject matter the polis had banished from public conversation was now able to be brought back again, directly to the city, so that open wounds might be recognized.¹¹² It is this function of tragedy that seems so vital against calls to "bury" a disaster into a place's past that threatens to silence those still mourning.

From the perspective of the city, what is being depicted is something all too present, all too familiar. As theatre scholar Alice Rayner describes, "recognition or re-knowing or unforgetting is, rather, a particular kind of perception; it is a sensation of seeing for the first time what one has

seen many times before. One function of any art is to bring about that moment of unforgetting, when the familiar world suddenly seems strange and new or impossible.”¹¹³ Rayner draws a clear connection here between recognition and trauma: when processing trauma, reestablishing memories—by detailing what occurred—is essential to narrativizing and making sense of the traumatic past. Wallace argues that “self-recognition... [comes] through the encounter with others—of one’s own situation and cognitive limitations.”¹¹⁴ Given the pervasive mental health problems in the post-Katrina population, audiences almost certainly included people suffering from flood related trauma or depression.¹¹⁵ Even if not though, audience members undoubtedly knew someone, or encountered someone regularly, who was struggling with these issues.

In places befallen by mass trauma, tragedy may encourage audiences to commune with the dead, to witness ghosts, to embrace emotional vulnerability, and communally mourn. The theatrical tragedies that emerged in the wake of Katrina mirror the ongoing tragic condition that the citizens of New Orleans experienced as new pains and challenges emerged. New Orleans is still very much haunted by Katrina: the long social, political, economic, and cultural changes following the 2005 flood continue to echo throughout the lives of those who call the city home. Lingering absences are recognized throughout New Orleans: tragedy served as a way of confronting these ghosts and sought to reconcile the new world that forcefully emerged at the point of rupture (the event that concludes one era/identity and sets the stage for a new existence). The use of catharsis in these plays is intended to grant the whole polis—even if the entire city wouldn’t attend the plays—a purgation, helping the city collectively process, and extend generosity towards each other in acts of engaged communal compassion.

I view tragedy as a mechanism of processing trauma through its investment in communal engagement, distancing of subject matter through invented mythological frameworks, and in the creation of spaces for discussion. This chapter engages scholarship that emerges from contemporary, psychologically driven research into lived traumatic experiences. The trauma lived and experienced by those within New Orleans during and after the 2005 flood is not theoretical. This lived trauma has generated severe mental health crises which for many remain unresolved. Trauma scholars such as Jack Saul, Bessel Van Der Kolk, and Robert Landry demonstrate the connections between current approaches of trauma therapy and drama therapy with the real tactics deployed by theatre and performance artists in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The linkage between trauma therapy and tragedy comes in the form of catharsis—the purgation of unhealthy emotions and ability to communally process catastrophe is a fundamental strength of tragedy in engaging traumatized publics.

In the wake of disaster, mass trauma and depression are to be expected. The most effective means of combating these forces (such as reliance on primary networks like family and friends, as well as mental health resources) are typically severely strained or unavailable in the aftermath. In the wake of massive trauma, both weak and strong community ties are severely disrupted.¹¹⁶ The need to form new communities, both permanent and temporary, is paramount to survival. Further, the most direct means of confronting trauma from a psychological standpoint is narrativizing the experience.¹¹⁷ This is tremendously difficult without strong support networks—after Katrina many non-licensed persons, particularly school professionals, took on the role of mental health professional, directing interventions and leading conversations about the ongoing effects of the disaster.¹¹⁸ Further, many people avoid processing or even acknowledging their own trauma altogether because they felt they did not have a right to their pain given the severity of others’

losses.¹¹⁹ Theatre therapy and trauma specialists argue, given these realities, that theatre can offer a powerful tool against mass trauma given its ability to foster community and generate conversation specifically about the traumatic incident.¹²⁰

There has been a turn in recent years to thinking through trauma corporeally, and a renewed interest in utilizing theatre techniques as tools for working through trauma. Perhaps most publicly recognized is the work of Bessel van Der Kolk, whose bestselling book *The Body Keeps the Score* concludes with a chapter dedicated to the ways theatre serves as a direct intervention into traumatic histories, particularly those that are stored within the body. Van der Kolk, a practicing therapist who has published a wide body of trauma scholarship, argues for what many theatrical practitioners have long understood: theatre generates community through contemporaneous spatial presence and generates collective support for interrogating the painful and traumatic pasts that are sometimes impossible to access individually.¹²¹ While theatre therapy has existed for decades, it has remained a small field, and one often overlooked within the broader realm of psychology.¹²² Despite this, it is a popular tool for communities that have been violently traumatized such as New York city following the September 11th terrorist attacks.¹²³ Similarly, in arguing for the role of theatre of the oppressed within deeply traumatized communities, cultural theorist and psychologist Helen S. Lorenz argues Boalian techniques might “allow for dialogue, historical accounting, imagination, and transformation.”¹²⁴ All of these scholars point to the value of theatre in processing difficult, often contested, memories, through group support.

Much of theatre therapy points to the role of practicing theatre (specifically acting) as a form of therapy, but equally important is the value of community engagement and representation. While there are of course tremendous therapeutic benefits for those directly acting out the traumatic scenarios, a significant component of the benefit emerges in the form of community

support—the actors and directors who assist those performing traumatic material and their role in communally confronting that which is difficult to comprehend (the trauma). This aspect directly extends to the audiences attending. There is value in the (thoughtful) fictionalization of real events. By developing fictional stories, often based on or deliberately utilizing aspects of real events, the audience is provided with experiences that are immediately familiar and recognizable, while not merely replaying the lived traumatic events. This is critical to creating, “a safe opportunity to recreate, recollect, relive, and reincorporate the memories of traumatic experience as understood by both the group itself and the audience.... [generating] a lived moment in time and place in which painful memories of loss, deviation, and confusion can be revisited while reducing the risk of being retraumatized.”¹²⁵ This argues for how an audience can connect to material safely, but it also points to the value of seeing representative stories onstage. Indeed, religion scholar Kathleen M. Sands makes this role of tragedy explicit arguing that “tragedy, as an aesthetic form, consigns trauma to a ritual space where, rather than being silently reenacted, it is solemnly voiced and lamented.”¹²⁶ By providing a group with a representation of their experience, in a safe manner, theatre allows for groups to recognize and rethink their own experiences both individually and collectively (in the form of conversation tied to the theatrical event).

Southern Rep Theatre

Southern Rep, the oldest fully professional theatre company in the city, was established in 1986 with the explicit goal of bringing professional, union actors to New Orleans and fostering new works about life in the South.¹²⁷ From its inception under founder Rosary O’Neill, the company was committed to creating Equity jobs in the city—both bringing in outside artists as well as affording professional experience and opportunities to work with professional actors to

local performers. The company was committed to diversity and featured numerous plays in its early history that relied on colorblind or color-conscious casting policies to include more actors of color.¹²⁸ During its first five years, the company tied itself to ornate venues that evoked 19th Century New Orleans in the form of auditorium spaces at the Grand Ballroom of the Bourbon Orleans Hotel and then the New Orleans Board of Trade.¹²⁹ In 1992 Southern Rep took up residency in a black box theatre located in the upscale Canal Place in Downtown New Orleans.¹³⁰ The partnership lasted until 2012, at which point the theatre moved through a variety of venues (with notable residencies at the University of New Orleans and Loyola University of New Orleans) before moving into a permanent home in 2018: a large, century-old deconsecrated church in the seventh ward of New Orleans that closed after Hurricane Katrina.¹³¹ Throughout the various venue changes, the company's aims have shifted slightly as different artistic directors led the organization: O'Neill's chief aim was creating a sustainable, professional theatre hub in the city. Her successor, Ryan Rillete, put enormous energy into making the company a central driver of new works, especially those that focused on the South and New Orleans. Aimée Hayes, the company's third artistic director, has built on those goals with a keen eye towards representation and material that reflects contemporary issues of social justice. Throughout its history, Southern Rep has continued to exist as the only year-round Equity house in the city and remains a leader in the theatrical and artistic community given its status as the largest employer of professional actors in Louisiana.

Although small for a regional theatre in both audience size (roughly 14,000 annually) and annual budget (less than \$1,000,000 annually), the theatre employs around 100 artists per year and is widely regarded as major part of the larger arts and culture industry of the city.¹³² Despite the company's longtime emphasis on diverse storytelling, Southern Rep's audience is majority white

and middle-aged or older. That said, it should be noted that the audience does typically include a substantial number of young people and Black viewers. While audience demographics limit its impact in marginalized communities within the city, the company's attention to telling stories that explicitly confront issues of racism and injustice does allow it to introduce new ideas about race and class that can challenge predominantly white and middle-class audiences.

Immediately following Katrina, Southern Repertory Theatre began commissioning new works that expressly confronted the problems of life in post-Katrina New Orleans. In total, Southern Rep commissioned four Katrina plays; three of which were penned by local author, playwright and Loyola University English professor, John Biguenet. Biguenet's *Rising Water Trilogy*, consisting of *Rising Water*, *Shotgun*, and *Mold* was written and produced over an eight-year period following the storm.¹³³ The first of the cycle, *Rising Water*, deals with the traumatic event itself and wraps Katrina into the greater mythology of the city, asking what New Orleans is to be (and how it is to survive) in the aftermath. The second play, *Shotgun*, turns explicitly to confront racial inequities and the strained race relations in post-Katrina New Orleans, while acknowledging the longer legacy of racism in the city that magnified problems facing marginalized groups. The final work, *Mold*, expresses the grief felt by those coming back to New Orleans and turns to the reality of how New Orleanians are (or aren't) able to return, and the obstacles that existed for those who wished to return but found a new city, one they likely no longer recognized, in the place of the old. Biguenet's plays reveal his anger at not only the disaster but the ongoing failures of recovery efforts by the government. The plays explore the problems and changes that set in, over time, in post-Katrina New Orleans and highlight the range of topics and ideas Southern Rep aimed to stage and direct the audience's attention to in the wake of the storm. Beyond positive audience and critical responses to the plays, these works clearly demonstrate how theatre is utilized

as a tool for engaging trauma, and how tragedy is used to engage the city.

Rising Water

Rising Water debuted in 2007, a mere eighteen months after the storm. The play takes place the night of the levee failure in New Orleans. At two o'clock in the morning, Camille and her husband Sugar are in the powerless attic of their home, lit only by their flashlights, avoiding the waters that have begun to flood the house. While written so that Camille and Sugar could be played by actors of any race, the original production featured two white performers (subsequent productions have, however, featured Black, Latinx, and white performers variously in the two roles). Throughout the first act of the play, they discover various items in the attic (old pictures, Mardi Gras costumes, etc.) that cause them to recount and relive episodes of their lives. It becomes clear that this is a strained marriage, marred by an broken relationship with their son, a lack of emotional intimacy between the couple, and an incident of physical abuse by Sugar long ago. As the waters continue to rise, the couple is forced to confront these painful, and previously unspoken, memories. At the conclusion of Act I, the waters have reached the attic itself, forcing Sugar to use an ax to puncture a hold through the roof in a bid to escape. Act II takes place entirely on the roof of the house. Camille has escaped onto the roof, and Sugar, too large to fit through the hole he broke through in the attic's ceiling, is stuck halfway between the roof and attic with only his head and one arm visible to the audience. Throughout, as they face possible if not likely death, the couple continue to try and reconcile their marriage, slowly tearing down walls they had built over the decades. The play ends with the two, fearing the coming heat of dawn, trapped on the roof, singing to each other until they are cut off by the sounds of roaring sirens first in the distance, then closer and closer to the terrified couple.

Biguenet began the project as “a gift to the city.”¹³⁴ Seeking to express, even excise, his own anger towards the government, he rejected moving the piece towards abstraction and instead directed his energy into making it hyper-focused on New Orleans, particularly with an idea of building the play around the architecture of the city—a facet of New Orleans identity he thought could form a mythos for the play.¹³⁵ To achieve this, *Rising Water* (and the other plays in the trilogy later on) is wholly focused within a single house. The value of the home as setting is apparent through all three of the plays in the trilogy (and, more broadly, this dissertation: examples of houses as performance venues run through every chapter).¹³⁶ The set of the home was immense—a full house attic set on a revolve that turned to reveal the rooftop from which the actors play the second act. Local critic David Cuthbert wrote that “the physical production is stunning, especially Geoffrey Hall’s first-act, memory-filled attic interior and the stark, second-act rooftop... William Liotta’s lighting is magical, with its reflection of the water in the house on the attic’s trap door, the moonlight streaming through the vent.”¹³⁷ The connection between the house and the water underscores the value of connecting New Orleans with the water that has so shaped the city. Surrounded by the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain, New Orleans’ geography is literally shaped by water. Water has shaped New Orleans’s economy and history through its port, as well as the legacies left by previous storms that fixate within the memories of the city’s inhabitants.¹³⁸

Tragedy operates as a tool in mythologizing the present, offering a mythical version of life that allows audiences, very much living the ontological displacement Arthur Miller described as the heart of tragedy, a lens through which to view their experience and begin to collectively process the break they are navigating. This idea of generating a mythology for New Orleans is critical to understanding how the play was engineered, from conception, as a means of processing the trauma of the storm. Mythology is a critical facet of group formation—especially on the scale of city or

nation. Common mythologies have linked (and created conflict for) cultures across time. Mythology, as Greek tragedy clearly demonstrates, changes, evolves, and is open to interpretation. Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, arguing for how myth as a structure serves as a kind of language, argues that “with myth, everything becomes possible.”¹³⁹ This possibility is essential to reconfiguring disjointed communities and their amalgamate civic identities because of the need for common languages that can engage and help think through traumatic disasters (catastrophes). Further, the possibilities offer multiple interpretations—enabling audiences to share separate understandings and promoting productive disagreement that can encourage a deeper engagement with the issues facing the collective. Amid trauma, mythology offers the possibility of distancing the disruption as to productively work through the issues confronting survivors and, simultaneously, begin to find common language with each other—thus beginning to establish new civic identities.

Given this view of the role of myth in civic identity formation, Biguenet’s effort to mythologize the city and its people is a move towards creating possibilities for the *polis*, both those for who live within the city and for its civic identity. Biguenet has repeatedly stated that the play was generated from the stories he encountered in the months after the storm, “from stories I had heard first-hand; stories my father, a sailor, told me; stories I heard—the couple walking in Lakeview with their dog who saw what they thought was fog coming down the street and then realized it was a wall of water...the old couple in their attic who taped their driver’s licenses to their chests with duct tape when they realized they were going to drown, but wanted to make sure they would be identified.”¹⁴⁰ While Biguenet is quick to point out that these stories don’t actually appear in *Rising Water* (although the latter example would eventually feature in the trilogy’s final work, *Mold*), they inform how he considers the audience, “an authority” in the room.¹⁴¹ Ryan

Rilette, the artistic director of Southern Rep who commissioned the play, as well as the production's director, emphasized the role of writing to the local audience, saying, "we're just two local guys telling a story for local people."¹⁴² Biguenet echoed this idea, saying, "the Elizabethan playwrights wrote just for their neighbors, just as the Greek playwrights did. Something happens and they addressed it in their theatre."¹⁴³ Biguenet's references here underline his attention to a Western tragic tradition and demonstrates that he views theatre as critical to the functioning of the city, and tragedy as particularly critical to investigating the problems of the day.

Arguably the most difficult task for *Rising Water* lay in generating a play that could both express profound anger towards the government failure of 2005 while not landing on the audience as a mere diatribe, or didactic sermon. Much of the success of the play was attributed to the humor deployed throughout, with audience members regularly noting that, "you laugh to keep from crying."¹⁴⁴ Danny Bowen, who originated the role of Sugar, compared the work to the absurdist humor of Samuel Beckett, noting the parallel in the second act where his character appears only through a hole in the roof as similar to "*Endgame*, where the two characters pop their heads out of the trash cans."¹⁴⁵ Beckett was a major influence on Biguenet when writing, as he realized "*Waiting for Godot* could be interpreted not as absurdist drama but as prophetic realism."¹⁴⁶ These bits of absurdism help to inform much of the comedy of the piece, but also help audiences to view the work as more multi-faceted than a simple recitation of one Katrina experience.

The absurdism within the play is critical in that it releases the audience from direct confrontation with their daily life in a place where most people were living with ongoing trauma and instead allowing for a refracted version of that experience that is easier to emotionally engage with. While much of the play seems like a realist drama, there are two chief ways *Rising Water* defies this. First, the play is rooted in and emerges from a storytelling tradition, one that is

frequently compared to Beckett in its lack of action and the sensation of waiting that is developed through the passing of time. Second, the utilization of music within the script is strategically interspersed to directly interrupt unhealthy emotional buildups that could be retraumatizing for audiences.

A common question asked by both scholars and artists when dealing with artworks that engage traumatic subjects is how to prevent retraumatization of the audience. Theatre is particularly well suited to mitigate retraumatization as *Rising Water* demonstrates: here the wound of Katrina is still open, not only for the audience but the author, director, designers, and actors. However, the community-oriented nature of theatre, especially in new work development, is engineered to work against trauma through regular feedback and revision. Throughout *Rising Water*'s rehearsal process, Biguenet continually wrote and rewrote the script based on the comments, difficulties, and experiences of the team in the rehearsal room. The result of this was a keen attentiveness to the need for relief: coming in the forms of song, comic material, and periods of silence that allow for audiences and actors to literally breathe for a moment and recenter themselves. Biguenet's approach to writing is typical of many new play development processes, however it is worth noting that works meant to serve a role for traumatized populations demand this kind of attention. A collaborative, open developmental process (an element that remained Biguenet's approach for the subsequent two plays in the cycle) represents a more multivocal expression that, in turn, serves the public in recognizing the voices of those living through an experience in a set place.

Biguenet regularly cites the role of storytelling in the play, describing it as the "architecture" of the work: "you tell one story, and then another, and you find them echoing each other."¹⁴⁷ Indeed, the play unfolds as a process of exploring memories and bringing what has been

buried—often literally under the miscellaneous objects that accumulate in an attic over a lifetime—to light. One of the first examples occurs when Camille wants Sugar to distract her from the heat of the attic and asked him to “tell me one of your stories, Sug, like you use to do when we first met?”¹⁴⁸ Sugar proceeds to tell her a ghost story about how a ship captain brought his family along for a journey to Panama, whereupon the captain’s wife and son died. In the story, the spirits haunt the place they died, rising as two pillars of water in the ocean. At the story’s end, Camille and Sugar discuss how ghosts maintain a hold on the living:

CAMILLE (*shuddering*): Even hot as it is right now it gives me goose bumps, thinking of that woman and her baby waiting out there in the middle of the ocean all alone.

SUGAR: Waiting for what? That’s what I don’t understand. What were they looking for?

CAMILLE: You think the dead don’t have a claim on us?

SUGAR: Yeah, sure they do. But what is it they want, the dead?

CAMILLE: Whatever it is we haven’t got to give ‘em.

SUGAR: Man, the things scare you witless when you small, they just make you sad when you get old, don’t they?¹⁴⁹

Most of the stories operate in this fashion: a story is told, it is lengthy and sentimental, and at its conclusion the couple reflect on it. These reflections nearly always parallel the couple’s condition. The stories work to build a mythology through an attachment to common New Orleans experiences and topics of discussion (Mardi Gras balls, fishing, family and neighborhood gatherings, biblical references). Connecting these ideas to ghosts, to that connection to the dead and the responsibilities the living maintain to them, hints at the connections across time that are formed through place—the mythologies (beliefs and cultural frameworks) that make a place recognizable. Throughout the play, storytelling remains the chief way Sugar and Camille pass the hours. In the first act, many short memories are relived as the couple rifles through the various possessions strewn throughout their attic and the audience is brought into their history and connection to New Orleans.

Dramatic irony runs throughout the play, allowing the audience to connect their own

experiences of the catastrophe to those of Camille and Sugar. A particularly strong example is when Camille suggests that the levees are failing and Sugar defiantly replies “don’t talk crazy woman. The U.S. Army built those things. The Army Corps of Engineers.”¹⁵⁰ The line was consistently regarded as one of the funniest of the play as the audience recognized, from their vantage of several months after the event, that this was precisely what had happened. Given these understandings, audiences were able to hear the stories and reflect on them through their own experiences slightly further down the road of survival and recovery than Camille and Sugar.

As the play moves to the rooftop in Act II the stories grow longer, and their relationship problems become clearer. The fractures in the couple’s marriage are brought more plainly to light as the audience learns that Camille blames Sugar for their son’s departure from their lives and has never forgiven him for a night where he physically abused her. Repeatedly, Sugar attempts to atone for previous mistakes, while also flirting with Camille, attempting to seduce her. At one point he tells her that he only began to fantasize about other women, such as the pop-star Madonna, when Camille stopped singing to him in bed. In the first use of music in the show, Sugar attempts to get Camille to sing “If Ever I Cease to Love,” a traditional New Orleans tune most famous for being the anthem of the Rex parade. While she deflects his advance, he sings the song to her, and brings in a piece of local lore to add to the mythology the show works to create.

As the night wears on, the tone changes as Camille and Sugar begin to grasp the scale of the catastrophe, describing the water and darkness before them as they stare out onto the city around their roof. Sugar remembers that his father had originally told him the ghost story on a fishing trip and precedes to recount how that night, they were attacked by an army of mosquitoes, so dense that they cover his father’s face making it appear the man had grown a “full black beard.” To escape them, they jump into the waters below their boat, only to feel a shark edging against

them. Sugar explains how they waited out the night in the water:

SUGAR: After all those hours in the water, my father's having a hard time staying awake, I think, because all of a sudden he starts singing. In his whole life, it was the only song I ever heard him sing. (*Pause.*) Let me see if I remember it. (*Singing.*)

*If the ocean were whiskey,
And I were a duck,
I'd swim to the bottom
And never come up.*

*But the ocean's not whiskey,
And I'm not a duck,
So I'll play the jack of diamonds
And trust to my luck.*

He just keeps singing those same verses over and over again, like a chant more than a song, really. Then I start singing. (*Pause.*) It must have sounded strange out there in that dark marsh, those two voices carrying across the water. We kept at it a long time, waiting for the light.

CAMILLE: The whole night in the water?

SUGAR: The whole damned night.¹⁵¹

As Sugar recalls surviving his “night on the water,” he remembers that his father would later tell him that, “they all end the same way, sea stories—in madness or in death.”¹⁵² The obvious parallels to the couple’s precarity are unmistakable. The ghost story Sugar had told, while ending with a reflection on the way the dead linger in the living’s memory, was originally intended to pass time as a kind of “spooky campfire” story. The stories the couple tell are ultimately meant to ignore the worsening situation around them. But this final story Sugar tells, while captivating, only serves to continually reinforce the characters intense feelings of dread. The inclusion of music changes the nature of the story though. It begins comically as Sugar belts out the verses—but with the realization that the music continues on repeat, it becomes a condition of madness, a tool to stave off death but with the realization that there is no escape from the all-encompassing waters that surround. As this sets in for the couple, an alarm sounds. Camille wonders if rescuers are on the way, and soon grows terrified. She pleads with Sugar to sing with her “let’s sing, Sugar. Like you

and your daddy did. Let's just keep singing till the sun comes up and those boats get here." Against only the sound of the alarm, she begins to sing "If Ever I Cease to Love" and after a verse Sugar joins in. The two sing together until the alarms grow so loud as to overpower their voices, and the lights grow unnaturally bright—surpassing even the bright, hot light of a New Orleans summer day—until the play ends with a sudden blackout.

These two elements, the storytelling form that dominates much of the play and the music that pierces through moments of overwhelming fear or anguish, serve to make palatable the fraught subject matter. Classicist Naomi A. Weiss argues for a revised understanding of tragedy wherein we recognize that music is an essential element of the production. Weiss concentrates on Aristotle's use of the term "seasonings (*hēdysmata*)," and stresses that this far exceeds readings that treat music as extraneous or superfluous, but rather underscores that it is what can make tragedy pleasurable and even consumable.¹⁵³ While pity and fear run throughout the play, methods of relieving these emotions are essential to allowing the audience to reflect on what they are being shown. Given the subject matter, it was expected that the audience would begin in a place of fear, and certainly that they would innately pity the characters who were experiencing—albeit from a much closer perspective than much of the audience—the disaster that had come to shape much of the audience's lives for the last year. *Rising Water* does not seek to make its characters so pathetic or their situation so frightening as to close the audience off. Crucially, it consistently interrupts an overflow of these emotions through storytelling and music that makes the experience consumable.

When director Ryan Rilette commissioned Biguenet to pen *Rising Water*, both wanted to create a piece that could rise to the audience's needs for the moment. The population of New Orleans in 2007 was still less than two-thirds what it had been prior to the storm, and many parts of the city were still physically devastated.¹⁵⁴ The full artistic team and cast was nervous about the

production, and there had been discussion of bringing mental health professionals onboard for performances in case the material was too upsetting.¹⁵⁵ But the aim of the production was to provide “a place to air our suffering, a forum to discuss the problems we need to confront.”¹⁵⁶ In this regard, the production was an overwhelming success. The run of *Rising Water* has become theatrical lore in New Orleans. While those involved were initially concerned about the production selling at all, given the subject matter, the full month-long run sold out and an additional month-long extension was added. *Rising Water* was the biggest ticketing success in Southern Rep’s history.¹⁵⁷ While Southern Rep’s audiences are typically always overwhelmingly made up of local New Orleanians, *Rising Water*’s appearance during the early years of recovery, when the city was still playing host to a large number of relief workers and temporary residents who moved there to aid recovery (some of whom stayed permanently and some of whom left after a year or two), gave the production an audience with a higher than average number of out-of-towners. Despite this, the overwhelming majority of the audience remained the locals Southern Rep and Biguenet were hoping to reach.

On opening night, after the houselights came back on in the theatre, the audience refused to leave. Rilette brought out folding chairs and held an impromptu talkback with the audience. The conversation, however, wasn’t focused on the actors or crew.¹⁵⁸ Instead, audience members quickly turned to talking to each other, checking in with how one another was doing, as they told their own stories of recovery (or lack thereof). While a few talkbacks had been originally planned for the run, the audience’s refusal to leave, and the demand for conversation following the play, was repeated at every performance. Of the demand for conversation, Rilette told audiences that “this is the best thing theater can do—create an ongoing dialogue with the audience.”¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the conversation following the play became the highlight of attending the show, with the *Times-*

Picayune noting the popularity in particular of the discussions around the play.¹⁶⁰ Audience members would admit in the talkbacks that they had been afraid to see the play given the subject matter, but that the show and the talkback were a major emotional release—it allowed them to discuss things they otherwise could not.¹⁶¹ Actress Cristine McMurdo-Wallis, who originated the role of Camille, regularly attended talkbacks. Her husband, Tom Anderson, who attended the play several times during the run, said as much as he loved the play, and as powerful as the production was, his favorite part were the conversations afterward.¹⁶² McMurdo-Wallis recalled a particularly memorable comment from a discussion when an audience member commented on how “[when] Sug and I are holding hands at the end [of the play]. She said, ‘that’s what New Orleans should be doing right now. We should all be holding hands.’”¹⁶³

Often tragedy is viewed as merely seeking to create a catharsis; that the soul aim of the work is to purge the audience’s emotions. This view is overly reductive, but in the case of post-Katrina drama, it is essential to regard the theatrical production as merely a step in the process. Biguenet and Rilette’s attention to the conception of a “forum,” follows the imagining of a forum as the place of public discussion and argumentation. The aim of the production was *always* to generate conversation for the local audience: both to show them their living experience, that they might openly engage their own emotional responses to the world around them, but also so that they might hear each other. The goal was not only to achieve a cathartic experience, but to use that to generate a sense of community—a feeling to be leveraged into communal care. To work communally, common language and experiences must be turned to. Recognizable legends, settings, and lore form the semantic patterns that make up mythology and thus make myths useful for grounding groups in common frameworks that allow them to understand the world. Especially in places where the ontological experience of a place has been broken, reestablishing myth

becomes an essential way to begin communication and build connection. In the subsequent plays of the trilogy, this notion was expanded as the goal moved more directly into encouraging thoughtful negotiation of the problems of the city and cohesive community action in response to them.

Shotgun

Biguenet's second Katrina play, *Shotgun*, premiered in 2009. The show specifically aimed to drive conversation around the rebuilding process within the city, and demonstrates that, despite much progress having been made, New Orleans' recovery was disjointed and uneven for many. The play revolves around Mattie, a Black woman from the Lower Ninth Ward, and her father Dexter (who goes by "Dex"), who are renting their home out to Beau and his teenage son Eugene, two white tenants from the middle-class neighborhood of Gentilly, to make their mortgage payments. All the characters lost their homes, and Beau's wife drowned during the flood. Throughout the play, Beau and Mattie strike up a romantic relationship that is met with disapproval by both Dex, who believes it will be impossible for them to overcome their racial differences, and Beau's son Eugene, who is equally disapproving of the romance as he blames his father for his mother's death and thinks Mattie is attempting to replace her. By the play's end, the challenges prove insurmountable for Beau and Mattie, and Beau and Eugene ultimately move out of the house.

The turn to a new family as the center of the story in *Shotgun* moves the trilogy away from following a central set of characters or individuals (a fact repeated in *Mold*, the final piece of the trilogy) and towards a tragedy of place or of collective peoples. By focusing on discrete families in separate moments of the Katrina saga, the tragedy moves away from a model that prioritizes the individual and closer to a model of community tragedy representing a variety of viewpoints and

experiences. Feminist scholars such as Nicole Loraux, Page duBois, and Wai Chee Dimock have powerfully argued that tragedy as a genre is more interested in democratic representation than individual storytelling. These scholars emphasize the multi-vocal nature of tragedy through examining pieces such as *Trojan Women*, and the choruses of slaves in *Hecuba*, *Libation Bearers*, and *Phoenician Women*.¹⁶⁴ Throughout these works, the range of voices and experiences in the polis is highlighted as the chorus transforms to present contrasting views of civic life. Throughout the *Rising Water* trilogy, the attachment not only to New Orleans but to the houses of these New Orleanians reemphasizes an interest in representing the multi-vocal city.

Shotgun explores a variety of themes regarding the rebuilding of the city, but the two dominant issues the play directly engages with are race and the impossibility of change within this new New Orleans. *Shotgun* turns the trilogy's focus explicitly towards race, directly engaging the long history of racism and racial division within the city, and openly calls into question the idea that Katrina served to bridge these divides (indeed, by most measures the city has only grown more divided since the storm).¹⁶⁵ The turn to race coincides with the attention given to hopes for change in the city. While, at least publicly, local officials spoke of desire for racial healing within New Orleans, in practice the aims among Black and white leaders were divided. Black community leaders in particular articulated a desire to return to the pre-Katrina status quo, perhaps most controversially stated by then Mayor Ray Nagin's comments about making the city "chocolate again."¹⁶⁶ Contrastingly, white authorities derided the poor performance of schools and the high violent crime rates of the pre-Katrina city—topics suspiciously viewed by Blacks who took this as coded language for a desire to ensure the reduced Black population remain permanently marginalized through gentrification. *Shotgun* references this obliquely through confrontations regarding the racial politics of New Orleans. Perhaps the most significant exchange occurs when

Mattie's ex-boyfriend Clarence "Willie" Williams—who has taken Mayor Nagin's recent remarks about making the city "chocolate again" as a warning towards Black residents being pushed out by whites—attempts to get Beau to reveal his own opinions regarding the racial dynamics of the city:

Willie: Well, think about it now. This gonna be a chocolate city or not?

Beau: You swing by the parking lot of Home Depot in the morning, with all the Mexicans looking for work, I wouldn't be surprised we wind up some kind of refried bean city before we're done.

Willie: Don't you worry about that. The mayor already say he ain't gonna stand by and let Mexicans overrun the place.

Beau: And what's he gonna do about all the damn Texans we got here now. And Georgians? And all those contractors and roofers from Florida come over here?

Willie: That's not what I'm asking you, man.

Beau (*beginning to stiffen*): Well, what are you asking Willie?

Willie: I got to spell it out for you?

Beau: You asking whether I want this place to go back the way it was? (*Slight pause.*) Can't say I do.

Willie: So the mayor's right you white people looking to take things back.

Beau: The schools we had, the housing projects, the crime, the politicians stealing us blind. That's what God meant for us?

Willie: White man do that, nobody open their mouth. Black man come along, all of a sudden, shit, we got to do something about all this corruption dragging us down.

Beau: Not me. I say put 'em all in prison. Black, white, Mexican—they break the law, lock 'em up.

Willie: Depends on whose law you talking about, don't it?

Beau: The law's the law.

Willie (*laughing*): Man, you wouldn't last ten minutes somebody turn your ass chocolate.¹⁶⁷

The exchange is revealing. Beau's racist reference to the increased numbers of Mexicans in the city is directly related to the Latinx population surge experienced in the wake of the storm when many Mexican laborers came to the city seeking work.¹⁶⁸ To date, it is the largest demographic increase in the city, with the Latinx population doubling since the disaster.¹⁶⁹ Beau is clearly less comfortable engaging the issue of white and Black relations with Willie though. Certainly, part of this is because Willie is Black and Beau white, however it also points to the long history of racism within New Orleans and the lack of willingness by white residents to grapple with the systemic

racial issues within the city.

Beau's complaints are among the most frequent grievances held by white New Orleanians regarding life in the city: poor schools, poverty and crime (often coded language for Blackness), and a history of corrupt politicians. Each of these issues had experienced remarkable change by the show's premiere in 2009. Following Katrina, the educational system was entirely taken over by charter schools and private interests. While a tremendous increase in funding did help improve New Orleans schools over the next decade, it also did irreparable harm to the Black middle class in the city who disproportionately relied on teaching careers for economic survival.¹⁷⁰ Likewise, public housing was largely eradicated in the aftermath of the storm, and in result housing prices have continued to soar, pushing many poor (and especially Black) communities outside of the city limits.¹⁷¹ While at the time of the play's debut in 2009 the government corruption referenced was arguably most pronounced (Mayor Nagin's popularity was abysmal by the end of his tenure), the city would elect the first white mayor since 1978 the following year, Mitch Landrieu. Each point Beau highlights was a regular complaint, yet they also all underscore Willie's very real concern—that the white political and economic leadership of the city was actively working to restructure New Orleans in ways that would fundamentally benefit white New Orleanians for years to come.

Connected to the racial issues are class concerns that are made visible through costuming. The characters are, mostly, working class. Mattie is arguably lower middle class, and as such ranks as the most economically secure character (a fact that undoubtedly irks Eugene as he is angry both at his new lower economic status and the fact that Mattie is Black and better off than him). Beau and Mattie are the only two characters with steady employment, and while Mattie's job is unspecified it seems to be in an office. Her clothing matches her status, as she wears common middle-class outfits such as white capri pants with bright colored tops, as well as a nightrobe over

more casual clothes in the evening like a simple tank-top and blue jeans. Beau too wears the trappings of his work as a carpenter, regularly appearing in worn jeans and a tank-top, often with a cotton workman's shirt over his outfit. As Beau and Eugene lost everything in the storm, their wardrobes are mostly practical and feature little variety. Eugene typically wears clothes we assume are meant for a school uniform or dress code: khaki pants with a purple collared shirt. Dex also has limited variety in outfits, likely due to his lack of money, and mostly appears in blue jeans with a simple undershirt and variety of plain, loose-fitting overshirts. Of the three Black characters, Willie is the only one whose clothing feels connected to race—we regularly see him in blue jeans with fashionable sneakers, a simple undershirt and black leather jacket with orange patterning. The streetwear style, coupled with a hint of African patterning embroidered into the jacket, gives his appearance a popular Black New Orleans flair—a noticeable absence from Dex's outfit (where we might expect an African inspired shirt commonly worn by members of Black Social Clubs in the city).

These costuming choices generate much in the way of immediate understandings between the characters, particularly in their meetings. While Dex and Beau's costumes are similar, their discourses around race—and Beau's obvious discomfort at engaging in the topic—highlight that more than class, race is what separates them. On the other hand, Beau's mistrust of Willie is apparent from the first time he sees him. The fact that Willie is the only Black character to wear popular streetwear hints at Beau's discomfort with Black cultural expression, reemphasized by his willingness to enter a relationship with Mattie who wears clothing that is popular amongst middle-class (especially white middle-class) women. At one point, when Beau and Mattie are discussing their family's objections to their relationship, Beau attempts to bat away her concern with a rather tone-deaf attempt at color-blindness:

Willie: you know, all those years we were together, Audrey and me, if somebody would ask, “what color are your wife’s eyes?” I’d always have to think about it for a second. Drove Audrey crazy, I couldn’t remember. But that kinda of thing, it’s not what I see when I look at somebody I got feelings for.

Mattie: It’s not just the color of my eyes we talking about.¹⁷²

Beau’s recurring attempts to minimize the importance of race stands in stark contrast to the obvious racism of his son (who repeatedly uses racial slurs), and the overt dislike and mistrust of whites exhibited by Dex and Willie. And while the show brings issues of ongoing racial conflict between whites and blacks within the city to the stage, particularly for the predominantly white audience of *Southern Rep*, there are clear weaknesses in how the subject matter is engaged. For instance, in a scene between Willie and Dex, the two discuss white oppression and violence towards Blacks in the city. Dex brings up how “back in the day” they used “fire hoses and billy clubs and dogs.”¹⁷³ Willie argues that “that was a different time. They learned their lesson, those people. They don’t make the same mistakes they used to make—not in front of a TV camera anyway.”¹⁷⁴ The conversation pivots to the ways whiteness is reified within the very architecture of the city, concluding with an agreement on the racist intent behind keeping the statute of Robert E. Lee which, until 2017, dominated Lee Circle, a prominent area in the Warehouse District of the city (see chapter four for more on monuments within the city and the changing memoryscape). While the conversation does point out entrenched racism within New Orleans, and the general feelings of racism endemic to American Blackness, these examples feel minor set against the tremendous violence directed towards Black New Orleanians in the wake of the storm. By the time the play premiered, what was arguably the most egregious example of anti-Black violence during the aftermath of Katrina, the Danziger Bridge shooting, was already a national news story.¹⁷⁵ Arguments that Black citizens would not still be met with overt police brutality feel more akin to a white imaginary than a lived Black experience.

There is of course immense value in challenging a predominantly white audience to engage

with the racist nature of life within the city they live in—successfully done, it is imaginable that the production could offer a clarion call to turn focus to the inequities and systemic challenges facing minorities. However, doing so in a manner that promotes real self-reflection and critique requires a willingness to think outside of the lived experience of the largely white creative team. To this end, Southern Rep brought in a regular collaborator, Valerie Curtis-Newton, to direct. Curtis-Newton, a director based in Washington who runs the Lorraine Hansberry Project, explicitly discussed her role helming the show, saying, “the play sort of needed an African-American on the artistic team because race is such an important element of it. In that way, John [Biguenet] and I have struggled in some of the same ways the characters in the play do—we see the world from fundamentally different points of view.”¹⁷⁶ Curtis-Newton’s allusion here to the varying visions of Black life within New Orleans offered by the director, the white playwright, and the audience was echoed in the Theodore P. Mahne’s, *Times-Picayune*’s theatre critic, review of the show. Mahne notes the racial themes that run throughout, but calls attention to two characters in particular, writing that Eugene is, “virulently bigoted,” while saying that Dex is “at the outset [appearing] to be a simple working man, harboring his own brand of racism, [but has] a Shakespearean wisdom [that] is revealed late in the play that is pragmatic and poignant.”¹⁷⁷ Mahne’s remarks are telling: the first character in his review he points to as holding racist views is Dex: the Black character the audience most interacts with outside of Mattie. The allusion to Dex possessing a kind of mystical wisdom also points to his problematic interpretation of the character as an example of the so-called “Magical Negro” trope. Further, Mahne seems blind to the racism of Beau’s character—the character who functions as a proxy for the liberal white audience. The fact that *Shotgun* was the least financially and critically successful show in the trilogy, points to a discomfort the predominantly white audiences held with acknowledging myriad forms of racism

within their own lives and New Orleans as whole.

Despite the failure to engage deeply with the Black experience within New Orleans, *Shotgun*'s attempt is still worthy of attention: particularly as it relates to the larger concept of tragedy and the city. What is tragic within *Shotgun* is the continual hope Beau and Mattie hold onto regarding the city coming back as a better place, one where many of its deepest ills could be dispensed of. The play's *agon* is the continual battle between the various characters over their hopes for what the city might become: Beau, naively, believes a new color-blind city is possible; Mattie is somewhat enchanted by Beau's vision of the future, but pushes to recognize that while racial relations might improve their lingering imbalances at some level, they cannot be fully erased. Dex sees the harm being done to Black New Orleanians and fears for his daughter's happiness and safety if she disregards the real dangers of trying to enter the white world. Finally, Eugene seeks a conservative return to the city as it was fully before the storm, with racial dynamics staying as they were. The catastrophe of Katrina made possible a new world, and the play smartly opens the possibility of the disaster as a positive catastrophe representing a brighter future for those who were able to return. By the end of the play though, the voices against this positive outcome have grown too strong. The collapse of Beau and Mattie's relationship serves as a synecdoche of racial relations in the city at large and speaks to the failure of New Orleans to make real progress towards equality, instead more deeply entrenching segregation and the marginalization of Black citizens.

A particularly interesting way the production sought to explore the idea of racial division was through the starkly minimalist set. While all three plays in the trilogy had the same set designer, Geoffrey Hall, both *Rising Water* and *Mold* feature realistic sets that take the audience directly into the homes of the characters. *Shotgun* alone had a non-realist set, a speckled background on which lights could change the color (using a bold palette to evoke time of day, such

as deep blues for night). A faux-marble platform stood in for the porch of the shotgun home. Apart from this, the stage was bare, inviting the audience to imagine what the interiors and exterior of the house appeared as. In practice this meant that the spaces the audience saw for both Mattie and Dex's half-of-the-house and Beau and Eugene's half-of-the-house were exactly copies. This equivalency (already existent in the construction of the double shotgun homes common to New Orleans) reinforced the idea that the issues dividing the characters were not anything tangible or real, but rather the societally constructed divisions of race. The set design for the production went through numerous plans to reach the final result. Curtis-Newton emphasized the importance of representing the people of the city and providing space for their stories in the play, something developed through the stories told by the cast and crew during the rehearsal process. An early set design idea was to include the names of those New Orleanians who had died in Katrina on the back wall of the set as a tribute. Ultimately, this idea was stricken because the creative team felt it would be too emotionally difficult for audience members to sit with names of the dead for the duration of the production. In an interview, Curtis-Newton relayed the story of artistic director Aimee Hayes, whose grandfather had died in his attic during the storm, as one of stories cast and creative members of the shared that dissuaded them from ultimately proceeding with directly naming the dead.¹⁷⁸ Curtis-Newton pushed both the script and design to focus on the inequities and challenges facing the Black population of the city, and the idea of a simple set that allowed character disputes to emerge out of their personal viewpoints rather than material differences was decided on.

The play constantly reiterates the ways the city was caught in a dichotomy: nothing is the same, but nothing will change—a common idea in New Orleans, as the city has bound itself to “Old World” depictions in an effort to attract tourists. This paradoxical quality echoes what

performance scholar Freddie Rokem refers to as the “ludic logic” of tragedy, wherein oppositional worldviews are “played” out for debate by the audience.¹⁷⁹ While early on, Beau hopes that “maybe the city will come out of this a brand new place,” by the play’s ending it is clear this New Orleans is an unknowable world, one in which old problems are amplified even while they have become unrecognizable given their scale.¹⁸⁰ Mattie says “call this normal, how we living now? I don’t know a set of rules exists for life in a place like this.”¹⁸¹ Mattie’s point, that much of the old way of life is gone now, is undercut by Beau’s desire to return to a pre-storm existence. In one exchange, Beau tells Dex that he has finished repairs on a shed Dex asked him to mend. Their dialogue reveals a sour recognition between the two:

BEAU: Yeah, it’s all done. Like nothing ever happened here.

DEX: Don’t you believe that, Beau. Better or worse, there’s nothing the same as what it was before the flood.

BEAU: Nothing I can think of came out better than before.

DEX: Yeah, it’s true, the city, it’s all turning out worse than anybody could’ve ever dreamed.¹⁸²

Shotgun functions, as *Rising Water* did, as a means of directly interjecting into the *polis* a recognition that the scale of change New Orleans has undergone has fundamentally upended the existing world. The break has redefined the rules and the way we must consider life going forward.

While the production did not have the same effect of *Rising Water* in leading to spontaneous nightly discussion, the show did feature weekly talkbacks that encouraged audiences to engage with the questions of race and recovery that were unfolding around them in the city. The production was also successful among the audience—the play was extended for a further two weeks following its initial four week run and reached over 6,000 audience members. As *Rising Water* had done, *Shotgun* created a piece of theatre that was responding directly to the present moment and concerns of the local population. The play incorporated the actors’ lived experiences into the rehearsal process. The script underwent extensive rewrites in the rehearsal room,

particularly to give greater authority and depth to the Black characters of the play and their ongoing struggles in a city where most of those who had returned were white. This work was a direct effort to create a piece that, stemming from the experiences of those working on the production and the stories they heard living in the city, allowed an opportunity for audiences to reflect on the changed realities of life in New Orleans and the ongoing negotiation with what it meant to live in the changed place. Performance theorist Diana Taylor turned to tragedy as a means of recognizing how the attacks of September 11th represented a fundamental break wherein any “sense of directionality, containability, and moral purpose,” are broken and therefore challenge our comprehension of the event. Biguenet similarly argues that Katrina has fundamentally redefined New Orleanians’ ability to grapple with the way they perceive the world. Any view of the city, and the inherent problems within it, now demands that those living within the city expand their thinking past Katrina and into the long-held, systemic problems that have manufactured oppression and inequity across generations. Belief that these problems will resolve post-Katrina, washed clean by the waters that swept away so much of the city, is naivete at best.¹⁸³

Mold

Mold, the conclusion of Biguenet’s trilogy, took the longest to reach the stage, not arriving at Southern Rep until 2013. This delay had clear ramifications for both the aims of the piece and audience impact. Many early theatrical responses to the storm focused on the terror caused by the possibility of death, or of impending death, including *Rising Water*. Within *Mold* though, death has already collected its souls: the “2 dead” referenced on the door are Trey’s parents, drowned in their attic when the waters rose. The death that is present onstage isn’t a menacing figure, preparing to act, but a long lingering specter, a ghostly force that has seeped—like the mold that covers

nearly every part of the set—into the home itself. In his review for the *Times Picayune*, critic Theodore P. Mahne wrote of the set “everywhere, the speckled signs of a grotesque life form, the rising mold. Through the impact, one’s sense memory is triggered. Those smells, that awful sour smell, invades the nostrils again.” The value of mold in the home was a constant refrain in the post-Katrina world, and indeed is seen in other Katrina related performances such as the presence of real mold in the *in-situ* performances of *Home: New Orleans?* (see chapter 2) and the Flooded House Museum (see chapter 3). In the post-Katrina world, mold and X-codes (the spray-paint codes on houses that informed rescue crews if a home was searched, when, and if bodies were found inside) were mythic symbols, holding a power of immediate recognizability for the storm and serving as constant reminders of the New Orleans that was destroyed. Mold is a powerful stand-in for death and mirrors the long-lasting nature of the very real trauma lived and felt by those within New Orleans in the years after the storm. A study from the year prior to the play’s debut found a third of New Orleanians still had Katrina related PTSD, and nearly the same number had ongoing psychological distress.¹⁸⁴

The choice to have the ghosts of Trey’s parents lingering (quite tangibly through the onstage X-code present) throughout the play speaks to the unanswered, unfinished toll of Katrina that still resides in the city some eight years after the storm when the show debuted. By the time the play reached the stage, the city had reached a crossroads: while 41% of white residents felt that New Orleans had improved since Katrina, 36% of black New Orleanians felt that the city was worse off.¹⁸⁵ Particularly in the minds of white New Orleanians, the catastrophe was something the city needed to move on from, potentially erasing the event from memory.¹⁸⁶ Mahne wrote, “it proves that while most of the wounds of that time appear to have healed, the scars are easily reopened as the playwright rips the bandages away once again.”¹⁸⁷ In this reading, the play uses

the absent dead to stand in for, and openly investigate, the ongoing, living trauma of Katrina within New Orleans that is not being healthily processed, but instead, unhealthily buried. The role of the absent bodies and the ever-present mold also speak to the rot, the decaying, that the home has experienced. This rot is consuming, seemingly overwhelming and yet throughout the play Trey argues it can be restored. The parallel here to bring the dead home back to life—to resurrect the home—represents his desire to resurrect his parents. This mirrors the desire of locals to resurrect their city. For audiences, the impossibility of the situation continues to reinforce the reality that the losses must be accepted and the new city recognized.

Mold takes place a year after the storm and focuses on Trey Guidry and his wife Marie as they return to Trey's parents' flooded home for the first time. While trying to salvage whatever is possible from the home, Trey is increasingly drawn to the idea of rebuilding the property and returning permanently, despite the numerous challenges that emerge throughout the play. The largest problems are: first, the realization that, because his parents lacked flood insurance there would be essentially no insurance money with which to rebuild; and second, that the home is scheduled to be torn down by the city as ordinances calling for the removal of "blight homes" mean that the grace period to return and restore is ending in only a few days.¹⁸⁸

Death lingers over *Mold* as a constant reminder of what was lost, and in turn builds a tragic model that seeks to recognize, and perhaps free, the ghosts that remain within New Orleans in the long aftermath of Katrina. In *Mold* we never meet or see Trey's drowned parents, yet their presence is inescapable in the house. The set makes this apparent: it consists of the home of Trey's parents' dilapidated shotgun house onstage in disrepair. The set revolves between the living room and the front, dividing audiences between the interior and exterior worlds. An open doorframe on the left side of the home points to rooms beyond the living area that are, we imagine, equally devastated

as the overturned living room. However, without power, the space past the doorframe is entirely dark, creating a frightening sensation of the unknown for the audience. What is visible to the audience is the overwhelming decay present within the house. Small black spots of mold run across the walls and have eaten away at the carpet. A once white couch is collapsed in on itself and has been discolored as well—in fact, everything in the home has been discolored from the waters that sat in the house. It is as though the entire home has been put through a desaturation filter in photo editing software and stripped of its color. All that remains are ugly yellows, off-whites, and black mold. Faded pictures lying strewn across the room with other detritus and broken lamps mark the space as once lived in but now empty. The only small pieces of color onstage are the costumes. While the men wear muted outfits meant for working, the women have more colorful ensembles. Marie wears blue jeans with a bright yellow top and a baby blue scarf, all under a light white jacket. Amelia also brings in color with a tan skirt and floral purple shirt. That the two women, the two characters most determined to move forward, bring the most color to the play visually marks them as stepping away from the cold, desaturated colors of those living in the past of the disaster. Finally, as if these markers of decay and absence were insufficient, a haunting X-code reading “2 dead” written above the door serves as a constant reminder of the dead parents. The X-code, more than any of the detritus, serves to remind the audience of the unseen characters, their lingering presence haunting the action of the play forming what theatre scholar Andrew Sofer terms “theatrical dark matter” meaning “the invisible dimension of theatre that escapes visual detection, even though its effects are felt everywhere in performance.”¹⁸⁹ Here the dark matter is the recognition of an encompassing sensation of being surrounded by death (both of loved ones but also a way of life), or, as Biguenet put it, a feeling that, “death is our neighbor.”¹⁹⁰ Trey’s deceased, unseen parents stand in for the pervasive death that loomed throughout the city in the years that

followed the catastrophe. These unseen characters offer the audience a point of connection for their own lost friends, families, and previous lives.

As Trey becomes obsessed with the notion of rebuilding, of restarting and carrying on his legacy as a New Orleanian, it becomes obvious he has failed to accept the catastrophe: he does not recognize the city as he knew it has ended and that “going back” is impossible. The play reinforces this through allusions to the death-state of the city. Marie reflects that “it’s like living in the middle of a ghost story, living here.”¹⁹¹ Referring to the “X-code,” Edgar, the insurance assessor, simply says “I’ve seen so many of those X’s, I didn’t even notice it.”¹⁹² After learning of Trey’s desire to rebuild, Amelia, the neighborhood volunteer recording blight homes, tells him, “fix this place up, you just pitching a tent in the middle of a graveyard.”¹⁹³ The fact that the house served as the literal dying place—the temporary graves—for Trey’s parents, reinforces the haunting presence living within the home. That the home served as the temporary tomb for Trey’s parents emphasizes the nature of the house (and in turn, the city) as a graveyard. Given this, the choice to return, to try to rebuild is to disturb the dead: rebuilding would upset the resting place of the dead in a futile effort to resurrect them.

Mold, and particularly the smell of mold, remains one of the most visceral memories of the aftermath of Katrina for those who lived in the city in the months, and years, after the storm. The set itself is dominated by mold, both in small black spots that have taken to the outdoor vinyl of the house, and to the large splotches that dominate the house’s interior walls—running most heavily on the bottom half of the house but having spread, noticeably, all the way to the top of the ceiling. In addition to the constant references to the mold, the actors regularly physically react to the stench and cough around the smell. Mold is an invader in the home—a presence that is new, unwelcome, and should not exist. In the post-Katrina landscape, even after the largest debris had

been cleared, reminders of the storm existed: mold, the ubiquitous “X-codes,” and waterlines being the most prominent. These signs made memories of the storm inescapable. Yet, just as much as these new additions, these remnants of the disaster, were ubiquitous within New Orleans, there were also the profound absences that marked the city. As Jean Paul Sartre writes “the world is revealed as haunted by absences to be realized, and each *this* appears with a cortege of absences which point to it and determine it... thus the absences indicate the *this* as *this*, and conversely the *this* points toward the absences.”¹⁹⁴ Sartre is referring to the ways absence references what is lacking. Here absence is a chief means of phenomenologically understanding something, particularly place. Sartre argues that we learn our conception of a place through our absence from it, or the absences that form within it.

With the mass demographic changes following Katrina absence became a clear metric of understanding place. As much as mold now resides, unwelcome, in the landscape, so too do voids: businesses, schools, and public services that closed permanently following the disaster; home foundation slabs with conspicuously absent houses; and, critically, the overwhelming absence of friends and neighbors who died or were never able to return to the city. These absences run throughout *Mold* offering a glimpse of the world that lies beyond the broken home. The blackness of the interior rooms, completely inscrutable to the audience, invites questions of what else lies broken within the house. Our only glimpse into the damage within is in the large trash bags full of broken items that Trey periodically removes from the house and piles outside—overtime creating a wall of destroyed memories physically laid out for the audience. Outside, the unnatural darkness of the set around the house informs audiences of the eerie nature of the absences that lie beyond. For instance, when Trey and Marie first arrive, they describe the environment around them:

MARIE: Looks like somebody dropped a bomb here.

TREY: Like there’s been a war.

MARIE: Yeah, and we lost.

(Silence.)

TREY: Everything's so gray.

MARIE: The saltwater leached out all the color I guess.¹⁹⁵

Beyond providing a visualization of the bleak atmosphere of New Orleans for the audience, the conversation points to the fundamental level to which the city was transformed. New Orleans architecture is famous for its vibrant paint colors: indeed, in some areas of the city, these colors are prescribed by local boards who seek to maintain the character and historical nature of neighborhoods. To see the New Orleans as a sea of gray, absent of color, creates a powerful recognition of how seemingly no element of the city's character was left untouched. Likewise, we are regularly reminded of the lack of people within the city. At one point Trey mentions how "there's not another human being for blocks."¹⁹⁶ Marie echoes this when she describes the neighborhood as "a bunch of wrecked houses tumbling down on themselves. Their doors flung wide open, windows busted out. And not a human being anywhere in sight."¹⁹⁷ A year after the storm the population of the city was still less than half its pre-Katrina level, and 15 years after the disaster New Orleans had only recovered to about 85% of its pre-storm population.¹⁹⁸ The things that are absent from the city serve as powerful reminders—often reminders that remain to the present day—of the devastation and death that was visited upon New Orleans.

Likewise, the mold covering the set makes this death visually inescapable. The insurance adjuster, Edgar, who comes to assess the damage talks of mold as though it is an inevitable, eternal foe. He recounts a story of a man who rebuilt his home after the storm.

EDGAR: This old-timer the other side of Franklin Avenue—one of the first houses I got sent out on after the flood—he decides he's gonna rebuild. Three months, the place is ready to move in. But then, before he's even got any furniture, he starts to smell the mold still in the walls. So he tears out the new sheetrock in the laundry room, the kitchen, the bathroom—thinking it must be near the pipes, condensation, something like that. Sure enough, everywhere he looks, the studs are turning black again. And every room he walks into, he smells the spores in the air. So he rips

open the walls in the living room and the dining room and the bedrooms. Time he's done, he's got nothing left but the studs, every one all black with mold. So he calls me up, says he's got a new problem, can I come see? I go out there, but I got to tell him we already paid you for what happened. We can't give you another check for damage you done yourself.

TREY: I had no idea.

EDGAR: They call it the fifth kingdom, mold.

MARIE: What they mean by that, the fifth kingdom?

EDGAR: (*counting on his fingers*) You know, you got your bacteria, your one-celled creatures, your vegetable kingdom and your animals. But then you got this other kingdom. It's alive, but it don't ever move. Just sends out spores all the time, infecting everything else. That's the fifth kingdom—mold.

MARIE: Ought to just change the name of New Orleans to The Fifth Kingdom.

These constant reminders, the mold and absences, foreground for the audience the total transformation that occurred and its irrevocable, permanent nature. The allusions to a new world, a world of mold, tie into a larger semantic framework, one that mythologizes the power of mold and elevates it from ubiquitous foe to new world order. Mold's constant presence, the near impossibility of defeating it, reemphasize how the city must reconcile with what has passed and what must be done to make the city habitable again. As Sands argues, "tragedy ought to uncover the grief and the pleasure; ought to be, in other words, not a symptom of melancholia but a vehicle for its healing... but to heal is to uncover, not recover, a loss—to recognize the loss precisely as such."¹⁹⁹ Trey's painful refusal to acknowledge the scale of devastation echoes those in the city who refuse to admit New Orleans has fundamentally changed. It is to cover the dead but not truly acknowledge their passing and properly bury them. The mold that continues to return, to decay the home even as, like ghosts, it haunts the house, reveals that simply papering over the damage—or even bleaching it—will not change the fact of the destruction. Only through truly recognizing the devastation, digging into the walls (or the new reality) and making something new (while utilizing the beams from before) can Trey, and in turn New Orleans, hope to make a home in this new city.

While the city will obviously rebuild in some fashion, the ever-present death that surrounds

the characters of the play haunts the actors, making it clear that returning to life before Katrina is impossible, and that any existence that takes hold must be set on a firm new beginning and a recognition that that which had been before has died. Performance theorist Joseph Roach's conception of surrogation is particularly useful for reading this understanding of New Orleans' transformation: "into the cavities created by loss through death... survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternatives. Because collective memory works selectively, imaginatively, and often perversely, surrogation rarely if ever succeeds."²⁰⁰ Here it is useful to return to catastrophe: while catastrophe means the end of one way of being, surrogation ensures that an existence, an evolution of the prior form, will take hold. Throughout this dissertation, I map ongoing efforts to collapse the pre-Katrina world with the post-Katrina world. In this, I move to demonstrate that while Katrina was a break, histories and repertoires are preserved, seeping through the chasm to connect across the breakage and preserve elements of the pre-catastrophe world into the new one taking shape. *Mold* underscores how the dead cannot be ignored, replaced, or surrogated, but must instead be recognized and mourned should any actual processing or recovery take place. In other words, the catastrophe must be continually recognized and remembered rather than disregarded by trying to return to life as before or by ignoring the disaster that took place. To truly find a new existence we must acknowledge the *pre* while living in the *post*.

This is perhaps best demonstrated as the play heads towards its conclusion and Trey and Marie enter a final fight about staying or leaving. Marie pleads with her husband saying "baby, look at this place. It's not a home. It's not even a house anymore. It's something you need to bury." When Trey again refuses, Marie finally reveals the gruesome details of his parents' deaths, asking him:

How'd they identify the bodies, the soldiers found your parents in the attic? ...your daddy found some duct tape up the attic and what did he do with it? Taped your

mom's driver's license to her arm. Then he did the same to himself. Why you think he did that? *(Pause.)* 'Cause the attic must have been a hundred thirty degrees up there and he knew nobody was coming to save them. *(Pause.)* What you think that's like? Taping your wife's name to her body 'cause you know the two of you gonna die and there's nothing you can do about it. Imagine taping my name to me so after I die my body can be identified. *(Pause.)* But why? Why your daddy do that, huh? Something terrible as that. *(Pause.)* So we wouldn't think when the water went down maybe there were still alive somewhere. He didn't want your mama and him to turn into two ghosts haunting us the rest of our lives. He wanted us to be able to bury them and move on.²⁰¹

Marie's direct engagement of Trey's parents forces a change in him. Shortly after the exchange—for the only time in the play—Trey calls out to his father, acknowledging his own feelings of responsibility for his parents' deaths. Trey finally seems to break his manic desire to return to the house, and in turn, seems to let go somewhat of his feelings of culpability for the death that surrounds him. Critically, it allows Marie to acknowledge what has gone unsaid for a year, and finally emotionally support her husband, and openly tell him that the blame for the disaster is not his. Her reading of Trey's father's final act is one that calls for the recognition of the finality of change. She asks him to recognize that a catastrophe has occurred and that he cannot go back to the world as it was, but rather must step into the world as it is. In this, she is demonstrating the role of tragedy as vehicle for acceptance—the acknowledgement that what was pre-catastrophe can never be returned to. What is now needed is to mourn the loss and build a new world in the old's absence.

Like *Rising Water* and *Shotgun, Mold* went through an extensive developmental rehearsal process that fundamentally reshaped the piece around the living experiences and stories of the actors, designers, and theatre staff who participated in the process. Starting as a series of disconnected monologues by five characters, Biguenet redeveloped the script through actor improvisations and feedback into the more traditional two-act structure with four characters that eventually premiered. Throughout the process, actors relayed their own experiences and the stories

they had heard from friends and neighbors, often directly weaving these into developmental exercises.²⁰² As with the other productions, talkbacks were still a feature of the play with regular Sunday conversations following performances. The talkbacks continued the trend of focusing on audience experiences more than on the production itself, with the play functioning as a starting place for audience members to recount their own experiences of rebuilding and what was still an unfolding process of recovery for them individually.

By reflecting New Orleans back to its assembled citizens, Biguenet makes clear the need for a purgation of the specter of the pre-Katrina world—not in forgetting its existence, but in accepting the inability to return to it, the inability to resurrect the city that *was* and the need to recognize that city that *is*. If one of the roles of catharsis is to free the city from that which it is collectively clinging onto unhealthily, then *Mold* certainly aims to utilize this function of tragedy by bringing forth unresolved emotions and offering a platform from which to better think through grief, and thus enable the audience to imagine a better, future New Orleans together. In calling out to his father, in emotionally embracing to his wife, in taking steps to move on from the haunting home of his parents (and the guilt that haunts him and calls him to remain stuck in a past that no longer exists) Trey begins to accept the devastation, to bury the dead, and to process what was lost. Trey's catharsis is as much an exorcism as it is an emotional purgation. This chance for catharsis seems to be the aim of *Mold* as the capstone of the *Rising Water* trilogy. Biguenet's use of tragedy as a method of generating catharsis for the city echoes its long tradition as a form for civic engagement. Catharsis may not exorcise the ghosts of a traumatized place, but in opening a character to emotional purgation, a play may encourage the same experience of the audience. In places befallen by mass trauma, tragedy may encourage audiences to commune with the dead, to witness ghosts, to accept emotional vulnerability, and begin communal mourning. This is an act

of radical empathy, of healing, and of honoring the dead. In leaving the dead as unseen characters, *Mold* encourages audiences to recognize the countless dead surrounding the play, and enables them to begin the necessary work of processing trauma.

Processing Over Time

The *Rising Water Trilogy* utilizes tragedy in service of two key aims: first, create a work focused explicitly on the *polis* and thus create opportunity for audiences to reflect on their city and its ongoing struggle; and second, to acknowledge that Katrina served as a catastrophe (in the ontological sense) and therefore acknowledge the need for mourning what was lost while reconciling the new world that is. To this end, Biguenet hoped to generate conversation amongst his audience—pushing them to confront their own trauma and speak it aloud. The trilogy served as a prime example of tragedy as an intention for mobilizing civic discourse and engagement, or, as Simon Goldhill says, “a machine to turn epic myth into the myths of the *polis*.”²⁰³ Biguenet hoped the trilogy would keep the devastation of the storm, and the pain of what was buried, present within the memory of New Orleanians as they began to recover and adapt from the devastation of Katrina. The trilogy itself highlights the need to recognize and remember the dead. The plays serve as a sharp reminder that whatever is next for the city will represent a whole new way of living, a new way of experiencing and existing in New Orleans. But by picking up the model of tragedy, Biguenet seeks to use a ritual form to create a space for conversation within the polis. While by no means did the trilogy reach the full city, it did argue its ideas before thousands of residents.²⁰⁴ The value of regularly narrativizing what occurred to the city, and encouraging audiences to voice their experiences through talkbacks, demonstrates the function of tragedy wherein long lasting traumas may be collectively interrogated and confronted. The productions enjoyed strong support from

Southern Rep's membership with *Rising Water* remaining the most successful show in the company's history via ticket sales, and *Shotgun* and *Mold* also serving as major fiscal successes. By the time of *Mold*'s run, plays about Katrina were largely unpopular in the city, yet the positive audience interest demonstrates a trust that Southern Rep had built with its audiences over the subject, and a willingness by patrons to continue to engage with the idea of New Orleans through the forum of theatre.²⁰⁵

Chapter 2: “I’m a good neighbor, I’m a good friend, I’m a good neighbor, you’re in good hands”

Health services were still crippled, and mental health services for people with post-traumatic stress disorder, what my cousin Pam called “Katrina crazy,” were virtually nonexistent.

—Sarah M. Broom, *The Yellow House*²⁰⁶

When we tell stories we are sharing with each other how we put things together. When we share stories we share whole parts of ourselves. Stories come charged with the spirit of the teller and have lives of their own.

—John O’Neal, “Story Circle Discussion Paper”²⁰⁷

Among the most lasting images to emerge from Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath were the mass camps of FEMA trailers. As families returned to rebuild, the need for a place to stay during the often months or years-long process meant that the demand for trailers far exceeded supply. But as more trailers arrived new problems developed. The trailers were typically relegated to camps, often 100 miles or more from New Orleans and thus remarkably inaccessible to the homes that the displaced populations were ostensibly rebuilding.²⁰⁸ These trailer parks brought added concerns as they were often placed in remote areas that made obtaining food and medicine difficult—especially for vulnerable senior citizens who were already suffering from a total breakdown of support networks.²⁰⁹ In congressional hearings, residents testified that the conditions in these facilities were those of a “concentration camp.”²¹⁰ Then, in 2006, the mobile homes provided by the Federal Government came under scrutiny when it was discovered that the trailers had toxic levels of formaldehyde. The numerous failures of the FEMA trailer program ultimately resulted in national scrutiny and a total shift in how FEMA manages displaced individuals in post-disaster environments.²¹¹ Amidst this backdrop of far-removed, temporary homes, the city’s population had shrunk tremendously. For those New Orleanians who were able to return, coming home meant years of experiencing new absences and losses as community institutions and physical structures were permanently shuttered or erased. Building entirely new support networks and navigating the ongoing evolution of traditions and neighborhoods became essential to survival in

the new, often unrecognizable, city.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how artists utilize place-based performance to lay claim to the physical and metaphorical places they call home. In so doing, these performers engage in a work of home-making that encourages acts of reclamation, acknowledgement, and recognition. In the aftermath of the storm, theatre and performance makers in New Orleans recognized the need for returning citizens to reconnect to place within the city: those places lost, changed, or slowly returning. Placemaking—the series of practices and histories we collect and utilize to pass on communicable narratives—became a central part of existing within the city. As residents sought to turn space into place, citizens naturally look to traditional, often ritual, forms of meaning-making to generate place. Artists in the aftermath of the storm recognized the necessity of placemaking to their practice both for the spiritual connection to home, but also for the political necessity of staking out their right to exist within the land they had historically inhabited. For the artists I study, the role of artist is intertwined with that of activist: just as their art is an expression of who they are and how they live in the world, so too their activism is critical to their survival. The community-based performances I study demonstrate how placemaking is an act of survival by communities, especially marginalized and hyperlocal communities, such as individual neighborhoods. In so doing, these artists lay claim to what New Orleans is and who belongs within it (both shaping and imagining the civic identity they seek for their home). Throughout this chapter I rely heavily on interviews with artists and scholars who directly worked to create the two case studies explored below. Additionally, I draw from a range of primary source materials from the productions including performance recordings, photographs, grant reports, programs, and contemporaneous interviews by the artists. I also rely on news accounts, scholarly reviews, and academic articles written on these events.

I use two case studies from separate performance groups to demonstrate how locals went about demanding space in a city that was rapidly beginning to push against their presence. The first of these, the interdisciplinary artistic collaboration project *HOME: New Orleans? (HNO?)*, was an academic-led series of neighborhood performances and artistic events meant to help create space for locals to process their grief, as well as acknowledge their needs in the devastated city. The second piece, *Homecoming Project*, is an ongoing neighborhood ritual-based performance series helmed by the leading Black activist theatre company in the city, Junebug Productions. Both projects utilize memory-work (which I theorize here through author Toni Morrison's conception of "rememory") and strategic home-making practices that allow for community prosperity (an idea referred to by Black feminist scholar bell hooks as "homeplace").

I turn to Black feminist thinkers to understand the community engagement work done in post-Katrina New Orleans not only because these frameworks help identify the practices taken on by local activist-performers, but because Black women are regularly leaders in such initiatives in both credited and uncredited roles. In the case of Junebug's work, it is easy to understand how a Black, woman-led company relies on these theorists. In the case of *HNO?*, while many of the artists and academics on the project were white (and the *LakeviewS*, performance featured the largest number of white artists and participants of the various projects) it is critical to remember that the work they accomplished was only possible through the input and collaboration of Black men and women who made accessible the ideas that shaped the art, and often served as mentors, critics, and audiences during both the development and execution of projects. Throughout these cases, I demonstrate how the importance of embodied presence, educational outreach, and a spirit of welcoming allows local artists to fight displacement, claim residency, and reject erasure in a rapidly gentrifying city.

Building Community and Audience Engagement as Activism

The devastation of 2005, and the ongoing changes to New Orleans in the catastrophe's wake, left a foundational legacy within the city's arts scene. Katrina served as an inspiration to not only existing arts groups, but for a large number of entities that formed in the void left by the disaster. Perhaps the most nationally recognized theatre piece to come from the storm was the Classical Theatre of Harlem's 2006 production of *Waiting for Godot* starring Wendell Pierce. Set in Gentilly, in front of and inside a storm ravaged house, the production was lit by the headlights of audience members' cars.²¹² Similarly, the multidisciplinary arts collective the New Orleans Airlift, a group of displaced New Orleans artists who returned in 2008, expressed their own experiences with the slow recovery through community-based place-making artworks. The bedrock of their work has been a series of "musical architecture" pieces that allow for audiences and artists to make music through artistic installations that resemble small treehouses. Mondo Bizarro, a local interdisciplinary performance collective, launched two pieces tied to oral history work entitled *I-10 Witness* (2006) and *I Witness Central City* (2008). The first of the two, *I-10 Witness*, was named for the interstate that runs throughout Louisiana and took many evacuees out of New Orleans and sometimes back in. A collection of interviews with residents, the project received over 5,000 responses and was made available digitally. The success inspired the follow-up piece, a series of 40 video interviews of long-time residents of the poor, predominantly Black, neighborhood of Central City. Stickers were attached to prominent sites in Central City where the videos were filmed and passersby could scan the sticker with their phone to learn about its history as part of a self-guided tour.²¹³ Even fourteen years after the storm, Katrina continued to serve as a dominant theme for the city's arts scene as a 2019 art exhibition at the Historic New Orleans

Collection entitled “Art of the City: Postmodern to Post-Katrina,” proved. The exhibit was dominated by artworks that explored the lingering legacy of devastation and trauma from Katrina. Katrina remains generative subject matter for local and national artists. Descriptions of devastation after the storm regularly referred to the catastrophe as “apocalyptic.”²¹⁴ In the wake of such total catastrophe (see chapter one), place is fundamentally changed, and therefore holds new meaning. Whether a building was absent, its ownership or purpose changed, the structure physically altered after flood damage, or its histories and memories unknown to—and, in turn, erased by—the new population that had come into the area, the places that make up New Orleans were permanently transformed. Performers immediately recognized this and sought to grapple with the ways the city had physically changed.

In the early months after Katrina, artists from both within and outside of the city foregrounded place in their work. Recognizing the power of bringing audiences to specific places, artists leveraged the layered meaning and histories represented at specific sites and wove places and buildings into their performances as more than settings, but as themes, subject matter, and sometimes characters. Some of the turn to site-specific work was, undoubtedly, due to economic and physical realities. Given the devastation, many theatres and performance venues were shuttered or damaged from the storm and were physically unable to host local artists or financially prohibitive for artists to access. Equally important, though, was the enormous power of space for meaning making within their productions. This can be well understood through the 2006 NOLA Project’s (a now prominent though at the time start-up theatre company in the city) production of *Get This Lake Off My House: Our Tempest*. Written and directed by founding artistic director Andrew Larimer, the production was held on Lake Pontchartrain’s public beachfront. The choice reflected both the small budget of the company, and Larimer’s personal attachment to the site, as

his family residence was near the lake. In interviews, Larimer explained the choice of venue stemmed from a desire to meet the audience where they physically were.²¹⁵ Additionally, no scenery could rival the layered meanings of using Lake Pontchartrain itself as the backdrop to a play about the lake waters flooding the neighborhood. Larimer deliberately wanted to confront the problem of a body of water that had flooded his neighborhood, yet also serves as the site of joyful memories of fishing, swimming, and summertime.²¹⁶ New Orleanians, like most people of the Gulf South, live in a delicate harmony with water. On one hand it is the source of life (both economically and spiritually) for many, yet it also serves as a constant threat, ready to take life with little or no warning. Likewise, the many productions that took place in or around deserted and dilapidated buildings offered a unique emotional resonance. While this power could be mimicked through intricate sets, audiences could not walk through, smell, or touch sets. Further, sets were devoid of the connection to history and memory that previously inhabited structures offered. Artistic companies recognized the value in stepping away from mimesis and towards the actual. This fostered backdrops that could highlight other elements of the production. Documentary style theatre holds additional power within the very rooms from which the stories emerged. Contrastingly, fictionalized stories or more representational art forms (such as dance) encouraged audiences to reflect on the body's relationship to space (made manifest through the bodies of both the performers and the audience members themselves).

Among the most common of post-Katrina artistic tropes was a focus on second-lines. There is arguably no ritual more embedded in New Orleans life than the second-line. In New Orleans, the second-line (derived as a portion of the longer Jazz Funeral tradition, see introduction) is an immediately recognizable form, and one turned to time and again to impart site-specific understanding of a location to the audience. Traditional rituals offer an immediate intelligibility to

audiences, as well as provide a specific set of actions that can be followed helping participants ground themselves emotionally, thus quieting harmful emotions.²¹⁷ While local performers have long used the form to speak to contemporary political and ecological problems in the city, in the time since Katrina, the structure has become an outsized part of contemporary performance by those both living and visiting New Orleans.²¹⁸ Leveraging the structure of the second-line allowed performers to tap into a readily understood ritual practice—one that is entirely developed from connection to place. This connection, formed through recognizing important places in a deceased community member’s life, is particularly useful to linking friends and neighbors and helping audiences metaphorically “step into each other’s shoes” by *literally* walking along the same paths another individual has walked. Both case studies in this chapter borrow from the second-line: for Junebug it is the very form of the performance, for *HNO?* the second-line served as a starting place and spiritual guidepost for the framework of the project. In speaking with the artists responsible for these artworks, all of them brought up, discussed, and referenced the second-line as part of their thinking about the work, and as a blueprint for structuring their pieces.

A key reason that second-lines serve as an important framework for post-Katrina performance is because of the ritual’s physical action of walking through neighborhoods. As journalist P.E. Moskowitz writes of New Orleans, “in other cities, the rich and poor live in completely different parts of town—highways, train tracks, and other vestiges of racist urban planning ensure that the rich and powerful sections of cities hardly ever mix. Here, water from the Mississippi is a constant threat, so the rich live where the land is highest, and the poor live in the valleys. That has given New Orleans a chaotic topography of inequality.”²¹⁹ Moskowitz establishes this understanding of the overlapping racial and class dynamics at play in New Orleans to lay out how gentrification became the norm in the post-Katrina city. Indeed, this “chaotic topography of

inequality” extends back decades.²²⁰ In redline maps (the segregations tool used to legitimize disinvestment in predominantly non-white areas) of New Orleans from 1939, the confusion over the mixture of racial and wealth groups living in proximity clearly irked land surveyors. Of the French Quarter, the reviewer wrote, “it is difficult for an outsider to realize why this section should be in demand from a residential standpoint. All the buildings probably range in age from 50 years up, streets are very narrow and present population is largely of the undesirable element, but the fact remains that there are people in New Orleans of the highest type who prefer to live in the ‘French Quarter’ and are willing to pay good rents...”²²¹ Thus a critical component of any neighborhood work in New Orleans is working to form cross-community alliances and movements—the mix of citizenry requires it. Gentrification in the city post-Katrina has meant historically Black areas have, increasingly, seen white encroachment that threatens traditional cultures and access to housing. The “topography of inequality” though has meant that while communities may be divided by race, they are often united by flood risk. This means forming coalitional partnerships has, in some cases, grown easier as white residents have been pushed into the more flood-prone areas. The fact that the second-line exists essentially as a party that moves throughout a neighborhood makes it an ideal form for local actors to bring together groups from different backgrounds and collectively experience the places they live. This helps to form natural partnerships, especially those vesting in the preservation of place.

Second-lines also demonstrate an important component of memory transmission: active, embodied engagement. Memory is not merely an individual’s recollection. Memory studies has shown that memory may be public or private, foggy or clear, stagnant or in flux. Memory can be a tool, weaponized for or against populations or the instrument through which a community is built. Renowned author Toni Morrison augments this point through her conception of “rememory,”

an idea that expresses “history versus memory, and memory versus memorylessness. Rememory as in recollecting and remembering as in reassembling...”²²² Rememory requires an active presence, a willingness to engage and wade through, typically painful, memories to piece together what has often been willfully disregarded or hidden. In so doing, it must be curated and selected—rememory is the labor conducted when oppression and destruction have worked to silence or hide memories. Rememory is naturally invoked in the context of trauma and historical silencing: sites where memory requires processing, excavation, curation, and active re-collecting/re-assemblage.

Rememory is thus a critical tool in the post-Katrina environment. Yes, New Orleanians were deeply traumatized, but given the disjuncture of the population, the preservation of memory required physical salvaging through destroyed and damaged material.²²³ Second-lines are a critical rememory tool. As political action, they occupy public streets and demand recognition for community members. But as rememory machine, they curate important places to the person being honored (often restaurants, bars, and places of work) and have the participants walk along the footsteps of the honoree. Importantly, second-lines encourage communion amongst the paradegoers, creating opportunity to meet, make friends, and experience each other. As Black dance scholar Yvonne Daniels writes, “through resilient and exciting ritual performance, dance and music embody memory and perseverance and, in the end, inspire and support survival.”²²⁴ At jazz funerals and second-lines honoring those harmed by painful event such as Katrina, the ability to learn about those who were lost serves as a powerful act of reclamation by those leading the ritual.

I invoke Morrison in this conceptualization to underline the significance of Black feminist thought on post-Katrina performance. Often un- or under-credited, Black women’s labor was deeply tied to the neighborhood based, community engaged approaches post-Katrina artists

centered in the wake of the disaster. As Carol BeBelle, a poet and co-founder of Ashé Cultural Arts Center (the largest Black arts cultural organization and a major partner in countless artistic programs in New Orleans) wrote of herself and other Black women in the aftermath of Katrina,

[they] were keeping it real and holding it together for their children, who had never seen life so out of control or their parents in such dire straits. Elders were frightened—some almost to death—by the prospect of losing everything, especially their independence... Out-performing and over-performing the role of “woman” in the most stressful circumstances, the challenges these women faced brought them closer than ever to understanding and internalizing the lives of their ancestral mothers, the enslaved and disenfranchised women who heroically struggled to live nearly every moment of their working hours, protecting their children, their parents, and their men; providing for their children and the children of the enslaved village while also finding the humanity to care for their oppressor’s children. They managed all this while improvising such an effective performance of seeming “carefree,” “safe,” and “friendly,” that they were able to offer breathing room and protection for themselves and their loved ones. For contemporary New Orleanians of African descent, the Katrina-related flood disaster contemporized the horrific ancestral and historical memory of the African slave experience.²²⁵

BeBelle’s linking of Black women’s, often unrecognized, labor in the wake of Katrina to centuries of racial oppression demonstrates how the work of Black women artists was often ignored or undervalued because of how they were expected to perform caregiving roles for their communities. It also parallels the larger legacy of slavery and the role of Black women and children that theorist Cristina Sharpe points to as a condition of remaining “in the wake,” through the long legacy of legal channels of oppression.²²⁶ In interviews, I was regularly told stories of how Black women’s labor across recovery efforts was undervalued or even openly attacked by others for markedly sexist and racist reasons.²²⁷ In the following case studies, the artistic leaders represent a mix of both white and Black men and women. However, it should be noted that all of these projects relied on community-based approaches and local leaders, especially Black women, to craft their productions.²²⁸ All utilized resources from Ashé Cultural Arts Center, the organization helmed by BeBelle, especially the network and community ties that BeBelle had worked to build at the center

over the eight years Ashé had physically existed and her earlier years of artistic outreach work in the community and at organizations such as Efforts of Grace (a predecessor organization to Ashé founded in 1993).²²⁹

HOME, New Orleans?

HOME, New Orleans? (HNO?) was an early response to Katrina that was originally conceived by artists outside of the city. Director and performance scholar Richard Schechner served as impetus for the project. Schechner has deep ties to New Orleans: he conducted his graduate education at Tulane and then taught at the school for several years while working with the Free Southern Theatre (a company discussed in greater detail in the Junebug Theatre section of this chapter).²³⁰ However, for most of his career, Schechner lived and worked in New York. Seeing the devastation wrought unto New Orleans following Katrina, Schechner worked to mobilize his New Orleans connections, alongside current and former students from NYU, to generate a city-wide artistic project built around a traditional second-line. While this ambitious project didn't ultimately develop as intended (largely because of community response to the idea), Schechner's concept and linking of artists and activists throughout NYU and New Orleans gave rise to a series of large-scale, neighborhood-based multidisciplinary-arts projects that were critical to rebuilding disconnected arts communities in the wake of the disaster.²³¹

Spanning four neighborhoods (Central City, Lakeview, the Lower 9th Ward, and the 7th Ward) the project united a multi-racial network of performers, interdisciplinary artists, scholars, and activists to engage local audiences, process grief, and reestablish local understandings of home. *HNO?* was initially sponsored by Transforma Projects, a group of artists experienced in community-based art from Houston and Los Angeles who were invited to Louisiana by Robert

Ruello, a New Orleans artist who had evacuated to Houston after Katrina. Together, this team served as an information and funding hub for artists both from New Orleans and those wanting to support New Orleans' recovery. Further, they worked to develop relationships with local and federal rebuilding organizations.²³² *Transforma* attracted funding from major national granting organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ford Foundation among others.²³³ This was in turn given over to a variety of community projects through mini-grants and seed funds that allowed for the creation of a range of programs and cross-community partnering.²³⁴ Given *Transforma* Projects' attention to community engaged work, it is worth noting specifically what that entailed. First, projects were intended to support community-identified needs on a neighborhood level. This meant deliberately working to drive economic investment into areas that were historically marginalized, as well as those still in recovery after the disaster. Second, in addition to strengthening previously existing bonds, the projects were meant to create new bonds and collaborations between local artists. Third, the projects utilized local knowledge holders to advance community memories and histories for native and non-native audiences. This was a deliberate move towards educating publics through community-oriented models rather than through elite forms of knowledge production. It was also a deliberate rejection of academic hierarchies that often feel disquieting to marginalized communities.²³⁵ *HNO?* was one of the first major programs to receive funding from *Transforma*.

Each neighborhood in *HNO?* had separate leadership and differing aims. Beginning in the fall of 2006, a transdisciplinary team of artists and scholars held neighborhood meetings to create artistic responses to the disaster and assist in recovery. The focus of the work was explicitly built around healing and recovery—especially in relation to mental health. From there, the aims differed around individuals and discrete projects. For instance, visual artist and Xavier professor Ron

Bechet and Amy Koritz, then-head of Tulane's civic engagement programming, both noted that their students were traumatized. This sentiment was echoed at the city-wide level by Jan Gilbert (an independent artist and program leader) and Jan Cohen-Cruz (an artist/scholar from NYU) who, in conversation, both emphasized that "everyone was traumatized."²³⁶ All specifically noted the importance of talking about experiences and difficult conversations, however their means for doing so varied. Gilbert believed that large, site-specific artworks were powerful opportunities for creating conversation. Cohen-Cruz, an outsider to the city, set up listening sessions and attended story-circles to learn about the experiences of those in the city. From there, she planned dance workshops that sought to have students embody their ideas about what home meant to them. This corporeal approach towards thinking of home as living and present was a move against focusing on trauma, and instead thinking about life before the storm and imagining possibilities for the future.²³⁷ Koritz discussed the critical importance of class time and community engagement for students understanding of differing perspectives. Further, she noted that the conversations were critical for bridging gaps socio-economic and racial differences while allowing students to collectively give voice to their lived traumatic experiences. The diversity of backgrounds and interests meant that projects under the *HNO?* umbrella took separate approaches to serve the communities in distinct ways.

HNO? was deliberately engineered to mix activism with artistic engagement. Built out of community conversations and in response to neighborhood needs, the project took a social justice approach, focusing on issues of race and class with a hope towards generating conversations across differing populations.²³⁸ The aim of the project was one of healing and "rejuvenation."²³⁹ This attenuation to recognizing the separate experiences of people after the storm, exacerbated for those of marginalized identities regarding race, class, and gender, was essential for the work. Throughout

all of my interviews with those involved with *HNO?*, artists reemphasized the importance of recognizing and meeting the needs of the various populations served.

While the projects under the umbrella of *HNO?* were diffuse, they shared two commonalities: first, an attention to understanding New Orleans *before* the storm; and, second, an approach that encouraged the transmission of memory and experience through embodied means—most commonly in-person conversation, but also dance, shared walks and tours, and other experiential practices. These priorities, when understood as practices meant to encourage healing, reflect a Black feminist approach to the communal processing of trauma. Building community has long been understood as a chief way that Black women survive white supremacy. As hooks notes “it is important that Black people talk to one another, that we talk with friends and allies, for the telling of our stories enables us to name our pain, our suffering, and to seek healing.”²⁴⁰ *HNO?* was envisioned as a space for engaging in conversations about New Orleans as a place and what it means to be a New Orleanian. Given the long history of racism and systemic oppression that have existed in the city, any meaningful dialogue would need to account for these realities.

The final objective of *HNO?* was to create cross-community connections. Some of these, such as the educational partnership across Dillard, Tulane, and Xavier universities, were meant to unite people with congruent backgrounds or needs (such as education). Others were tied more directly to place. These afforded opportunities for connections and partnerships that were logical but may have been priorly invisible to the participants. For instance, despite growing up only a few blocks (and several years) apart from each other, Kathy Randels and Jan Gilbert had no knowledge of each other until working on *HNO?*. Their partnership on the *Lakeviews* project led to a longer-term connection and support for each other’s work that proved useful over the following years.²⁴¹ These cross-demographic partnerships were essential to creating meaningful

engagement with long-term challenges that existed in the city. Those involved in the process regularly noted the value of the connections made, and how the community of artists and activists formed was what they felt to be the largest success of the project. Koritz and Jan Cohen-Cruz both reiterated the value of process over product in the work. Many artists viewed the ultimate product not as a specific production but new networks that were brought into a post-Katrina landscape bereft of support systems.²⁴² As poet and activist Audre Lorde wrote “without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.” When in conversation with the white artists and leaders of the project, a common theme that they reiterated to me was an emphasis on listening and a willingness to learn. Likewise, Black leaders regularly pointed to the education white partners received as positive growth (in particular, the collaborations that emerged between the predominately white institution of Tulane and the historically Black institutions of Dillard and Xavier paved the way for partnerships that exist to the present). Further, they highlighted the value of resources and cultural capital that white artists and activists brought to the project as important contributions that were often denied to Black creatives in the city. The following two sections examine how *HNO?* developed and produced programming meeting its educational goals (through a series of university generated programs in the Seventh Ward) and public artistic aims (through the product driven *LakeviewS* performance tour).

Educational Work and Centering Community

Ron Bechet, one of the *HNO?* leaders for the Lower Ninth Ward and the head of visual arts at Xavier University, believes in the power of place. Bechet explains that landscape itself is

“connection to my roots, my ancestors... [it] becomes a metaphor for those things of who we are. The understanding of the struggle for our humanity.”²⁴³ This idea of the power of place is a guiding theme for the partners in *HNO?* as all understand that local histories within neighborhoods serve as a major force in how people understand themselves and why they were motivated to return. From inception, the project recognized that a neighborhood approach would be essential to the kind of granular community centered work the project aspired to foster. Further, while healing and revitalization were the express aims of the project, the artists involved learned that the kind of work they were being asked to perform was *not* to explore Katrina the event, but far more a prompting of conversations about New Orleans the place: both as it had existed pre-Katrina and what it might become post-Katrina.

The educational work took place at multiple levels. At the higher education level, a class was created and headed by Koritz (Tulane), Bechet (Xavier), Barnes (Dillard), and Cohen-Cruz (New York University) that rotated between the three New Orleans campuses as well as went into local communities in the city itself. This class, entitled *Re-Building Community Through the Arts*, provided opportunities for the students to engage both with each other and locals. The aims of the students and their faculty were tied to a common goal of developing strategies for creating community-based art that served local populations. Through the class, students were able to work with local partners and support the various projects developed under the umbrella of *HNO?*. However, faculty were quick to acknowledge the critical differences in background and experiences represented by the students from their various institutions. Much of the work the faculty reported as being the most critical was tied to frank conversations of race that took place in the classroom.²⁴⁴ Conversations around gentrification forced the (predominantly white) students at Tulane and NYU to consider their role in New Orleans and what it meant to temporarily attend

school or aid recovery in the city rather than *live in* and *be from* the city.

Among the largest concerns for locals after the disaster were worries regarding gentrification and displacement following the storm. For community groups and artists, this was often expressed in deep apprehension over outsider groups coming to New Orleans whom locals viewed as trying to profit off the city's misfortune. It is impossible to speak with New Orleans artists and leaders who worked in the city post-Katrina who did not feel threatened or openly resentful towards outside groups. Kortiz noted that, in the early days of the storm, local professors relayed stories about getting countless emails asking for syllabi and reading lists they could acquire about New Orleans as they had received grants to perform research in the city. Despite receiving major financial resources, these out-of-town faculty expressed little or no interest in sharing the grants or naming the professors they contacted as co-investigators on the projects; in effect, hoarding both the credit and funds for themselves.²⁴⁵ Likewise, Kathy Randels and Anne-Liese Juge Fox, two local theatre makers in the city, both expressed frustration with the national media attention and economic resources that out-of-town theatre companies received for their work in the city—especially because they felt these artists did little or no work to engage or work with local performers, designers, and other art makers.²⁴⁶ Nick Slie, artistic director of Mondo Bizarro, and José Torres-Tama, a performance artist in the city both critiqued Paul Chen's Lower 9th Ward based production of *Waiting for Godot* in particular for its failure to work with local artists or to form lasting bonds with the city beyond the few months the company was in residence.²⁴⁷

Given complaints regarding groups who “parachuted” into the city only to leave shortly thereafter (these visitors with limited interest in long-term partnership building were often referred to as carpetbaggers by locals), the members of *HNO?* worked diligently to create programming that could prove sustainable. Indeed, the community arts class across the three universities ran for

three years and paved the way for other collaborative and cross-community courses that are now offered by the institutions. The three schools are now part of a multi-university New Orleans consortium that allows students at any institution to take coursework at a consortium member, a major step forward for resource sharing in the higher-ed landscape of the city.

Representation was equally important in developing programming at the K-12 level for *HNO?*. In the 7th Ward, theatre artist and scholar Jan Cohen-Cruz developed a theatre literacy program for children that took place at artist Willie Birch's The Porch cultural organization. The Porch, originally Birch's actual porch, served as a meeting place and art space for locals. After Katrina, The Porch grew into a full-scale cultural organization with a particular focus on youth-work and preserving local history. Cohen-Cruz met with Birch, a long-time leader in the historically Black 7th Ward community, in the early planning of *HNO?* and expressed an interest in mounting a theatre education initiative for the neighborhood. Birch had strong feelings about representation in whatever show was created. The 7th Ward, a chronically underfunded neighborhood, was severely damaged by the storm and resources for the program were limited. In their conversation, Birch was clear with Cohen-Cruz: "I don't want to see any kids waving their hands over their heads like they're on top of a roof."²⁴⁸ For Cohen-Cruz, this demonstrated a larger sentiment she found in talking to parents and the children involved in the theatre group—Katrina itself was not what they wanted to relive or put on stage. Searching for subject matter for the production, Cohen-Cruz organized a trip to a nearby swamp for the students. Despite living only minutes from the site, none of the children had ever previously gone on a swamp tour.²⁴⁹ This outing ultimately led to the first production the theatre troupe performed, *The Creation of Life in the Seventh Ward*, an exploration of the neighborhood's history from the Big Bang to the present.

The focus on neighborhood did speak to a common theme of much of the local-led artwork

that followed the disaster (and is echoed in the *LakeviewS* performance piece examined below): while Katrina's presence was all encompassing, the artists and communities served were not interested in a constant recounting of the storm, but rather in understanding the connections to place that made their residences, still ravaged and holding uncertain futures, home. Katrina was domineering in both daily life (repairs were ongoing, services unreliable, uncertainty over recovery a major part of the day-to-day existence), but also in the reality that, by taking place in flood-ravaged neighborhoods, *HNO?* was sitting amongst bulldozed lots and gutted homes awaiting renovation. Artmaking that took place did so in the shadow of Katrina. But rather than focus on the flood and failures of governance that led to the human rights atrocity that played out across national and international media attention, what the artists and educators working on *HNO?* Found was a consistent desire to focus on the stories of living. They expressed these stories by telling neighborhood histories and memories that existed before Katrina and relayed their hopes and dreams for what might come next.

LakeviewS: A Sunset Bus Tour

LakeviewS, the arm of *HNO?* that was most explicitly interested in artistic product (as opposed to educational work or long-term civic partnership building), was helmed by a multi-disciplinary team of artists originally from or connected to the Lakeview neighborhood of New Orleans. A traditionally white, middle-class area, Lakeview was one of the disaster's worst flooded zones. Despite this, it was rebuilding and repopulating at a rate far faster than traditionally Black regions with comparable damage (such as the Lower 9th Ward and New Orleans East). The recovery of Lakeview, arguably the fastest and fullest recovery of badly damaged Katrina neighborhoods in the city, was undoubtedly due to the greater financial and political resources of

its residents. Indeed, a common complaint amongst Black citizens in poorer areas was that, in the New Orleans master plan of recovery, their neighborhoods were often marked off as so-called “sacrifice zones” for future floodwaters and flood prevention measures. Political leaders never suggested the equally damaged Lakeview area be considered as a “sacrifice zone.” Lakeview’s comparatively better recovery was still in early days though when *HNO?* launched the *LakeviewS* project. Despite this, the larger number of locals in the area provided an audience that other neighborhoods could not match in terms of numbers. The ready audience in Lakeview informed the artists desire for a temporary piece that engaged directly with residents’ experiences. The artists behind the project placed less emphasis on creating new community institutions and more on providing an opportunity for residents and locals to meet, reflect, and process the impact of the storm on their lives. The piece’s explicit aim, as told through leaflets advertising the performance, was to serve as a “rejuvenation ritual” for the community.²⁵⁰

Part of *LakeviewS* goal was to serve as a resource hub for community artists—both in terms of forming connections but also economic opportunity. By connecting artists, audiences, and resources, the project sought to foster artistic networks that could help bring back and unite practicing artists to the city but who felt isolated by the desolation of the storm. The leadership of *HNO?* projects in Central City, the 7th Ward, and the cross-university course had strong ties to major institutions (Ashé in Central City, university resources in the 7th Ward, and the multi-campus course that ran throughout multiple neighborhoods). Those involved in *LakeviewS* were largely independent artists, many of whom had lost their rehearsal or studio spaces in the city. The ability to work on artistic projects with the support of grant funds enabled them to begin to rebuild their practices in New Orleans for the first time after the storm. Further, *LakeviewS* sponsoring of this work helped demonstrate to other artists working on post-Katrina projects a model of collaboration

and civic mindedness that was rare for the time. More specifically, *LakeviewS* built deep ties and conducted scores of oral history interviews with community members in the neighborhood and used this work to build several of the pieces included in the program. The evening performances were presented free-of-charge to the public—at once an invaluable show of community awareness for a deeply impoverished and struggling city, but also a luxury that few independent artists in New Orleans would be able to afford doing given their economic precarity. In this, the project represented the *HNO?* work most directly concerned with serving the New Orleans artistic community.

While *LakeviewS* maintained its mission was expressly celebratory, the actual artworks produced took an approach that decidedly aimed to trouble questions of belonging in the neighborhood. Perhaps nowhere was this more obvious than in the format of the overall ritual: a bus tour throughout the neighborhood. A deliberate response to the numerous bus tours of devastated environments that were popular in the early years after Katrina (and largely disdained by locals), this tour aimed to counter those profiting on disaster tourism with a detailed attention to the people who had (and were) living in the area. Subverting the trope from the off-set, audiences were greeted not with large Greyhound buses or typical rented tour buses when they reached the start point, but instead with five bright yellow school-buses.²⁵¹ The most important aspect of the bus tour was the act of leaving the bus. In getting off at stops, walking through homes, smelling them, touching them, and directly engaging with their physicality, the audience was encouraged to reject the common form of Katrina bus tourism where the patrons zoomed through neighborhoods with no engagement of those who live there, simply examining devastated areas. Walking through spaces is mapping spaces, for, as dancer Anna B. Scott notes, “the way in which we “carry” our bodies in space... communicates[s] our emotions, our sense of belonging, cultural

history, ethnic identity, and gender identity.”²⁵² Further, the fact that audiences here engage with the performers’ orature (to borrow Black performance theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s meaning of traditional performance forms that combine deep cultural ties through myth and spirituality with place) at each site demands a wholly separate kind of work from simply looking at the area.²⁵³

While the separate sites of the *LakeviewS* bus tour each encapsulate a distinct artistic experience, the connective thread of the tour comes in the form of performance artist Kathy Randle’s “Black Lady” character. Randles, a white woman, “inherited” the character from a dancer during her time performing in Serbia after the Yugoslav Wars. The “Black” of the character’s name refers to her costume (a long black dress and hat) and the deathly connotation of the figure.²⁵⁴ Indeed, the “Black Lady” is a haunting presence—silently ushering the audience from site to site and only speaking during Randles performance mid-way through the event. The whole tour serves as a valuable, and deliberate act of rememory work. Through collecting histories, telling personal narratives, experiencing the tangible items artists and community members had physically salvaged, the curation of the performances is exactly the kind of deep, engaged effort to salvage and save memory that is necessary for rememory performance. There were five stops in total: Holt Cemetery, the Lakeview Baptist Church, Kathy Randels’ family home, Jan Gilbert’s family home, and Bruning’s Restaurant. Randels noted that the range of sites was due both personal connections the artists’ held to the locations, and also as a deliberate effort to demonstrate the “vastness of the wasteland” that was left in the wake of the flood.²⁵⁵ Over the course of the two weekends of performance, roughly some 600 audience members were served.

Audiences gathered first in the parking lot of Brunings, a popular restaurant that had been destroyed by the storm, where they congregated and eventually boarded the buses. Both in the parking lot and on the bus itself, attendees had opportunity to converse with each other and relay

their personal experiences—a part of the performance that ultimately became integral to the audience members.²⁵⁶ Indeed, audience member and theatre scholar Anne-Liese Juge Fox wrote that one of the most meaningful aspects of the performance was that audience members were able to point out their former homes to each other and tell stories about their residences to other guests on the bus.²⁵⁷ For those who didn't strike up a conversation with their neighbor, a semblance of this experience was still achieved as the bus speakers played recordings with neighborhood elders overhead. The focus of the ride was not on showing off the destruction of the town, but on giving attention to the real people and stories that had lived in the flood-ravaged community.

The first location on the tour was Holt Cemetery, a local below-ground cemetery regularly known as Potter's Field that had served predominantly as a resting place for poor-Black residents of the city.²⁵⁸ At Holt Cemetery, the audience is introduced to "The Suited Man," performed by Black artist Maritza Mercado-Narcisse. Mercado-Narcisse is a local dancer and actress, and performs a monologue in three parts, taking on a lineage of male characters—now assumed absent or dead—from a single family in a piece entitled, "What Would My Father Have Said?" Her dress accentuates the gender unbalancing her character's name implies: from the top up she is dressed in a stereotypical man's suit with a black blazer and knotted tie around her neck, her bottom half though is clad in a sheer white skirt that sharply departs from a traditional, heteronormative men's suit. Coupled with the cemetery backdrop that invites audience members to wander throughout and observe the missing gravestone, unmarked sites, and ill-maintained space, Mercado-Narcisse's appearance summons the history of objectification and abuse that relegates the Black body to "otherness," as critic and theorist Hortense Spillers argues.²⁵⁹ As Spillers notes, the "*theft of the body*" experienced by Black people captured during the slave trade has caused "[us to] lose at least *gender* difference in the outcome" so that "in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured

sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of ‘otherness.’”²⁶⁰ Playing between male and female, between alive (flesh) and dead (the bodies that rest beneath the actor and audience), Mercado-Narcisse highlights not only the contemporary struggle of post-Katrina Black families, but she embodies the “physical powerless... resonating through various centers of human and social meaning.”²⁶¹ The centering of generations of Black experience, as told through the three “fathers,” grounds the predominantly white audience—in a predominately white neighborhood—in the knowledge that the flood did not cause the disproportionate suffering of Black New Orleanians but merely exposed the long history of this oppression. The fact that Holt cemetery was largely unknown to white residents (multiple artists commented on having lived in Lakeview their entire lives and being unaware of it prior to working on the piece) underscored the value in beginning there, and therefore priming the audience to think about the hidden or obscured sins that linger throughout their exploration of the neighborhood, and why the city was rebuilding in the manner it was.

Following the performance at Holt Cemetery, the audience returns to the buses to move on to the Lakeview Baptist Church where two separate events greet them. The church had been Randels father’s, a local pastor, for most of his life and he welcomed audiences in as they entered the gutted building. The first thing the audience encountered was a portrait exhibition entitled “Heroes: Ages 1-91.” The gallery was attached to fresh drywall, the only hint of repair in the structure.²⁶² The portraits were a collaboration by local school children from Metairie Park Country Day School and the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts/Riverfront (NOCCA) and coordinated by Jan Villarrubia. The portraits, and the short oral histories that accompany them, represent community members who had returned to Lakeview and were working to rebuild the neighborhood while forming community groups in the city.²⁶³ Once past the gallery, while waiting

for the performance in the sanctuary to begin, audiences could take in the gutted nature of the space. Tealight candles stood in for missing congregants and occupied the hollow spaces between lumber in the exposed walls. Inside the sanctuary, the pews of the church had been replaced by empty seats, far more than would accommodate the audience observing the performance in the space: eight church elders sharing their memories of the church and questioning who from the missing congregation would return. Randels had directed the piece, the sole event to feature community members, not professional artists, performing.

The exhibit and performance at Lakeview Baptist Church were the events closest in tone and mission to the other neighborhood projects in *HNO?*. Built through oral history collection and deep community engagement, the piece centered on art by non-professional artists. The work expressed a commitment to creating opportunity for local audiences to tell their own stories—an important act of embodied rememory. Cohen-Cruz describes “community-based theatre” as “models such as ritual, political demonstrations, and therapeutic role-play...” and forms that prioritize “emphasizing spectators who participate more than observe, the doing as more important than the ‘how it’s done’...”²⁶⁴ While all of the events featured in *LakeviewS* sought opportunities to create conversations and tell stories, the works at Lakeview Baptist Church went the furthest towards giving space directly to community leaders, as well as creating opportunity for area children—thereby engaging with the educational aims of the project. Further, it is the piece that most enabled the reformation of community networks, directly bringing elders and youth into contact with each other and presenting audience members with direct connections to figures who had long lived in, and understood, the neighborhood.

Following the church, the buses carried the audience to Randels’ family home on General Diaz Street for Randel’s performance of “Spaces In Between.” Randels, as “The Black Lady,”

beckons the audience in. Until now the character has haunted the tour—now she commands it. The character, prior to reaching the house, has been a looming if quiet presence. She has not spoken, and her movement were largely subdued: a presence that is known but not distracting from the other performances. Now though, on her own territory, The Black Lady becomes spritely, skipping, running, and then standing unnaturally still. She is, undoubtedly, a ghost. But of whom, and of what age, it is hard to tell. As the audience enters the home, the smell of rot and exposed construction material—a common smell in the post-Katrina world—filled the space. The gutted walls leave no place to hide in the houst, as the exposed beams mean the audience can see across the building from any point. Clumps of insulation dangle from the rafters.

Randels takes the audience through a poetic visit of her home. She variously rhymes and jokes, sometimes pausing for a painful memory of being bullied, sometimes stoically informing the audience of where the children's beds had been—how they had been rearranged over the years. A white sheet sits on the floor to serve as a stand-in for the bed. After telling us about its former occupants, she grabs the sheet and throws it over herself to resemble a child play-acting at being a “ghost.” The presence of the ghostly figure teasingly wearing the costume of a ghost makes the audience wonder who is haunting and who is being haunted. Is The Black Lady a ghost of Randels, or Randels' personal haunt? This double reading creates a moment of uncanniness, in the Freudian sense, that makes the entire home more frightening: what should be hidden (the house's beams and wiring) is exposed, what should be concealed (the stories of the house we are unaware of) is made apparent.²⁶⁵ The Black Lady becomes an *unheimlich* persona: a force that follows around the former occupant of the home whom we must now recognize as absent (either through death or leaving the house).

Having taken the audience in through the back door, the tour ends at the front door of the

house. There, Randels recounts childhood boyfriends coming to the door, meeting her parents, and stolen kisses that took place just out of sight from prying eyes. As she faces the space beyond the open door—the audience now confronted with a sea of silent, abandoned homes and the odd trailer in front of a property in recovery—The Black Lady relays a frightening recounting of her experience with the storm:

[This is] the door where she saw the sky turn yellow one day, just before a summer storm,
 And later that night, in her dreams, I showed her the end of the world. The end of this city.
 She saw that it would end one day, and that it might be in her lifetime.
 This is the door that lets you out of her realm and back into your own.
 Look for me again. I'll be seeing you again. You'll know me when you see me, feel me, hear me at
 your doorstep. Knock, knock, open wide your window to your sorrow no today and no tomorrow.
 Wake up little one, there's snow on the ground.²⁶⁶

This warning to the audience, that the city they know might end within their lifetimes, followed by the haunting reminder that this ghost, this figure of death, will return once again mirrors the haunting tone experienced throughout the (now haunted) house tour. This haunted house is not marred by a malevolent force waiting to frighten the audience, but rather feels like a warning presence. The mixture of joyful storytelling, the Black Lady's playful jumping between ages, the family photo albums used as props and then left for audiences to view as they pass through the rooms, make the shell of a house a definite home—grounded in the memories and experiences of Randels father (whom the audience met at the church) and herself (as represented through the Black Lady) create an experience that forces the audience to reconcile with the profound sense of loss experienced within the walls. Further, audiences are given a sharp awareness of the precarity that faces New Orleans given its location and ongoing risk from a rapidly changing environment. While *LakeviewS* expressly worked to resist the trope common to art of the time that critiqued or outright accosted government inadequacy regarding hurricane preparedness and Katrina response, this oblique reference to the threat was the closest the tour came to that criticism.²⁶⁷ The fact that the complaint is registered through a warning, one given as the audience is left to return to the

world outside of Randels house, gives weight to the possibility of future harm without change.

As The Black Lady exits her house, she runs around the corner and the Suited Man takes over guiding the audience to the next location: Jan Gilbert's home (only a few short blocks away from Randel's) on Vicksburg Street. Whereas the preceding performance was directly tied to bringing audience members into the interior, Gilbert's space focuses on the exterior. "Biographies of a House," explores the lives of the Gilbert family in and around the house. Gilbert "wrapped" the home in a giant "embalmed ribbon of family photographs."²⁶⁸ Collectively, they walk audiences through important family moments: moving into the house; the birth of children; the family playing in the yard; the children's graduations; and other major life events. As the audience reached the exhibit, they could hear a soundscape playing continually from inside the house. Gilbert commissioned her nephew to go through family recordings and create a soundscape that includes a variety of normal sounds one might expect from a house: children laughing, a television playing, the sounds of plates and dishware clattering.²⁶⁹ Where "Spaces in Between" focused on bringing the audience into the space, having them walk through the stories they were being told, "Biographies of a House" provides images without context—without explanation—that encourage the audience to imagine the house and family who lived there. This difference moves the audience from retracing the memories of others person in a space towards imaginatively reflecting on their own lived experiences. Indeed, as Juge Fox recalls of her time with the space, "[it] enabled me to construct my own experience: to walk closer, walk away, speak or remain silent, share or keep to myself. It was empowering for me to navigate on my own terms a subject area so personal."²⁷⁰

The final stop on the tour was the return to Bruning's restaurant, where tables and chairs had materialized and were adorned with place-settings and food. Andrew Larimer and members of the NOLA Project theatre company performed a short comic play entitled at Bruning's entitled

“Generations,” that revolved around a crawfish and a crab exploring the city and watching various short scenarios involving quarrelling couples. The restaurant was a perennial favorite of the neighborhood that had existed since 1857 but never reopened after Katrina. Performed with young NOLA Project actors alongside Peter Gabb and Janet Shae—two locals who had been favorites for over four decades—the pieces emphasized the deep roots of the neighborhood, noting that in Bruning’s 105 year history the restaurant had only had two head chefs (Odeal and Odile who had served for 52 and 53 years respectively).²⁷¹ The restaurant backdrop was fitting as food was brought out and audiences were given an opportunity for the audience to talk to each other and share their own stories.

The creators of *LakeviewS* set out to make a project that would serve as an act of rejuvenation. In practice, they created a piece that enabled deeply personal, communal acts of storytelling. This was an act of creative healing. Both Randels and Gilbert noted that the process was important to them and their families personal healing from the storm. Gilbert expressed that creating the piece was essential to her own grieving process, and that of her mother who had been hitherto unable to return to the house pre-performance.²⁷² Randels told me that the creation of the piece was therapy for her and her co-artists, and an essential part of mourning the loss of her family’s home.²⁷³ While the artists expressed a desire to keep a celebratory tone throughout—focusing on the return home, and the beloved histories pre-storm that so occupied their memories—the real celebration was found in the audience experience. Through sitting on the bus together, communing in the sorrow but honoring the lives lived in their neighborhood, in connecting and forming (even brief) bonds, and expressing care for each other, the audience’s presence made the event a remarkable celebration of overcoming heartbreak and rebuilding an understanding of home.

HNO? Impact

While the projects detailed above were deeply impactful, it is important to recognize they represent only the beginning of the collaborations that would ultimately be recognized as stemming from the original *HNO?* projects. Between 2008-2009, after the original 7th Ward classes and *LakeviewS* productions, some 28 public events and 131 workshops and classes were held that reached over 4,100 people (including 400 students).²⁷⁴ Three additional plays would emerge from the *LakeviewS* team in conjunction with Artspot Productions and other local performance groups (*Whispering Bones*, *Turning of the Bones*, and *Go Ye Therefore...*).²⁷⁵ Ashé in Central City would continue to serve as a major hub of artistic creativity, and was able to form a lasting partnership with Dillard University. The Porch 7th Ward Cultural Organization developed into a full-time performance and community center and produced new works by Andrew Larimer and other local theatre leaders expressly for children.²⁷⁶ The Lower 9th Ward Project developed into Sankofa Marketplace—a project that in turn became a major community center, food co-op, and nature preserve that remains a vital service provider for the neighborhood to the present.²⁷⁷ Above all, the project formed lasting bonds between artists and activists throughout New Orleans, helping to usher in not only a ground-swell of creative activity, but lasting networks of support that have become the foundation of the contemporary performance art and visual arts community in the city.

Junebug Productions

In between notes on productions and musings on his own plays, Thomas Dent (a leading Black writer, activist, and artist in New Orleans throughout the second half of the twentieth century) often paused to record his hopes for the Free Southern Theatre (FST). In the summer of

1966 he noted that he was, “not interested in FST becoming good theatre as a theatre, but as a tool toward freedom and [the] education of black people.”²⁷⁸ The FST was founded as an integrationist theatre company in Mississippi (with performances and financial ties in New York), but soon moved to New Orleans. With the move came changes in the mission—while early seasons had contained a mix of Black-centered productions alongside more white centric offerings to attract white audiences and dollars (a benefit production of *The Lion in Winter* stands out), in New Orleans the company decided to commit firmly to the goal of serving as a Black theatrical company.²⁷⁹ Soon the FST would fully invest in generating art that determinedly sought to complicate and understand contemporary Blackness. Starting programs like BLACKARTSOUTH, an annual writer/actor collaboration workshop that generated much of the FST’s output, the company began to concertededly move towards a Black communitarian aesthetic.²⁸⁰ In 1979, co-founder and longtime company leader John O’Neal would write, “we have learned that the interests of Black people will best be served by a revolutionary politics, and that revolutionary politics requires revolutionary art,” a decidedly more radical position than the one on which the company was originally founded.²⁸¹ The FST had grown into a nationally recognized company dedicated to audience engagement, ethnographic interdisciplinary performance, and probing examinations of race and society in the South.

To understand the theatrical aims of Junebug Productions, an awareness of its genealogical connection to the FST is necessary. Junebug expressly positions themselves as the “successor to the FST,” and understanding how the FST’s aims continue to inform Junebug’s company values is essential to understanding the importance of the memory-based activism they strive for.²⁸² While the FST formally disbanded in 1979, it wasn’t until 1985 that O’Neal held a jazz funeral in Armstrong Park to lay it to rest. For five years O’Neal had been touring a series of one-man shows

featuring his iconic character, Junebug Jabbo Jones, and it was at this celebratory farewell to the FST that O'Neal announced the formation of a new company: Junebug Productions.²⁸³ The funeral for FST was to delineate the difference in audience that O'Neal wanted to reach. The FST had been formed as an auxiliary of the civil rights movement in Mississippi, and its original aims were to serve as a populist (as defined by O'Neal: a company "for the people") theatre that toured throughout the South providing educational entertainment and mobilizing poor Blacks to civic and political activism.²⁸⁴ O'Neal had by this time found that the only sustainable means for him to survive economically as an artist was through reaching a mix of audiences: middle class (both white and Black), wealthier cross-disciplinary arts organization such as the New Orleans Contemporary Arts Center, and universities.²⁸⁵ Thus while Junebug revised the populist and educational aims of the FST, it maintained several of the same goals as its predecessor, namely: a desire to showcase and develop young Black performers throughout New Orleans; a commitment to touring works to audiences around the country; and generating art that spoke to current political and social issues concerning Black Americans, particularly in New Orleans and the South.

While Junebug's work sought a wealthier, more highly educated audience from its inception, some traces of populism were still easy to discern. For instance, the company was quick to find that festival style and walking performances were an important part of its aesthetic. As often as possible, Junebug presented free events for the public. One of the largest and most notable of these was the EC(h)O Arts Festival, a ten-day collaborative project the company spearheaded.²⁸⁶ The festival was hosted by the Contemporary Arts Center, and several local arts groups participated (including Chakula Cha Jua Theatre Company and Artspot Productions) alongside larger national companies (such as the Kentucky Roadside Theatre, and Urban Bush Women).²⁸⁷ The festival, conceived of and ran by Junebug, marked the beginning of the organization's ongoing

interest in environmentally themed art, particularly focusing on environmental racism. Given this history, it is no surprise that Junebug has been the theatre company arguably most at the forefront of grappling with the long ramifications of Katrina, particularly from a Black activist perspective.

Homecoming Project

Starting in 2011, Junebug launched what would become their signature annual performance event, the *Homecoming Project*.²⁸⁸ *Homecoming Project* emerged from a deep need to recognize the pronounced changes that had developed in the city since Katrina. The program was the final project helmed by O'Neal, who turned over Artistic Direction to *Homecoming Project* collaborator Stephanie McKee-Anderson in 2012. O'Neal envisioned the event as a performance festival that explicitly mixed art with activism. Blending site-specific performance, ritual, and storytelling, *Homecoming Project 2011* demonstrated how performance is strategically deployed by marginalized communities and those under threat to generate community awareness and intervene in the collective memory of a place. The main structure of the 2011 production was formulated around that of a second-line, with O'Neal wanting to explicitly acknowledge those who had died in Katrina first, and the losses still felt since the storm, but create space for building community with new residents. In particular, the production wanted to highlight new pressures facing the Black community in the wake of Katrina, chiefly, housing and the right to return as well as the growing threats to Black economic and cultural life.²⁸⁹

Since the early aftermath of the disaster, looming above most other considerations was the problem of how to get New Orleanians back to New Orleans. While some did not wish to return, far more often displaced New Orleanians were unable to return due financial constraints.²⁹⁰ In an effort to combat this reality, the state formed the Road Home project, a system meant to provide

financial support to Louisiana residents displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The program was funded by the Federal Government through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Despite securing nearly \$9 billion in funds (and eventually distributing slightly more than that number), the road home, particularly in the first years after the storm, was widely viewed as a failure.²⁹¹ Largely, this was because the program but was slow to release promised funds. This hit marginalized communities (who often had the least wealth prior to the storm and faced the greatest economic catastrophe because of the disaster) particularly hard.²⁹² As it became increasingly clear that the government response against the scale of the disaster was insufficient, calls grew within New Orleans demanding a guaranteed right to return home.²⁹³

Inextricably tied to the struggle to return home was the issue of housing itself. In the aftermath of the storm much of New Orleans' public housing was torn down and never rebuilt. This created a massive shortage in low-income housing, particularly for those who require government assistance to make rent.²⁹⁴ While the housing issues were acute by the time of the first *Homecoming Project* in 2011, the issue only grew more palpable in the following years. Housing has become a major aspect of Junebug's creative work, serving as a prominent theme throughout most of their productions since 2010. As real estate prices continue to soar in New Orleans, it has become increasingly difficult for those working in lower-income jobs (such as musicians, club workers, and restaurant staff—the backbone of the tourism economy that continues to grow) to find housing within the city.²⁹⁵ During her successful bid for mayor in 2018, LaToya Cantrell made housing her central campaign issue—a strategy that proved highly effective.²⁹⁶

While issues of housing insecurity and a lack of government support in assisting the return proved disproportionately difficult obstacles for Black residents to continue living in the city, the period was also marked by cultural battles where many Blacks, who had long historical roots

within New Orleans, felt their culture was being pushed out by the new (mostly white middle-class) New Orleanians who had arrived in large numbers in the wake of the storm. Perhaps the most prominent example of this was a series of disputes regarding noise ordinances around the French Quarter that began in 2010. Arguments over noise levels in the Quarter have existed for generations (a particularly contentious period between musicians and residents saw several new laws emerge in the mid-1990s). The fight in 2010, largely centered around the youth-led To Be Continued Brass Band, quickly turned into a press fiasco for both the new chief of police, Ronal Serpas, and the new mayor, Mitch Landrieu.²⁹⁷ Landrieu's office made moves to demonstrate his commitment to local musicians, however, To Be Continued turned to social media to spread reports about how bands were under threat from the new regime. Within days, 9,000 people had joined the Facebook Group, "Don't Stop the Music, Let New Orleans Street Musicians Play!"²⁹⁸ Over the following months, editorials were regularly published regarding noise levels in the tourist heart of the city, as neighbors and musicians argued over how loud, and for how late, bands should be allowed to play.²⁹⁹

While the issue was first felt most strongly by the Black community of the city (who make up the overwhelming majority of street and brass band musicians), over the following years it would grow into a problem of enormous contention for both white and Black New Orleanians.³⁰⁰ By 2014, the city had raised multiple ideas for new noise ordinances, moves that prompted protests from musicians around the city.³⁰¹ Finally, the city council approved a measure that appointed investigators to individually assess complaints, rather than mount wholesale restrictions, however by that time the issue had left musicians bitter from years of perceived police harassment and government oppression.³⁰² The episode also served as a clear reminder of the new divisions within New Orleans: overwhelmingly blame was pointed towards post-Katrina arrivals as the cause of

the complaints, and, in turn, many felt these newcomers were challenging the fundamental culture of the city.³⁰³

Finally, in the early years after Katrina, another cultural battle had arisen: second-line parades were facing new police measures and government control. While many outside of New Orleans view second-lines as a purely celebratory act of music-making and free dancing, the ritual grew out of the jazz funeral practice, and within the city is understood as an essential part of grieving after the loss of a loved one, especially for Black New Orleanians.³⁰⁴ Second-lines have long been recognized as a means of resisting (through joy) white oppression within New Orleans. The practice grew out of a blend of religious (Yoruban, Catholic, and Protestant) customs. The most prominent feature of a second-line, walking through the streets along a unique route that highlighted important places in the deceased's life, can be viewed as a tactic of minoritarian resistance: effectively cutting against what Michel de Certeau would view as the strategic formulations of a city's geographic layout as generated by the state.³⁰⁵

In 2006, seventeen Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, the historically Black groups that run jazz funerals and second-lines in addition to providing a range of economic and social services to their members, enlisted the American Civil Liberties Union to file charges against the city government and its "excessive, selectively enforced police escort charges."³⁰⁶ The surge in charges followed a highly controversial incident where police fought with second-liners who were parading without a permit and subsequently arrested them. Parading without a permit is common in the historically Black Treme neighborhood where the violence took hold.³⁰⁷ The ensuing controversy was viewed bitterly by many long-time residents, who were already concerned about growing gentrification, and now saw newcomers as complaining against long-cherished rituals.³⁰⁸ The new fees police charged for a second-line permit in 2007 had more than doubled over prices

in 2005, and rivaled or exceeded the requirements necessary to obtain a permit for a Mardi Gras Parade.³⁰⁹ Although the ACLU injunction succeeded in getting fees cut nearly in half, the issue continued to cause conflict.³¹⁰ Even with the establishment of a Mardi Gras Indian and Second-Line Parade Task Force—a group specifically designed to intervene between these organizations and the New Orleans Police Department—complaints about over-policing at second lines would continue for years.³¹¹

It was against this backdrop that Junebug's *Homecoming Project* emerged. The project was envisioned as a months long festival based in the 6th and 7th ward of New Orleans (two predominantly Black areas just north of the French Quarter and anchored by Treme) consisting of three main components: community dinners; story circles; and a second-line through the neighborhood that featured a variety of local artists and art groups giving performances at installations throughout, followed by a community resource fair. These different parts served separate aims, but all sought to build community within Treme and help bridge divides between newcomers to the city and those with long lineages in New Orleans.

The first initiatives were the community dinners. The dinners aimed to put local leaders in conversation with each other and offer an opportunity for newer residents to meet some of the more established figures in their neighborhoods. This practice of bringing together community within a shared space has a long history within Black activist communities, particularly those led by women. As political scientist Zensele Isoke has argued, these political-social personal interventions represent “geographies of resistance” and are a powerful tactic of change utilized by Black women activists.³¹² There were three total, with each having around 20 attendees. When asked about the role of the dinners in the project, McKee Anderson said:

“There’s something that happens when you invite somebody to dinner, that just allows them to just relax and be themselves, and to also debunk the myth that work

doesn't happen in social spaces. It very much does. In fact our most important work happens in social spaces. It is there that we're getting to know each other, it is there that I'm looking you in the eye, it is there that I'm learning what you stand for and what you don't. In those social spaces those guards are let down. I get to see who you really are inside of those spaces. So those are very powerful organizing spaces. And we felt like again, we want to use that as a framework. Because that is typically how, as Black folk, we meet, we get to know each other. I got to see you, I got look you in the eye, I got to find out who your people are, and where you come from, and I gotta know what you stand for. And I can't do that at a meeting when you're on your best behavior there. But I can do that over dinner. I can in those social spaces."³¹³

This view of social space as critical for knowledge transmission and relationship building speaks to the value in the ritualistic sharing of a meal with others. Meal sharing in this context is as a crucial means of bridging gaps in understanding such as racial difference and collective memory. Inversely, by bringing outsiders into a home, insiders are granted powers of observation through a destabilizing of familiar power dynamics. White social behaviors and familiarity with interracial relations in white controlled spaces are undone in Black spaces: this allows a more authentic vetting of white allies to determine who genuinely supports (or understands) Black political struggles. This is an expansion of bell hooks' conception of the "homeplace." As hooks conceives it, homeplace is, "a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination."³¹⁴ The community dinners were hosted in the homes of local Black community leaders and Junebug supporters. McKee-Anderson points to the strategic value of incorporating the same Black feminist practices of safe-space making for community building, in effect revealing that white discomfort within Black controlled spaces is both an educational tool for white audiences as well as means of gathering knowledge critical for survival within Black communities.

The story circles offered by *Homecoming Project* are part of the long legacy of Junebug. Building out of years of O'Neal's practice as a director and actor, the story circle is a space where

audiences are encouraged to narrativize their own experiences and lives to make the problems and struggles they are encountering more understandable to the larger community assembled. Indeed, the story circle process remains one of the signature elements of a Junebug production, not only featuring prominently within their own works, but as an educational outreach effort—Junebug has conducted hundreds of story circle trainings around the country. There were two story circles held during *Homecoming Project*.

The story circle is, fundamentally, a chance for civic growth through community building. Each story circle featured over forty audience members in attendance, and groups came together to discuss gentrification, the policing of Black culture, and the ways life had changed post-Katrina.³¹⁵ Junebug's story circles work by having a facilitator establish the circle, lay out the ground rules—listening and respect are key—and then begin telling a story. A monitor or educator is also in the room, there to watch the energy of the participants and intervene should a story fail to arise or participants become disrespectful or upset. A Junebug story circle does not focus solely on oppression as in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, but rather expects that through the sharing of personal stories a dialogue will form where different issues are covered essentially by association.³¹⁶ O'Neal insisted on a democratic approach—while there were leaders in the room, the circle itself was meant to underpin that the participants were equally valuable to the process, and without all of them the whole event would be impossible. The function of the circle is to gain understanding: rather than steering the discussion or trying to find a solution, the process of narrative sharing allows for different perspectives to rise. This can naturally lead to argumentation or controversy, in such cases the moderators might intervene, however the aim isn't necessarily to silence these disputes but rather demonstrate them—to reveal the cracks in the social fabric and understand better why these differing viewpoints exist.³¹⁷

O'Neal's (and in turn Junebug's) story circle approach is not the radical revolutionary tactic of some theatrical practitioners like Augusto Boal, but rather grew out of his integrationist theatrical practices with the FST.³¹⁸ The goal of these processes is not debate, but rather to encourage the audience to contemplate and reflect on their own experience in the aftermath of a theatrical event.³¹⁹ The story circle seeks to empower through the raising of individual voices a, rather than a utilitarian exercise for finding solution. This kind of performance experience is less what Dolan imagines as a "Utopian Performative" (particularly as intense conflict can arise between the gathered parties of the story circle) but is instead an active practice towards the shaping of civic life. Both *Homecoming Project* story circles were held in Tremé and attended solely by residents of the neighborhood. By literally engaging with one another as neighbors, spending time before and after the circle to meet and speak with one another, and hearing each other speak from their own perspective, the performance practice sought to create a living understanding and recognition between neighbors—one that could carry forth into regular interactions between the neighbors. The circles sought to literally introduce neighbors and help them to practice better civic engagement and communal recognition of each other.

The final, and largest, component of the 2011 *Homecoming Project* was the second-line celebration on December 3rd. At any second-line, places of importance are visited. For a jazz funeral, important sites might include the deceased's home, place of work, and favorite jazz clubs. For a wedding or celebratory event, sites would always include a number of bars. The selection of sites to visit along the route was critical, because in McKee-Anderson's words "[in] this new New Orleans, people weren't familiar with places and people's attachment to things. People will be like, 'you don't do that there,' because in their mind, that's like sacred space. You don't mess with that. But that other person, that's new to the city, they don't know that place. So, we decided we would

allow this to help people understand...what used to be.”³²⁰ Thus the performance served as embodied rememory work in its excavation of memory from local elders, but also in how it sought to utilize the second-line’s inherent ability to communicate memory across bodies. It was a natural tool for establishing networks across residents, both rebuilding those that had existed before but also integrating those who were new. African dance scholars Kariamou Welsh, Esailama G.A. Diouf, and Yvonne Daniel note that, “African dance and drumming... connects memory across centuries and generations, it addresses the potential for change... within and among Diaspora communities and between outside communities and Diaspora communities.”³²¹ The second-line, firmly in this tradition, is thus a powerful tool for bringing outsiders into these memory legacies. The second-line drew several hundred participants, as it wound its ways through the streets, led by the popular Hot 8 Brass Band.³²² At each stop, stories were told and various community members explained the history and significance of the site to the community.³²³ Some of the locations included a hotel that stood on land that had formerly been Lu and Charlie’s Jazz Club (a prominent spot for young musicians in the 1970s); John O’Neal’s Katrina ravaged home; Hunter’s Field, a historically Black park and gathering place for Mardi Gras Indians; schools closed by the storm; the RAE (Resurrection After Exoneration) House, a transitional home for those exonerated of criminal charges; and the still closed Circle Food Store (that would not reopen until 2014).

The use of storytelling and memory making, by people with lived connections to each place visited, is a powerful strategy for staking claim to Black life within an increasingly marginalizing environment. As cultural theorist Katherine McKittrick argues, “space and place give black lives meaning in a world that has, for the most part, incorrectly deemed black populations and their attendant geographies as ‘ungeographic’ and/or philosophically undeveloped.”³²⁴ McKittrick argues that social practices that generate meanings for space are a particularly powerful ways of

recentering conversations toward disenfranchised peoples. Junebug's work has long recognized the value and importance of Black memory as a means of navigating change and interjecting in white hegemonic narratives. As McKee-Anderson explains, the choice of the second-line was natural, as much of the disruptive power of a second-line is tied directly to memory, and the (joyful) reclamation of space:

We used that form of a second-line because we felt like, there's a technology in that that's so ancient, it's not typically looked at in that way, that there's ancient technology in the way we gather, and a way that we move, and a way that we feel, and it all is represented on the inside of a second-line. The best of who we are is apparent on the inside of a second-line. For us to be happy, and to be joyous, and to be supportive, and to gather and to move as a community through the streets, right? To move together is such a powerful, powerful metaphor for what we really should be doing as a community, right, that that felt important to use that one form... You see we're moving through the very neighborhoods that we can no longer live in, that we can no longer afford to buy a home in, that are experiencing rampant gentrification... So we're literally moving through that, and seeing that, as we're holding up our own sense of joy and connection to one another—that's so much deeper than just a second-line.³²⁵

Thus, the use of the second-line was a deliberate effort to create an embodied practice of learning and communing, one that could motivate change in the community through a collective experience of knowledge transmission. The event began at Congo Square, the historic center, and spiritual heart, of Black life in New Orleans. Congo Square is significant for its role within African slave communities as a central marketplace and gathering point for engaging in community, celebration, and music making for slaves during the colonial and ante-bellum periods of the city.³²⁶ Beginning the event at Congo Square was not only an act of noting the center of Black life in New Orleans, but very much an appeal to the ancestral importance and performative genealogies that reside in the place. The group chosen to begin the event was the Kumbuka African Drum and Dance Collective, whose mission is to pass on the living, embodied knowledge of traditional African drumming and dance that have been carried in the bodies of Black New Orleanians for generations

through community engagement work that directly takes the collective into local neighborhoods.³²⁷ During the drumming, a member came forward and prayed:

“Father/Mother God, you know what we need at this time, is a sense of oneness, that those who have come, new to this space, would respect, honor, and begin to ask questions. To know more of what it is, that, that we seem to treasure, those of us who, who—because it’s in our bones—we own it. And so, we ask for, a reciprocity. A reciprocity that those who are, come for whatever reason, that they come and bring their gifts, and their love to build. And those of us that were here, that we step up to a new place—a new place of honoring truth when we see it, and denying and acknowledging the wrongdoing when we see it. Give us the courage, give us the confidence, give us all that we need to step up in the tradition of our ancestors! We’re not making nothing new, we’re not doing anything new!”³²⁸

The prayer—that was met with affirmative response from the audience—is a powerful tactical deployment. As sociologist Sandra L. Barnes has demonstrated, one of the most popular and effective tactics of activist community action within traditionally Black spaces is through the use of prayer and prayer groups.³²⁹ This appeal has immediate, recognizable connections to the long history of Black activism that grows out of religious movements. Further, given the traditional costuming the woman wears—a dashiki and headscarf, with a white linen skirt—accompanied by the light, rhythmic drumming that underscores her, there is a clear appeal being made to the power of long, ancestral connections to the place she occupies. She serves as an embodied reminder of the very claim she is making: that those whose families and friends have lived in New Orleans for centuries have lived within this culture, and made this culture, their whole lives. Her presence reminds the audience that to claim to love New Orleans, to want to be a New Orleanian, means accepting the presence and culture of those who have always been New Orleanians.

This practice of spatial memory transmission, through performance, is especially clear at *Homecoming Project’s* stop at the Circle Food Store, the first Black-owned grocery store in New Orleans, and a landmark space in the Tremé community.³³⁰ Not only was the Circle Food Store devastated by several feet of water during the flood, but the site also became one of the most

recognizable images of the flood ravaged city thanks to a variety of photographs taken of it. Thus, when the audience arrived at the well-known storefront, and gathered behind the building in its parking lot, the memory work they experienced was a kind of corrective—it was a correction of what audience members thought of the place (that it was a famously well photographed, devastated site). Upon walking up to the store, an actor with a bullhorn took charge of the group and began to call out to the audience, “Food fo’ ya’ soul! Food for your mind! Your spirit—make it whole! We got food fo’ ya body! Food fo’ ya’ soul! Food fa’ ya’ spirit! Get your mind right, get it whole!”³³¹ As he calls out to the crowd, he dances, throwing his free hand in the air and weaving around the open playing area, quickly covering the space, twirling around. Suddenly, he runs over to a table with a variety of produce, and begins to yell out in extended, sing-song phrases, “We got miiiiirlitons! We got, we got, caaaaabage! We got, ripe, RIPE, sweet bananas! We got, oooonions! Taaaangerines! Sat-sat-suuuumas!”³³² Then he approaches the crowd and shifts his demeanor slightly, letting them recognize that he was no longer playing a part, but instead relaying a story.

He tells them:

Ya know, when I was a little boy. Even when I was a little boy—believe it or not y’all know I was young you gotta believe—but when I was a little boy, the men would come through that, would come through with their truck! Cooooollard greeeeens! Waaaaaatermelon! And they would bring it too! They would sing that song! Bring it down that vibration over here, bring the people together up out there.³³³

The story here connects the space (the abandoned grocery store) directly to the longer history of singing street vendors that had seemingly ceased to exist in the world outside of New Orleans (and the musical streets of London in *Oliver!* and Catfish Row in *Porgy and Bess*). It reveals a piece of history that hds seemingly vanished but lives on in New Orleans. Even the produce mentioned points to the importance of being from the city for knowing the significance of the chosen items

(mirlitons are a popular squash in the south but particularly prominent in New Orleans, and bananas are also a notable ingredient in local cuisine, not least because of the most famous dessert indigenous to the city—bananas foster). The tradition of the singing produce vendor within New Orleans existed until 2017 through Arthur Robinson, a local grocer known as Mr. Okra.³³⁴ The *Homecoming Project* performer, in recounting the experience of the singing vendors, in letting their performance continue on through his physical presence and reenactment, shares with the audience a history that most are totally unfamiliar with, and some recognize as an old memory—giving those in the know an understanding and cultural capital that the newcomers are acutely aware they lack. In this, the performance allows the story to engage the newcomers, to welcome them into the fold of the city’s history and to learn and appreciate this world around them they have chosen to move into. At the same time, it reinforces, for those with memory of the grocery, and the singing grocers, their own sense of belonging and understanding within this place. The memory exchange that these performances created is a key means of building community networks within a neighborhood, generating understanding and commonality to establish unity and support networks for both old and new residents alike.

Homecoming Project ended with a community and health resource fair at the New Orleans African American Museum of Art, History, and Culture (NOAAM) in Tremé, that served to provide immediate means for those who were motivated by the performances to engage more deeply in supporting their neighborhoods.³³⁵ The resource fair was framed as an opportunity to gather and learn about ways to engage within the community, but also as an after-party where the audience could reflect and commune with each other on the performance. According to McKee-Anderson, “the conversation swirled around, what does it mean when people that have grown up here and lived here for years—that this is really the place that they lay their roots—what does it

mean when other people who have no history come into the neighborhood? And—wherein you see something quite beautiful—they see an empty lot, or they don't see that? You see the beauty in it, you see the history, you feel the story quite deeply, they don't see that.”³³⁶ The inclusion of the resource fair was critical not only for providing direct means through which those attending could learn how to work proactively within the community, but also to allow these conversations to naturally unfold amongst audience members.

Homecoming Project 2011 sought to create a space where the audience came into direct contact with their neighbors, and the history of their community. For those who already knew this history it served as a powerful reminder of the value of embodied knowledge of place for a sense belonging. For those who were new, it offered an opportunity to deeply engage with the history around them, as well as the needs and culture of the community; in turn allowing a more comprehensive understanding of how to be a part of the community. Performance scholar Soyica Diggs-Colbert argues that the jazz funeral is recognized for its use of “mourning as a political practice through its celebration of black life.”³³⁷ This spirit applies to the entire HP. Utilizing joy, community, and place-based embodied rememory work, the story circles, dinners, and second-line helped build community ties as a means of resisting further marginalization, while centering Blackness as the main force that defines New Orleans culture—and therefore what makes it a desirable place to live. In the years since, Junebug has presented several subsequent works under the label of *Homecoming Project*. Sometimes these are exclusively focused on place, such as 2016's *Congo Square* or 2018's *Bell School*, however as with 2019's *Water*, theme can also serve as the unifying concept. The main cultural and political issues the company grapples with in productions, however, have largely remained the same. While the form of the performance has moved away from a large-scale festival to a more intimate interdisciplinary arts event, the goals,

and the role of community building, continue.

Neighborhood-Up Resilience and Creating Permanent Change

In the years since Katrina, site-based performance has only grown. Artspot Productions, Kathy Randels' interdisciplinary performance troupe, has long had an interest in local, site-based work, often with an environmental focus, however this has become the overwhelming aim of the company post-2005. Pieces like Artspot's 2010 *Go Ye Therefore*, that took place in a gutted Katrina home and explored the difference between Black and white recoveries since the storm, and *Sea of Common Catastrophe*, a multidisciplinary narrative about a city underwater, speak to a focus on how our relationship to nature continues to impact us. Likewise, works such as Goat in the Road's *The Uninvited*, a piece that invites the audience into a grand New Orleans home (the Gallier House) to confront the legacy of slavery through historical, immersive theatre, demonstrates how New Orleans' companies recognize the value of space in making direct interventions in history, particularly racial history. Mondo Bizarro's experimental aesthetic frequently looks to site-specificity to confront issues of nature and flooding, as with their *Pchile Goyin*. Artspot and Mondo Bizarro's collaborative multi-disciplinary and multi-media work on *Cry You One*, an environmental theatre piece that took place in the swamps of Louisiana and directly involved residents of the bayou in the performance, highlight the ongoing importance and power of site-specific work where audiences can see the direct effects of the changing environment around them by being brought directly to an evaporating shore. Since Katrina, companies that have wanted to directly take on issues of the environment, racism, and anything that feels touched by the long shadow of the 2005 catastrophe, have continued to utilize the methods first sought in the early aftermath of the storm.

In their assessment on New Orleans's recovery ten years after Katrina, political scientists Peter F. Burns and Matthew O. Thomas write that "a top-down agenda prevailed because it had powerful backing. The bottom-up agenda failed to take hold because its backing lacked the power to guide a remaking effort. The top-down agenda is likely to succeed after disasters because those who espouse it possess the resources and authority necessary to set and implement it."³³⁸ They highlight how this approach brought successful anti-corruption measures, but mixed educational progress and increased inequality—a fact that has continually been made manifest by problems related to rising housing costs, gentrification, and violent crime rates that remain among the highest levels in the nation.³³⁹ The failure to integrate a model of resilience that was neighborhood based and worked to directly engage the needs of vulnerable populations has meant that since Katrina, locally engaged leaders have disproportionately shouldered the burden of advocating for the most marginalized groups in the city. Many of these leaders are the artists who led these post-Katrina performances. Troi Bechet (who appeared in a number of Junebug led story-circle programs and performances as well as assisted in running programs in the Seventh Ward arm of *HNO?*) formed the Center for Restorative Approaches, a community based nonprofit that works with young people and adults to resolve conflict and build empathy as a direct intervention in the criminal justice system that disproportionately affects Black people.³⁴⁰ Rashida Ferdinand, following her work with *HNO?* for which she developed the Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association, later formed the non-profit Historic New Orleans Council for Arts and Sustainability.³⁴¹ This developed into the Sankofa Marketplace, which in turn has developed into a food co-op program that leads arts and community programming while running produce markets in the area—a food desert—three days a week.³⁴² Amy Koritz and Ron Bechet both worked diligently to form cross campus partnerships between Tulane, Dillard, and Xavier that have reshaped how the universities interact,

and contributed to a resource-sharing program that now allows students enrolled at any of the three universities to take classes for credit free of charge at the others.³⁴³ Other relief organizations that were born of Katrina (such as Common Ground Relief and the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum that is explored in chapter three) continue to exist, taking up similar essential educational and community support needs in their respective neighborhoods.

The story of post-Katrina recovery is often looked at as a shining example of heroism and community engagement that helped New Orleans recover and allowed some areas to experience financial boons.³⁴⁴ But the ongoing need for community leaders to take up basic roles of governance and protection (from housing insecurity, to starvation, and, most prominently, environmental threat) demonstrate that “top-down” approaches to resilience too often fail the most vulnerable populations. Artists are community leaders. Artists, by their nature, are expert partnership builders—building on years of experience with audience engagement efforts. They are remarkably well-informed sources regarding community priorities. In New Orleans, artists and arts groups who attempted to advocate for policy goals and neighborhood rejuvenation were often dismissed or rejected by outside recovery agencies and insider political machines that sought to preserve their power and engage in neo-liberal efforts to privatize the city.³⁴⁵ Even in New Orleans, where art and culture are recognized as essential parts of the economic infrastructure because of their role in tourism, artists struggled to be recognized as leaders in the recovery. Recovery efforts need to remain in conversation with community stakeholders and should leverage local networks to understand needs and weaknesses. Community engagement groups regularly point to the value of artists in this exact realm for their ability to build strong, diverse partnerships across populations and simultaneously communicate varying perspectives to these same groups.³⁴⁶ Sites of recovery should rely on these assets and learn from these deep community ties to strengthen equitable

responses to disasters.

Chapter 3: “They’re Tryin’ to Wash Us Away”

I drive around and try to figure out those Byzantine markings and symbols that the cops and the National Guard spray-painted on all the houses around here, cryptic communications that tell the story of who or what was or wasn’t inside the house when the floodwater rose to the ceiling.

In some cases, there’s no interpretation needed. There’s one I pass on St. Roch Avenue in the 8th Ward at least once a week. It says: 1 DEAD IN ATTIC.

—Chris Rose³⁴⁷

In the above epigraph, Chris Rose—a popular columnist of *The Times Picayune* who was perhaps the most recognizable writer and speaker on post-Katrina life within New Orleans in the first years after the storm—points to the dichotomy of living in a city of death and absence. The codes Rose refers to (sometimes referred to as X-codes, Katrina codes, or the “Katrina cross”) were ubiquitous throughout the city after the storm. They appeared in the most heavily flooded areas (the Lower Ninth Ward and St. Bernard Parish) and in the safest (the French Quarter and the “Sliver by the River”). The X’s were originally a spray-painted message left by search parties to denote whether or not a home had been searched and what was found inside. After the crews left though, the crosses remained. They became an omnipresent symbol of the storm’s devastation, of the forced absence of the city’s residents, of having had unknown persons enter and search a home, of missing and dead friends and neighbors. While there was an alleged system for coding a home, in practice there were a wide variety of formats. The vast majority utilized the X, but circle and Y codes also appeared, and often sections were left blank: the disparities fostered confusion, something that only reinforced the feeling of lostness and uncertainty that pervaded early post-Katrina New Orleans.

A year and a half later, Rose penned another piece, entitled “Badges of Honor” wherein he reflected on X-codes once more. He notes the expense of repainting a home to clear the mark. He raised the differing opinions regarding the symbols, that ranged from “sickening to look at,” to

“I’m in no hurry to get rid of that... it’s a reminder of what happened.”³⁴⁸ As time has worn on and the symbols have begun to fade, some locals have now proactively taken steps to preserve the markers; throughout the Bywater neighborhood visitors will sometimes see bronze or iron X-codes affixed to homes as memorials. The Katrina code and its position as a nebulous sign open to personal (often individually contradictory) readings stands as a synecdoche for the catastrophe itself within the memory of New Orleanians.

Throughout this chapter I use different museums in the city to demonstrate how embodied memory practices are utilized in separate sites to create opposing narratives of Katrina in the years since the storm. Many in New Orleans worked to excise Katrina from both cultural memory and public spaces to maintain a fantastical presentation of the city that appealed to tourists. Only as time has progressed has New Orleans woven Katrina and its aftermath into the fabric of the city’s public history, most often in the form of a recovery and growth narrative. The three museums studied differ in scale, aim, and location: the state-run Presbytère Museum in Jackson Square, a community rebuilding project named the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum in the heart of the Lower Ninth Ward, and the non-profit activist group Levees.org’s Flooded House Museum in Gentilly. Each museum utilizes distinct performance tactics tied to place-making to promote a specific agenda and seeks to engineer audience understandings of memory through specific, embodied practices. In this way, they speak to the role of bridging the temporal gap between the storm and the present, through reviving, preserving, or reframing memories of the storm via experiential practice in the present. To demonstrate how these organizations execute their goals, I rely on a mixture of site visits, conversations with audience members, interviews with museum founders and directors, and archival sources related to the establishment and development of these exhibits.

New Orleans, Tourism, and Post-Katrina Change

In the years since Katrina, memory, and the way that the collective memory of Katrina is performed, has served as a critical battleground between separate groups. From the outset, media coverage of Katrina and the levee failures within the city created an apocalyptic, often overtly racist, narrative of the disaster. This vision was dominated by the idea of a once in a generation storm overwhelming a city run by corrupt officials and populated by violent Black citizens. Local community leaders, reporters, and scholars have subsequently spent years correcting this story, pointing out fallacies and obvious racism in early news coverage.³⁴⁹ Likewise, local groups have worked to rectify the accounts that absolved the Army Corps of Engineers from culpability in the levee failures (such as Levees.org, as this chapter will explore). Differing approaches to understanding the storm speaks to the discrete interests of separate groups within the city.

In the early months following the storm, business and political leaders moved to turn attention away from grief and towards preserving the city's reputation as a tourist destination.³⁵⁰ Tourism has long played an outsized role within the city's economy, representing over sixteen percent of employment and a tenth of the total earned wages in 2004.³⁵¹ As sociologist Kevin Fox Gotham has noted, elites within the city felt New Orleans suffered from a major branding crisis, and sought to not only to reestablish the tourism infrastructure of the city, but undo the damage they felt Katrina had caused its image.³⁵² Officials felt an immediate need to promote New Orleans as open and ready to receive visitors (one of the central agendas of both the first post-Katrina Carnival season and the first post-Katrina Jazz and Heritage Festival) in a direct effort to paper over the numerous sins (racism, poverty, economic inequality, poor public education, etc.) that the aftermath of Katrina had elevated to international attention.³⁵³ From the outset it was clear that

New Orleans had endured a tremendous cultural trauma, one that would have lasting repercussions and fundamental impacts on life within the city. Simultaneously though, New Orleans had spent decades cultivating a curated external image to attract tourists, advertising the city in particular as the birthplace of jazz, the sexually liberal home of Storyville, and one of the most significant food and beverage cities in the world (a complex history chapter four explores in more detail).³⁵⁴ As performance scholar Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett notes, tourism relies on the heritage industry to create “the scene of ‘hereness’ necessary to convert a location into a destination.”³⁵⁵ Katrina threatened not only the ability of tourists to physically get to and stay in the city, but also represented an existential threat to the carefully crafted image of the city that lured tourists in the first place.

Civic leaders, believing that the prioritization of tourism was an act of immediate survival for the city, helped reify a vision of New Orleans that reinforced highly curated heritage practices.³⁵⁶ Of course, the image of a city in mourning contrasted with the idea of New Orleans as a place of festivity where visitors come to “*laissez les bons temps rouler*” (let the good times role). Theorist Judith Butler understands the process of mourning as “agreeing to undergo a transformation (the full result of which one cannot know in advance)... When we are dispossessed from a place, or a community... something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us.”³⁵⁷ In Butler’s reading then, the mourning that follows loss yields a new understanding of what was lost and forces a new comprehension and recognition of the self. The focus on maintaining the pre-Katrina identity of the city in the interest of generating tourism deliberately cut short opportunities to accept Katrina as part of a *new* civic identity. Thus, the heavy emphasis on tourism by city leaders, naturally connected to a pre-storm identity and outward

focus, forewent a process of public mourning—wherein a new understanding or identity could be found—in favor of a melancholic desire to resurrect the city as it had been.

In the years since Katrina, tourism has only grown in importance to the city's economy and workforce (over twenty percent of New Orleanians now work in a tourism contingent job sector).³⁵⁸ Rivalries over who has claim to the city—often expressed through battles over how to perform the city's identity—speak to the underlying tensions between those who have long lived in New Orleans and the large number of newcomers who have migrated to the city over the last decade (see chapter two). In ethnographer Helen Regis's terms “belonging in contemporary New Orleans is exceptionally contested.”³⁵⁹ Memory exists as critical capital in the post-Katrina world. Both for the tourism and heritage industry, but also for individuals wishing to articulate their claim to a place within the city, the memory of New Orleans pre-Katrina serves as a powerful source of ownership and participation in the city's present. Expectedly then, Katrina remains a flashpoint for those who feel increasingly marginalized within New Orleans. While elements of Katrina's memory are nearly universal—expressions of sadness, grief, and loss—others are far more disjunct, often around racial and class boundaries. In presenting Katrina to the world, discrete groups serve differing aims.

The most obvious agendas were those of government officials and economic interest groups. Only three months after the storm, the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation (NOTMC) held a launch party on the second floor of the Sheraton Hotel for their New Orleans Tourism Media Center. As the *Times-Picayune* noted, the center was, “designed to help persuade the world that the Crescent City once again is ready for tourists.”³⁶⁰ Meanwhile, “on the third floor, scores of residents lined up to tell Mayor Ray Nagin how increasingly hard it is to try to put their lives back together in the ravaged city.”³⁶¹ After the storm, concerted campaigns were launched

by both New Orleans and Company (formerly the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau) and NOTMC that presented a romanticized version of the city, absent not only of Katrina damage, but divested from the deep-seated racial, economic, and historic inequities that the storm dredged into national view. Culture and tourism scholar Lynnell L. Thomas compellingly argues that these campaigns, tied explicitly to pre-Katrina ideas of the city, represent “narratives that compel visitors to forget the racial and class injustice illuminated by the hurricane.”³⁶² Thomas points to how other tourist ventures, most notably the so called “disaster tours” or “dark tours” that readily capitalized on the opportunity to show off the city’s devastation for curious tourists, stood in open contrast to campaigns engineered to paper-over the disaster.

In the years after the storm these differing viewpoints on how to appeal to tourists have become more nuanced in the ways they incorporate Katrina narratives into the city’s identity. Groups like NOTMC and New Orleans and Company moved away from ignoring the storm to instead touting recovery, by emphasizing that more restaurants, hotels, and tourists are now present in New Orleans than at any other point in history. For the tenth year anniversary of Katrina, the city opened the “Mayor’s Office of Resilience and Sustainability,” an initiative that launched a “Resiliency Campaign” demonstrating how the government was actively working to prevent another Katrina-scale catastrophe from occurring.³⁶³ Meanwhile, local interest groups used the memory of Katrina as a means of demonstrating the ongoing inequities present in the city, such as the annual Katrina March and Second Line that features local performers and activists. While auspiciously a remembrance-based event, whose first priority is to secure an August 29th state-wide holiday commemorating those lost in the flood, the walk’s aims include “calling for racial and economic justice,” and “action on climate change from local, state, federal and world leaders... [to prevent] more of these extreme weather events.”³⁶⁴ Thus Katrina has become a cultural

touchstone within public memory. For some, Katrina is a benchmark to measure the progress, recovery, and overcoming of disaster that proves New Orleans has only become *more* desirable as a location to visit since the catastrophe. For others, Katrina is a site both psychological and physical. It represents a breakage that must be continually acknowledged and returned to both to honor and grieve what was lost (and is still missing) as well as ensure that positive change emerges from the darkness of the disaster. Literary theorists David Eng and David Kazanjian proffer that melancholia is “not simply a ‘grasping’ and ‘holding’ on to a fixed notion of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains.”³⁶⁵ Melancholia allows for possibility: the continual return of the site of a psychic break is, in this way, a conscious choice to return to, reinterpret, understand, and reclaim, all in an effort to imagine a more positive future. In this way, the New Orleans’ groups who take up the mantle of maintaining Katrina in public memory continue the long process of mourning, thereby realizing a better world that might emerge from the catastrophic loss caused by the flood.

Performing Memory: Embodied Experience, Place, and Bridging Time

Memory of the storm has, predictably, become a site of contention. Particularly important is the fact that audiences—whether tourists or new permanent residents—likely have some memory of Katrina generated by the extensive media coverage that focused on New Orleans after the storm (and continues to emerge for important anniversaries of Katrina). This has created, in media scholar Bernie Cook’s terms, “a paucity of experience and a surplus of mediation.”³⁶⁶ In this environment, performance is essential. While performance does not replace (or surrogate) lived experience, vying entities who seek to shape the memory of Katrina within the public sphere regularly employ performance-based practices to instill their preferred understanding of the

disaster, and therefore exercise control over the cultural memory of the storm.

Place-based performance encourages unique and powerful memory formation processes that allow for the tangibility of space to encourage imaginative connections across time. Theorist Walter Benjamin argues “memory is not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium.”³⁶⁷ That is, one “who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters the earth, to turn it over and over as one turns over soil.”³⁶⁸ Benjamin’s conception of memory directs us immediately to the values of tangibility and connection to earth (soil here being both literal and metaphoric). It not only raises the need for active participation within the memory process, what Benjamin thinks of as “digging,” but points to how we must return to memory and actively delve into it and explore it. Further, the idea of continual return points back to Eng and Kazanjian’s call for the value of “continuous engagement” in melancholia.³⁶⁹ Read together, these conceptions point to the importance of returning to sites of memory not only to discover the past but shape the future.

Throughout theatre and performance studies there is a wide body of literature dedicated to the role memory transference across bodies—particularly in conjunction with the relationship between performance and space.³⁷⁰ Both museum studies and performance theorists have examined how interactive, performance-based approaches have become common features within museum settings. This turn is fundamentally connected to the active quality of memory that Benjamin points to. For instance, theatre scholar Tracy Davis, in discussing the role of the museum spectator as actor, argues that “visitors experience something fundamental to the content and are drawn into performing this themselves, rather than watching others do it.”³⁷¹ Davis’ suggestion that an engaged actor-participant model of experience demands a different relationship between

knowledge and the past affords a deeper engagement with memory than simple observation or didactic approaches to information transmission.

This role of embodied memory transmission is particularly significant to how traumatic memories are held, interpreted, and passed across time through performance. Trauma scholar Silke Arnold-de Simine argues that experiential forms of understanding memory are regularly turned to when “the conviction that mere knowledge about the past does not suffice to prevent the perpetuation of violent and traumatic histories.”³⁷² Simine argues that “never again” mantras are inefficient at preventing future violence. Rather than allowing the memory of such traumatic events to remain at the level of text of verbal tributes, what is instead called for is an embodied engagement with the trauma that allows for engaged memory transmission. An embodied approach instills a personal connection to the past through present actors—thereby allowing the past to live on through temporal (performance) genealogies.³⁷³ Embodied action allows those in the present to forge living memories of the past, as well as spiritually connect to the dead and honor their absence. This is mirrored in theatre scholar Freddie Rokem’s conception of the actor as “hyper-historian” wherein “performing history” grants embodied, deeper imaginative connections to the past that are particularly powerful for connecting to traumatic memories.³⁷⁴ Rokem’s notion that actors, acting as historians by embodying new memories, encourage us to “re-do” the past speaks to the value of performance work for the melancholic drive to dig through memory in search of new possibilities.³⁷⁵ The case studies of this chapter view audiences (or “guests” as museums might term attendees) as actors in museum spaces. In this, the exhibits studied, to varying levels of success, leverage the power of space and embodied experience to encourage participants to engage with memories of Katrina and emerge with new understandings of both of the disaster and the future possibilities of New Orleans.

The following case studies demonstrate the ways embodied experiences work to form memory. These sites leverage the value of the intrinsic locations, coupled with place-making practices, to generate specific narratives regarding how Katrina is remembered and how the disaster shapes New Orleans' present and future. Common to the case studies are two tenets: first, that memory is critical to the ongoing survival not only of the representative institution but the larger constituency of New Orleans—whatever these different organizations might imagine “New Orleans” to mean. Second, that embodied, experiential practice is critical to memory formation. It is worth noting the museums utilize different approaches in their work to achieve separate aims. The Presbytère uses practices that help to reinscribe state narratives that make the city palatable and “safe” for tourists. The two subsequent case studies, those of the Flooded House Museum and Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum, encourage direct, embodied experiences for the audience. The ways embodied experience operates is critical to the memory formed: sites that encounter a facsimile of the pain (the latter two case studies) create a more binding connection than an experience that seeks solely to heal or show the scar that has formed after the cut (the Presbytère). Cumulatively, these examples demonstrate the use of embodied, place-driven approaches to encourage the formation of specific—and differing—memories of Hurricane Katrina. Some techniques overlap or rely on similar principles but differ in how they focus attention. Each museum demonstrates aims that are contingent on who it believes it represents. In representing these separate visions of the city, and legacies of Katrina, these museums demonstrate how the memory of the city remains contestable, and how survival within the city is tied to being recognized within the civic body.

Museums in New Orleans

Like any major metropolitan area, New Orleans is home to a wide array of museums that speak to local cultures and global interests. There are the expected tentpole institutions such as the New Orleans Museum of Art, and the Audubon Nature Institute (which manages a zoo, aquarium, and insectarium). A unique feature is the National World War II Museum, founded in 2000 by historians Stephen E. Ambrose and Gordon H. “Nick” Mueller with substantive backing from major Hollywood figures such as Stephen Spielberg and Tom Hanks.³⁷⁶ The World War II Museum demonstrates in particular the power of museums to function as a tourism engine: it has consistently ranked on TripAdvisor.com’s top 5 museums in the United States since its inception, and brings in over 700,000 visitors annually (more than 85% of whom are from outside of Louisiana).³⁷⁷ While these major institutions are the largest draws for tourists, beyond them sits a number of smaller—although still prominent—museums such as the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, The Cabildo and 1850 House (the partner institutions of the Presbytère), Fort Pike, The Louisiana Children’s Museum, and the Confederate Memorial Hall Museum—New Orleans’ oldest museum. Additionally, plantations like Oak Alley and Houmas House, among others, are popular destinations for weddings, school visits, and overnight stays around the city. The Whitney Plantation, a museum dedicated entirely to the lived experiences of slaves, stands in stark contrast to the mission of the other plantations in the Greater New Orleans area. Finally, the city hosts far too many small museums to list, ranging from the Museum of Death to the Pharmacy Museum to, significantly, several “house museums.” House museums, such as the House of Dance and Feathers and Backstreet Cultural Museum, are in houses. Sometimes house museums take the full span of a house, but sometimes only some rooms are dedicated to exhibit space—this allows the owners to live in the remaining portion of the house. House museums are typically (although not exclusively) run by homeowners who seek to share their unique cultural knowledge while

subsidizing their income (often to afford maintaining their collection of artifacts). These small entities can hold impressive collections of memorabilia and cultural artifacts, such as Mardi Gras Indian costumes which are the most popular item displayed at house museums (although instruments and more eclectic pieces are also popular).

While all these museums rely on a mixture of tourists and locals for their audiences, their missions vary widely. In general, the more directly tied to Louisiana or New Orleans culture and history a museum is, the smaller it is. The largest museums focused on the city or state are state-run institutions. Many New Orleans centered museums are privately owned (such as Mardi Gras World, which operates as an arm of Kern Studios—the largest Mardi Gras float-studio in New Orleans) or operated as a means of supporting a single cultural maker (e.g. the House of Dance and Feathers). Except for the Whitney Plantation, plantations have little interest in historical accuracy or academic scholarship—they exist to attract diners, wedding parties, and overnight guests. Of the three museums explored here, one is state-run and two are operated as small non-profits. Together, these examples demonstrate not only how Katrina is depicted within the museum landscape of the city, but highlight how institutional size and mission impacts the way discrete entities cater to tourists, and, likewise, what they feel is significant to educate publics on concerning the 2005 disaster.

The Presbytère Museum

The Presbytère Museum, part of the Louisiana State Museum system, sits directly beside St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square. The square is inarguably the most iconic location within the city, dominating images of New Orleans across visual media. It is the most common location for tourists within the city to congregate for a walking tour, whereon they will likely be informed

of ghosts that remain long after their time seemingly everywhere around them.³⁷⁸ The Presbytère's location is ideal for pulling tourists in from the heart of the French Quarter. However, the location is far less popular with locals who typically are either unfamiliar with the museum or regard it as something only tourists visit.³⁷⁹ The displays within the Presbytère reflect this aim, representing a family friendly, positive image of New Orleans and Louisiana. While the museum features occasional rotating curated projects, the overwhelming majority of the Presbytère is dedicated to the two permanent exhibits: *Mardi Gras: It's Carnival Time in Louisiana* and *Living with Hurricanes: Katrina and Beyond*. The juxtaposition of these two topics is put into profound, and immediate, visual relief upon entering the museum. As visitors walk in, they are greeted by Fats



Figure 1. The entry hall to the Presbytère Museum, with Fats Domino's Piano in front of a Mardi Gras King's Costume. Photo by the author.

Domino's Katrina-ruined piano with its back leg broken and twisted off, the body of the instrument

jettisoned into the air, and keys misaligned with a missing cover. Directly behind it stands a mannequin wearing a Mardi Gras King's costume, including an enormous feathered and jeweled back-piece reaching nine feet into the air, a three-foot feathered crown, and ornate bejeweling across the white tunic.

The contrast created by the museum's opening artifacts underscores that the Presbytère, with goals of celebrating the history and culture of the state, struggles to incorporate an exhibit that must, by its nature, explicitly confront trauma, difficulty, and government failure in an easily digestible and "positive" framing. To navigate these complexities, the Presbytère stages Katrina not as an event with ongoing repercussions in the daily lives and evolving memories of New Orleanians and those in the region, but, instead, as a discrete incident that has been firmly relegated to history and exists exclusively within a narrative of survival and overcoming catastrophe. This is perhaps an unsurprising claim for the state government to stake. States have always used performance techniques to posture their authority and power, and narratives that undercut their ability to provide security for the public demonstrate a clear risk to their ongoing control.³⁸⁰ The Presbytère relies on a number of performance techniques to convey a narrative that both broadcasts its authority, and presents a history-driven version of events that removes the audience from the experience of Katrina while generating a positive story of overcoming the catastrophe. Indeed, the exhibit suggests the city has *improved* on what existed pre-Katrina.

The Presbytère's main method of establishing authority over its subject matter is through a control of space. The museum partially draws power from its central location. Marvin Carlson's seminal work analyzing the semiotics of theatre architecture notes that Ducal Theatres derived much of their authority from their "formal, regular, and powerful" appearance.³⁸¹ These same aspects are easily applied to the construction and layout of the Presbytère within Jackson Square;

flanked by government structures and the cathedrals, the space is designed to convey authority and gravitas. Inside the museum, the careful coordination of the Katrina exhibit represents what theatre scholar Vivian Patraka terms a “performance place,” or a site that, “is narrativized in advance and we are solicited to perform the narrative that is organized for and given to us.”³⁸² Both by controlling how the audience navigates the museum, and also through emphasizing embodied, experiential practice through specific educational aspects that focus on recovery and growth, the Presbytère prioritizes a safe narrative of the storm. The Presbytère crafts an experience that generates a highly sanitized and selective history meant to reify the unique cultural value and experience offered by New Orleans, in turn validating tourists’ reasons for visiting, and citizens’ reasons for living within the city.

Historicizing Katrina: Construction, Aims, and Strategy

The Presbytère announced they had begun planning a permanent Hurricane Katrina exhibit in April of 2006.³⁸³ At that point the museum had already acquired a number of artifacts for the display, a process that started in the immediate aftermath of the storm.³⁸⁴ During this early planning stage the museum director, David Kahn, launched a series of interview-based studies to assess the expectations and desires of local New Orleanians in relation to a Katrina display.³⁸⁵ The exhibit had two specific goals from conception: first, increasing the number of local attendees for the museum, and second, educating the public on hurricane (and environmental) science.³⁸⁶ These two aims are critical in thinking through how the museum chose to stage Katrina. If local audiences were going to attend, minimizing the storm, and its impact on the citizens of New Orleans, would be unfathomable. Simultaneously though, focusing on government ineptitudes, particularly those of the city and state, could isolate government leaders who controlled museum funding. Thus, a

narrative that could demonstrate the pain and difficulty that faced New Orleanians during Katrina but insisted on New Orleans' permanence despite difficult storms (even when facing catastrophic *federal* government failure) was the decided aim. This meant schoolchildren, the primary local audience of the museum, would be able to attend and learn about hurricane science.³⁸⁷ When the museum opened in October of 2010, the Katrina exhibit elevated heroic narratives of the city overcoming the devastation of the storm. The exhibit also argued that New Orleans was now safer than it had been pre-Katrina. Finally, the Presbytère reified the long-standing narrative of New Orleans' exceptionalism heralded by the tourism sector.

The Katrina exhibit was constructed with four separate components or galleries: "Spirit of Resistance," "Is This America?," "What Happened?," and "Changing the Game." These are laid out to construct a narrative of the storm and recovery process as complete and limited to the past. The galleries establish the lead-up to the storm, the destruction and loss represented by the disaster, the heroism of local actors and outsiders who came to the rescue, and, finally, extensive explanations of how the city has taken steps to prevent a similar disaster from unfolding. The finished narrative presents limited experiences that generate or invoke memories of the catastrophe. Any attributes that might encourage audiences to imagine how Katrina continues to impact those living in the city today, or how it will continue to impact them in the future, are dramatically overshadowed by the exhibit's focus on the finished nature of the disaster.

The exhibit's "performance place" is constructed to both constrict and control the historical narrative of Katrina and the audience's embodied experience of this narrative. This is meant to limit the kind of memory formation that occurs. Rather than make Katrina a living part of the city or the experience for the tourists, the museum sets out to make Katrina settled history: complete and resolved. Historian Pierre Nora describes the countervailing relationship between memory and

history as:

“Far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory... remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting... History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer... [history] belongs to everyone and no one, whence its claim to universal authority.”³⁸⁸

This move to “universal authority” undergirds the museum’s hegemonic narrative. This narrative detracts from the living communities who survived Katrina and hold unique knowledge (lived memories) of the catastrophe. This disregard of affected populations still struggling from the effects of Katrina minimalizes these ongoing experiences and marginalizes groups who are still recovering from the disaster. Nora points us to the important idea that memory encourages reprocessing or, as Benjamin would say, digging. By moving Katrina away from memory, the museum seeks to discourage deep engagement with the disaster and the imaginative work embodied memory processes enable. By strategically focusing only on the period closest to the actual levee breakages, the timeline offered by the Presbytère is radically condensed, and the storm’s implications in the present minimized. This ignores the complex and lasting ramifications of Katrina on survivors and those who returned to the city (such as the elimination of many historically Black neighborhoods and occupations).

If memory “remains in permanent evolution,” then relegating the storm to history helps contain the narrative.³⁸⁹ If history speaks to “what is no longer,” than by keeping Katrina in the past, the Presbytère suppresses memories that could complicate the state’s authoritative narrative.³⁹⁰ Further, the lack of embodied experiences that relate directly to the storm speaks to a lack of desire to instill memory or raise the specter of the storm’s ongoing impact beyond the carefully coordinated and positive narrative provided by the museum. Performative encounters constitute the exact phenomenological formations that are necessary for memory formation.³⁹¹ Encouraging embodied experiences to foster Katrina memories would challenge the museum’s

historicization of the disaster directly. Nora's claim then that "history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it," seems particularly apt of state narratives.³⁹² State narratives naturally deter experiences that promote questioning or problematization, utilizing constructivist and positivist forms that sociologist Elizabeth Jelin argues "deploy discourses that seek closure, in other words, a definite answer that approximates 'truth.'"³⁹³ By marking Katrina as finished history, the exhibit offers an uncomplicated disaster,

promoting a positive view of the city post-Katrina, and prioritizes the increased safety tourists and residents now enjoy within New Orleans.



Figure 2. Window introducing the exhibit. Photo by the author.

Performance and *Living with Hurricanes*

Following the broken piano that sits in the lobby, the first thing to greet the audience is an opaque window that poetically informs the entrants of what to expect in the exhibits: "memories of past storms. Warnings that Louisiana is washing away. People on rooftops, escaping rising floodwater. Terror. Panic. Heroes in boats, bringing people to safety.

A region struggling. The kindness of strangers. Levee investigations. The search for solutions. Hope for the future... Even as we mourned lost lives, we came together in new ways, honoring

this place we call home.” This introduction establishes two major ideas that run throughout: Katrina is firmly situated in the past, and the future is hopeful, brighter, and safer than ever before. The reliance on the past tense phrases, “we mourned,” and, “we came together,” helps root Katrina not as something still living amongst New Orleanians, but as a finished event.

The exhibits consist of a mixture of artifacts and experiential elements that work to make the audiences feel like engaged participants. However, these are designed to prevent deep immersion into the subject and, therefore, real engagement with memories of Katrina. For instance, the opening room of the exhibit consists of a series of wooden panels with informational placards that lay out the historical value of New Orleans’ location at the mouth of the Mississippi, and the history of flooding present in the city (with particular attention paid to the 1927 Mississippi River Flood and 1965’s flooding associated with Hurricane Betsy). Following this background, the exhibit moves into a chronological accounting of the storm, beginning with a bank of screens that show footage from local and national news sources covering the growth and path of Katrina as it took aim at Louisiana—collectively these emphasize the strength and size of the storm. This opening has two effects: first, it places the audience into the role of a Louisianian watching the impending hurricane and asks them to imagine the experience of waiting (and presumably fearing) an impending storm. Second, it stresses the “uniquely dangerous storm” narrative from the inception of the exhibit, foregrounding what is to come with the (debunked) idea that Katrina’s devastation was due to the tremendously powerful nature of the storm.

Primed to enter the exhibit as engaged participants, the museum next offers a deeper embodied experience for the audience/actors: a video and effects display meant to serve as a simulacrum of Katrina. The video display plays a continuous loop of footage of the storm uprooting trees, flooding streets, and general havoc, and is accompanied by a hurricane soundscape

with occasional strobe effects to simulate lightening as well as two fans attached to the rafters that create a small amount of “wind.” The intent is unmistakably to demonstrate the ferocity and power of the storm, yet the effect is more akin to the “Hurricane Simulator” booths that populated malls across the south in the 1990s and early 2000s than anything that might frighten or awe the viewer. In fact, the room holds benches where the audience can sit—one of the few places in the exhibit where sitting is possible—emphasizing the audience’s role as *viewer* more than *participant*. Overall, the room asks the audience members to watch the footage but doesn’t create an atmosphere that in any way prompts them to consider what being trapped in the storm would feel like. Even the footage selected does little to acknowledge the most haunting experiences of Katrina: the thousands who were trapped inside and on top of buildings trying to escape the rising waters caused by the levee failures. What the room does accomplish, especially when coupled with



Figure 3. Attic set within the Presbytère Museum. Photo by the author.

the previous news coverage, is the reification of the exceptionality of Katrina the storm.

Walking into the next room of the exhibit, audiences encounter a small room intended to represent the attic of a local family who had to escape as the floodwater levels rose. The attic is quite literally staged: raised on a platform and constructed of wood paneling and beams, the hole in the roof is easy to miss, and gives the sensation more of looking at the set of an attic than being within one. The only objects within the attic are a large flashlight and small box. In front of the display sit a series of informational panels, along with phone receivers that allow the audience to listen to survivor stories of escaping to and being rescued from their rooftops. The final element is a hatchet that we are told was purchased by a local woman who in turned used it to break out of her own attic when the waters rose.

While the attic helps to instill an ominous feeling, and the hatchet is often pointed to as one of the highlights of the collection in media reports, the staging here does more to distance the audience than activate them as participants.³⁹⁴ Rather than drawing the audience in to the attic itself (something that would have been relatively easy to accomplish in the limited space), or offer some nature of immersive experience allowing them to peer through the attic hole (and thus appreciate the difficulty of climbing out), the museum separates and displays the attic space. In this, audience members can reflect on the past horror, but are in no way mobilized to consider how they would respond to the situation, or imaginatively process how the escape would have unfurled: would the viewer have been able to likewise hack through the ceiling? Could they have raised themselves out of the attic (in near or total darkness)? What would go through their minds as they were entrapped by a sea of surrounding water? By staging the attic as something to look at—rather than engage with—the room works against the audience considering the embodied nature of the disaster. It pushes away from any melancholic idea of “digging” (in the Benjaminian sense)

through memory to understand the experience. In this way the museum works to make the flood smaller, not larger. There is no nod to the incalculability of the disaster, or effort to demonstrate how it extends beyond our imaginative comprehension. To demonstrate the progress *from* the experience, the museum presents a completed narrative that includes survival and recovery, rather than an encounter with the disaster itself.

The storm and attic rooms are the closest the Presbytère edges towards an immersive experience. However, the engagement is consistently cut short or discouraged by the exhibit's staging. The lack of direct engagement or haptic elements within these displays means the experience lacks what performance scholar Josephine Machon terms the "(syn)aesthetic." Machon writes that "to experience synaesthetically means to perceive the details corporally," this in turn creates a double "sensory" approach where what is "sensed" (physically, phenomenologically) likewise is derived through "sense" (intellectual comprehension). It is this process that makes immersive theatre so effective in reconfiguring audiences into performers (or at least active accomplices).³⁹⁵ It is easy to imagine a more immersive attic space that incorporates the storm elements, focusing the audience's attention to the difficulty of escaping through the hacked away hole in the roof—perhaps through the simple method of focusing lighting *on* the roof. The choice to separate the elements, to nod towards performance practices that generate empathic memories but position the audience as a safe viewer rather than active participant, reveals the museum's unwillingness to foreground experiences that could move Katrina out of settled history and into the space of memory.

The main gallery of *Living with Hurricanes* demonstrates the Presbytère's reliance on a condensed timeline of the catastrophe focused solely on the most chaotic period in the immediate aftermath of the storm's landfall. This timeline excludes the long-lasting years of displacement,

slow rebuilding, and systemic change the city has endured following the flood. The gallery houses numerous artifacts that help provide insight into the experience. One display features a collection of military MREs (Meal, Ready-to-Eat) with an explanation of how these served as the common diet for many in the city for months after the storm. Another area displays a series of wall segments that local man Tommie Elton Mabry used as a diary in the weeks after Katrina. Other artifacts allow the museum to highlight significant points of the catastrophe, such as a trio of seats from the Superdome (pre-renovation), affording an opportunity to discuss the venue as a “shelter-of-last-resort,” and explain the poor conditions within it. Much of the space is dedicated to the “heroes” of the storm: first responders, locals who arrived in their own boats to assist in rescue efforts (affectionately termed the “Cajun Navy,”), hospital staff, etc. The emphasis tends towards the roles of those who assisted, or, in the case of the federal government, those who hindered the immediate rescue efforts in the first days after the storm.

The artifact gallery points to the value of spatial control and arrangement that shapes the overall experience of the museum. As Davis notes, many contemporary museums “constrain and direct visitors’ behavior as a theme park would. They encourage an *encounter* with the ideology and its *mise-en-scène*...”³⁹⁶ While audiences are able to freely wander through this room, it is strategically set between the preceding galleries (which establish the unique strength of Katrina) and the ones that follow (exploring the science of the levee failures and the steps taken to prevent future disasters). Even the artifact gallery has been carefully laid out: it opens with a series of panels concerning heroic rescues and ends with one that features the supplies taken in to save the city. While there are artifacts that highlight the pain of the storm, these work to reveal exceptional heroism rather than human suffering—of particular note is a tattered flag that evokes the kind of patriotism one would expect from a war museum display. Cumulatively, these rooms work to

narrow audience ideas of Katrina to the immediate weeks after the levee failures. Even this curtailed narrative though is one that focuses on narratives of heroism and survival at the neglect of those who died or were unable to return.

The second half of the exhibit changes radically in tone, focusing on the science of the storm (and hurricanes in general) and explaining the changes in engineering that have been undertaken since Katrina to prove how much safer the city is today. Bringing the audience into the second half is another informational window that reads,

“WHAT HAPPENED? Some have called Hurricane Katrina a ‘natural disaster.’ Others describe the disaster as entirely man-made. In fact, Hurricane Katrina was a natural force with an outcome compounded by human error. The systems and structures built to handle the effects of hurricanes were incorrectly planned and engineered, and preparation for the storm and emergency response afterward fell far short of acceptable levels.”

Beyond lies a variety of “interactives” that encourage audiences to directly engage with the various forms of levee protections and threats. Many are geared towards simulation, featuring a dial or crank that cause a visible reaction to a specific target. For instance, an interactive designed to demonstrate the importance of soil quality allows participants to turn a crank for a levee situated in “dense clay” and then one that sits on “organic soil.” Another station depicts the city in three large boxes, representing New Orleans with three varying levels of wetlands in front. When a lever to the side of each box is pulled, a stream of small white beads (representing flood waters) pour out, showing how the unprotected city floods whereas the more protected miniatures flood less or not at all. In addition to these manually operated devices, several digital interactives also run throughout the room. Screens allow the audience to choose between different levee designs or problems and see why they are or are not successful through short, simulated videos. A notable interactive depicts a map of the United States with bold letters atop asking, “Are you prepared? Select a disaster,” and offers the choices of “drought, earthquake, hurricane, landslide, tsunami,

wildfire, tornado, severe winter, flood, and volcano.” When one is selected the map displays different regions of the US that are particularly vulnerable. While auspiciously this may serve to educate tourists on the perils of their own environments, the fact that the video always concludes with the screen flashing, “We’re All at Risk,” underscores a denial of New Orleans’ intense vulnerability by noting the possibility for catastrophe that exists universally.

The interactive educational elements demonstrate that the museum understands the value of embodied learning as a means of teaching and forming lasting understanding. However, while the interactives connect knowledge to kinesthetic experience (pulling a lever, pushing against an object, even playing with a touchscreen), they do little to connect the experience to a historical event (e.g., a particular levee failure or the actual experience of flooding). Tactile methods were not employed throughout the museum, but only in the most positive and future oriented space in the exhibit. Seven years after the exhibit’s opening, during an interview, curator Steve Maklansky described the exhibit as including “sights and sounds that give you some idea of what it would be like to be in New Orleans at that time.”³⁹⁷ But he also questioned how New Orleanians should remember the storm and encouraged moving on from the lasting trauma.³⁹⁸ What is suggested by this interview, and by the strategic deployment of interactive elements within the exhibit, is that the Presbytère’s goal is not to support deep reflection on the catastrophe. The museum does not offer performance-based engagements with Katrina that could focus the audience’s thoughts to the experience of the storm and the ongoing ramifications within the daily lives of New Orleanians that Katrina caused. Instead, the aim is to distance audiences from the painful subject matter and consequences of the storm, and instead reinforce the positive narrative that the state has put forward.

The educational portion of the exhibit does not erase the failure of government response in

the disaster, but it does seek to prove the increased security of the city should a comparable storm emerge in the future. The exhibit does readily acknowledge systemic failures by the Army Corps that led to the levee collapse, and a single informational pane (in a back corner) even notes the “disorganized response” of “local, state, and federal governments [who] were not adequately prepared for Hurricane Katrina.” Yet the overarching tone of the display is one of future security. A full wall in the middle of the educational materials bears a quote from the independent levee investigation team: “it must be the goal and objective of all of us that a catastrophe of this sort never be allowed to happen again.” In this framing, the suffering and damage presented by earlier displays showing the catastrophic effects of Katrina explain why the improved protections were essential, and how the work undertaken since Katrina will make that disaster a historical anomaly.

The spirit of renewal and improvement that the Presbytère advocates for is made abundantly clear in the exhibit’s final offering: a video presentation directed by Glen Pitre and Michelle Benoit that features various community members speaking to why they came home.³⁹⁹ The film is shown in a purpose-built theatre featuring a variety of screens attached to a wooden framework. Each of the twelve screens has been placed within a wooden box meant to resemble a window. As speakers enter telling stories of why they returned to New Orleans, it is as if they are materializing from behind one of the windows of their own home. The fact that the windows seem to emphasize the idea of “home” goes beyond metaphors of returning home or the notion of New Orleans as home once more: they also lay claim to the idea of place as a marker of belonging. By seeming to represent the speakers as if they are in the windows of their own homes, the windows serve as surrogates for locations within the city. The windows imbue the exhibit with an otherwise power it would otherwise lack: they transport audiences directly into the city, as though one is meeting the citizenry and therefore able to make claims about the city and its people. The

interviews are meant to grant the documentary authority, arguing the voices of the interviewees are the voices of New Orleans. The porch-like set makes this a house within the city, even though the museum itself is, by its nature, non-residential. The fact that there are numerous windows for speakers to appear from signals to the audience a variety of perspectives. This in turn makes the speakers seem representative of the city, as though the fact that they appear in separate windows allows them to speak for different neighborhoods, streets, and histories. The documentary fails to identify the speakers or even provide titles that might explain why they are authorities: the windows help allay questions of authority by claiming that, as residents of different areas, the interviewees are worthy representatives. Their stories relay overcoming the hardships of the storm, but overwhelmingly focus on what is “beautiful” about the city: its food, music, culture, history, and the overall community of people who live in New Orleans. They speak to their roots in the city, telling audiences that “we’re here and we’re not going anywhere.” They ask, “how can we not come back,” when, “nothing [is] better than our way of life?” The interviews present a narrative not of suffering or ongoing struggle, but a love of the “magical” city of New Orleans. While the museum features many personal accounts, most of these are written on information stands or are only featured in audio recordings. The only time we can see the faces of those speaking is in this final video presentation. The impact of being able to see and hear the speakers who discuss their experiences of New Orleans grants far more authority to these voices. The video is among the most popular elements of the exhibit, with most audiences choosing to stay and watch, awarding it not only the power of finality within the exhibit, but also that of greatest reach.⁴⁰⁰

As I watch the video, a band plays in front of the cathedral. The music creeps in and, simultaneously, one of the video’s interviewees praises the music of the city saying “it’s our own personal soundtrack.” The moment highlights the exact romanticized view of New Orleans the

museum seeks to reify. The Presbytère is built on exceptionalizing New Orleans, and the selective narrative of the storm it depicts is engineered to demonstrate that Katrina was exceptional, and that the city has moved on from this historical point. This treatment helps tourists feel that Katrina based tourism, viewed in this light as an educational endeavor, is normal and encouraged by those living within the city. The last thing audiences encounter as they exit is a presentation that remarks on the enormous specialness of the city, its history, architecture, food, and music. Space is given to those who returned. As I exit *Living with Hurricanes*, I cannot help but reflect on all that is missing: the dead, the ones who never returned, and the ones who are still struggling in the years since. In nearly every other museum I've visited that presents violent death and destruction, I have always found a reflection or memorial space. I have always found this space a critical portion of my visit and make a point of lighting a candle or sitting in contemplation or prayer. Yet, there is no space for commemoration at the Presbytère. This ritualistic healing is absent from the museum—after all, to include it would mean recognizing a wound still in need of healing. This absence speaks to the underlying principle that runs throughout: the physical and imaginative conception of “New Orleans” is what must essentially remain in the public’s collective memory (to help feed tourist dollars and locals desire to stay in the city), not the trauma and not the loss. If memory is as much a process of forgetting as it is remembering, then *Living with Hurricanes* chooses to forget those who died, and those are still living with Katrina’s aftereffects.

Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum



Figure 4. *ROOTS RUN DEEP HERE* poster in from the of the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum. Photo by the author.

Sitting outside the double shotgun house-cum-museum is a large plywood sign, painted with local iconography (the Claiborne Avenue Bridge, Mardi Gras Beads, crawfish and corn for a crawfish boil, a gold trumpet, etc.) and four words: *ROOTS RUN DEEP HERE*. This phrase, which became a rallying cry of the Ninth Ward in the years following Katrina, serves not only to evoke a sense of camaraderie and solidarity for locals, but to remind visitors that those living within the neighborhood have long histories and legacies tying them to this place. The word “*ROOTS*,” written in green lettering with brown roots growing from the letters, ties the idea of familial, cultural, and historical roots to nature. This underscores the ways that rootedness ties a

group to a place, as well as how roots allow for life to regrow. The museum's attention to life is critical; most "living museums" focus on bringing something long gone back to life in the present (e.g. a reconstructed castle or colonial village). But the living museum here features no onsite historians or costumed tour guides. Instead, the name "living" is a direct intervention calling audiences to remember that this community is still very much alive, largely against the will of the government and neoliberal forces who sought to eradicate it in the years after 2005.



Figure 5. Front entrance of the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum. Photo by the author.

In response to the slow recovery of the area following Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Caroline Heldman and Ian Breckenridge-Jackson, two visiting academics who volunteered in recovery projects after the storm, co-founded the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum in 2011. Prior to Katrina, the Lower Ninth had a population of roughly 14,000 people. In 2017, some 12 years after

the storm, the population sat at less than 4,200. While the city of New Orleans had rebounded to 80% of its pre-Katrina population level, the Lower Ninth was sitting at an abysmal 30%.⁴⁰¹ The small museum exists quite literally in the heart of the neighborhood: the area is fully residential. The museum's street and all those surrounding it are exclusively homes—including the second half of the shotgun building that houses the museum (this is indicated to audience members by a sign on the residence labeling it as such). This placement is critical to the neighborhood memory project that the museum fosters as well as its community education work.

Living and Dying in the Lower Ninth Ward

Hurricane Katrina brought national attention to the Lower Ninth. The area was among the most devastated by the levee failures and was prominently featured in media coverage of the storm, as well as in later depictions such as Spike Lee's 2006 four-part documentary *When the Levees Broke*. The water level was so high in the area that flood shelters that had served for previous hurricanes were entirely submerged. The Lower Ninth remained under a government mandated curfew longer than any other part of the city, with a "look and leave" policy (residents were allowed to come and examine their homes during the day but were not allowed to remain once darkness fell) in effect for over six months following the storm. Writing of the neighborhood's appearance in 2009, four years after Katrina, media scholar Linda Robertson said that "from the air, it looked at that time as if a gaping giant's mouth had all but a few teeth knocked out. Block after block of leveled houses and empty lots are punctuated by a few houses, here and there, rendered uninhabitable by the flood. On the ground, the most immediate comparison is with a bombed-out district."⁴⁰²

The Lower Ninth Ward is a majority Black neighborhood of New Orleans that sits slightly

downriver (hence “Lower”) of the French Quarter. A ten-minute drive from the French Quarter, the area was historically swampland. The part closest to the levees by the river, known as Holy Cross, housed wealthy plantation owners. During the early-to-mid 1800s, the swampy backwoods of the region was a popular spot for poor immigrants and free people of color to live, as iconic shotgun homes were relatively easy to construct from the abundant cypress trees in the area.⁴⁰³ The New Orleans city government and uptown population viewed the Lower Ninth as an “isolated backwater,” and the area was continually slighted by the city, serving as the literal receptacle for waste, sewage, and industrial runoff for generations.⁴⁰⁴ Given this willful disregard, the Lower Ninth would grow into one of the most segregated parts of the city. By 1960, anger over segregation was at its most acute. Violent white protesting in the neighborhood broke out when Leona Tate, Gail Etienne, and Tessie Prevost (along with Ruby Bridges at a neighboring elementary school in the Upper Ninth Ward) became the first three Black students to integrate McDonogh No. 19 Elementary School. Five years later, when Hurricane Betsy hit, the levees in the neighborhood gave way to the storm surge. The ensuing flood reached most of the area. Following this incident segregation intensified, with most of the white population moving to the nearby parish of St. Bernard.⁴⁰⁵ By 2000, over 98% of the Lower Ninth Ward was Black.⁴⁰⁶ Thus the fact that the Lower Ninth came to be among the Blackest and poorest in New Orleans was not happenstance, but due to willful acts of white actors in the city. It is important to understand that residents of the Lower Ninth Ward did not experience the levee failures as a moment of accidental failure, but rather as the culmination of decades of willful disregard.

In media portrayals of the Lower Ninth Ward, terms like “apocalypse” and “zombie-state” were common descriptors.⁴⁰⁷ This language points to the fact that, in addition to the widespread property damage the neighborhood experienced, death tolls from the storm were particularly high.

In many ways, the face of the storm became that of the Lower Nine. This focus both helped direct attention to the massive inequities faced by Black residents of the city throughout the disaster, as well as demonstrated on live TV how biopolitics shapes Black life and death. Multiple scholars have compared New Orleans, and the Lower Ninth Ward in particular, to the idea of a “death-world,” theorized by political philosopher Achille Mbembe.⁴⁰⁸ In his conception of necropolitics, Mbembe argues that governments utilize, “...the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead” as a means of exercising terror as power over living subjects, which he terms “necropower.”⁴⁰⁹ Yet the entire history of the Lower Ninth Ward is one of being marked as the depository for the pollutants and unwanted waste of New Orleans. When the levees broke during Hurricane Betsy many in the neighborhood refused to accept the collapse was natural; instead, residents believed that (as had been the case in St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes during the 1927 Mississippi River Flood) the government and local officials had deliberately dynamited the levees so as to spare the wealthy residents of the French Quarter and Uptown.⁴¹⁰ This legacy lingers into the present, with many still convinced that Katrina was a deliberate flooding of the city by government officials in an act against Black New Orleanians.⁴¹¹ This attitude is not one that emerges from a singular catastrophe, but is rather the product of a prolonged conditioning wherein the population has been not only oppressed, but treated as disposable by the governing body.

Living Museum Against the “Death-World”

While Katrina’s aftermath laid bare the disregard for (or open rejection of) Black life, what remained invisible were the ways the population of the Lower Ninth Ward had created, and

celebrated, life within their neighborhood in direct resistance to generations-long subjugation. In her book, *Yearning*, bell hooks writes:

Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world.⁴¹²

This conception of “homeplace” as a space of respite and healing from the ongoing oppression of white hegemony is, in hooks’ understanding, an act of resistance. The creation of homeplace not only allows for survival, but generates the literal space for resistance to be imagined.⁴¹³ Historian Juliette Landphair compellingly reads the common refrains in the neighborhood about how the area fosters uncommonly close bonds as evidence, coupled with the historically strong community activism culture within the Lower Ninth Ward as being directly tied to the isolation and rejection experienced by the community against the richer, whiter, and more politically powerful neighborhoods of New Orleans.⁴¹⁴ The strong community bonds that exist within the Lower Ninth are a direct result of generations of state necropower operating against the neighborhood. This framework of community networking is a critical tactic of survival (see chapter two). Resistance to the “death-world” begins, quite literally, by living. Establishing “homeplace” requires the forging of space in a world that has actively conspired to deny a right to life. Survival becomes a radical act. The joyful celebration of life is an act of open revolution against state forces that seek to erase life. Homeplace is the site where the radical acts of survival are made manifest. The making of a home allows for the creation of joy, of individualist expression *and* community building, of gathering to teach and support each other, and to build alliances. Homeplace is the center of survival. That the Living Museum is set in a house—one that is still actively engaging in the important work of making home for the people of the Lower Ninth Ward—serves as a powerful

act against death and the political factions that would utilize death as a tool of oppression.

The museum was founded with the express intention of serving the community as a meeting and learning space, but also working as an educational and advocacy hub for outsiders to learn about the Lower Ninth Ward from members of the neighborhood. While the founders were not permanent residents, the museum's advisory board is comprised overwhelmingly of local civic leaders, including prominent figures such as Executive Director Leona Tate (one of the McDonogh Three and founder of the Leona Tate Foundation for Change) and Malik Rahim (founder of the post-Katrina relief organization Common Ground Collective). Since its inception the museum has always been free of charge to the public. While the community center serves local school children and residents, the primary audience for the museum are school groups and tourists. To date, the museum has taken in over 25,000 visitors.⁴¹⁵ Sitting directly in a former residence, the museum's neighbors are exclusively homeowners. Prior to breaking ground on the project, the founders approached neighbors in a door-to-door campaign as part of planning the museum to ensure support for the project and explain their aims for the Living Museum.⁴¹⁶

The placement of the museum far outside the normal paths tourists might take in the city accomplishes three things. First, it centers the project within the domain and control of the neighborhood itself. As the museum functions as a youth-education hub with multiple community outreach programs, the placement signifies the deep ties (or roots) that it is both representing and fostering. Secondly, the location helps to challenge and expand what tourists imagine is (and belongs to) New Orleans. Rather than focusing on the most heavily trafficked areas outsiders typically visit (the French Quarter, Uptown, City Park and the Museums of Mid-City), the choice to install a museum directly in the neighborhood (as opposed to a more commercial site within the Ward or an area closer to more recognizable tourist sites) makes a claim that the neighbors

themselves deserve recognition within the popular imaginary of New Orleans. This move calls for the *people* of the Lower Ninth Ward to be seen as worthy of the same attention and recognition as the more well-known institutions within the city: institutions they have historically made possible through their labor (such as music halls and restaurants). In this, the museum also enters a longer lineage of (predominantly Black) house museums throughout the city. The final aim of the museum's placement is to control the narrative and memory in the post-Katrina landscape, particularly in terms of steering the neighborhood's public image away from one crafted by "dark tourism" and towards one that prioritizes individuals and local knowledges.

The confrontation with real and recorded bodies the museum offers demonstrates a presence instead of an absence. This is an effort to remove the "dark" nature of the ongoing tourism within the area. Performance scholar Emma Willis suggests that dark tourism is predicated on the visitors servings as an "audience to absence."⁴¹⁷ In the years immediately following the storm, tourists frequented many devastated areas of the city, including the Ninth Ward, with large Greyhound buses roaming the streets to point out the destruction.⁴¹⁸ In this environment, creating a purpose-built museum, helmed by community members and with their input, served as a means of articulating the narrative of those who had returned—and stood as a rejoinder to enterprises that capitalized on residents' loss. In this way, the museum articulates the present lived experience of those in the Lower Ninth, while simultaneously combating narratives that dehumanize and distance the living people in the area from a depiction of the Lower Ninth as dead, destroyed, or beyond recovery.

This effort to articulate residents' narratives is the driving force of the museum. Its motto, "remembering the past, sharing stories of the present, and planning for the future," demonstrates the importance of memory to the process of imagining the future. The cornerstone of the museum's

memory work is an ongoing oral history project. With over 60 oral histories of members of the community conducted, this is a powerful act of historic preservation for those who have returned. Critically, the histories are used throughout the museum. Most rooms feature small televisions that play short (5 minute) videos on repeat, allowing guests to learn about the central ideas of the museum directly through locals' words and telling. Throughout the conversations, a theme emerges amongst the residents as they articulate feelings of being forgotten. Contrastingly, there is also a strong attention to the impressive number of well-regarded public leaders at both the city and national levels who emerged from the neighborhood—underscoring the area's vital contributions to the larger world, even as they are underserved. An understanding of how residents continue to see the neighborhood as home is the dominant theme.⁴¹⁹

The recordings of community member oral histories throughout the museum does critical work in embodying the lived experiences of those within the Lower Ninth and grounding the museum in recognizing the humanity within the living neighborhood. Through both the recorded footage and the explanation of the museum's purpose by community volunteers when audiences enter, the museum works to reinforce the living nature of the neighborhood. As theorist Judith Butler argues, the quest for recognition is essential for those whose lives are precarious.⁴²⁰ By foregrounding the bodies of those who live in the neighborhood, the museum is demonstrating the community and the individual's drive for recognition, away from their status as other and towards a future where their existence does not require continual activism. Further, by making the museum the focal point of experience for outsiders within the neighborhood, it both humanizes the people who live in the Lower Ninth Ward for visitors, as well as centralizes where people interested in the neighborhood should visit (helping to curb dark tourism from roaming along private residential streets).

Walking the Museum

The museum is comprised of six color-coded rooms: red, yellow, blue, white, green, and purple. Each encompasses a different idea or theme. The colors mirror the bright color palate popular in much of New Orleans, in addition to making the space warm and inviting. The sole exception is that of the white room that, as is explored below, serves to focus all attention on the painful subject matter of its exhibit. The red, yellow, and blue rooms survey the history of the neighborhood, providing detailed informational explainers alongside archival maps and images that tell the story of the Lower Ninth as being long neglected and mistreated by the rest of New Orleans, while simultaneously rich in its own culture and history. A welcome video in the red room demonstrates this, as locals vocalize “this is where our roots lie.” One interviewee says “I was born and raised here, 83 years” and several list out important cultural customs to them including cookouts, Mardi Gras, the Mardi Gras Indians, the Martin Luther King Day Parade, and Jazz Funerals. The yellow room emphasizes the historical ties to the neighborhood as a colony for escaped slaves. It also notes prominent religious and cultural leaders who emerged over the centuries within the area. The blue room explores the role of the Ninth Ward as a pivotal site in the fight for desegregation, highlighting in particular Leona Tate and the McDonogh Three.⁴²¹ The blue room also presents numerous cultural icons from the area to demonstrate the significance of the Lower Ninth to broader American and New Orleans culture, noting that Fats Domino and Mahalia Jackson both hailed from the neighborhood, as well as more regional celebrities such as Kermit Ruffins, Atwood “Mr. Magic” Johnson, and Kalamu y Salaam. Together, these opening exhibits work to establish the long history of the neighborhood. In walking through the space, audiences weave around corners and along walls, passing by windows looking out into neighboring houses and yards that encourage audiences to think through the long history of who

lived here before, and who continues to live here now.

The museum shifts to take on the Katrina/post-Katrina narrative with the nearly barren white room. Only a small projector sits on a foldout table next to a wooden bench constructed of plywood and two-by-four lumber. The plainness of the white room demands the audience process what is absent in the room. This space, perhaps more than any other in the museum, reminds the audience that this was very much a functional home that has been repurposed. The tile floor is cracked, and the bare wooden frames in the center of the room point to a retrofitting of the space. Perhaps this was formerly a kitchen? The absence within the room encourages audiences to imagine what was—how the space was occupied previously and who might have lived in the home. While the rest of the house displays signs of its use as a museum and community space (tables, chairs, informational displays, books and activities, piles of paperwork, etc.) the absence of the white room asks the audience—rather than tells them—to imagine what was. What had been here? What was lost? This absence that draws the audience’s focus is what theatre scholar Andrew Sofer describes as performative “dark matter.” Sofer argues that “dark matter comprises *whatever is materially unrepresented onstage but un-ignorable*.”⁴²² By directing us to the absence of the space, the museum forces the body to recognize this lack, and directs attention to both what should be present but is not, and why this is.

Projected on a blank wall is silent footage of the storm playing on a loop. The scene is harrowing. Amidst a sea of water, heavy winds and pouring rain, we see two men atop a rooftop during the storm after the levees have failed. The video is taken from a rooftop with the camera zoomed in to focus on a house across the street. Visibility is terrible. The water appears too thick for either the camera or the people shown to see well. Water has flooded up to the second story windows of the house. I find myself inevitably trying to guess the height of the floodwaters.

Fourteen feet? Fifteen? More? The two men on the rooftop are too far away to make out discernably: all I can tell is they appear to be adults, male, and trapped. The camera shakes wildly and the tape cuts in and out as the cameraperson evidently stopped and started recording over the span of the hours they were trapped on the roof during the storm (a date and time stamp reveal the juxtapositions). In a terrifying sequence, a small boat approaches the house. The boat is tossed about as though fighting a violent storm on the ocean, a gut-wrenching sequence to see in the middle of residential street. The two men on the rooftop slowly climb down from the small patch of roof that has remained above the flood, trying not to fall directly into the mad waters below, which swirl with high waves and an unknown, but strong, current. The men toil to reach the boat, and those coming to their rescue reach out their hands trying to bring them onboard. The rescuers, who are clearly local civilians and not emergency responders or government actors, are equally concerned about falling into the water themselves, or hitting the trapped residents with the boat, as they battle against the waters and try to grasp the men swimming from the rooftop. Finally, after minutes of struggling, bobbing up and down under the water, the first man makes it the few yards from the house to the boat, with the second man slightly quicker, but still taking over a minute to fight his way through.

The lengthy rescue scene footage is, by design, painful for the audience to view. Literary scholar Elaine Scarry has argued that pain is an unshareable phenomena.⁴²³ Scarry is right of course, in that individual physical pain is non-transferable and unknowable to a reader. As performance scholars have articulated though, sympathetic somatic responses register in the body.⁴²⁴ While an audience watching will not experience the same physical sensations as the recorded person fighting against water, viewers may experience a wide array of sympathetic bodily responses such as changes in breath, heart-rate, adrenaline level, temperature, etc. These

involuntary experiences palpably connect the audience to the body in pain. In watching this struggle, Butler's conception of vulnerability as signifier of, "a primary helplessness and need, one to which any society must attend," rises to the fore.⁴²⁵ That the audience must witness, for several minutes, two men be entirely vulnerable to the impossible strength of nature surrounding them, demands not just the empathy of the viewer but action. In the act of watching the footage the audience moves from passive consumer of the experience to a witness of a specific trauma. By making the audience into witnesses the museum is asking audiences to engage deeply with the catastrophe and the somatic experience of individuals. As performance theorist Elizabeth W. Son argues, redress for groups fighting traumatic pasts is, "a continual process of reckoning on the part of survivors and their supporters... through the body."⁴²⁶ By introducing the viewer to the disaster portion of the museum through footage that so directly privileges the human body, the museum asks the audience to engage with the vulnerability of the people whose lives are on display and approach the material that follows as an ally.

If the first experience of the rescue footage is through viewing, the second part is connected to hearing. The choice to present the footage, the sole encounter for the starkly barren room, is a performance. It centers the audience on this experience and asks us to deeply engage with what we are watching. The silence *encourages* us to listen: what would the waves have sounded like? The thunder? What are the men yelling to each other as they attempt to communicate with the boat? Theorist Fred Moten notes the performative staging of Black people in pain or death (as a result of violence and trauma) is a strategic depiction of precarity in order to mobilize agony in the viewer and indict the perpetrators.⁴²⁷ Moten argues that through this work, which he terms "mo'nin' (standing in for both mourning and moaning), the depiction of trauma through silence forces us to "keep looking at this so we can listen to it."⁴²⁸ By stripping the room of any elements

beyond the footage, the museum asks the audience to seriously interrogate what is being watched. It asks the audience to consider their own embodied response to the footage and to imaginatively consider what is missing. The museum requires the audience to *listen to the silence*. The clash of an image that is wrought with sounds that are inaccessible in the recorded form pushes the audience to listen to what they cannot hear. This asks the audience members to put themselves in the place of the cameraperson and experience what is being recorded. The staging of absence and silence amidst trauma is a powerful act that encourages deep witnessing and empathy on the part of the audience.

Immediately after the rescue footage is the green room, which guides the audience through the devastation of the disaster. The room makes explicit the role of the federal government in the catastrophe, both in the levee design and maintenance, as well as in aiding those who were trapped in the city after the flood. Some of the more famous images of the storm are showcased, such as a distraught Angela Perkins in front of the super dome on her knees, screaming out in anguish. Another is Mario Tama's iconic photo of two men sitting in a small fishing boat, paddling with pieces of lumber in a river of water sitting on the highway. Scores of pictures from around the Lower Ninth demonstrate the severity of the destruction: homes leveled by water, a school-bus rammed against a river barge, burnt out cars with "Merry Christmas" spray-painted on, and gutted home after gutted home with five-foot or higher piles of destroyed belongings obscuring the streets.

Juxtaposed against the images of devastation is a bright table in the middle of the room. On it sit two stacks of memento books, displaying a variety of handwritten notes and drawings inside. The messages are of hope and thanks: "I see all this and feel so much pain. You are so strong, all of you who went through such tragedy," "thank you for this museum to ensure this

history survives and show us all how we must do better.” A child named Madeline has scrawled in all capital letters, “I AM SAD THAT YALLA [sic] LOST YOUR HOME.” The notes running throughout form a picture together: people thankful for the experience, commenting on what they learned, how it made them feel. Through the books, messages of support and comments regarding how visitors love the city are the most common comments. Author Sarah M. Broom notes in her bestselling memoir *The Yellow House* that in tourist guides and histories of the city this part of New Orleans is overlooked, and “mentions are rare and spare, afterthoughts.”⁴²⁹ The guestbook indicates that, for the thousands of tourists who have visited the Living Museum, the Lower Ninth Ward is no longer some amorphous “other” outside of New Orleans, but very much a key part of how they understand the city.

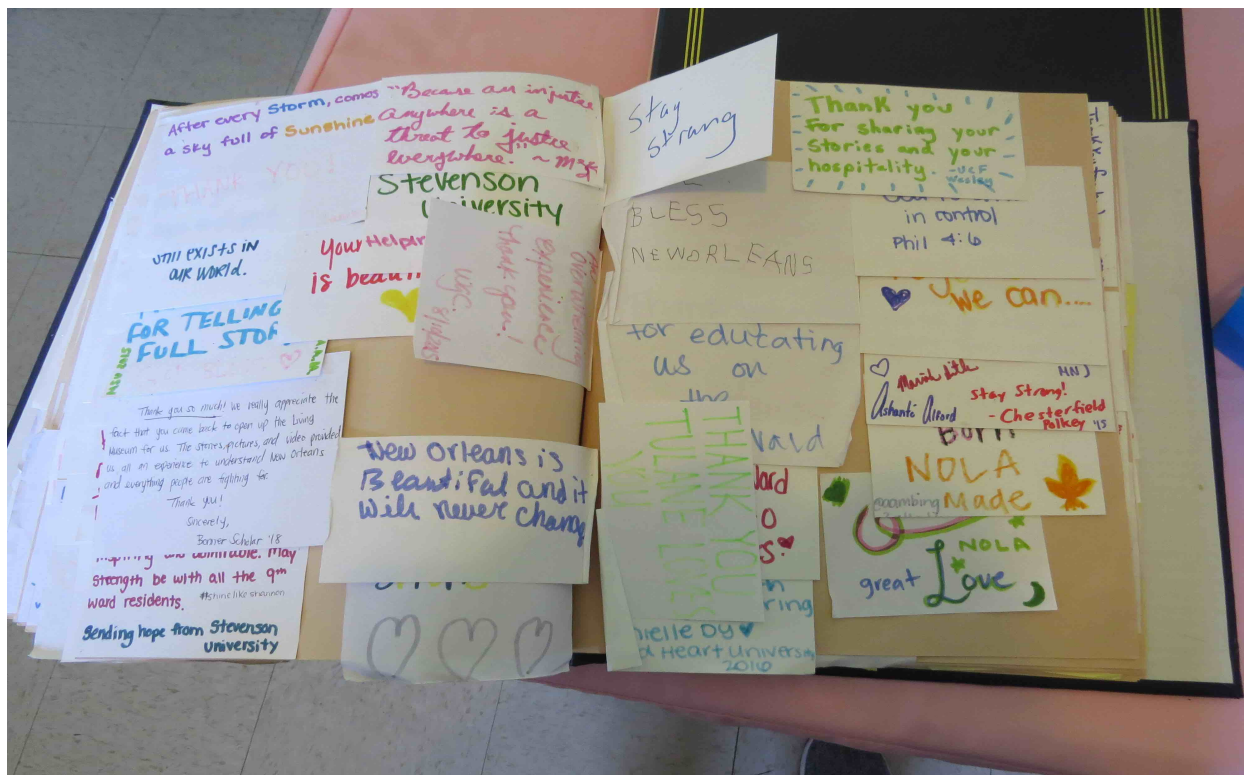


Figure 6. Scrapbook from the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum. Photo by the author.

The last room in the museum is the purple room, which presents narratives of healing and recovery since the storm. Numerous portraits line the walls, with short biographies and first-person

accounts of life since Katrina. The room paints a picture of joyous return, but stresses the work still needed for the community's survival. Several community partnership organizations dedicated to rebuilding the Lower Ninth Ward are highlighted, encouraging visitors to learn more about these organizations and actively assist in the recovery. By ending with a display focused on the ongoing work of recovery and returning home, the museum explicitly invites audiences into the continuing project of making the neighborhood whole.

The Living Museum's memory work directs the audience to remember the present and future through the past. While it commemorates the neighborhood's past, this ultimately serves to demonstrate that there is a present and will be a future. By opening a home to the community, inviting community members and outsiders to come together, learn, and connect to those who still call the Lower Ninth home, the museum mobilizes memory to move out of the home, out of the neighborhood, and into the broader world. Hooks writes that, "the act of remembrance is a conscious gesture honoring their struggle... I want us to respect and understand that this effort has been and continues to be a radically subversive political gesture."⁴³⁰ The tactics utilized by the living museum demonstrate an expansion of those traditionally used within homeplaces, and deliberately create an in-between space where, for those in the community, homeplace may be found. For those outside of the community, the resistive strategies typically imagined and planned in the home may instead be imparted in this museum that was, and still is, a home.

Leaving the museum, I decide to drive around some of the neighboring streets. Despite growing up in and remaining connected to Greater New Orleans, I've never explored the Lower Ninth Ward. As I drive, I try to imagine the history of the places I see. Far and away, what is most prominent are the vast absences. Concrete foundation slab after concrete foundation slab. Through what is missing though, I revel at every sign of recovery. Occasionally I see new construction:

often it doesn't fit the architectural spirit of the neighborhood (a regular complaint of locals). These buildings give me a gnawing fear of gentrification. As I leave the ward and head back home, I notice that, unlike with most Katrina sites, my thoughts are not at all focused on the disaster. Instead, everywhere I look, thoughts of the future fill me: will the neighborhood recover? Are proper steps being taken to increase flood safety? Will those coming into the Lower Ninth be outsiders who fail (or refuse) to learn and understand the history and bonds of this community? Will those who have managed to rebuild a fragile existence in this place now have to fight against those who seek to capitalize on the slow return of neighbors, friends, and family? This response is exactly the mobilization the Living Museum's memory work aims to accomplish. In taking me into the neighborhood's past, the museum has rooted me to concerns for its future.

The Flooded House Museum

The Flooded House Museum (FHM), often interchangeably referred to as a museum, memorial, and monument by its founders, sits at 4918 Warrington Drive in the middle-class neighborhood of Gentilly. Completed in 2019, the museum is nondescript: a one story, deep red brick house. It has a low roof, green shutters and four windows that run along the front facade. Small, plain bushes sit beside the porch; the rest of the well-maintained lawn is empty. Far more noticeable is the wave of new construction happening two blocks down the street. These homes feature various stereotypical elements of classic New Orleans architecture, such as thick wooden columns, vibrant colors, and wrought iron decorations meant to evoke the creole shotgun style found throughout the French Quarter and Uptown. Striking too is the house directly beside the FHM sitting in disrepair: boarded up windows, broken pipes, an overgrown lawn, and a long black stain along the side of one wall all mark the home as long abandoned. The viewer must know what to look for when finding the unassuming FHM: the only marker is a small wooden plaque that sits

beside the driveway. Only when the audience walks up to the front door, notices the spray painted “X” beyond the iron entry gate, and can peer into the windows, does the purpose finally sink in.

The FHM sits only 400 feet from the site of the 2005 London Avenue Canal breach in the



Figure 7. Flooded House Museum exterior. Photo by the author.

Gentilly neighborhood of New Orleans, and its interior has been rebuilt to look as it might have several weeks or months after the city flooded following Hurricane Katrina. The FHM is one of the major initiatives of Levees.org, a non-profit formed in the early aftermath of Katrina that was dedicated to correcting media narratives about the storm and advocating for government accountability for the disaster. The museum’s aim is to serve as a site of memory preservation, permanently creating a space where audiences can come and “witness” the damage of the 2005 flood. While the site allows an audience to see what a post-Katrina home looked like after sitting

in floodwaters for several weeks, the FHM also encourages audiences (without instruction) to follow along the imaginative path of a family returning home from evacuation. The FHM's location and then embodied nature of the site seek to leverage the audience/actor's recognition of temporal disjuncture in service of activating awareness of the scale of the problem. In so doing, the museum aims to incite audiences to question government preparedness for natural disasters.

Embodied Experience, Temporality

The FHM seeks to create a temporal bridge through embodied experience for its audience.⁴³¹ The museum's layout works to generate an audience member to actor transformation, whereby the spectator imaginatively experiences the process of the return home. This is accomplished through a process of re/living history, wherein one is simultaneously put into contact with the past and its present ramifications. This enacts a manner of what theatre scholar Freddie Rokem terms "performing history" wherein the performance objective is "to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from the past will matter again."⁴³² At the FHM museum, audiences are transformed into actors when they re-walk the imaginative path of displaced homeowners returning for the first time after the storm. This experience is complicated for local audience members (for instance any neighbors in the area) who will likely not imagine an experience but instead simply relive their own memories. Thus it is important to note that the FHM imagines its audiences as tourists—not locals. Despite this, the FHM aim expects the educational aim of its work to perform the same for ultimate goal (mobilization against government inaction) for locals who choose to visit.⁴³³

Key to the work of the museum is its location. Situated in a living neighborhood, with the site of one of the most prominent levee failures resting only feet away, the museum occupies a

powerful historical place—a place made into a memorial space through its educational work and the embodied experiences it encourages amongst the audience. The backdrop of the neighborhood serves multiple purposes: making the audience keenly aware of the lives at stake and the toll taken by the storm, but also noting how life has or has not returned to the area. The museum is visibly contrasted against the present and readily imaginable future worlds surrounding it: directly next to the FHM's left sits a destroyed Katrina home, to its right are a series of new construction projects and recently built residences. In seeing the larger street beyond the museum, the audience member is encouraged not only to relive or imagine a past experience (memory) but to further recognize the hauntological nature of the performance site. Ken Connor, the chief artist on the project notes that this is a deliberate choice, meant to “physically [put] the audience in the midst of the before and after image.”⁴³⁴ As Derrida points to with his analysis of how “time is out of joint,” possible (lost) imagined pasts, presents, and futures exist around us at all times. It is only when confronted with a breakage that the audience recognizes these possible temporalities and the “out of jointness” of time comes to the fore.⁴³⁵ This forces the audience to consider what is next for the city and the neighborhood—how does Katrina's long arm reach from the past and still shape what is yet to come?

The FHM is dedicated to making audiences aware of the collapsed time surrounding it. As discoveries are made, and the artificiality of rebuilt destruction is juxtaposed against living ruins and demolished (and built over) pasts, the audience is forced to grapple with these possibilities, and to bring their own embodied knowledge of experiencing a “return home” to imagining the ramifications for those who lost their homes and lives to the levee failures. The museum's stated aim of educating audiences and preserving historical sites connected to the levee breakages comes together here to activate a powerful unspoken goal: to convert audiences into actively engaged

citizens. The FHM mobilizes memory in service of informing audiences of what Levees.org views as the accurate history of Katrina. Further, the site demonstrates the long consequences of the government failures and inactions that permanently reshaped much of New Orleans. The museum is dedicated to creating a space for audiences to engage as citizens. It asks and locals who visit to remember and consider their place within the post-Katrina world and their responsibility to each other—especially in terms of how they hold the government accountable for the environmental safety of the city. This goal of active engagement for improved safety is likewise the aim for tourists and outside publics who view the site. This work extends beyond the educational and into a kind of environmental justice activism. The FHM leaves no doubt that government inaction can and will result in catastrophe—therefore it is incumbent on viewers not only to learn *about* Katrina, but *from* Katrina. The audience leaving should be more prepared and more aware of the calamitous possibilities that come from government failure and lack of responsibility, and it is incumbent on those who visit to push for real protection and changes (whether these might be environmental or infrastructural) that will ensure this kind of catastrophe is not repeated.

The FHM History, Purpose, and Presentation

The museum opened on 23 March 2019 and is a signature project of the non-profit awareness group Levees.org.⁴³⁶ Founder and President Sandy Rosenthal formed Levees.org a year after Hurricane Katrina to challenge the official narrative of the city's flooding after Katrina. A major aim was forcing a new independent investigation into the levee failures to challenge the prevailing explanations established by the Army Corps of Engineers, the group responsible for constructing and maintaining the New Orleans levees. Finally, the organization was dedicated to correcting media accounts that they viewed as overemphasizing the strength of the Hurricane and

misrepresenting the levee failures. Since 2010, Levees.org's focus has shifted somewhat, pursuant to the Army Corps' acknowledgement of their failing, as well as the reduction in media attention to the city. Levees.org has increasingly been committed to generating memory-based projects that continue to grow in scale. Their first act of memorialization was the purchase and placing of two Louisiana State Historic Plaques in 2010 and 2011 at the 17th Street Canal and London Avenue Canal Breach sites respectively. Both feature language that acknowledge the death and devastation caused by the flooding but devote equal space to condemning the Army Corps' failure.⁴³⁷ In 2012, the organization began a Guided Levee Breach Bike Tour that evolved from an annual guided tour to a permanent suggested route. However, by far the two largest projects the group has developed are the Levee Exhibit Hall and Garden, and the FHM.

While the Exhibit Hall and FHM are separate ventures, and Levees.org views them as two separate memorial spaces, they sit next to each other separated only by a small plot of unoccupied (although well maintained) quarter-acre land.⁴³⁸ Both grew out of a need to memorialize the experience of Katrina, particularly as, with the passage of time, Katrina related sites (and visible markings of the destruction) are disappearing in the face of new construction and city revitalization projects. Both were developed separately, with a few years in between, with feedback and support from neighbors in the area.⁴³⁹ Despite their existence as separate entities, they are encountered by audiences concurrently. The Exhibit Hall houses six large panels with information and graphics that lay out a narrative of how the levees fell, the root causes, the failings of the Army Corps, and the ultimate recovery and reconstruction of the levees within the city: while the language of the panels is generally staid, it is noticeable in that directs real blame and anger at the Army Corps of Engineers.⁴⁴⁰ A small garden of indigenous plants encourages attendees to take a moment of

reflection at the site.

The FHM is far more interactive than the reflection area. This aids in accomplishing the museum's aim of teaching audiences the magnitude of damage done by the storm via tangible experience. The museum functions in three ways. First, the audience approaches the house, which is completely restabilized and appears normal (mundane even) from any distance beyond the front porch. Once on the porch, depending on how audience members walk along the structure, there



Figure 8. Interior of the Flooded House Museum. Photo by the author.

are three distinct elements that become apparent. The two most obvious components are the two banks of windows that flank the entryway. On the right sits a room torn apart, ripped down to the studs. The audience is given the impression of a home in the process of being rebuilt. The main feature of the museum is what sits behind the left bank of windows: a devastated front living room.

Audiences must literally peer into the space to see anything: the windows are murky—discolored from weeks of sitting in floodwater and difficult to see through. The viewer generally must get as close to the glass as possible, shield the sun from the pane, and still only sees parts of the room. Based on observation at the museum, most guests will stop to press their cameras against the windows to both look in as well as take pictures of the interior. The act of taking pictures, of claiming a souvenir from the site, speaks to the conflation of experiencing with consuming. The taking of pictures hints at the dark tourism undertones of the museum: the desire that audiences have for experiencing through “reliving” some facsimile of the disaster. At the same time, in overhearing audience’s comments about the pictures, they would often notice new things through looking at the images they had captured, immediately sharing their discoveries with each other and looking back through the window after the digital image had drawn their eye to something they had originally missed. Thus the images were both a kind of souvenir, but also objects that deepened the audiences experience and engagement with the display.

The first thing likely noticed about the room is the mold. Among the most common—and visceral—memories that New Orleanians recount of the recovery process is the smell of mold (see chapter one). Ken Conner, the project’s set designer and lead artist, was emphatic about the importance of mold and the criticality of it to representing a flooded site.⁴⁴¹ While the window itself is almost impossible to see through until the viewer is nearly pressed against the glass, the windowsill is readily visible. The sill is covered in flecks of black. The mold spreads across nearly the whole room, connected to the six-foot waterline where the floodwaters would have rested for weeks. The corners of the room are particularly overgrown. Once the audience reaches the window and begins to peer in, the image of destruction is consuming. Conner stressed the importance of understanding the loss to those who had lived here saying, “what we wanted to do was, evoke the

sense of: this was the way people lived, this was real people here—and, this was what happened to real people. Their lives was gone. We don't know, if, for example, we don't know if the people in the house were killed. That's not a part of what we were trying to convey. It's just that, a home, which is emblematic of our life, whomever we are. This home... was destroyed."⁴⁴²

The main room depicted is that of the living room, a powerful metaphor for the absence that is so overwhelmingly felt. By making the focus of the audience's attention the living room, viewers are confronted with the most public room of the house—but also in many ways the most expressive. It is the room where the full family would gather, where the piano lives as well as toys and a television. The significance of the living room, in this depiction, as the spiritual center of the home marks it as a powerful place to draw attention to the absence of its namesake—living. By featuring a living room with no living family, no life inside, the only living thing being the mold that is growing—a fatal force—the stark emptiness of the home is put into full relief. The most striking feature in the living room is a twisted baby grand piano, covered in mud and dust, resting on a broken leg close to the windows. Behind it lies one bookcase that remained in place, and one that has hobbled over. Other furniture crowds the space, although it is out of place and seemingly unidentifiable. The pictures that adorn the wall are concealed under dirt and grime, and it is largely impossible to discern what they represent. There is a dismal couch, now a dark dirty grey—the same discolored shade most of the furniture has taken on—an askew coat rack, broken lamp fixtures on the wall, a hat caught on a picture frame that has remained since the water level receded, and an entertainment unit under a thick coat of grime. The flooring is black and dirty, presumably mold covered as well. It is littered with detritus. Perhaps most haunting of the debris is the array of children's toys: a wooden rocking horse, a plastic toy telephone, and a giant discolored teddy bear. Multiple lines exist showing where the thick sludge of water, mud, and oil, would have rested

as the city slowly drained in the weeks following Katrina. There are a few large puncture holes in the ceiling where the water weakened structure likely succumbed to the weight of objects in the attic. Finally, in front rests a broken coffee table. Atop it sits an open copy of the local newspaper *The Times Picayune* with the foreboding warning: “Katrina Takes Aim.”



Figure 9. Interior of the Flooded House Museum. Photo by the author.

The last aspect of the front facade is the main entryway, that consists of an iron gate typical of many New Orleans homes. Just beyond the gate—and tucked away so it is often the last noticed element of the house—is a spray painted “X-code.”⁴⁴³ The marker helps ground the knowledgeable viewer: the home was searched on 22 September and no hazards and no dead were found inside. However, it is highly unlikely most attendees would have the required knowledge to decode the

“X,” and many do not recognize it as a near ubiquitous symbol of the Katrina aftermath. The choice to place the cross inside of the entryway is particularly interesting—typically the cross would appear on a front facing location of the home or even on the roof, immediately notifying other search and recovery crews in the area that it had already been searched and providing warnings of

what was found inside. The recessed entryway is not an unimaginable place to put the cross, however it does invite dramaturgical questions. By putting the cross somewhat out of sight, it must be found. Is hiding the merely a courtesy to the neighborhood? Passing the orange spray paint sign daily could certainly be upsetting to those who live around the FHM.



Figure 10. X-code in the front entryway of the Flooded House Museum. Photo by the author.

In practice the experiential effect is that the cross, which would typically be the first thing a visitor encounters, instead becomes the last element to unfold. The cross serves as the single largest data point for a visitor—it provides a date (we know the moment we are visiting the house must exist somewhere in time after 22 September as a team explored it on that date), and, critically, that no bodies were found within it. That this is revealed only after witnessing most of the devastation, and confirmed by the informational panels behind the visitor, allows for powerful

emotional connections to the space. These connections emerge in practice through an active questioning that visitors conduct. In my visits I nearly always heard audiences discover the “X” and wonder aloud what it meant. They would ask if it was the actual mark that had been on the house, and if it meant anyone had died inside. This would lead them to make other comments tied to imagining the experience itself. Most audience members asked each other things like, “can you imagine coming home to this,” and “how do you come back after this?” More than once I heard audience members ask if locals understood the code, and comment on how frightened they would be by discovering an indecipherable symbol—a possible omen of death—on their own house or in their community.

The final component the museum offers is an informational timeline of the events of the storm attached to the backside of the house’s pillars, deliberately placed there to encourage their reading only after first experiencing the imaginative “return home.” The panels begin with images of the house as it might have looked prior to the storm: bright yellow walls, clean, well-polished furniture, and welcoming rugs atop tiled flooring. The timeline details the catastrophic flooding and government mismanagement, the final clearing of water from the city on 11 October, the permission for residents to return on 25 October, the Army Corps admissions of failure in the years to come, and finally information on the development of the FHM. Particularly important is the attention paid to the Army Corps: of the four informational panels at the FHM, one is entirely dedicated to the Corps’ failure and consequential reform efforts they implemented. In this act of narrative construction, all of the preceding events on the timeline (which detail the devastation to the city and losses of the residents) are made directly attributable to the Army Corp’s cost-cutting and time-saving decision making.

The FHM presents the audience with the detritus of the imagined lives of those who once

inhabited the home. These broken objects, offering us a glimpse into this conjured past, raise the ghosts of those who are no longer present. While much of what rests in the FHM is so torn and discolored it has become impossible to determine what it once was, some of the items' original identities may be gleaned from careful study of a picture of the "pre-storm home" on the informational panels. One small, haunting detail remains with me. It is a bit of sheet music that sits open on the piano: the main theme from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. I would have expected a standard jazz tune, or music directly tied to the city. Instead, the unconventional choice—*Scheherazade* is an orchestral work and piano versions are not commonly taught or performed pieces—focuses my attention to the character and her role as the teller of 1,001 stories. It marks the museum as holder and teller of infinite stories—both standing in for the thousands of untold stories of Katrina, and the countless imagined versions of life that were ended when the levees crumbled. As the museum asks us to embody some aspect of these stories, it also asks us to imagine the countless Katrina stories that are too numerous to ever grasp fully, and to imagine them all around us, as we are confronted with the living impact of the levee failures surrounding the site, and the ever-present potential for disaster that surrounds us all.

Memory in Flux: Vying for Katrina's Legacy

Just one week after Katrina hit and the levees failed, George Friedman penned an essay extolling the importance of New Orleans exclusively because of its seaport. He wrote, "New Orleans is not optional for the United States' commercial infrastructure...with that as a given, a city of some kind will return there because the alternatives are too devastating... The port area will have to be cleared, by herculean effort if necessary. As in Iraq, premiums will be paid to people prepared to endure the hardships of working in New Orleans. But in the end, the city will return

because it has to.”⁴⁴⁴ The comparison to Iraq is particularly telling: just as in a war zone, post-Katrina New Orleans presented countless opportunities for outside contractors and actors to capitalize on the disaster. Scholars and social activists quickly realized that, nearly from the moment the severity of the crisis was understood, neoliberal forces saw the potential of capitalizing on the catastrophe.⁴⁴⁵ In the time since the storm, it is easy to see the ways New Orleans was rebuilt by outside interests: the public school system in New Orleans was eradicated; public housing gutted; gentrification flooded the city; Charity Hospital (the nation’s second oldest public hospital) was shuttered and replaced with a university system hospital far more attuned to attracting donors than serving the city’s poorest; mental health facilities have been replaced by prisons, and these are only some of the most glaring examples.

Within the post-Katrina environment, where regaining tourism dollars was viewed as a first-order priority to many in the city, culture was often viewed purely in terms of economic capital. In a left-leaning Urban Institute report on rebuilding the city, researcher Maria-Rosario Jackson continually points to the need for integration between the tourism sector and arts leaders for both the advancement of arts groups and the cultural economy.⁴⁴⁶ Given the criticality of heritage practice and performance to how tourists view New Orleans, memory control becomes essential to maintaining capital. As performance scholar Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett writes “heritage is a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse in the past.”⁴⁴⁷ Thus to attract tourists (and their dollars), tourist-based businesses and the state actors representing them desire to strictly curate New Orleans’ past. The clearest way to do so is through memory.

This chapter explored three museums that present vying images of how Katrina effected or continues to impact the city of New Orleans. Each considers tourism differently. The Presbytère, an arm of the state, seeks to reiterate popular images of New Orleans that demonstrate the value

of visiting and spending time in the city. It presents the levee failures as a singular occurrence, terrible in their devastation but juxtaposed against a legacy of renewal and improvement. The Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum aims not only to inform local and tourist audiences of the ongoing ramifications of the storm, but to deliberately intervene in the “dark tourism” that has run rampant throughout the neighborhood. It complicates ideas of who has been allowed to recover, and what survival has looked like for the city outside of the major tourist hubs. Finally, the FHM seeks to preserve an understanding of the catastrophe of Katrina, and make audiences recognize the lasting impact the storm has had on the city. In instilling understandings of the devastation, the FHM serves as a memorial site, but one that is grounded in educating and activating audiences’ initiatives against government inaction in the face of looming catastrophe.

Establishing Time and Narrative

Within each site, narrative and time serve as crucial components. At the Presbytère, the firm delineation of a Katrina timeline that marks the catastrophe as something exclusively of the past, and complete in its scope, is essential to the museum’s structure. This approach allows the museum to carefully control how Katrina is understood and viewed, for, as Nora argues, historicization seeks to dominate memory and therefore seize control over popular understanding.⁴⁴⁸

Both the other sites naturally resist this approach of historicization. First because, as Andermann and De-Arnold write, “historiography’s ideals of disinterested objectivity, detachedness and clear distinction between past and present appear heartless, like a betrayal of the dead and especially of the victims of traumatic events. To relegate something completely to the realm of historical knowledge seems nothing short of shying away from our moral

responsibility.”⁴⁴⁹ The Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum demonstrates that the Lower Ninth is still alive and that the consequences of Katrina are also very much living with the population. It is impossible to enter the neighborhood and miss the vast absences that are present while witnessing remnants of the disaster all around. This, coupled with the museum’s content, explicitly details how the neighborhood is still in recovery, making it impossible to view the disaster’s timeline as complete. The Flooded House Museum likewise aims to complicate a conception of Katrina as finished. In opening the audience to the changing environment around the house, and in generating a keen sense of temporal disjunction to make participants engage with the ongoing trauma of the storm, the site demands that Katrina remain in living memory, and therefore break free of constricting views of history.

Haunting Through Place and Absence

Central to the success of each museum is its reliance on place. The Presbytère can reach large audiences of tourists through its prime location in the French Quarter. Further, the grandeur of its exterior facade and the sheer volume of the Katrina exhibit inside grant an authority to the museum that it leverages to generate a persuasive narrative of the storm. The wide array of artifacts represented helps deliver a sense of totality—that the museum has covered the storm in its fullness. This helps construct a sensation that the disaster might be fully understood or comprehended. This work runs contrary to the work of most museums focused on traumatic pasts. For instance, in her reading of the US Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., theatre scholar Vivian Patraka notes how the museum approaches the “unmanageability of history itself,” and that understanding this, “makes the Holocaust not just a fearful absence, but totally unmanageable in a cognitive sense. In doing so it points to the terrifying abyss, the horrific rupture, that is the history of the Holocaust.”⁴⁵⁰

In the Presbytère though, the accumulation of objects aims to reflect a synecdoche of the total experience—there is no desire to depict Katrina as a cognitively unmanageable.

The Living Museum leverages its strategic location to help foster the formation of memory for its audiences. The Living Museum's locale within the heart of the Lower Ninth Ward immediately shifts the audience's focus to the neighborhood and real neighbors who surround the museum. Further, by placing the museum in a small shotgun home, the audience is forced to reconcile the former purpose of the building with the current one. This asks audiences to imagine both the space itself, as well as how they would interact with it personally. The culminating effects of watching community members discuss their experience of the storm and the neighborhood, mixed with taking in the living remnants of the storm that surround it, allow for embodied memory formation that re-contextualize audience experiences of the storm. Similarly, the Flooded House Museum centers the body around a living neighborhood, but this time in direct connection to the levee that sits behind the home. By asking the audience to actively engage as though they were homeowners returning after the storm, the imaginative processing of the house's devastation helps generate a strong affective connection to the home itself, and the audience's personal understanding of Katrina.

The museums also all rely on sound, especially noise and silence, as a form of meaning making. While the Presbytère nearly always features loud soundscapes (forecasts, hurricane sounds, news reports, and stereotypical New Orleans music), the other museums feature profound silence. Once volunteers have greeted the audience at the Living Museum, the only other sound throughout comes from the video interviews of community members. The Flooded House Museum features no sound, and the audience is drawn to listening to whatever sounds exist in the surrounding neighborhood and nature.

The Living Museum's white room, which displays the video of the boat rescue from the rooftop, is marked by the absence of whatever previously occupied the space against the now barren setting. The lack of bodies within the home at the Flooded House Museum creates an odd sensation of seeing something private. In both cases, the absence forces the audience to either violate the privacy of the homeowners or imagine themselves as the homeowners. Absence speaks to the common feeling of desertion and loneliness that was so prominent in the wake of the storm. It also creates a particular imaginative drive to understand what is missing; to fill in the tangible gaps (whether these are sounds or objects). This mirrors theatre scholar Andrew Sofer's conception of theatrical dark matter in that it, "allows observers to look back in time and place."⁴⁵¹ By putting absence on display, these museums foreground what is still missing, what was lost, and they encourage audiences to complicate their conception of how the past continues into the present and future.

The Performative Museum

There is a long line of literature exploring the relationship between museum culture and theatricality, much of which has recently turned to the importance of experience and participation within museums.⁴⁵² The central power of the FHM lives in its location: this is critical not just for the historical significance of the levee breakage site, but because it sits next to a reconstructed and functioning levee within the living neighborhood of Gentilly. It is only three houses down the street from new construction projects that are readily recognizable as part of a slow and still ongoing recovery project. Simultaneously, it sits beside blighted homes that have remained untouched since 2005. The acute awareness of what has passed echoes into the material reality of the neighborhood as the audience walks towards the house. When the audience reaches the FHM

they are immediately confronted with what performance theorist Rebecca Schneider (building on a term from Elizabeth Freeman) refers to as a “mutually disruptive energy” as they are forced to reckon with how “neither [past nor present] are entirely ‘over’ or discrete, but partially and porously persist.”⁴⁵³ Likewise, the very nature of what makes the house remarkable—that it had been rebuilt and then artificially made to seem destroyed—impacts how we witness and understand the trauma of Katrina.

To the end of confronting the trauma of the storm, the experiential process the museum encourages follows a larger trend within museum culture itself. As Jens Andermann and Silke Arnold-de Simine argue, in matters of violence and trauma “the obligation to remember is taken to its literal extreme: visitors are asked to adopt memories in order to be able to respond emotionally to the past and museums take on the role of facilitators in that process by providing experientially oriented encounters with memory media and technologies.”⁴⁵⁴ Given the need for a more fully invested approach to the material, and the desired effect of imparting memories into the visitors to allow for a trace of the event to live beyond the traumatic past itself, the embodied, experiential process is logical. Tracy Davis argues museums seek to more directly engage the audience/actor through deliberate pathways and experience based knowledge when she writes that, “[museums] encourage an encounter with the ideology and its mise-en-scene... visitors are in part like the audience of a realist stage play deciding whether to be caught in the simulacrum of a depicted time and place, and in part like the spectators at a promenade performance where they are at liberty to move from staging post to staging post and direct their attention at will.”⁴⁵⁵ Rather than allowing those going to the museum to remain passive “visitors” or “audiences” they are instead encouraged through active processes (walking along the same path as those who lost their home, having to physically lean and peer through windows to experience the museum) to become

performers, or, to borrow Boal's term, "spect-actors."⁴⁵⁶

The way the FHM engages these disparate temporalities, on one hand paying respect to the lived past through memorialization and on the other gesturing towards the possible lost, destroyed, or actualized presents and futures is a strategic deployment. The FHM serves an educational function: seeking to inform those too young to have lived through the media coverage of Katrina as well as correcting inaccuracies instilled in many tourists' minds by early narratives of the storm. But its arrangement of audience experiences (centering the past first, making the audiences' first experience at the site an embodied experience followed by informing and finally releasing into the living surrounding world) helps generate a recognition of the catastrophic potential of government failure. This is particularly crucial to the engagement and awareness aims of Levees.org. Founder Rosenthal has remained committed not only to the goal of rectifying early narratives of Katrina, but on sending the clear message to those outside of New Orleans that the catastrophic government failure represented by the levee breaks can happen anywhere. The language Levees.org imparts throughout their sites, continually noting the government failure and coverups, demands the viewer's awareness of the possibility of catastrophic failure within their own lives.

By structuring the experience so that memorialization occurs first, and then education falls in secondarily, by the time the audience/actors are released back into a world they are immediately confronted with the imaginative temporalities that surround them. The site decidedly assists in narrative correction, but through its encouragement of understanding fostered through acts of re/living the past, the FHM demands the participants recognize the implications of mass government ineptitude and the long echoes that these failure represent. The museum functions as a process of activating engaged citizenry who will be alert to and, hopefully, challenge, their government so that the devastation that occurred in New Orleans is not seen elsewhere.

Embodiment and Memory Making

Each museum relies on embodied memory formation practices to achieve differing goals. The Presbytère deliberately distances the audience from experiences which may be upsetting or foster deeper understandings of the traumatic nature of the storm by putting moments like the attic on a stage, rather than in a more immersive environment. The most significant use of embodiment in the Presbytère is the interactive displays which undergird the museum's claims of improved levee security and better hurricane preparedness for the city. By insisting that the most powerful memory formation elements are explicitly tied to the part of the exhibit that focuses on the scientific efforts to prevent future storms, the museum is crafting a careful presentation of the safety of the city.

The Living Museum prioritizes experiences with actual bodies—volunteers from the neighborhood greet visitors and explain the museum's aims directly to them. Recorded oral histories prioritize seeing and hearing community members. This attenuation to displaying the body—a hallmark of demonstrating vulnerability as Butler shows—demonstrates a strong desire to humanize and bring residents into the fore of perceptions around New Orleans. The use of film footage at the Living Museum focuses audience attention to the humans trapped in the terror of nature. Whereas the Presbytère's film experience is absent of human bodies—instead attempting to provide a pale replica of a storm—the Living Museum's approach to film footage is far simpler, and far more effective, in generating empathy and engagement precisely because we are grounded in the human toil we watch. The Flooded House Museum forces audiences to experience the process of returning home from the storm, imaginatively undergoing the path of a family who has been displaced and returns to find their personal devastation. The acts of physically peering and

moving across windows to grasp the destruction utilize embodied practice to motivate audiences into deeper thinking and empathy for Katrina evacuees and survivors.

As time has passed, Katrina's role in the memory of the city continues to develop. Likewise, how differing groups within the city seek to remember Katrina varies depending on aim. Is Katrina firmly within the past? Does it shape New Orleans's entire present and future? As annual remembrances, and a host of small continually developing memorials and museums across the city demonstrate, Katrina still has a powerful hold on the consciousness of the city. And importantly, as the catastrophe moves further into the past, efforts to prevent a collective forgetting of the flood grow in their scope to demonstrate how this forgetting would mean erasing the still very real consequences.

The ability of performance to generate memory through embodied practice, spatial engagement, and temporal disjuncture, makes it a powerful tool for those seeking to engage audience understanding and action regarding traumatic pasts. As Katrina becomes further removed from us in time, narratives that seek to erase the long-lasting implications of the storm could easily become dominate. Through active resistance that complicates and corrects these simplistic renderings of the past, achieved through powerful embodied memory formation practices, it is possible for groups to remain within the public memory of the city as a means of survival.

Chapter 4 – “Anywhere I Go, There’s a Bit of Tipitina”

The scale of the project will transform the selected section of the town and will reinforce the notion of New Orleans as the most European of American cities and as the leading city of the Caribbean. – “Anticipated Outcomes” of the Katrina memorial from the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP)

Decatur Street, which runs only three short blocks south of Bourbon Street, is almost certainly as heavily trafficked, if less well known, than its more famous neighbor. The patch of road which runs from the Central Business District to the French Quarter (also known as the Vieux Carré) is full of shops, restaurants (including Café du Monde), and monuments. Positioned directly in front of Jackson Square, the street must be passed through to visit St. Louis Cathedral and the accompanying prominent government and religious buildings of the French Quarter, as well as several of the city’s other landmark buildings. Sitting on opposite ends of the stretch are two statues: Joan of Arc (gifted to the city by France in 1972) and Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville (the French colonizer credited with founding New Orleans whose statue was commissioned and built by locals in the 1950s). The two monuments serve to reify New Orleans’ connection to French culture and the Catholic Church. Joan of Arc is recognized as a Saint by the Church, and Bienville’s statue shows him standing next to a priest and above a native man projecting a message of Christian and colonial dominance. As exemplified by the above epigraph, the two monuments are strong reminders of one of the city’s most prominent and carefully coordinated narratives—that New Orleans is as close to Europe as you can get in the United States.

These artworks make a claim to both the city’s past and present. Both statues underscore the French ties to the city’s foundation and culture, but, when read against the Spanish architecture of the Quarter and the statue of Andrew Jackson (which commemorates his repudiation of British forces at the Battle of New Orleans), cumulatively argue for a romanticized vision of New Orleans as the nexus of American and European cultures. This vision runs parallel against an equally

meticulously constructed identity: that of New Orleans as a preserve of antebellum life and race relations. For over a century, any tourist wandering outside of the Vieux Carré to other popular sites such as City Park, Canal Street, or the museum hub of Lee Circle, would encounter myriad monuments to white supremacy. The four most prominent of these monuments were taken down by city officials in 2017, amidst violent protests and national media attention. Coupled with the erection of memorials to Hurricane Katrina and a new wave of statue removals in 2020, it has become apparent that the memoryscape formed by the city's memorials and monuments has been shifting since the 2005 storm. Increasingly, New Orleans leaders and civic groups are seeking to reconcile a romanticized version of the city with fervent opposition to the continued relegation of Black citizens—the primary culture makers within the city—to the outskirts.

From Shelley's depiction of the fallen Ramses II in his poem "Ozymandias," to the destruction of fascist monuments following the Second World War, or the tearing down of the ubiquitous Confederate and racist statues throughout the United States following the protests over the murder of George Floyd by police in 2020, artists, scholars, and the public have understood the powerful hold aggrandizing depictions have on public memory. Monuments and memorials function as clear political interventions into broader memoryscapes: the collection of landscapes and sites which, through continual acts of narration and human action (e.g.- preservation, usage, landscaping, etc.), have accumulated meanings in both public and private memory.⁴⁵⁷ There are clear, and confusing, overlaps in function between objects called monuments and those named memorials as both seek to publicly hold space for a person or event. I delineate between the two in terms of function in how they script interactions (following Elizabeth Son's reading of Robin Bernstein's scriptive things).⁴⁵⁸ Memorials invite a set of ritual practices that encourage mourning and remembrance, typically of an individual, group of people, or specific traumatic event.

Monuments, like memorials, claim space to remember a person or idea—typically aggrandizing this figure or concept—and rarely encourage ritual memorialization. For instance, while the Lincoln Memorial is auspiciously a memorial, my reading of the space, and especially the kinds of performances the space encourages (protests, assemblies, encampments, tourism, etc.) moves it into the realm of monument. Contrastingly, the Vietnam War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier are two D.C. spaces that encourage ritual interactions of mourning (prayer, laying of wreaths, scripted changing of guard ceremonies, etc.)—what I view as true memorials. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the scriptive encounters with a memorial or monument may vary based on the public attended and the historical and political moment that changes the backdrop to a space.

The cultural objects I focus on here call attention to the ongoing trauma of the 2005 flood and the lingering absences felt by local communities. This new memoryscape puts forward a powerful argument about who is erased by the tourist gaze the city often views itself through. It reflects changing values and power dynamics within New Orleans, as vying publics seek to project different futures and identities onto the place they live. In this, these artworks warn against complacency towards the real, ongoing, threats to survival that New Orleanians continue to face. Throughout this chapter, I rely on site visits to explore how these objects function. As I researched and encountered these memorial and monumental spaces from 2018-2021, I repeatedly visited the sites, spending hours at each location and recording (through field notes, photographs, and occasionally video) my experiences in the spaces. The field notes that run throughout the chapter reflect my first experiences with each location. In addition to the visitations and thick descriptions collected, I also conducted archival research into the memoryscape of New Orleans and the various art objects studied here (through public records and newspaper accounts). I interviewed artists who

helped to create these objects, and local leaders familiar with these spaces to understand both authorial intent and public reception and awareness. Finally, when possible, I would interact with others at these spaces and engage in conversation with them about the objects and their impressions.

I am intrigued by the melancholic effect these objects hold. As English scholars David Eng and David Kazanjian argue “the work of mourning is not possible without melancholia.”⁴⁵⁹ Eng and Kazanjian proffer that melancholia is a creative process explicitly tied to imaginatively processing what *might be* or *might have been*.⁴⁶⁰ These processes are particularly important at the community or societal level. For collective healing to begin, a recognition of what occurred, what was lost, and how this echoes into the present and beyond is necessary. Eng and Kazanjian unite Benjamin’s historical materialism with Freud’s conception of melancholia to argue that working through loss is a “creative process.”⁴⁶¹ Benjamin serves as a guiding voice throughout this dissertation (see introduction, and especially the preceding chapter), with his conception of digging into memory a key tool of thinking through how memory requires embodied engagement. Here I would add to this understanding of melancholia by arguing for the importance of Derrida’s conception of hauntology as a driving force for animating melancholia’s generative power. In this reading, monuments and memorials serve as reminders that time is “out of joint,” or in continual conversation with the histories and potential presents and futures that exist in a place simultaneously.⁴⁶² The new Katrina memorials and monuments that are quickly becoming a major facet of the New Orleans’s memoryscape utilize melancholia as a political tool. These sites help communities generatively process the losses experienced by the 2005 disaster, allowing for individual and collective mourning. But they also serve as political calls to action against the very real threats of environmental inaction and ever-present racism (particularly through the

marginalization and erasure of Black life and Black labor in New Orleans) endemic to the city.

I argue that the new memoryscape taking hold in post-Katrina New Orleans is a deliberate rejection of traditional narratives that disproportionately imagine the city as belonging exclusively to white tourists and citizens. This new memoryscape refocuses its intended audience from outside (majority white) tourists, and instead towards the interior of New Orleans: its residents, local communities, and neighborhoods. With this comes a deliberate shift seeking to recognize and elevate marginalized voices, in particular the Black residents of the city who have long been the city's majority in terms of demographics, but far less commonly recognized in public spaces than white figures. This broader shift is very much in-progress, but the growth of community focused and Black led artworks speak to a new awareness of the need for recognitional justice within New Orleans. Together, these sites collectively indicate major revisions of New Orleans' civic identity since 2005. As city leaders and social activists have sought to fundamentally change the way tourists and residents experience the memoryscape of the city, they have moved to challenge the Eurocentric historical narratives that erase or hide the (often painful) histories of marginalized communities within New Orleans. The city still seeks to perform an out-of-time utopic (traditionally built on markers from the Old South and labeled as antebellum, colonial, and/or Jazz Age charm) that allows tourists to map on their own readings and meanings of place.⁴⁶³ Increasingly, civic and community leaders are acknowledging the racist realities of the city's past that echoes into the fraught racial dynamics of the present city and offer new representations of who New Orleans belongs to (and, relatedly, who belongs in New Orleans).

This chapter serves as a cartography of the city's changing memoryscape, as performed by its evolving memorials and monuments—and the varying publics they are intended to reach. As New Orleans scholarship demonstrates, appealing to the tourist gaze has held an outsized role

within the city for the last century.⁴⁶⁴ Organizations like the Vieux Carré commission, which steadfastly monitors and controls any changes to buildings in the French Quarter, demonstrate the fierce resolve by which city officials and leaders seek to preserve highly curated depictions of New Orleans. Because of the power these sites hold, functioning essentially as carefully crafted *lieux de memoir*, they grant powerful meanings to the spaces they occupy and create charged sets for actors to utilize in campaigns for social and political change. Tourism scholar Athinodoros Chronis argues that monuments are critical for the staging of tourist imaginaries, serving as the material artefacts that give tangibility to narratives that make sense of place.⁴⁶⁵ But they perform meaning for those visiting a place as well as those inhabiting it. Read collectively, the monumental memoryscape performs a narrative of what New Orleans is and who New Orleanians are.

The memorials I focus on in this chapter act as a counter-map to the more prominent statues and monuments that have historically dominated the city's memoryscape. They are either derived by or commissioned through local communities and artists. Their foremost aim is to express local views of the storm. Though their intentions differ in how they maintain an awareness of Katrina (and the publics they serve), they share commonalities in their mobilization of grief as a tool for recognizing the lingering effects of the storm and impose a clear warning to the city not merely to "never forget" but to recognize the impending threat inaction represents to their lives. In this, they refocus the memoryscape of the city away from monuments that project outwardly to tourists and instead work to reclaim public space for locals: in effect, arguing that those who live within the city itself deserve a memoryscape that reflects their lived existence, especially given the increased awareness of the precarity incumbent in that existence.

I begin with a non-exhaustive overview of historic monuments in the city that existed pre-Katrina to establish a narrative of the pre-2005 memoryscape, as well as to demonstrate how

monuments in the city have long served as contestable sites regarding civic identity. Then I detail a series of Katrina memorials that emerged in the aftermath of the storm and show how they work to create new spaces for understanding the storm in the memory of both the city's residents, but also for those who visit. Finally, I nod to the continual evolution of the city's memoryscape, as evidenced by efforts like the Paper Monuments project that followed the removal of four racist monuments in 2017 and sought to reclaim New Orleans history by challenging longstanding narratives of its past. In the tearing down of the monuments, and the responses to their removal, we can see how spaces hold power for forging identities, and that the city's ongoing efforts to address the racism and devastation since Katrina are rapidly leading to an entirely new understanding of what it means to live in New Orleans and be a New Orleanian.

Tourism and the Imaginary City

New Orleans has long relied on tourism as a major economic driver. While it is difficult to map the exact economic impact of the tourism sector, conservative estimates would indicate that over ten percent of the city's jobs are wholly or substantially tied to tourism.⁴⁶⁶ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a tremendous boom in tourism that followed the early years of Katrina recovery. In particular, the 2010s saw a rapid growth in the annual number of tourists, with 2018 bringing in a record 18.5 million visitors and \$9 billion in tourist spending—over 11 percent of the city's annual GDP.⁴⁶⁷ Since the decline of the oil industry in the city during the 1980s, successive mayoral regimes have focused on tourism as a key, if not chief, site of investment for the economic durability of New Orleans.⁴⁶⁸

Tourism, however, has been a shaping force for the city long before recent decades. Historian Anthony J. Stanonis demonstrates how New Orleans' began to rely on tourism as a major economic force in the interwar period when civic leaders sought to capitalize on new automotive

travelers. Stanonis compelling demonstrates how this period set the stage for much of the contemporary global imagination of New Orleans.⁴⁶⁹ Indeed, over the last century the city has established a wide range of laws, social systems, and economic rewards that preserve a specific idea of “the Big Easy” as a relic of itself, as well as an American city distinct from all others. These policies have been critiqued for both leading to a “Disneyfication” of the city, and, more troublingly, a direct tie to an explicitly white supremacist view of the past that both spiritually harms and economically exploits minority residents. The oft heard refrain that the city is “the most European in the Caribbean and the most Caribbean in the US” points to New Orleans as an almost impossibly large heterotopia: Foucault’s conception of a mirrored spaces that serve as “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted.”⁴⁷⁰ Anthropologist Shannon Lee Dawdy builds on this concept to label the city as a “chronotopia,” demonstrating how the deliberately curated patina of the city (prevalent both in much of its architecture but also in many ordinary objects) works to help disturb understandings of temporality within New Orleans. Dawdy argues that from the earliest years of US possession, New Orleans sought to present itself as “other” as to allow tourists to take a step into another time.⁴⁷¹

New Orleans utilizes myriad ways to maintain clear linkages to bygone eras and histories. Among others, there are: strict regulations concerning repairs, maintenance, and color palette for homes in the historic French Quarter; highlighting of connections to colonial (especially French) rule, such as the statues of Joan of Arc and Bienville; the preservation and display of “stately homes” throughout the city; city-supported cultural initiatives that deliberately reinforce favorable, romanticized literary and artistic depictions of the city; and sharp increases in the licensing and fees for traditional performance practices such as jazz funerals and second lines leading to their

increased commercialization and ubiquitous appearances in the tourist heavy French Quarter.

The city government and tourism boards have worked diligently to preserve a specific image of New Orleans that not only appeal to tourists but propagates a romanticized, often totally fictional, version of the city tourists recognize from popular media. In choosing *where* to preserve (overwhelmingly the French Quarter and wealthy Garden District are subject to the most regulation) the city has also selected the areas that are excluded from tourism and its accompanying tourist dollars. It is no coincidence that the majority Black neighborhoods of the city, such as New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward, have historically received little support from the city but faced many targeted regulations that force Black residents to work (typically in low-wage service positions) within the tourist centers of the city.⁴⁷²

The gross disparities revealed by Katrina served as a powerful impetus in calling for public redress regarding the treatment of Black cultural makers within the city. Perceptions of New Orleans are intrinsically tied to Blackness. Most prominently in the forms of music (certainly jazz, but also in New Orleans bounce, and blues and R&B) and food, these hallmarks of the city's identity are firmly built on the accomplishments, histories, and underpaid or unpaid labor of Black people in the city—a trend that has only deepened since 2005.⁴⁷³ Lynell Thomas articulates how, in the late part of the twentieth century, the city found ways to capitalize on Black culture while reifying whiteness:

“Tourists were encouraged to think that they were experiencing and celebrating black culture by eating Creole cuisine, dancing to local music, participating in the traditional ‘second line’ street parade, attending jazz funerals, and listening to anecdotes of quadroon balls and secret voodoo rites. At the same time, however, tourists were directed to adopt the white supremacist memory of slavery and black culture that views the old South with a sense of loss of and nostalgia by touring plantations, lodging and dining in repurposed slave dwellings, purchasing slaver memorabilia, and being pampered by black-service workers.”⁴⁷⁴

By leveraging the labor, history, culture, and knowledge of Black citizens in the city to build the tourism industry, New Orleans perpetuated a modern “plantation economy” that celebrated a

lexicon of white nostalgia from popular memory, and simultaneously relegated Blackness to the realm of servitude. In so doing, the tourism economy—intrinsically tied to the role of popular memory—worked to promote a white image of the city through the preservation and glorification of white emblems: grand homes, sites of white historical prominence, and, most notably, monuments.

Given this landscape, monuments have become a particularly potent site for contesting the history and identity of the city. During the monument teardown controversy in 2017, local artist Phlegm began manufacturing and selling shirts which read, “EVERYTHING YOU LOVE ABOUT NEW ORLEANS IS BECAUSE OF BLACK PEOPLE.”⁴⁷⁵ The shirt inspired a wave of social media interest and became a common sight during the 2020 protests following the police killing of George Floyd. The sentiment well encapsulates the growing demands of recognition, support, and acceptance of Black New Orleanians that extends beyond laborers providing food and entertainment, but instead seek genuine equity within the city.

Pre-Katrina Landscape

Monuments and memorials perform a variety of roles within the dramas of the day. Through claiming public space, these objects establish who belongs and what narratives are representative within the public realm. Monuments serve as useful backdrops for social and political action through protests, gatherings, and even violence. They also typically occupy sites of public prominence and lend themselves to visually demonstrating the strength of gatherings. For instance, when new monuments were unveiled in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in New Orleans, local papers reported that at every occasion there were great processions and, to demonstrate public good will over the new object, referred to the number of attendees present

for the unveiling (typically claiming a number higher than any that before seen in the nation).⁴⁷⁶ While the ever increasing grandeur of statue unveiling events is likely a hyperbolic exaggeration by the papers, it does reinforce the importance of ceremony in placing new statues in public realms, and the necessity of citizen participation in unveilings for the new object to be viewed as a genuine expression of the people's will.

Monuments' dominance over the streets on which they sit is equally important when using them as settings for calls to action. Sometimes a monument functions as a "scriptive thing," to use performance theorist's Robin Bernstein's term for an object that invites a common set of interactions that have been "scripted" through common cultural awareness.⁴⁷⁷ Elizabeth W. Son adds to this understanding by arguing that memorials move beyond individual scripted actions and instead invite collective engagement as publics encounter them.⁴⁷⁸ Memorials, for instance, typically invite ritualized acts of mourning (such as pray, the laying of a wreath or token, and inviting quiet to a space). Monuments commonly function as theatrical sets, where they are performed upon or have their meanings changed given the context of the performance happening at, on, or by them. Over time, this use of monuments as sets may develop enough community knowledge that these sites function, for local audiences, as scriptive locales. For instance, during a white supremacist uprising against the Republican governor during the Reconstruction era known as the Battle of Liberty Place, the insurrectionists assembled and gave speeches to launch the rebellion under the statue of Henry Clay before launching a rebellion that would force the governor out of the city.⁴⁷⁹ Later, Clay's statue would also serve as the site for gathering a lynching party for some eleven Italian-American men who had been imprisoned on charges of murdering the popular police chief David Hennessy.⁴⁸⁰ The central location of the statue meant it was commonly understood that illicit or illegal actions—especially those that were extrajudicial but

viewed as legitimate by the actors—came to be based around the Clay statue. Similarly, the Liberty Place Monument, which was erected to commemorate the aforementioned battle, would likewise serve as a popular place of assembly for protestors and rioters for decades after its erection.⁴⁸¹ This underscores the role that monuments play as loci for change fostering both revolutionary and rebellious energies.

Among the oldest monuments in the city are those of Andrew Jackson (erected in 1856) and Henry Clay (1859)—and the two represent an early example of the roll that monuments hold in public life: who is commemorated and how speaks powerfully to how a place envisions itself and seeks to project itself to the wider world. These two well represent early battles of identity and power within the city. Over the nineteenth century, New Orleans had changed from a predominantly Francophonic Creole culture and political base, to an increasingly Anglophonic American one.⁴⁸² The tensions had grown so unpalatable that in 1836 the city was split into three separate municipalities: two of these were an alliance of French Creoles and other Catholic minority residents, and the third was predominantly English speaking, Protestant Americans. This tripartite system grew financially untenable, and the state legislature ultimately consolidated the city once more in 1852—solidifying American control over the city.⁴⁸³

The statue of Andrew Jackson in front of St. Louis Cathedral was erected four years after the fall of the tripartite system and can be read as a deliberate move by Americans in the city to assert their dominance. Jackson was popular with American residents of New Orleans for his victory at the Battle of New Orleans, however, he was loathed by the Creole minority.⁴⁸⁴ During the battle, Jackson became convinced of French treachery and ordered all French nationals to vacate the city. A series of tumultuous imprisonments and legal challenges were ultimately stopped by news of the Treaty of Ghent reaching the city and the war ending. Despite this, Jackson's anti-

French actions had permanently damaged his reputation within French communities of the city and state.⁴⁸⁵ Henry Clay, the leader of the Whig Party, however, was strongly favored by the Creole minority of the city. It was then an unsurprising choice to mount a new monument to Clay in 1860 on the major thoroughfare of Canal Street (the monument was later relocated to Lafayette Square where it remains to the present).⁴⁸⁶ Canal had functioned as the dividing line between the former American and French municipalities and began the street's longtime status as an avenue for holding monuments and memorials to significant events and persons that continues to the present. Whereas Jackson's twelve-foot-tall statue was widely regarded as a masterpiece of American statue-making—the first of its size and kind manufactured in the U.S.—the twelve-and-a-half-foot tall statue of Clay was imported from France.⁴⁸⁷

The dueling statues of Clay and Jackson help demonstrate the ways that groups use monuments as proxies for control over space and memory, but these two also demonstrate how meanings change over time. Both the Jackson and Clay monuments today cause controversy given the politics and actions of the two men. Take Em' Down NOLA, an activist group that has worked diligently, and with great success, since the mid-2010s to remove white supremacist monuments labels Jackson, “[a] Slaveowner, [and] perpetrator of genocide against Indigenous peoples,” and Clay, “[a] Slaveowner, [the] President of American Colonization Society, [and a] defender of slavery in Congress.”⁴⁸⁸ Undoubtedly, given the state of tension throughout the country and the media coverage in 1859 promoting the “Great Compromiser” narrative of Clay's legacy, a major factor in the statue's construction was as a message of unity through the maintenance of existing slave policy.⁴⁸⁹ However, the erection of the Clay monument was also undeniably tied to ongoing tensions within New Orleans between Creoles and Americans. This element of the rival statues though has long since faded from public memory, giving way to new meanings and understandings

of their roles in society. As efforts to historize and often remove or replace statues remain controversial, it is important to recognize that the meanings and cultural understandings of monuments shift over time. While these objects may be etched in stone, the ways they are culturally understood are not.

The Jackson and Clay monuments represent the first wave of monument construction in New Orleans. This was followed by a sharp increase after the Civil War: between 1875-1900 a spate of war memorials went up—the overwhelming majority of which were tied to the Civil War. Many stood in the city’s large public cemeteries; however, a number were placed in central locations throughout New Orleans’ parks and byways. A complete history of public monuments undertaken by *The Times-Picayune* in 1925 and 1926 lists twenty-two statues and memorials. Of them, only one was of a woman (Margaret Gauffrey Haughrey, a much beloved local philanthropist) and none were of non-white people.⁴⁹⁰ This would remain largely unchanged for decades.

Starting in the 1950s local jazz club members began arguing for a need for public monuments dedicated to the city’s most famous musical form, with many supporting the idea of a statue to the New Orleans’ best-known performer, Louis Armstrong. Since in the 1930s, groups of developers and local leaders vested in the city’s tourism industry had been systematically tearing down structures from the area formerly known as Storyville. Storyville was famous for its connection to jazz, but its *raison d’être* was its position as one of most prominent red-light districts in US history—despite only offering legal brothels from 1897-1917. “The District,” as it was colloquially known, had changed tremendously since it was forcibly dismantled during the First World War (due to military regulations about the legally required distance between troop bases and brothels).

Following the teardown of a large number of historic buildings associated with the Storyville neighborhood, the New Orleans Jazz Club, an organization formed in 1948 dedicated to archiving the history of jazz and preserving what it considered “original jazz,” began campaigning for a series of statues to local jazz greats to be placed throughout the district.⁴⁹¹ In particular, they argued for a statue of Louis Armstrong to go on Canal and Basin street—again highlighting the centrality of Canal for depicting significant figures from the city. The local groups and business leaders who had spearheaded the demolition of Storyville were diametrically opposed to the idea, realizing that a monument to Armstrong would underscore the area’s connections to Storyville and, in their view, link its image to jazz, sex, and blackness. Ultimately, the Jazz Club was unsuccessful at winning public or developers’ support for the construction of jazz statues. Instead, a statue of Simon Bolivar was installed as an attempt to woo business and tourism from growing trade relations with South America.⁴⁹² The choice to erect the Bolívar statue rather than something that would commemorate Armstrong or Jazz serves as a key example of how deliberate the crafting of the memoryscape of the city has always been. Between the 1930s and 1950s most of Storyville was deconstructed and even the old street names were deliberately replaced to mask connections between the image of New Orleans and (Black) jazz musicians and sex workers.⁴⁹³ The motivation behind this was to push a new tourism narrative—one that rejected the legacy of Storyville and a “seedy” New Orleans and instead framed the city as a major player on a global scale.

During the 1960s two major changes developed that began to shift in the New Orleans memoryscape: first was the increased political power of the city’s Black citizenry, and second was an acceptance of jazz as a major selling point for the city’s tourism aims. Organizations such as Preservation Hall, a performance venue and jazz orchestra formed in 1961, began working to “preserve” or “maintain” authentic New Orleans jazz. The preservation of jazz shifted the notion

of the artform into a vestige of the past, making jazz palatable to the tourist imaginary of New Orleans by linking the artform to an out of time quality within the city. The fact that Preservation Hall (arguably the leading institution in the city to the present day to hear “traditional jazz”) was founded by Allan and Sandra Jaffe, two white, Jewish tourists visiting on their honeymoon from Pennsylvania, underscores the interconnected nature of tourism and romantic idealization of the city’s cultural forms.⁴⁹⁴ This approach to preservation and maintenance of sound is one of many elements utilized to form the chronotopia of New Orleans: a trip to Preservation Hall allows tourists to hear pre-1950s style Jazz in a club from the 1960s seated in a Colonial era building. The emergence of Preservation Hall also highlights the ways in which white approval or endorsement was often necessary to mark Black cultural forms as valuable. Efforts like Preservation Hall and the formation of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band worked to glorify jazz greats—most notably those individuals who were deemed acceptable to local figures interested in bolstering the tourism economy. Simultaneously, Mayor Maurice “Moon” Landrieu (the last white mayor of New Orleans until his son took the office after Katrina in 2010) sought Black voters to maintain his political position and worked to popularize himself with Black residents. Thus, in 1970 when many jazz musicians and enthusiasts began calling for the city to build a statue of Louis Armstrong, Landrieu recognized the value of the idea and quickly offered his support.⁴⁹⁵ Following Armstrong’s death in 1971, the proposal gained further popularity, and in 1976 the statue was unveiled in Jackson Square.

The statue of Armstrong was always intended to adorn Armstrong Park, a public greenspace that tells a useful story of how statues and monuments may serve to obfuscate the history of the land on which they rest. The park had been erected over a large housing project in the Tremé neighborhood (which included the historic Congo Square) in the 1960s. Armstrong

Park's construction meant the eviction of hundreds of local Black residents for the construction of a civic space that featured a disproportionate number of events popular for white audiences (early Jazzfests, among other events, took place in the park before the festival moved to the larger Fairgrounds in the Mid-City neighborhood).⁴⁹⁶ Armstrong Park also holds the Mahalia Jackson Theatre of Performing Arts, a 1973 performance space named for the esteemed gospel singer. The Mahalia Jackson houses the New Orleans Opera and generally hosts touring performances that are far outside the economic realm of possibility for the historically Black Tremé neighborhood residents. Following the erection of the Armstrong statue, the park would eventually come to house the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, although this would face continual controversy as members of the neighborhood sought input on the figures included and their depiction, and local critics (notably from outside of Tremé) complained of overemphasizing the importance of Black musicians to the development of the artform.⁴⁹⁷ Despite the layered meanings and problems built into Armstrong Park and the Jazz Park, prior to Katrina the area was still the only place in New Orleans where any monuments to Black New Orleanians could be found.

Making Sense of Catastrophe and Mourning

The convention of naming hurricanes only began in 1953. Prior to this, storms were referred to by the location they made landfall and the year, such as the infamous Galveston Hurricane of 1900. The naming change has, in many ways, changed our interaction with Hurricanes. They are often referred to as having personalities, and names that seem particularly fearsome are often accompanied by superstitious concerns regarding their severity. This is perhaps best shown through the example of Hurricane Ivan, whom many at the time remarked would be devastating solely based on its name. When the storm made landfall and then returned to the ocean

only to circle around and hit the US coast a second time—a phenomenon overzealous meteorologists were quick to label the “ghost of Ivan”—it was a confirmation for many that Hurricanes should not have names that summon up monikers like “the terrible.” Storms rarely inspire permanent markers, monuments, or memorials. Indeed, the Galveston Hurricane inspired a sole commemorative statue that went missing in 1919 (a new one was eventually constructed in 2000, although the original has never been found).⁴⁹⁸ Despite a lacking presence of memorial objects for hurricanes in public spaces, powerful storms have lived on long past their existences in oral tradition. Growing up I had no memory or embodied interaction with the legacies of Hurricanes Betsy or Andrew—yet I knew their names. Katrina stands apart from these older storms. Not only are there memorials to Katrina victims, but there are also memorials that speak to the condition of the city and the remarkable change New Orleans incurred following the disaster. These memorials are numerous, and utilize public spaces to create psychic holds, often strategically using memory and history to call for understanding and improvement.

The memorials I examine here are an incomplete list of the various monuments and public artworks that have emerged in the years since 2005. They represent both pieces that arose in the earliest days after the storm, and later pieces that demonstrate the ongoing psychic hold of the storm in New Orleanian memory. Part of my curation of these examples is that they share a public nature: while some are explicitly intended for local audiences and others are geared more to an outsider’s gaze, all occupy spaces where they are (deliberately) easily discoverable. They are monuments that could readily be stumbled upon by residents or tourists (although more likely locals). There are other impressive monuments to the storm in the Greater New Orleans area, some that speak directly to the environmental aspect of the storm and rely on nature to create powerful statements about the condition of storms and loss. These include the Katrina memorial at the

University of New Orleans (a small stone and metal monolith which stands in front of four wind-damaged trees that have grown lopsided ever since Katrina—a stunning natural memorial demonstrating the power of a Hurricane) and the St. Bernard Parish memorial (a metal cross overlooking the river that rose to flood the entire parish with devastatingly high water and sits behind a plaque of names of those who died). While these sites are powerful—indeed, the UNO Memorial is the one that had the greatest personal impacts while visiting—their locations make them difficult to find or stumble upon for either locals or tourists. These sites largely require pre-existing knowledge of their existence to find, and for this reason they are not included in my analysis.

Together, the following case studies form a cartography of Katrina memorialization in the city. These sites demonstrate the shifting ways artists engage with the storm and how they want audiences to consider Katrina. In this spirit of mapping, I guide the reader to each location both noting how one travels to the memorial as well as including an excerpt from my field notes from each site. In this, I follow dance scholar SanSan Kwan's call to kinesthesia as methodology as she notes that "space is determined, in part, by the objects, including bodies, that are composed within it, and time is measured, in part, by its movement forward."⁴⁹⁹ Monuments require embodied engagement—it is how they shape the spaces in which they live and physically intervene into public discourse. I argue that monuments and memorials perform and encourage performances. They perform by creating audiences and enabling scripted engagements, and they encourage performances by serving as sites for embodied interaction and settings for performances around them. Performances may serve the monument builders' intentions or run against them. I turn to cartography to show how, as cultural theorist Katherine McKittrick notes "we produce space, we produce its meanings, and we work very hard to make geography what it is."⁵⁰⁰ Thus this

cartography seeks to recognize the role of embodied experience in public memorial spaces, and to underscore the political dimension entailed in traveling to these sites. There is a fundamental difference between a memorial that sits a block from a local school (whether good or bad the memorial exists in a quotidian capacity for those nearby) and one that rests in the middle of a sidewalk on a heavily trafficked street. While tourists may (and sometimes do) seek out any of the structures I attend to, they are largely located in areas where local audiences are most likely to encounter them. Some require a degree of local knowledge (or willingness to investigate) that makes them unlikely to resonate or be understood by brief passersby.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Monument, Lower Ninth Ward

Driving East along North Claiborne Avenue, a central thoroughfare that stretches from just north of the French Quarter and through several other traditionally Black parts of town, it takes roughly twenty minutes to get from Tremé (arguably the most famous Black neighborhood and unquestionably the spiritual heart of Black life in the city) to the Lower Ninth Ward—the neighborhood that became most synonymous with Katrina’s devastation. To reach the Lower Nine (the vernacular name for the neighborhood), you must cross the Claiborne Avenue Bridge. The first thing any visitor will encounter upon crossing the bridge is a small red wooden structure—what appears to be the scaffolding of a half-constructed house—surrounded by a series of blue poles: the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Monument of New Orleans.

As with other Katrina memorials in the city, I argue the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Monument serves the function of recognizing and maintaining an awareness of public grief. Archeologist Benjamin Morris notes that, in the aftermath of Katrina, countless small, hastily constructed memorials materialized throughout the city and Gulf Coast at large (which he terms

“minuments”).⁵⁰¹ While the purpose of Katrina monuments and memorials may have originally served to recognize the losses suffered, and thus help grieving publics process their pain, today their presence forms a different ambition. The affective aim of these tributes has less to do with a processing of trauma than a recognition that, for many, the damage of Katrina hasn't ended or been remedied.⁵⁰² The desire to keep Katrina within the public eye is a turn towards mobilizing melancholia into a political force that demands recognition of injustice. The tangibility of memorial spaces insists on the presence of remains: both the remnants of the memorialized event as well as the presence of those who remain alive. Memorials reveal how loss is understood through what remains and “how these remains are produced, read, and sustained.”⁵⁰³ These memorials are often tied to powerfully charged places of memory or, in the case of the Katrina Memorial, are the keepers of bodily remains which serve as a physical bridge to events of the flood.

The main structure of the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Monument is the wooden scaffolding that clearly forms the foundation and walls of a house. This structure serves as the centerpiece of a memorial park (consisting of the monument, a large flagpole, and some greenspace) built by the New York firm Stull and Lee Architects. Neighborhood leaders deliberately reached out to Stull and Lee to hire an African American firm for the project. The architects donated their time and created the memorial over a month-long process in development with local community members.⁵⁰⁴ The project, spurred on by community leaders in the Lower Ninth Ward, was completed for \$7,500 a year after the storm. Although a modest sum, it was an impressive feat for the overwhelmingly Black (roughly 97%) neighborhood which had historically been one of the poorest areas in New Orleans and was arguably the community hardest hit by Katrina.⁵⁰⁵

The memorial features multiple parts: eleven blue pillars representing water levels of

flooding, a concrete slab supporting the red wooden scaffolding, and five brick lines representing bridges over the floodwaters. A marker notes that the memorial is “in grateful recognition to the legacy of courage and love, this monument is dedicated to the victims and survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.” Behind the red scaffolding, which is clearly meant to evoke the walls of one of the shotgun-style homes endemic to the area, is a series of concrete polls, the tallest of which appears to be roughly twelve feet tall, painted blue. The ten poles stand for the ten feet of water that flooded the area. Originally the memorial featured seven red chairs that sat in front of the “house.” Morris argues that the structure can be read multiple ways, noting that, “it is either half-demolished, in the aftermath of the storm, or it is half-rebuilt, in the rebuilding phase.”⁵⁰⁶ However, while the unfinished nature of the monument gives it an incompleteness, it is not that of a destroyed building. The lines of the scaffolding are clean and neat, perfectly held together. This is not a structure that has been hit by a wall of water or a tree, nor has wind ripped it apart. Rather, it is either a half-constructed building, or one which has been carefully, deliberately, deconstructed by human hands, disassembling the building to replace the (flooded) siding and affix it to the still standing foundations. In either case, the memorial expresses a structure in the process of rebuilding or under construction.

Time has changed the meaning of this monument though. Morris describes his experience with the 2007 monument as a mixture of hope and uncertainty:

“Once New Orleans is ‘rebuilt’, then this sculpture will no longer serve as an allegory for a half-empty city. Rather, it will serve the ‘proper’ function of a memorial, it will look backwards in time, potentially ignoring or disregarding its present context(s)... but in its current execution, unfortunately, the expression of hope, resilience and a promise of a renewed city gets lost along the way. As anyone who has visited the site will attest, it is difficult to look directly *at* the house: one is much more likely to look *through* it, and see the wasteland surrounding it on all sides.”⁵⁰⁷

Morris’s description is precisely right in how Katrina memorials rely on space to complicate temporalities: the juxtaposition of present, past, and future are made manifest in sites that reveal

their current state, past destruction, and hopeful future recovery. Returning to Morris' experience is also valuable in showing how expectations have changed in the time since his visit: his experience of looking "*through*" the memorial remains true, and, unfortunately, as the memorial has decayed the site's meaning has somewhat inverted. Rather than memorializing an event that occurred, the memorial now serves as a haunting reminder of a dream deferred. Today the monument carries far more sorrow than when it was originally constructed. The Lower Nine remains the least rebuilt and repopulated area of New Orleans, with poverty and environmental danger at their most acute in the area. Morris' observation of looking through the monument and seeing vast emptiness and neglect remains true some fifteen years after the storm (see Chapter 3 for more description of the state of the ward). But the monument has aged in the time since its construction. The two chairs on the front "stoop" of the "house" have vanished, whether from theft or weathering is unknowable. Either way, the painful metaphor is unmistakable: the objects most intended to represent the neighborhood quality of the area—the aspects meant to indicate how neighbors sit and talk, gathering in front of their homes—have literally vanished. Staring at the sea of empty foundation plots that mark the vacant lots of those who lost friends, family, houses, and life savings to the disaster, the absence of porches and friendly neighborhood conversations is manifested both in life and art.



Figure 16. The Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Memorial in full. Note the collapsed wall behind the structure, the blue pillars at right, and the missing beams (and partially visible collapsed beam) directly behind the front concrete slab. Photo by the author.

What is most remarkable about the memorial now though is how years of neglect have allowed it to fall into disrepair, unintentionally bringing it closer than ever to a direct depiction of the immediate after-storm. Several design elements originally incorporated into the memorial have now faded or been purposefully removed from it. Most notable, the seven wooden chairs (six red and one black) originally stationed around the “house” are missing. The red chairs were meant to mirror the house frame and serve as a symbolic space for those rebuilding. The black chair represented those who were lost to the storm—in the architect’s words “chairs of the family and the one who was lost.”⁵⁰⁸ When completed, the designers included brick pathways that were discernable from the pavement, along which were inscribed quotes from local community members about the recovery. These have, overtime, disappeared. In the original plans, the various

components of the memorial were meant to represent the themes of “renewed, remaining, remember, recovery, and told.”⁵⁰⁹ Today, through a combination of weathering, wear and tear, and lack of investment, the pavers have grown discolored and illegible, the house frame is collapsing, and the chairs are missing. Of the themes, only the “remaining” portion (the concrete foundation slab) remains as it was when the memorial was constructed. By all accounts from the architects and local leaders, the intention of the memorial was to recognize the loss felt and valorize the recovery to come. Instead, the site has deteriorated to more resemble the destruction first witnessed in the early aftermath of the storm.⁵¹⁰

When I visited the site in March of 2020 an entire wall had fallen off the monument. Multiple “foundation beams” had cracked in two, leaving three-inch nails dangerously exposed across the structure. A glass window affixed to the collapsed wall was shattered, leaving large pieces of glass sitting on the ground. When I first walked around the monument, having no prior knowledge about it at that time, I assumed the destruction was by design. It took walking around the structure, touching it and spending time with it, to recognize the danger represented by the real shattered glass and exposed nails. I had first thought these elements might have been designed to appear unsafe rather than be actual hazards, however after walking over a piece of glass I realized this was wrong. It took time, and real engagement studying the collapsing structure, to understand the memorial was not designed to appear as I was seeing it. While engaging with the monument though, I was painfully confronted with my own memories of Katrina: of my storm-damaged home, of helping to rebuild strangers’ houses, and of the endless images of gutted and demolished structures that were ubiquitous from that period. The nature of the materials, the familiar appearance of the frame and the shotgun style home it evokes, brought back powerful memories from my own experiences. It also left me questioning what the experience would be to live adjacent

to this marker when so many homes never returned or were rebuilt—to live in a place still in recovery, still feeling forgotten so long after the disaster.

There is a clear perversity of meaning between the intention of the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Monument and the experienced effect. Indeed, the memorial site itself is, painfully, difficult to discriminate from the surrounding landscape. While the devastation of 2005 has overwhelmingly been cleared from the neighborhood, it is impossible to miss the continual presence of absence and loss that mars the Lower Nine, and the ongoing poverty and lack of investment mean that dilapidated and storm damaged structures still reside in the area. Further, the monument underscores the ongoing sense of neglect and abandonment felt by many in the neighborhood as it remains, by far, the least repopulated in the city.⁵¹¹

What happens when an aspirational monument instead becomes merely another ruin in a decimated landscape? If this monument was constructed to serve as a sign of what was to come—the rebuilding of the Lower Nine—then it would move from a symbol of hope to one of remembrance once the area had “returned to normal.” However, the area never experienced reinvestment or repopulation. Today the neighborhood is a food desert and the first pharmacy to come to the Lower Nine was shuttered within two years of opening.⁵¹² If a memorial exists to maintain the memory of something within the public sphere, to prevent the forgetting of an event or loss, then what role can that memorial hold in a place that is sensorially overwhelmed by the ongoing consequences of that very event? When the loss remains, palpably, in the daily experience of a place, what function of memory can a memorial accomplish? It seems impossible that this structure gives any hope to locals, or that they can imagine it as a source of healing, when they it juxtaposed against the backdrop of a still unrecovered environment. Indeed, it is unsurprising that the monument has been left to erode—why preserve an object that seeks to maintain an already

omnipresent memory?

If the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Monument fails to serve as a means of healing the neighborhood's grief, then it is hard to view it (at least in the present) as an object of mourning. Rather, I suggest the monument functions as one of Freudian melancholia. If the work of mourning is the processing of loss, acceptance of it, and eventual recognition of a new state of being, then that of melancholia is the continual fixation on the lost-object/way of being—it is the failure to accept that which has been lost.⁵¹³ I do not here mean to suggest that the Lower Ninth Ward (or any of its inhabitants) exists in a perpetual state of melancholia, nor do I intend to give credence to Freud's view as individual psychological diagnosis. What I instead offer is that the memorial has, quite unintendedly, functioned as an object that prevents those around it not only from forgetting, but from processing. Given the still present nature of the devastation, the memorial fails as an object inspiring imagination and therefore fails to serve as an object that encourages a working through of loss and a healthy transition to mourning.⁵¹⁴ Because the monument was built to resonate in a future that has not manifested, it becomes a kind of strange melancholic object that continually pulls those encountering it into the past. The monument creates a hauntological presence that forces the audience to reconcile the layered temporalities summoned through the memorial. The memorial itself exists in the present, but it simultaneously pushes audiences to reflect on the past (a normal function of memorials) as well as both the real present and the imagined one the creators had anticipated (a less common occurrence). The blatant disregard for upkeep of the memorial prompts viewers to reflect on its sad state, and, significantly, the ongoing lack of recovery the Lower Ninth Ward has experienced. This reflection forces audiences to acknowledge what the neighborhood had imagined its recovery would be (a return to normalcy, with an ambitious recovery and improvement plan featuring new community-oriented greenspaces

and parks like the memorial) with what the recovery has been (limited to non-existent in places).⁵¹⁵ In this process, audiences are confronted with the past (as represented through the memorial), the real present, and the imagined-but-not-to-be-future. The memorial prompts audiences to wonder what the living future entails for the community. Through this difficult layering of possibilities, the memorial creates complicated relationships with a visitor's experience of temporality, forcing audiences to reflect on multiple pasts and possible (imagined) presents and futures.

If, as I suggest, this monument forces a melancholic engagement for the viewer, it is unsurprising that the monument has been left in a state of disrepair. Additionally, in multiple visits to the site, I never encountered others in attendance. Undoubtedly, some of this is due to its general lack of fame (the Hurricane Katrina Memorial in Mid-City is better represented in online searches and tourist guides). However, it also speaks to the small number of residents who populate the area around the small greenspace the monument occupies, and the possible unwillingness of locals to engage in the site. We could, in this way, read the neglect as willful—an act of understanding that the site doesn't fulfill its original purpose, and therefore has been allowed to enter a state of ruination. In the next studies (Vera Smith's altar, *Scrap House*, *Watermarks*, and the Hurricane Katrina Memorial) I explore how melancholia can become a political tool of calling for change through demonstrating the unfinished trauma of the past.

Field Notes
12 December 2019

The day I visited was overcast but warm. I attended having glanced at the memorial my last time passing through the Lower Nine but didn't get to spend any time with the memorial on that visit. Approaching it, I am struck by the twin bridges I see behind—the bridges that are so identified with this neighborhood both as they carry its residents to work over the canal (a canal that has historically caused difficulties for the neighborhood) but also so familiar in my mind as a site of sanctuary where residents swam, boated, and paddled during to storm to get above water. The memorial itself could almost be mistaken for a park: the brightness of the blue and red coloring invites the viewer to participate, to imagine, to engage with the structures. Only when I get closer to the memorial does a darker shape take place. The “flooring” panels are completely collapsed, several beams are broken in half, with exposed nails and screws jutting out. The back wall has completely fallen off, a window with shattered glass protrudes noticeably. It takes me several minutes to realize this is not the intention, that the destruction of the site is not in fact a memorial to the destruction that took place here but rather something that occurred over time either through weathering or the actions of individuals who perhaps used the structure as a kind of playground—there is no other playground I can easily see, despite this neutral ground clearly being a major bit of greenspace, especially given it's close proximity to both major residential areas and the school.

Vera Smith's Altar

Driving down from the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Memorial, take the Claiborne Avenue Bridge (the large industrial steel bridge which serves as a kind of unofficial mascot of the Lower 9) to pass through the Bywater, Marigny, French Quarter, and Warehouse District neighborhoods to reach the Garden District. The street will have turned into Magazine, a posh area full of shops and restaurants and a popular spot for locals to meander, shop, and eat. On the side street of Jackson Ave, jutting out of a restaurant's sidewall, sits a small brick altar, atop which reads “Vera Died Aug 29, 2005.” You've reached the memorial to Vera Smith.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, many impromptu memorials emerged overnight throughout the city. One of the most recognizable images was that of a rudimentary grave, where

the body of Vera Smith, which had been left decaying on a sidewalk for four days, was placed under a white tarp held down by a border of bricks.⁵¹⁶ On the tarp, spray painted in black, was a large cross with the words “HERE LIES VERA GOD HELP US” around it. A white cross stands at the top of the grave. The image of the grave is haunting not only because of the makeshift nature of the tomb—although the effort to provide some peace for the body speaks to a powerful act of



Figure 17. The Vera Smith Memorial. Photo by the author.

love and kindness amidst remarkable chaos—but because of its location. Vera Smith’s first grave was atop a city sidewalk, surrounded by debris, exactly where her body had been left by a car that hit her in the chaos of the flood. The final epitaph on the grave, “God help us” echoes out to all who witness the site. Is this a call for forgiveness? Or is the prayer for those who buried her and remained in the city? Or perhaps this a prayer for change: if the flood revealed the sins of the city that made the devastation possible, was this a clarion call for the almighty to help right the injustice, and heal the long-standing illnesses that the storm had so plainly laid bare?

While Vera Smith was eventually cremated, her remains were laid to rest near her family in Texas, her memory has been actively preserved at the spot of her first burial over the fifteen years since the storm.⁵¹⁷ Artist Simon Hardeveld first built a small memorial on the plot in 2006. In 2013, after building a restaurant over the original gravesite, restaurateur Blain Presenbach

commissioned Hardeveld and Scott Evert local artists to erect a second memorial to Smith outside of the business.⁵¹⁸ Presenbach claimed this was to allay her spirit, which had been semi-seriously reported to have been haunting the establishment.⁵¹⁹ Hardeveld and Evert claimed this spirit guided them (even though they don't necessarily believe in ghosts) in building the memorial. The two claimed the spirit unseen but made its presence known through the slowing down of its manufacture or outright breaking of aspects of memorial when it was displeased with the look.⁵²⁰ The memorial featured a highly decorated metal barrel, decorated with painted stars and flowers, underneath a windowpane flanked by two pieces of red metal which stated: "Vera Died Aug 29 2005 Qui Vera Sera." Metal stars burst from the piece, and the memorial has the feel of a small prayer altar—albeit far more celebratory and joyous than the typical staid altar. This early memorial was eventually replaced by a less conspicuous one: a small brick, square altar attached to the building. The present altar features a brick arch with a bright painting of a black cross against a blue sky. Atop this sits a smaller arch for the placement of flowers that has an inscription dedicating the memorial to Vera. Beside the whole structure are two small planters, and the memorial regularly has new plants and trinkets resting on it.

Smith's memorial raises an interesting question of audience: who is this memorial for? Does it solely exist to placate the spirit of Smith? Are we to believe that the original structure was truly built to allay her spirit, or more the owner's guilt for recognizing that his restaurant sits upon the ground of a former, very temporary, tomb? Of course, one of these motives does not necessarily negate the other. Is the altar intended to serve the public? If so, what does the memorial seek to tell us? Without detailed information or contextualization for Smith's passing the memorial does little to inform unknowing audiences of why her death so affected those in the area (although some visitors may be able to discern from the 2005 date that her death was tied to Katrina). The fact that

the gravesite continues to be refashioned (from the simple, shallow grave covered in tarp to the first and second memorial altars) speaks to a desire to physically mark her absence. But these tributes also allow for an absent presence to remain, to haunt, the neighborhood.

The choice of an altar for the two more permanent structures marking the location of Smith's resting place after the storm is particularly powerful as it engages embodied, active responses from those interacting with it. An altar has a commonly understood function, making it what Robin Bernstein regards as a "scriptive thing," or an object that "demand[s] to be reckoned with" and "issues both orders and blandishments."⁵²¹ While memorial objects such as gravestones and statues may certainly allow for the placement of trinkets or flowers, an altar, by its nature, demands gifts or sacrifices. Smith's identity as a Mexican immigrant is directly tied to the colorful nature and Spanish text on her first memorial. In many ways, the nods to her cultural background allow us to view the altar as an *ofrenda* (the traditional altar displayed in Mexican homes for *Día de Los Muertos*).⁵²² *Ofrendas* typically reside in individual homes, honoring the lost relations of the family. Smith's memorial borrows the three-tiered structure of the *ofrenda*: an open barrel base includes a decorative fireplace screen (an homage to the typical candles that would occupy the lower-rung of an *ofrenda*), the black iron mid-tier upon which tributes may be placed, and a decorative top that names Smith and serves as a representation of her spirit. This three-tiered structure directly correlates to the typical model of the *ofrenda*.

Where it deviates from the traditional memorial is that the structure was designed for display year-round as opposed to a single day, and Smith's memorial sits on a public street where it may be visited and encountered by anyone—not merely relations visiting the home. While the change to a more permanent memorial moves the altar into a space more typically associated with a permanent grave mark, this emphasizes the importance of regular remembrance of her absence,

and that of the Katrina dead whose losses are still felt within the city. This is underscored by the fact that the memorial is in a public space. Rather than an annual commemoration where time is taken to privately grieve the loss, the more permanent public reminder serves to claim Smith's loss as one deserving of our regular attention. The choice of putting a family memorial in a public space also marks Smith as being of the public's family, by extension, it makes the private public. The memorial claims the whole of the city as Smith's family, making New Orleans Smith's (private /public) residence, and reinforces the necessity of remembering her death and the horrific treatment of her body following the storm.

The ongoing evolution of the Smith's memorial underscores how the city continues to process and evolve memories of Katrina, but also proves the continued importance of the disaster to New Orleanians. From a shallow grave, to an ofrenda meant to appease a ghost, to the small brick altar that exists today, citizens continue to make dedicated spaces for remembrance of those who were lost. Further, objects like the Smith memorial that physically intrude into the public sidewalk invite passerby's (whether locals or tourists) to engage with the object, to pause and reflect on its presence and meaning. These small memorials, many of which require a degree of local knowledge, serve to continually mark the presence of Katrina and the ways it has shaped the city in years since 2005. In bringing attention back to the event, and particularly one of the most recognizable deaths caused by the disaster, the memorial roots Smith's death in the present. Certainly, the ritual activities audiences may perform at the altar (lighting a candle, bringing flowers or trinkets, praying, etc.) serve traditional functions related to the processing of grief. However, the existence of the memorial over the site of her remains, and the occupation of public space far outside of any place reserved for the dead, act not to help viewers process the New Orleans that exists without Smith but rather haunts the city with her absence. The memorial

reminds viewers of the loss, as well as the potential for another devastating event. To live in New Orleans is to recognize the precarity experienced (unevenly) by all those living so close to the water's edge—a rainstorm away from flooding, and a hurricane away from devastation.

Field Notes

10 December 2020

The memorial is smaller than I had expected, and clearer in purpose. The writing from the original memorial remains, although its structure has shifted (to the brick setup). I don't see anyone on this side street, although quickly realize that the artist (Simon) has his shop directly next door—this helps explain his continual revisiting of the memorial and its pristine condition. The memorial invites leaving objects—I note the wide array of small tributes. Necklaces, fake flowers, a votive candle of Mary all adorn the space. I wish I had something to offer: a flower, a token, something personal to connect with the space. I ultimately write a short note and leave it beside some other papers in the lower area of the memorial that feels more weatherproof. The spot encourages this kind of encounter. Without great detail it is natural to leave with questions as to who Vera was, what her life was like, why this memorial exists for her. Indeed, my father inquires about her as we leave. I recount what I know about Vera Smith and describe how she was left at the spot we had visited. Of the Katrina memorials I've visited, this one stands out for its individualistic nature—more than anywhere else I feel I was visiting someone, rather than an idea or memory. I left feeling the most settled in the encounter as well—having been able to perform a ritualistic act of mourning left me feeling more at ease with the experience. My parting thought as we head off is wondering how many times I've passed this place. Busy Magazine Street is a favorite spot of mine—stopping at Shaya for hummus or a drink at Barrel Proof, shopping for Christmas presents at the many art galleries, antique shops, and posh furniture and décor stores—how many times had I passed by this place? Had I missed this corner? Had I parked in front before and never noticed? Had I bumped into the memorial and not paused to understand what it was? The experience reminds me that, as much as New Orleans is where I called home for most of my life, I still know so little of it, its history, its people, its memories.

Public Art Works: Scrap House and Watermarks

Going north up Magazine once more, crossing into the Central Business District of the city, it's only a short drive (and not too bad a walk) to make it to the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. Sitting in front of the river, and with a few small, designated greenspaces around, the site is convenient to both those working in the busy business area of the city, as well as the popular

neighborhoods of the Warehouse District and French Quarter. At the convention center, directly in front of the main entrance, sits a large sculpture, the first of two artworks examined here: *Scrap House*.

In the aftermath of the storm, having witnessed the devastation of Katrina, the New York based Joan Mitchell Foundation committed to investing in the recovery of New Orleans and especially that of its artists.⁵²³ Originally, this support materialized in the form of 80 individual artist grants, amounting to \$6,000 per artist, throughout the Gulf Coast. Over time though, the foundation's partnership with New Orleans has continued and deepened, featuring artist support, project grants, Joan Mitchell art shows in the city, and culminating in a permanent residency and organizational hub (the only such branch outside of New York). In 2008 the Foundation made its largest single monetary contribution to the city in the form of a \$750,000 donation for the creation of a series of public art works explicitly intended to help artists rebuild from the storm. The project was entitled "Art in Public Places" and the grant ensured \$500,000 would be distributed directly to the artists through \$25,000 grants, and \$250,000 to the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) for the "engineering, installation, insurance, administration and maintenance costs."⁵²⁴ While not all of the twenty commissioned pieces (out of 308 artist submissions) explicitly engaged the legacy of the storm, the vast majority did in some way. Even though the project was only originally funded, and intended to last, for two years, some of the pieces have remained on display in perpetuity; I focus on two here, *Scrap House* and *Watermarks*.

Sally Heller's *Scrap House* sits across from New Orleans' Ernest N. Morial Convention Center making it an easily accessible and highly visible piece of art for those visiting the city. The house sits in a small park, with trees surrounding it. Heller's artistic practice commonly utilizes found and salvaged materials, and *Scrap House* is no exception: the structure is built entirely from

recycled oil drums and found materials. In a small identifying plaque at the base of the piece, Heller describes it as follows: “like so many remnants of cultural debris left dangling from branches brought after Katrina, *Scrap House* is a monument to nature’s unpredictable powers.” A large nearby stone marker from the city reads, “Honoring the people and remembering the events that occurred August 29, 2005 Hurricane Katrina.” Notably, the city’s marker reduces the events of Katrina to the single day the storm made landfall, erasing the weeks of floodwaters and



Figure 18. *Scrap House*. Photo by the author.

years of recovery (or lack thereof). Heller’s note hints at this longer legacy more clearly through her allusion to the “cultural debris” that tenuously remained in the city.

Depicting a shotgun home suspended in a tree, the sculpture stands 15 feet tall and is simultaneously playful and menacing. The tree jets out in multiple directions. The piece has echoes of a folk-art tradition, with colorful found materials featuring a range of browns, reds, blues, and greens on the bark. The style makes it seem nearly whimsical at first glance, as though it is a cheerful treehouse. Upon reflection though, the sculpture turns more haunting. While the tree is colorful, large sections of bark seem to be missing, and the twisting nature of the branches feels less like whimsy and more like the result of weathering by a powerful storm, one that ripped and pulled the tree into a misshapen form. The house, number “48,” stands apart from the tree. With a

blue front door, window, and wood above the entrance way (alongside a green screen door jutting open), real lantern lighting fixtures and an array of broken decorations lining the structure, this is clearly no treehouse but a home ripped—violently—from its foundation and come to rest atop the tree. The discoloration of the wood running along the structure and the debris atop the roof make it feel as though the entire home might collapse with a touch. The result is unsettling: the viewer feels as though the entire structure is close to falling apart and might fall on any passersby underneath.

The sculpture's overall effect is intriguing: while at first feeling whimsical and playful, spending time with the artwork points to the precarity of the situation, and the haunting legacy of Katrina becomes clear. In many ways this mirrors a tourist's engagement with New Orleans. While the city leverages its chronotopic nature to create a fictitious space where revelry is eternal and care forgotten, spending time outside of the mostly tourist centric areas reveals a New Orleans that is built on inequity and environmental precarity. The ramifications of the 2005 flood still touch many neighborhoods, and the legacy haunts those who experienced the storm.

The question of audience for *Scrap House* is interesting. Positioned in front of the convention center, it almost certainly has the most tourist encounters of the memorials in this chapter. However, the convention center also pulls in many locals as many major events come through that appeal to New Orleanians (trade shows, comic-cons, musical artists etc.). The convention center's close position to residential areas and the river also make it a popular spot for joggers. Given this, we can expect the audience includes a good number of New Orleanians as well as outsiders. While for outsiders this Katrina memorial likely brings up memories of the storm and reflection on the experience of viewing the disaster, for those within the city the memorial may bring up their own experiences, but also strikes different notes. There were certainly famous

images of houses ripped from their foundations and cars thrown onto houses, but not even the greatest of New Orleans's oak trees could accommodate a full shotgun home. The abstraction and whimsy therefore work to distance the viewer somewhat from an immediate reminder of the experience, and move audiences towards phenomenological encounter. The house feels as though it is dangling—it is a bit worrisome to go directly underneath it. Indeed, exposed nails and screws on the structure provide the viewer with a distinct sense of danger. This feeling of precarity, of uncertainty is something that, to local audiences, feels prescient. In a city where the waters continue to rise and storms hit with increasing strength and number, the reality of nature as a danger is rarely out of mind. The house atop the tree seems to be disintegrating—weathering away before our eyes. It is a powerful reminder not only of the danger of weather but of who is at the greatest risk from it: this is not a St. Charles Ave. mansion atop the tree, but a humble shotgun. In the house's lack of color we feel the loss of joy, the end of celebration. The end of a way of life for those who endure through radical acts of joy. In the idea that the house will disappear there is a recognition that the erosion of land and habitable space in the city will continue to make marginalized residents move away from New Orleans. *Scrap House* works to encapsulate the greatest threat locals feel in living in New Orleans—that climate may not allow us to remain—and couples it with a subtle reminder that we are not affected equally by this, and the past can all too quickly become our present once more.

Field Notes
13 December 2020

I approach the artwork from a nearby parking lot armed with my camera and notepad. Given the pandemic, the convention center is closed, and the street largely abandoned: only some nearby construction crews and a single homeless man in the adjacent park are in sight. Only once in my visit does a woman pass by jogging. Upon seeing the monument in person, what strikes me is the lingering sense of precarity. My initial reaction is that this is clearly a Katrina home, however knowing little of the site's origins and nature I am not especially moved or overwhelmed by the experience. It is in the small details I feel my stomach tighten. The "incompleteness" of the art: the nails that jut out from the underside, the screws that appear to threaten the stability. A broken piece of wood that appears to be from the foundation of the house lies on the ground and makes me wonder if it fell off or was merely carried by the nearby construction to the memorial. I am struck by the precarity not so much of the house resting atop the tree, but the house itself and the possibility of its collapse or disintegration. I am consumed by thoughts of erosion: that the structure might fall, that the memory might fade, that the city might disappear.

The second memorial of the Art in Public Places project we will visit begins not far from *Scrap House*. Leaving the convention center, follow the road along the river through the French Quarter into the Marigny neighborhood, make a left turn at Elysian Fields Avenue. *Watermarks* encompasses, by far, the largest length of any of the memorial sites (although the real estate it occupies along this path is minimal): it runs the length of the five-mile street with ends on the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain. *Watermarks* is highly effective in reminding locals of the experience of the storm and rooting daily life to an understanding that Katrina's waters may have receded but memories of it (and the incumbent consequences) have not.

The sculptures were designed by sculptor Erica Larki, who predominately works with metals, and Mitchell Gaudet, a studio glass artist. *Watermarks* is exceedingly simple, consisting of square bases and twelve-foot-tall poles made out of raw steel intentionally designed to weather and age over time. Affixed to the poles are two blue cast glass rings that rest on a welded disk.⁵²⁵ The blue rings correspond to the heights of the watermarks which ran throughout the city after the



Figure 19. The author beside one of the Watermark poles. The author is 5'9", meaning the watermark is likely around 10 feet high. Photo by Jim Twardowski.

storm. Following the storm, New Orleans was inundated with water from the broken levees which carried gasoline, toxic chemicals, and mud. This sludge remained for weeks and left distinct watermarks across buildings, some of which are still visible today. On the *Watermarks* sculptures, the area under the blue rings has been painted blue (clearly showing viewers the height of the water) letting them know how deep the flooding at the site of the installation was. In total, the artwork consists of twelve poles along Elysian Fields. Driving or walking along the road allows audiences to see how the flooding changes from the areas close to the lake—that were wholly submerged—to the Marigny neighborhood next to the French Quarter—areas that were essentially untouched by the floodwaters.

Elysian Fields was chosen for two reasons: it displays a wide range of flood depths and is a linear street, making it easy to take in the full range of sculptures in a short drive or bike trip. The street is not an obvious choice for tourists though. The insertion of the sculptures along a road that is mostly populated by neighborhoods and small businesses makes it, foremost, an experience for the local population. Indeed, Gaudet explains his vision of the artwork as both memorial, but also a piece meant to quite tangibly preserve the visual effect of Katrina in the landscape:

“I mean, if you were around for Katrina and the months after, it was like an amazing line that was in the entire city. And that was the kinda impetus for this piece, is that, that was disappearing ‘cause that was, even though you were here and you saw stuff, or whatever your experience was, to still come back and see that line was a real benchmark of how good or how bad it still was in certain neighborhoods. To us that mark is, uh, you know like a historical mark. But you know it’s kinda like

it's what we went through to survive through something like that. I think it is a good thing, or to continue on after it. So maybe that's what this says, yeah we went through this, but we can get through this, we can get through anything."⁵²⁶

Gaudet's comments demonstrate a concern about losing one of the most powerful physical reminders of the storm, the ubiquitous watermarks that ran through the streets after Katrina. In his comments though, he is torn regarding the purpose of the artwork. It exists in his mind as both a marker meant to preserve a chief element of the damage of the storm—a kind of “never forget” memorial—and, at the same time, he wishes for it to serve the positive purpose of reminding those who encounter it that New Orleans has made great progress in its recovery. And the fact that an audience would encounter it is quite strategic. He notes that the piece is, “real subtle in the landscape... that's nice in the way they kinda disappear but people kinda discover them a little bit.”⁵²⁷ This nature of discovery encourages a separate reaction for the viewer: by stumbling upon the artwork, the piece is intended to bring the viewer back, taking them into memories or previous embodied experiences of the after-period of the storm when debris littered the streets and the city smelled of chemicals and mold. The memorial encourages reflection and sense memory—this isn't a memorial one goes to visit, but rather that one finds and is then jolted in the discovery into an awareness of another time.

In my own experience with the piece, I was overwhelmed by the reminder of how high the waters were, and how living on the wrong side of the same street could be a death sentence. Going from one end to the other, particularly in my 2020 visit some twelve years after the artwork was erected, I was taken aback by the embodied experience of traveling along the road encountering the poles every few blocks as I traveled. The embodied experience of how far one would have to fight through water to reach safe ground, coupled with the reminder of which parts of town felt more and less recovered and which had clearly had less investment since the storm laid plain the

power of geography. The visceral experience of how location can quite easily mean survival in a city precariously close to drowning again shook me in my exploration of the memorial. The process of engaging with the artwork shift the embodied experience of the city for audiences: the scale of the piece requires energy and time to process, either through an impressively long walk, or else the use of a bike, automobile, or via making multiple trips. Kwan's conception of Kinesthesia, where the ways cities choreograph out movements for those within, is brought to the fore here: not only does the city shape *Watermarks*, but *Watermarks* forces reflection onto the city. As a visitor travels along Elysian Fields they experience an array of life in the city; at one end sits Lake Pontchartrain and the University of New Orleans campus, at the other the ultimate expression of chronotypical New Orleans—the French Quarter. Throughout, the memorial route is surrounded by endless houses, small businesses, and the trappings of daily life in a modern American city. The full kinesthetic experience of *Watermarks* forces the viewer to engage more deeply not only with being in New Orleans but challenges the tourist construction of what New Orleans is, and who it belongs to.

While *Scrap House* shared a degree of discovery of the artwork, particularly as, from a distance, it feels rather whimsical, Heller's serves more a reminder of what we have to lose—how the New Orleans that had been continues to disappear as we recall what was lost in Katrina. It calls me to consider how I interact with the city and particularly how I regard the people I meet and interact with *in* the city. I am reminded by the weathered shotgun home that speaks to the inequities of living conditions for those in New Orleans. *Watermarks*, which was intended very much to remind us of Katrina, feels frighteningly more like a haunting *memento mori*. Where the water was before it could certainly return to again, and the losses we experienced before cannot be forgotten, certainly because we remember and honor the dead, but also because to forget the conditions that

took their lives could very well cost us our own.

Field Notes

5 December 2020

Driving along Elysian from the river, we find the first two markers easily. They are completely on the ground, indicating no flooding in the area. The third is the same. Slowly, with the fourth marker we find, we notice a small rise: 2-2 ½ feet. The next is 4 feet above the ground—the sensation begins to set in. “What would it have been to walk through this water? Would you have to swim? What would carrying a child or animal feel like? What amount of damage would this have done to the neighboring houses? Only attic items would survive at this point, and this is hardly the worst of the flooding. The sixth marker we see stands nearly 5 feet tall and a sense of foreboding fills me. The recognition of waters that would cover all of me, save my head, causes a physiologic response as I contemplate how to navigate through, especially realizing how many miles I’d have to travel to reach safety: in a car, we lose some of the experience of walking or biking through the monuments but recognize the scale that must be traversed by someone in a highly flooded area. By the seventh marker, the water has risen to 6 feet. The eighth appears at least 8 feet high. The next oddly dips to a mere two feet above the ground—a change that I first think must mean the “bead” marking the waterline in the middle has fallen off, but then realize is no mistake: the blue paint under the bead is at the level of the bead. The water then rises to 6 feet again, and then the last marker we notice (near UNO) rests at the bottom of the pole indicating no damage. This last part of the journey confused both my father and I as we explored the artwork. How arbitrary was the flooding? We had expected it to be worse near the lake but clearly this levee must have held. Where did the water come from at the worst spot? Despite going around the poles twice, I managed to miss some here and there as there should be twelve but I never counted more than ten: a reminder that the piece is less meant for a casual viewer to experience in a single journey, and far more for those who regularly take the street to notice, reflect, forget, and rediscover the artwork—perhaps learning something new in the various iterations of this process.

The Spirit of Lower Mid-City

Heading from Elysian Fields, it is a short drive through the three historically Black neighborhoods of the Seventh Ward, Tremé, and Lower Mid-City to reach University Medical Center. The stark modern complex features tinted glass windows juxtaposed with dark grey concrete siding alongside three tower structures that make up the 2.3 million square-foot complex. Running the three blocks in front of the center’s façade in the neutral ground (the colloquial term

in New Orleans for a street median) between the two streets are a series of three-foot-tall concrete bases that support large rusted looking metal panels of cut steel. The panels recount the history of the neighborhood, from its inception to its ultimate dissolution when hundreds of families were forced out of the area to construct the new hospital. This memorial, that now rests in front of the hospital, reminds those who work at or visit University Medical of the sacrifices made to enable its existence.

I focus on *The Spirit of Lower Mid-City* in this cartography partially because it



Figure 110. A panel from "*The Spirit of Lower Mid-City*" entitled "*Relocation*." Photo by the author.

demonstrates how the effects of Katrina remain present in the minds and lives of New Orleanians today, but also because it exemplifies the larger trend this chapter argues: that the memoryscape of the city since Katrina has continually moved against historic trends of aggrandizing monuments that insist on a palatably white vision of the city for outside (tourist) audiences, and increasingly has moved towards inclusivity and community engagement. *The Spirit of Lower Mid-City* is both a direct consequence of Katrina and the most removed from the storm in this list. Installed in late

2019, the memorial was funded by the Arts Council of New Orleans and designed by artists Monica Rose Kelly and Nik Richard. University Medical Center's construction began in 2011 and it was completed in 2015, whereupon the memorial was commissioned. The piece is a clear demonstration of how public monuments in the city have increasingly moved to represent local

communities. Kelly and Richard interviewed scores of residents before and during the project in an effort to create a memorial that would not only win over the displaced citizens, but represent their own idea of what the neighborhood was.⁵²⁸ The project was overseen by Bryan Lee, who was one of the leaders of the “Paper Monuments” installation—a two-year project that ran from 2017-2019 and sought to create a city-wide conversation about monuments and memorialization in New Orleans.⁵²⁹ The 22 panels of *The Spirit of Lower Mid-City* offer a celebratory vision of the community, albeit one with pointed political critiques regarding the ever-present difficulties facing community members that ultimately led to their being relocated.

Before exploring the memorial itself, it is necessary to understand why University Medical exists today. Prior to Katrina, New Orleans’ main (historically sole) public hospital for the city’s poorest, overwhelmingly minority residents, was Charity Hospital. Charity was founded in 1736, making it the second oldest hospital in the United States—a record beaten only by New York’s Bellevue by a mere six weeks. Over its life, Charity survived and served the city through fires, epidemics, and hurricanes. The hospital became a major part of Huey P. Long’s legacy when he moved it into a new twenty-story, more than two-thousand bed, Art Deco structure in 1926.⁵³⁰ By the time Katrina made landfall the hospital had earned a reputation for being one of the finest trauma centers, especially for gun related injuries, in the state. Charity continued to function throughout early flooding in the city despite a crippling lack of resources and water breaching the building in multiple locations. What Charity couldn’t survive were the concerted efforts by its managing body, Louisiana State University’s (LSU) Health Care Services Division, to slow the hospital’s recovery and reopening, part of a long-standing dream of LSU’s to close Charity and open a new, state of art medical research and teaching hospital—a dream which necessitated stepping away from the hospital’s traditional role of helping the city’s most precarious.⁵³¹ Today,

the building remains a decaying shell despite multiple plans to repurpose the structure, the most recent of which would see it as a mixture of high-end apartments, restaurants, and retail stores.⁵³²



Figure 111. A panel from "The Spirit of Lower Mid-City" entitled "Cajun Navy Rescue." The large building in the upper half of the panel is Charity Hospital. Photo by the author.

The disappearance of Charity Hospital is often met with apathy by much of the city's white residents (and especially those who moved to the city post-2005), however, it remains a fraught point for poor citizens, and citizens of color who had disproportionately relied on the medical center.

University Medical, the hospital that replaced Charity, was never intended to match Charity in function, but instead serve as a wealthy research hospital that would operate as the main campus for all the medical schools in the city.⁵³³

Perhaps the clearest difference between the two is scale: where Charity had 2,680 beds, University

Medical has 446. When University Medical completely displaced the neighborhood of Lower Mid-City it was not only their homes the residents were losing; to most in the historically Black neighborhood, Charity was where they were born. It was where they went when ill or hurt. Losing their homes to the structure that would erase the beloved Charity was doubly painful.

Therefore, it is no surprise that Charity occupies a central part (taking up three panes, far more than any other topic in the memorial) of the *Spirit of Lower Mid-City*. The memorial depicts the story of the neighborhood, beginning with the founding of New Orleans. Along the way it

notes several important locations and themes within the neighborhood's history. The story begins with the construction and settlement of the region around New Orleans and the industrialization of these areas. Notably, bee imagery is common in these early panes. The depiction of worker bees easily cognates to the physical labor done by the earliest residents: slaves. While the memorial does not directly depict slaves (or the transportation of Black slaves across the Atlantic), the worker bee motif allows this unrecognized labor to be acknowledged. The choice not to depict slavery and slave labor realistically here feels not like an erasure, but rather a conscious act of not wanting to realistically depict pain, and simultaneously not imagine the lives and stories of people who were enslaved (the realistic figures depicted in the other panels could perhaps be real people the sculptors were told stories about or interviewed directly). Thus the bee imagery (which is absent in the panels depicting more contemporary topics) seems a clever way to acknowledge the labor without glorifying its history, or arguing that this joyful neighborhood of real, full, living people—people who have, without question, continued to unfairly struggle—can be reduced to their historical experience as slaves.

The next chapter in the story reveals the fullness of life in the neighborhood: images of St. Joseph Church (among the most prominent and oldest Black Catholic churches in the city), Jazz clubs with dancers, and a bustling local greenspace colloquially known as Billy Goat Park (officially named Pershing Park) with a returning WWI soldier and Voodoo Queen meeting under a palm tree. The early history panels culminate in a scene dedicated to Charity Hospital, with nuns under the 1926 structure representing the early history of the hospital, and bright leaves growing out of Charity indicating its heyday glory. The story turns with the panel remembering Katrina: tally marks at the top display the numbers eight, twenty-nine, and five (corresponding to the date Katrina made landfall, 08/29/05), and a hurricane symbol approaches the city's skyline. The panel

after Katrina returns to Charity, depicting the hospital (with a wave to its side indicating the damage it suffered) and patients being removed by locals who have come to rescue. Finally, a panel entitled “Charity is Condemned” depicts the Charity Nurse with her mouth covered, and a lock above her habit chaining her off from the community.

The last thread of the story explores the rebuilding and relocation aspects of the years since Katrina. The efforts of neighbors to reconstruct their homes are depicted, as are healthy residents gathered around town. These panels of recovery demonstrate a crucial element that the neighborhood argues was misunderstood by the media—Lower Mid-City did recover. This was not a place that ceased to be lived in after Katrina, that no one returned to. Instead, the community was returning, succeeding, and working diligently to rebuild what was lost. The choice to replace the community with University Medical therefore requires more nuanced recognition of the displacement of locals. While the memorial doesn’t indite the hospital (and the artists have publicly stated they did not wish for the memorial to read as an accost to the new facility), it does clearly reject the idea that this space was unoccupied or abandoned.⁵³⁴ Coupled with the fact that Charity still



Figure 112. Panel from "The Spirit of Lower Mid-City" entitled "Where Do You Go?" and depicting the full poem. Photo by the author.

stands, it adds deep meaning to questions about why this site was selected, and how much the abandoning of Charity has been accepted by those living in the city today. The replacement of the neighborhood with University Medical is depicted in the string of panels that show the relocation

of residents (five houses that float away with their owners precariously holding onto them by their foundations), and a poem written by Nik Richard entitled “Where Do You Go?” that acts as both elegy for the neighborhood and a call to walk proudly on, before revealing a series of famous neighborhood sites being disassembled (the Deutches Haus German restaurant and club, Dixie Beer’s old brewery, and several especially noteworthy homes). Finally, the memorial ends with a panel on “dreams of the future,” that features children celebrating, musicians playing, and new homes being built around a woman (representing the neighborhood) with her heart still beating with love for all those who had called Lower Mid-City home.

A powerful element of the monument is not only where it is located but how it lays claim to space. As it occupies the neutral ground the memorial’s location is unobtrusive—seemingly its position makes it a useful resting place for pedestrians and those waiting to enter the hospital. The placement of the monument in the former Lower Mid-City neighborhood provides a tangible historical marker for those new to the area insisting on recognizing the historical legacy of the community and the disruption the new hospital complex caused. But what is most significant to the placement of the monument, as well as how it was designed, is the fact that it occupies three city blocks. By taking up the commanding distance—as well as calling interested audiences to walk further along Galvez Street—it requires audiences to engage with the memorial through a sense of scale. While the three blocks do not represent the whole neighborhood that had come before, the act of walking through the area forces a unique engagement with the former neighborhood, and a far greater awareness of the scale of the displacement. In this, the utilization of space, and the act of traveling through space, highlights Kwan’s point that cities are understood via traveling through them, or that “location is locomotion; locomotion is location.”⁵³⁵ The stretching of the memorial across a series of long blocks choreographs the audience and challenges

how they engage with the area, and in so doing challenges how they perceive the hospital that now claims the former neighborhood.

This recognition of minorities, Black culture, and those who call New Orleans home speaks to the work of activists and artists who have continually fought to draw attention to their history and accomplishments within the city, in effect, demanding notice in a city that has traditionally demanded their labor and invisibility without recompense. In these changes the mythos of New Orleans has shifted. The ways in which the city presents itself to outsiders and locals has been forced to grapple with real questions that emerged post-Katrina regarding who belongs in New Orleans and how communities survive. *The Spirit of Lower Mid-City* certainly levels thinly veiled criticism towards those who ignore the histories of oppression and marginalization. The memorial explicitly engages how choices made in the aftermath of the storm pushed out (and continue to make life precarious for) many of the city's most vulnerable residents. But the success of the monument is that it is ultimately celebratory, ultimately hopeful. This is not a cold reflection of the hardships and pains experienced by a neighborhood (although these struggles are acknowledged). *The Spirit of Lower Mid-City* is a genuine celebration of the community. The uplifting quality that runs throughout leaves the viewer thankful of what the community has done for the city, and glad to better understand the history of the place, as well as hopeful for the displaced citizenry going forward.

Field Notes
3 January 2021

We walked in the wrong direction first, but I didn't realize until near the end. There were a few people around: a homeless man using the memorial as a place to sit and several couples passing as they went to the hospital, but, largely, the site was quiet—especially for being directly next to a hospital. The sheer amount of land (three full blocks long) covered is impressive. Visitors must truly walk through and garner a sense of scale as they move throughout the memorial and continue discovering it. My father more than once thought it had ended while I plowed on ahead to the next set of markers (he was tired and hungry and less fascinated with the story than I was). Heart imagery runs throughout. Charity occupies a central place in memory, not untied to the structure that replaced it behind (University Medical Complex) the memorial. Heavy African American themes and imagery run throughout the panels. The story of a place born, fought for, full of life, drowned, reborn, and forced away—but still alive—is recounted in these panes. This feels *of the people*. It feels connected and kind—a blessing of leaving while tied to those who remain in the city. I found it more peaceful than I expected to. I was surprised that, for so new a monument, many of the informational plaques providing the names of the individual panes were already missing.

Hurricane Katrina Memorial

Not far from *The Spirit of Lower Mid-City*, just a few blocks north in fact, at the very end of Canal Street across from the New Orleans Country Club, rest a series of cemeteries. Tucked away among them sits a receded iron gate that reads “Charity Hospital Cemetery.” While 2005 marked the end of Charity Hospital, it was not the end of its cemetery. In 2009, the cemetery, which had served as a potter's field even prior to its 1848 purchase by the hospital for the purpose of laying to rest the unclaimed, would become the site of the Hurricane Katrina Memorial (HKM): the largest such memorial in the city.⁵³⁶ Consisting of six large, stone blocks, which are all subdivided into yet more individual boxes, the memorial holds the remains of some 83 unidentified or unclaimed dead from the 2005 flood. The memorial site is arranged to depict a hurricane symbol (a map of the memorial explains this to those walking the grounds) when viewed overhead.

By mid-2006 there was great attention being given to the prospect of a memorial to the

storm and its aftermath, so much so that two competing projects formed. The first was led by a state-run commission who had been established to select a site and design for a \$3.5 million memorial complex.⁵³⁷ The second project was headed by Dr. Frank Minyard, who had for decades served as head coroner for the city of New Orleans, who was working with funeral directors and outside parties to put together the New Orleans Memorial. Minyard's memorial was explicitly meant to serve as the final resting place for the numerous bodies still under the care of the state. Given the scale of the two ideas, originally the two groups had sought to form a unified memorial to serve as the sole memorial for the city, however these efforts fell through quickly.⁵³⁸ This is because the two memorials had fundamentally different aims.

Minyard's HKM was intended to house the dead, but the commission's memorial was meant to serve as a tourism generating facility that would articulate a highly idealized vision of the city—a dream tourism authorities had long sought to engineer. The commission's mission statement laid out three distinct goals for the project: first, to “develop a place where the memory of those who were lost during Hurricane Katrina, and the spirit of those who survived can be acknowledged and celebrated;” second, to “develop a place that expresses gratitude for the compassion and support which flowed from all parts of the world;” and finally, to “develop a place of contemplation and education that encourages visitors to learn of the vastness, severity, and diversity of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, and challenges visitors to understand the causes of this event in order to seek ways to prevent such disasters in the future.”⁵³⁹ The state commission complex was, however, at odds with the purported aims of the city government of New Orleans and their memorial. While the state body seemed dedicated to detailing the history of the storm and creating a dedicated memorial space for those who died and suffered, the city, according to the Unified Plan (a document that served as the master recovery document for the

city in the years following Katrina), wanted a space that would serve as a tourism driver. The stated purpose of the memorial according to the Unified Plan was to “transform a section of town into a new destination for tourists and locals alike” by building “a permanent monument to the spirit of a City [sic] that found the strength to rebuild after such a devastating disaster. The scale of the project will transform the selected section of the town and will reinforce the notion of New Orleans as the most European of American cities and as the leading city of the Caribbean.”⁵⁴⁰ This tourism focused approach, enmeshed in language dedicated to preserving an idyllic version of the city to help bring out of town dollars to New Orleans severely complicates this “memorial” as doing the work of memorialization in the sense of processing lost individuals. Much like the Presbytère Museum examined in the preceding chapter, the plan for this imagined memorial seems more interested in demonstrating the city’s recovery, safety, and long history (relegating Katrina to a short—and completed—chapter), than in the devastation and loss.

Regardless of the intention, this state/city sanctioned memorial came to naught: the project was eventually scrapped over largescale resistance to the hefty price-tag amidst a city in dire economic straits trying to survive.⁵⁴¹ However, this original, imagined memorial is worth recognizing not only for how it well demonstrates the keen attention city leaders pay to the presentation the storm and the ways they recognize how the broad memoryscape of the city must be maintained to sustain an idealized vision of New Orleans for outsiders. It is also important to note that city and state officials gave their support to Dr. Minyard’s memorial after the collapse of the broader project, eventually picking up sizeable amounts of the cost for the \$1.5 million HKM that stands today.⁵⁴²



Figure 113. Entrance to the Hurricane Katrina Memorial, looking into the memorial from the cemetery gates. Photo by the author.

The present HKM occupies an odd space as both literal cemetery and figurative memorial. While memorials most often stand in for the dead or as reminders of events, the HKM collapses the function of remembering the dead with housing their literal remains. Cemeteries, by their nature, are layered: both with history and physical bodies. The use of layering to make space for the dead can be witnessed in the Paris catacombs, the physical elevation of the Old Jewish Cemetery of Prague, and in the thousands of mausoleums that make up New Orleans' cities of the dead. At the memorial there are multiple layers of bodies. There are of course the Katrina victims entombed in black marble. But there are more bodies beyond these: the bodies buried underground. Charity Hospital Cemetery is one of the few graveyards in the metropolitan area with underground tombs. Visitor's attention is called to the layers of bodies beneath the surface through informational plaques. A large fence bearing the name "Charity Hospital Cemetery" stands in front of marble

slabs dedicated to the hospital dead and the dead who offered their bodies to the LSU Medical center and were buried at the site prior to the memorial's construction. Finally, a large black slab explains the history of the memorial itself. These layers call the visitor's attention to what is absent and how this absence informs the world around them. Thus while Katrina is the overwhelming



Figure 114. Marble slab with information and map explaining the memorial to the public. Photo by the author.

experience of the cemetery, the awareness that this place has historically held those who were forgotten or left behind layers additional meanings onto the site—calling the audience's attention to who we remember and who is forgotten, who receives a marble tomb and who is kept below the ground.

The memorial itself serves as a kind of tomb of the unknown (as none of the graves are marked) and therefore plays well into the same kind of mythologizing narratives that other tombs of the unknown, such as those for soldiers, fall into.

Cultural theorist Harriet F. Senie notes that memorials are increasingly tied to conceptions of national (or local) identities, expressing loss and pain as integral to the formation of community. Simultaneously, throughout the twentieth century memorials have increasingly been “conflating the function of cemeteries with the purpose of memorials, focusing on the private losses of individuals while excluding any reference to the larger national significance.”⁵⁴³ Thus memorials help tell narratives (or myths) that are central to understanding group and place identities, while simultaneously making it difficult to critique these exact narratives. Critiquing these memorial

sites would be to challenge the heroism of those who died and, in turn, those to whom the memorial is dedicated.

The memorial is better known to tourists through guidebooks than to locals themselves. This is likely due in part to the fact that the memorial's original grand opening was waylaid by Hurricane Gustav and most of the commemorative events for the unveiling were cancelled.⁵⁴⁴ However, the other key reason is simple, if painful: there are few who will seek out a small memorial and cemetery when the only inhabitants are those who were unclaimed or unknown. The HKM has become a significant site for annual civic commemorations of the storm. Increasingly, the site is used to raise the spirit of Katrina while engaging with contemporary problems—in effect, exploiting collective memory for present aims.⁵⁴⁵

If the HKM creates a mythos of Katrina, it is one of a heroic overcoming of catastrophe: thus making the site a powerful backdrop for local leaders who wish to call upon the citizenry to live up to the promise of the city's survival. It is easy to exploit this idea and utilize the space as a stage from which to implore for locals to improve New Orleans for those who died because of its greatest disaster. Joseph Roach explains that “the politics of communicating with the dead... [are] a strategy of empowering the living through the performance of memory.”⁵⁴⁶ Thus the annual commemoration events typically involve a set of performances that help maintain the living audience's connection to the dead actors—musical spirituals (common at jazz funerals) are played, prayers are given, a wreath is laid, and, critically, civic leaders speak taking advantage of the powerful stage. For instance, at the 15th Anniversary Commemoration at the HKM, Mayor Latoya Cantrell gave a speech that drew direct comparisons between Katrina and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic the city was battling. Both disasters had disproportionately impacted the poor and black residents of the city, and Cantrell utilized the legacy of Katrina, and New Orleans' recovery, to

call upon New Orleanians to wear masks.⁵⁴⁷ This comparison demonstrates how Katrina remains prominent within the city’s memory and serves as a powerful rallying cry for change. Cantrell’s evocation of the Katrina dead adds power to those who died of COVID-19 by claiming that to disregard safety procedures in an ongoing disaster ignores the heroic sacrifices made by the city in its quest to recover from Katrina.

Field Notes

3 March 2018

My first reaction on reaching the site is merely that I feel it possesses a tremendously severe quality. The modern black marble structures are impersonal—especially in New Orleans where cemeteries typically have extravagant mausoleums and lush greenery. Further, while the memorial’s hurricane symbol layout might be striking from overhead, walking through the site it is impossible to visualize this, making the whole area feel more like a park than a space with a deep connection to New Orleans (a Katrina memorial in Biloxi Mississippi plays with this same idea of a hurricane shape, but is much smaller and easier to digest for the visitor). In speaking to guests at the memorial I never encountered a local, and seldom even came across visitors from the US—most often I met European tourists who were trying to create their own “Katrina tour” of the city to understand the legacy of an event they remembered vividly unfolding on their respective news services. In walking through the site, it was easy to sit and reflect. However, deeper engagement with the legacy of the storm and its role in the city’s history never came up. The one area of thought where my mind did imaginative work was in passing the rows of bodies—who were these people? How long were their bodies left at the place they had died? How did they die? The absence of knowledge forced me to imagine the possibilities of what their lives might had been. The knowledge of whose bodies rest under the ground where I could not see—the dead of Charity Hospital and LSU Medical Center—added other dimensions to my thinking: those of class and race. I doubt many of those buried here were white. All were poor. The city’s oldest cemetery for the indigent continues to serve that role for the dead of Katrina—and as it’s now closed and the final bodies have been buried within, the cemetery has, in a way, been laid to rest by Katrina.

The New New Orleans Memoryscape

In the Spring of 2017, then Mayor Mitch Landrieu and the New Orleans City Council began a months-long process of removing four racist statues throughout the city. The four statues (three of Confederate leaders and one dedicated to the so called “Battle of Liberty Place”—a race

massacre/political coup that ousted the Republican Governor of Louisiana in the late 19th Century) had been the subject of raucous debate throughout the city since the mayor had announced his desire to have the statues removed following the 2015 massacre of nine Black congregants by a white supremacist at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina.⁵⁴⁸ The contrasting forces who mobilized following the announcement of the monument takedowns made national news as they clashed (often violently) over the removal of the statues.⁵⁴⁹ The fighting also demonstrated a deep rift in New Orleans over who is represented, who is seen, and how the city should present itself to the world—a point of particular interest to the countless citizens whose livelihoods are tied to the tourism industry.

Following the removal of the racist statues, a transdisciplinary art project entitled the Paper Monuments Project emerged. Paper Monuments solicited suggestions for new monuments and sought out designs and ideas from hundreds of ordinary New Orleanians. These inspired ten temporary monuments by local artists that were put up around the city to demonstrate both the impermanence of monuments, as well as show how the meaning of a monument can change over time.⁵⁵⁰ These were accompanied by hundreds of informational art posters put up at major historical sites around the city. The posters included designs by local artists, as well as stories and brief histories by local historians and community leaders. Collectively, the project worked to formulate ideas for new monuments in New Orleans, but it aimed to create a city-wide conversation about the city's history and who is seen in that history. The fact that the largest monument erected post-takedowns in the city was the *Spirit of Lower Mid-City*, a project led by Bryan Lee who also helmed the Paper Monuments Project, demonstrates a growing awareness of the role monuments and memorials can play in telling erased histories and serving local communities.

In 2011 *New Orleans Magazine* ran an article entitled, “The New Orleans Art Trail: 11 Important Statues.”⁵⁵¹ Of the statues listed, two no longer stand (Lee and Beauregard), and only two (those of Margaret Haughery, a local philanthropist, and Bienville, the French settler who founded the colony of New Orleans) represent real people who had lived in the city. The remainder form a mismatched portrait of religious figures (Jesus Christ and Joan of Arc), imagined characters (a tribute to women in military service entitled “Mollie Marine,” and a statue of Ignatius P. Reilly, the protagonist of *A Confederacy of Dunces*, who serves as something of a literary mascot for the city), and “great men of history” (Simón Bolívar, Winston Churchill, and Andrew Jackson). If one were to visit these statues, either at the time of publication or today, little would be gleaned regarding an understanding of the city and its inhabitants.

Throughout this chapter I have highlighted several monuments and memorials that demonstrate how, since Hurricane Katrina, the memoryscape of New Orleans has undergone fundamental, and striking, changes. While it is natural for a degree of ebb and flow to occur within a memoryscape, the developments since 2005 reveal a clear set of patterns. First, there is energy and intention behind local actors’ desires to reshape a memoryscape that has historically been utilized to project a specific white, Southern vision of the city to outsiders—thereby changing the way the city presents itself to visitors and locals alike. Second, significant efforts have been made by the local communities and activist groups to create monuments that speak, first and foremost, to New Orleans residents. Finally, this work has been particularly invested in telling the stories and histories of historically marginalized, especially Black, communities within the city.

The New Orleans memoryscape continues to reckon with the realities of its past. Indeed, one major area of change is a recent wave of attention not only to adding monuments that celebrate the rich history of minoritarian communities, but also acknowledge the cities complicity with white

supremacy. Geographer Brian Marks has argued for the need not only to remove the emblems of white supremacy that remain in the city, but acknowledge sites of slavery and oppression explicitly.⁵⁵² The Black activist group The New Orleans Committee to Erect Historic Markers on the Slave Trade has placed two historical markers on the Mississippi River city bank and at Esplanade Avenue and Chartres Street noting the locations of former slave markets.⁵⁵³ At the same time, the New Orleans Slave Trade Marker and App Project is a local organization dedicated to creating informative markers detailing sites along the slave trade.⁵⁵⁴ As time goes on, the city will continue to evolve and determine which histories demand public space and which may become less visible. But what has become apparent is that, since Katrina, New Orleans has turned inward to understand how it projects itself outwardly. For a place that lost so many communities and had its sins of race and class put so starkly on display to the world, it is a mark of how people within the city envision carving out space for themselves going forward. The retaking of public monuments is an act of survival, a tangible way of making visible those who have been relegated to the periphery, and an overt call to acknowledge that every New Orleanian matters and should feel seen in the city they call home.

Conclusion: “Do You Know What It Means (to Miss New Orleans)?”

Disaster Time and Ecological Epistemology

In 1719, two years after the founding of La Nouvelle-Orléans by French Colonists—on land that had for over a thousand years been known as Bulbancha to the Indigenous peoples of Louisiana—the settlers built a three-foot-high earthen levee to protect themselves from the waters of the Mississippi River.⁵⁵⁵ Three years later, in 1722, a hurricane destroyed every structure in the colony.⁵⁵⁶ So began the tenuous relationship of New Orleanians with hurricanes, levees, and floods. Over the following centuries, various efforts to protect New Orleans from wind and water have been attempted. The 1879 formation of the Mississippi River Commission began large-scale schemes to change the size of the Mississippi River for the first time. The 1915 installation of four modern-era wooden pumps allowed for the drainage of traditional wetlands and marshes around New Orleans.⁵⁵⁷ The 1917 passage of the Federal Flood Control Act federalized the levee system. Following the 1927 Great Mississippi River Flood, the newly empowered federal government began a series of levee protection projects to redirect and tame the river at a scale exceeding anything previously attempted in the world. The redistribution of silt and earth that naturally occurs from the river’s flow was permanently disrupted by these actions, causing an erosion of land that has reshaped the Louisiana coast. So great is the land loss that since the 1990s television public service announcements have prominently asserted that “every hour, Louisiana loses a football field of land.”⁵⁵⁸ In 1968, city officials voted to construct a canal meant to shorten the time for cargo vessels to reach the Gulf of Mexico: the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet or “Mr. Go.” While Mr. Go was an economic failure, it succeeded in creating a supercharging hurricane highway that would ultimately allow Katrina to bring powerful storm surges directly to the city’s poorly maintained

levees.⁵⁵⁹

It is an oft pointed to irony that the centuries of attempts to prevent or mitigate flooding in New Orleans have ultimately devastated the city's strongest defenses—the miles of coastal wetlands that had previously served as buffer zones to slow down and weaken hurricanes before they descended on the city. This problem speaks not only to the vast difficulties of thinking through environmental challenges and needs, but also points to how we must adapt our thinking, as humans, in terms of time. As this dissertation has demonstrated, disaster time is long, complex, and reaches far beyond the initial impact and immediate aftermath. Disaster time, much like ecological time, is slow, expansive, and enduring. If we are to move towards an epistemology that prioritizes the ecological, we must recognize that disasters are not random acts. As philosopher Jean Luc Nancy argues, catastrophes are now (due to the interconnected nature of human civilization, infrastructure, and networks) fundamentally a human creation.⁵⁶⁰ Ecological time is the time that extends before and after ourselves and recognizes the long reach of human actions. Ecological time demands recognizing both how the Anthropocene has expedited catastrophes, but also how the disasters we face are, all too often, part of a longer legacy of human arrogance in the face of nature. History has taught us this human arrogance, and we continue to fail to change when presented with copious opportunities.

Understanding the New New Orleans

I embrace an understanding of disaster time as long, slow, and lasting. Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated how Katrina demanded a renegotiation of what it means to belong to New Orleans, to call it home, and to be a New Orleanian. In so doing, I have explored the ways that Katrina continues to exist throughout the New Orleanian imagination as a touchstone.

This dissertation reveals how the storm and its legacy have become a powerful political tool for locals to utilize in laying claim to place, imagining a more just city, and challenging long-standing conventions. Many of these efforts exist in contrast to, and result from, neo-liberal efforts to privatize social services and (sometimes unintentionally and sometimes intentionally) further marginalize minoritized populations.

Although the sites and artworks I move through in this project are multivariate, I utilize theatre and performance theory throughout to reveal how culturemakers employ common strategies to mark and delineate their understanding of Katrina. In so doing, these actors not only advance their understanding of Katrina, but leverage the rupture of Katrina to further their ambitions for the city that they call home. Katrina also exists as a complex fixture for comprehending time in New Orleans. At the simplest level, there is the common linear understanding of time that positions New Orleans as existing pre-Katrina and post-Katrina—a framework that survives in the city’s vernacular to the present. The rupture of Katrina though, still viscerally felt and preserved by many publics within the city, works to illustrate how, to use Derrida’s framework, “time is out of joint.”⁵⁶¹ As performance scholar Tracy C. Davis argues “the opposition of past and future held tenuously at odds in the present moment become, in performance, not only a reminder of human beings’ temporal ontology but also an experience of it... drama, as a discursive practice, foregrounds the multiplicity of temporality, while performance, as an epistemology, demonstrates the incommensurability of past and future to be experienced in the present, even as it requires playgoers to forget this condition.”⁵⁶² It is no coincidence that Derrida and Davis both utilize drama to explore how temporalities exist both discretely and in simultaneity. It is the embodied presence that allows for a recognition of the liminal nature of temporality, and sites of rupture enable us to recognize this overlapping quality

easily: connecting the present both to the past and imagined futures (those that remain possible and those that have been lost) through place.

I begin this dissertation with *The Rising Water* trilogy to center the role of theatre and performance in my exploration and to demonstrate the need for continual, multidisciplinary engagement in navigating environmental catastrophe. *Rising Water* demonstrates both the tremendous healing potential of theatre practice to help serve as a forum for the public, generating conversation and enabling storytelling for the processing of trauma. Further, the play's utilization of tragedy as a generic convention underlines the need for public acknowledgement of the ontological break that environmental catastrophe poses, and the need to understand these moments as complex, collective, and demanding of prolonged efforts to establish new identities. *Rising Water* also reveals the limits of a single artwork. In the best of circumstances audience reach is limited and the model of a singular style or genre may lose relevancy with the population served. This does not lessen the impact or importance of the work, rather it demonstrates that, as public interest and understanding shifts, so too must the responses shift in how we engage with those realities. As I show in the subsequent case studies, the role of embodied presence and engaged participation is critical for publics to form meaningful beliefs around memory, and the most effective works leverage these performative powers to generate collectivist action and change.

The work of navigating catastrophic rupture is long. In *Reconstruction Following Disaster*, a 1977 National Science Foundation study that comparatively examines disaster recovery efforts, ten years was suggested as the median time needed for purely physical infrastructural repairs.⁵⁶³ The cultural and identitarian ramifications of catastrophe though far exceed this timeframe as demonstrated by this dissertation and multiple examples from other scholars examining disaster recovery.⁵⁶⁴ This work is evolutionary and necessitates diverse approaches to reach the disparate

publics these sites hope to impact. For instance, amongst the earliest of artworks created was the altar to Vera Smith in 2006—less than six months after her death during Katrina. This original altar has been replaced multiple times over the years as the building it is attached to changed owners and the piece itself wore out over time. The altar, occupying a public street, serves multiple publics: it maintains her memory for those in the immediate area of the altar (friends and neighbors) while allaying the guilt of the business owner whose restaurant sits on Smith's former gravesite, but it also reaches those who encounter it and lack the full knowledge requisite to understand what it is or why it exists. This early memorial underscores both how the discrete cultural sites I examine serve multiple publics and are understood differently by separate groups. Further, it reveals how the memory of Katrina continues to shape and be shaped through conscious efforts intended to reach both New Orleanians and visitors.

As New Orleanians grapple with the ways their city continues to change in the long aftermath of the disaster, Katrina's memory likewise evolves. The various organizations and groups seeking to address this legacy also adapt. The earliest organization formed in the wake of Katrina this dissertation examines is Levees.org, which was established a mere two weeks after Katrina made landfall to combat media misinformation. As Katrina has faded from regular headlines with time, Levees.org has adjusted. Their signature efforts now focus resources on memory-based projects like the 2019 Flooded House Museum, a site Levees.org continues to expand. The Levee Exhibit Hall and Garden that occupies the lot next to the museum serves as a public art gallery in addition to an informational memorial site. The first exhibit at the hall opened in November 2021, as part of a broader neighborhood redevelopment effort known as the Gentilly Resilience District project.⁵⁶⁵ The redevelopment of this district is part of a \$141 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development meant to both revitalize the area

still damaged by Katrina and create a network of climate change resilience projects that will mitigate future storm damage and flooding.

The *Transforma* project, which was responsible for *Home, New Orleans?* and many other initiatives, is another early project that continues to have lasting impact. *Transforma*'s team began meeting and building relationships with New Orleans community members in December 2005, and over the next five years disbursed hundreds of thousands of dollars in large and small grants to local artists seeking to revitalize communities. Many of the artists who were brought together under its umbrella continue to collaborate and rely on each other as local experts. Further, multiple projects that grew directly out of *Transforma* mini-grants still perform important work within the community, such as the Sankofa Community Development Corporation (an artist-led community center, garden, and conservation organization) and Fundred (a national arts based anti-lead pollution non-profit). *Transforma* artists continue to make art that engages the long legacy of Katrina, as *Home, New Orleans?* co-leader Jan Gilbert's curation of a 2019 exhibit at the Historic New Orleans Collection entitled "Art of the City: Postmodern to Post-Katrina" demonstrates. Featuring pieces from the 1960s to the present, "Art of the City" included pieces from multiple *Transforma* artists as well as Gilbert's own material related to Katrina and revealed how Katrina is still a major force in artists' imaginings and understandings of their city. Another major outcome of *HOME, New Orleans?* was the creation of the cross-university "Rebuilding Community Through the Arts" class in 2007 that paved the way for the establishment of the New Orleans Higher Education Consortium that allows students from across New Orleans to take courses from any of the partner institutions: a major advancement in resource sharing between private, public, and community colleges throughout the city.

Some of the earliest responses to the storm have required alteration to remain palatable;

others, because they have not adapted, are now failures. A clear example of adapting to maintain relevance is the above-mentioned altar of Vera Smith. The tributes and tokens that are regularly laid at the memorial speak to its popularity and the understanding of its purpose by the public—an indication that the artwork’s evolution has been successful. On the other hand, the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Monument in the Lower Ninth Ward, erected a year after the storm on August 29, 2006, is so neglected that it is visibly deteriorating—much less attracting tourists or locals to the site. The lack of adaption, and the cruel irony of a monument constructed to celebrate a recovery that never occurred, speaks to how sites need a connection to the present reality to meaningfully connect with participants. Similarly, the Presbytère’s *Living with Hurricanes* exhibit, which opened in 2010, reveals how sites that fail to adapt hold little sway in the present. The public comments of the Prebytère’s curators, indicating how they believe the city has “moved on” from Katrina, demonstrate a lack of awareness of broader cultural conversations and/or an understanding that their exhibit is no longer efficacious at promoting its memory claims.⁵⁶⁶ This is contrasted with the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum, which opened in 2011 and has seen tremendous growth over the subsequent decade. The Living Museum, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, was nearly doubling its audience reach annually—in addition to serving as a community center that draws in large groups of neighborhood residents in need of a space for programming, working, or simply being in community. It was also planning a major expansion by moving into a historic public school shuttered by Katrina prior to the pandemic. The Living Museum has a miniscule budget in comparison to the Presbytère. Despite this, the Living Museum’s public reach continues to grow and shape ideas around Katrina and the identity of the city, channeling tourism and occasional media attention around the Ninth Ward and helping to elevate the neighborhood’s problems. In this, the museum works to frame more just and inclusive understandings of what it

means to call New Orleans home.

Theatre, through both professional companies and community-engaged collectivist performances, demonstrates the need to engage with the changing identity of New Orleans. In the early aftermath of the disaster, many works directly addressed Katrina, such as *Rising Water* (Southern Rep, 2007), *LakeviewS (HOME, New Orleans?, 2009)*, *Shotgun* (Southern Rep, 2009), *Homecoming Project* (Junebug Theatre Company, 2011), and *Mold* (Southern Rep 2013). Others responded to the storm in more opaque ways, such as Artspot's epic story of a thriving underwater city entitled *Sea of Common Catastrophe* (2017), or Mondo Bizarro's environmental based production *Loup Garou* (2013) and its successor work (co-produced with Artspot), the interdisciplinary storytelling project *Cry You One* (2013-2017). Junebug has made explicit the evolution of their thinking on both New Orleans identity and the long memory of Katrina by making *Homecoming Project* their flagship program and redesigning and remounting the piece (to respond to new ideas, themes, and current problems in the city) multiple times since the original 2011 version (with productions in 2013, 2017, 2018, and 2021). Except for Southern Rep, the performances engaging these questions of memory, identity, and loss are interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on the creative practice of actors, poets, musicians, visual artists, documentarians, and dancers.

Perhaps the best demonstration of the shifting public memories and identities within New Orleans are the memorials and monuments that form the memoryscape of the city. While some of these objects were erected in the early aftermath of the storm (Vera Smith, 2006; Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Monument, 2006; "Art in Public Places" series, 2008; Hurricane Katrina Memorial, 2009), newer monuments continue to emerge (*The Spirit of Lower Mid-City*, 2019; the Levee Exhibit Hall's expanding sculpture series, 2021; a long-term effort led by Levees.org with

community partners building commemorative plaques throughout New Orleans detailing this history of New Orleans levees and flood control, 2019-present).

The changes and challenges to the New Orleans memoryscape predate the national conversation regarding monuments and memorials that became a source of national debate after the protests and widespread racial reckonings of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd. The four white supremacist monuments that were ultimately removed from display in New Orleans were taken down in 2017. However, the hostility and national media coverage generated by these efforts to shift these identitarian markers of New Orleans resulted in open violence. A contractor who had been hired to remove the statues had his car firebombed, after which increased security measures by the state had to be secured for the monuments' removal.⁵⁶⁷ When Mayor Mitch Landrieu announced on 23 April 2017 that the monuments would be removed at night under the cover of police snipers, protestors in favor of the monuments began organizing immediately. The performances around the monuments are useful for demonstrating how monuments encourage different kinds of ritualized behaviors (especially amongst different publics). When the first monument (a statue of Jefferson Davis) was removed, outside agitators and activists had not yet had time to assemble in New Orleans. Thus the crowd that assembled to protest the removal of the statue was comprised largely of locals. These protestors staged a vigil around the statue, holding memorial services complete with the staging and props of visiting a typical memorial or monument: the singing of songs, lighting of candles, laying of a wreath and other tokens at the base of the statue, and the display of homemade signs commemorating war dead.⁵⁶⁸ This performance stands in contrast to the following ones which, notably, had much larger crowds present—often including many protestors from outside of the city. At the subsequent protests, police had to separate protestors from counter-protestors via metal barricades. Racist chants and

slogans could clearly be heard, and those fighting for the preservation of the monuments displayed a range of racist flags and signs. Those assembled utilized the monuments as sets for the larger social dramas they were staging—and they were happy to provide set dressings (flags, posters, chains to tie themselves to the monument), costumes (commonly militia outfits, T-shirts with racist slogans, and at least one notable full metal suit of armor), sound (music from acoustic and electronic sources, chants, megaphones), and even lighting (candles, torches, cell phone lights, and flashlights).⁵⁶⁹

As collective memory evolves, what is publicly glorified—and therefore viewed as representative of larger group identities—evolves as well. Indeed, in the aftermath of the monument takedowns city officials deliberately sought out artists and cultural leaders to engage multiple publics across New Orleans and collectively work to rethink what the memoryscape should be and who it should serve. This manifested through the Paper Monuments Project, a collective of artists, scholars, community leaders, and culturemakers who worked directly with New Orleanians (through libraries, schools, churches, community centers, and other sites of community engagement) in collectively fostering conversations about the meanings of monuments. While Paper Monuments was originally tasked with researching public feeling on monuments and creating educational programming around the role of monuments, the collective moved beyond this role to ultimately work with thousands of New Orleanians to imagine new monuments in the city. Highlighting the fleeting nature of memory, these monuments were deliberately designed to only remain in place a matter of months or years—underscoring how the memoryscape will continue to grow, shift, and adapt to represent new ideas. As growing attention has been paid to the need for anti-racist action in New Orleans (a fact long understood by marginalized groups and ignored, until recently, by the wealthy white elite), efforts to create works

that represent, uplift, and glorify the traditions of historically marginalized New Orleanians (especially Black New Orleanians) have grown in popularity and demand. Increasingly, New Orleans is moving to shed the Old South image it long cultivated and towards a representation of the city that not only represents but celebrates its history as a majority Black city. As the fight over the New Orleans memroyscape demonstrates, monuments and memorials are fraught spaces that articulate publicly ideas of who we are, what we believe, and who belongs. The fact that the memroyscape has undergone such remarkable change since Katrina, both via removing and constructing new monuments and memorials, underscores the ongoing evolution of how New Orleanians seek to define themselves in the post-Katrina world. Katrina's continued existence as a fundamental break within New Orleanians ontology (see Chapter 1) has allowed for an ongoing reimagining of which memories should be collectively held as ideas of home have changed.

Until the Next One

The case studies of this project cumulatively map dramaturgies of Katrina storytelling across media that demonstrate the myriad ways that New Orleanians have developed and adapted survival mechanisms since the storm. I have moved through multivariate cases to highlight the range of ways artists and citizens grapple with these realities across modes of expression as well as geographies. Cumulatively, these studies utilize different means to reach, teach, and advocate for various publics, serving overlapping and distinct publics in the process. They stake out claims to belonging in a city undergoing profound change in how it understands itself. The scale of Katrina's devastation forced change in nearly every aspect of life within New Orleans, the impacts of which continue to shape the present city in profound ways. Indeed, the lasting ramifications of the disaster and the unequal distributions of both damage and resources mean that the tangible

effects of Katrina still exist across the city in countless ways. That the memory of Katrina likewise exists throughout the city in equally disparate forms is logical. Across the sites I study commonalities emerge. An attention to placemaking is paramount to adaption in places where civic identity is in flux. Placemaking allows residents to physicalize intangible ideas for communities such as belonging, mourning, and communing. A recognition of the fluid nature of memory is also key throughout these studies. Advocates and artists recognize the political potential of memory and understand that without careful intervention and effort groups may be neglected or erased. I utilize theatre and performance theory to examine these spaces not merely because many of the artists and culturemakers emerge directly from these traditions, but to highlight both the critical importance of collapsed temporalities (as explored above) as well as that of engaged, physical participation within a set place. As varied as my case studies are, they recognize the interrelationship of memory, embodied engagement, and complex temporality. The cases marshal publics and seek to instill an understanding of them and in some way activate these publics through embodied experience. In understanding that the rupture of Katrina has not closed, these case studies utilize that breakage to move across and throughout the past, present, and future. In this, these sites bring history and possibility to bear in the hopes of collectively finding a new way to live together beyond the break.

Throughout this dissertation I have worked to highlight the disparity of recovery within New Orleans. Decisions made in the early years following Katrina have had permanent effects on the city that resulted in a richer, whiter population with a greater income disparity and stagnant recoveries in traditionally Black neighborhoods.⁵⁷⁰ As the city continues to see climbing rents and low-wage employment locking predominantly Black citizens into lifetimes of poverty, it is unsurprising that New Orleans has remained among the most violent cities in the nation.⁵⁷¹ I have

demonstrated how Black and marginalized residents have consistently found ways to carve out spaces for themselves as well as sought to make visible their lives and essentiality to New Orleans. Through demonstrating the importance of Black contribution to New Orleans, artists and activists have leveraged Katrina into an ongoing call for recognition. This recognition has in many ways come: New Orleans has grown far more explicit in its recognition of Black and minoritarian groups' role in shaping the city's identity. This recognition, however, has not guaranteed fair recompense or remuneration.

I have shown the critical role that performance plays in post-disaster environments. We are already entering a period of time that, due to human action, will be defined by regular, severe, disasters. As we adapt to this new reality, performance will serve as a critical way humanity tries to make sense of our changing planet. A commonly cited idea among both disaster scholars and the public, particularly since Katrina, is that cities are remarkably hard to kill. Despite a cacophony of forces working against them, very few cities historically have been permanently destroyed by war, famine, economic turmoil, or even natural disaster.⁵⁷² I fear though, as the very ground recedes in many places beneath the waves, that this will change. Already the climate refugee crisis is beginning, effecting over 20 million people a year and likely to reach over 1 billion persons by 2050.⁵⁷³ As we go into this new chapter of the Anthropocene, I wonder if the role of performance will move from one of recovery to transmission. Performance might serve those displaced not with the motivations or skills to return home, but as a means of bringing part of what had been to the new places we inhabit, in a new world shaped by a crisis from which we continue to fail to save ourselves and our planet.

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Notes

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- ² Richard Brent Turner, *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), xiii.
- ³ Quo Vadis Gex-Beaux, , Waterlogged, Nomadic Katrina Songs,” in *I Am New Orleans: 36 Poets Revisit Marcus Christian’s Definitive Poem* edited by Kalamu ya Salaam (New Orleans: University of New Orleans Press, 2020): 112.
- ⁴ Shalia Dewan, “With the Jazz Funeral’s Return, the Spirit of New Orleans Rises,” *New York Times*, 10 October 2005, accessed 25 May 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/10/us/nationalspecial/with-the-jazz-funerals-return-the-spirit-of-new-orleans.html?_r=0
- ⁵ Brett Anderson, “Jazz funeral for chef Austin Leslie a symbol of hope after heartache,” *Times Picayune*, 10 October 2005, accessed on 25 May 2017.
- ⁶ Brett Anderson, “Chef Austin Leslie is Dead at 71,” *Times Picayune*, 30 September 2005, accessed on 25 May 2017. http://www.nola.com/dining/index.ssf/2005/09/chef_austin_leslie_is_dead_at.html
- ⁷ Throughout this dissertation I use the term “Black” when writing of Black peoples. In quotations I defer to the author’s capitalization.
- ⁸ Turner, 97.
- ⁹ Steven Gray and Evan Perez, “New Orleans Jazz Funerals are Casualty of Katrina,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, September 8, 2005, accessed November 28, 2021, <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/nation/2005/09/09/New-Orleans-jazz-funerals-are-casualty-of-Katrina/stories/200509090233>.
- ¹⁰ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 68.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*,
- ¹² It is striking that, particularly in the early aftermath of the storm, a large number of scholastic texts deliberately stated they intended to side-step the cultural effects of the storm. Often this was couched in language about the unique and significant culture of the city and how these studies intended to focus on less “obvious” transformations. In effect though this meant there was a surprisingly small amount of writing on cultural change within the city (which, early on, would have been unknowable in regard to length of lasting impact and scale). There are now some excellent scholastic works published cultural impacts, most of which correspond to the ten-year anniversary, however, they largely focus on only the earliest years after the storm. Those interested should see Ron Eyeran, *Is This America? Hurricane Katrina as Cultural Trauma* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015); Simon Dickle and Evangelia Kindinger, *After the Storm: The Cultural Politics of Hurricane Katrina* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015); Mary Ruth Marotte and Glenn Jellenik, *Ten Years After Katrina: Critical Perspectives of the Storm’s Effect on American Culture and Identity* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014). There is more work on the music of the city post-Katrina available, however this is still more limited than might be expected. See particularly: Lewis Watts and Eric Porter, *New Orleans Suite: Music and Culture in Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Michael Urban, *New Orleans Rhythm and Blues After Katrina: Music, Magic and Myth* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016); John Swenson, *New Atlantis: Musicians Battle for the Survival of New Orleans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- ¹³ Fred Moten, “Black Mo’nin’” in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* edited by David Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- ¹⁴ Miranda Joseph. *Against the Romance of Communities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- ¹⁵ See, Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Communities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- ¹⁶ Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella, “Conclusion: Axioms of Resilience,” in *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005):344.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 365.
- ¹⁸ Rachel La Corte, “Jazz Funeral Procession Back in Big Easy,” *Associated Press*, October 10, 2005.
- ¹⁹ Carl Bialik, “We Still Don’t Know How Many People Died Because of Katrina,” *FiveThirtyEight*, August 26, 2015, accessed September 29, 2021, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/we-still-dont-know-how-many-people-died-because-of-katrina/>.
- ²⁰ Anderson, 10 October.
- ²¹ Clarence Page, “The Second Disaster,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 2005.

- ²² Mike Pesca, “Are Katrina’s Victims ‘Refugees’ or ‘Evacuees?’” *NPR*, September 5, 2005, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4833613>.
- ²³ While official death tolls vary, the most commonly cited number is 1,833 dead throughout the Gulf Coast, of which close to 1,600 were from New Orleans. These numbers do not include at least 135 who were never accounted for (some locals insist that number is in the thousands), nor do they reflect the hundreds who died as a result of stress, exhaustion, plummeting mental health, and lack of access to medicine that were deadly to many, especially elderly, evacuees.
- ²⁴ For more on the misinformation and sensationalized rumors after the storm, see Bernie Cook, *Flood of Images: Media, Memory, and Hurricane Katrina* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015). Among, if not the, most prominent groups to fight media narratives depicting Katrina as a storm of unimaginable intensity was Sandy Rosenthal’s organization, Levees.org. More information on the group’s activities is available at www.levees.org or in Rosenthal’s book, see Sandy Rosenthal, *Words Whispered in Water: When the Levees Broke in Hurricane Katrina* (Coral Gables: Mango Publishing Group, 2020).
- ²⁵ John Burnett, “Billions Spent On Flood Barriers, But New Orleans Still A ‘Fishbowl,’” *NPR*, August 28, 2015, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2015/08/28/432059261/billions-spent-on-flood-barriers-but-new-orleans-still-a-fishbowl>.
- ²⁶ Andy Horowitz, *Katrina: A History, 1915-2015* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020): 128-133.
- ²⁷ See Horowitz, *ibid.*
- ²⁸ See, Cedric Johnson, “Introduction: The Neoliberal Deluge,” in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans* edited by Cedric Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): xvii-l.
- ²⁹ See, Clyde Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans* edited by Jordan T. Camp and Laura Pulido (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).
- ³⁰ Adams and Sakakeeny’s edited volume in particular is critical to a new wave of thought on New Orleans that seeks to leverage New Orleans’ recognizability and Katrina based attention into a case study for a wide range of problems that exist in other cities throughout the US. See, Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny, “Introduction: What Lies beyond Histories of Exceptionalism and Cultures of Authenticity,” in *Remaking New Orleans: Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity* edited by Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 1-34. Vincanne Adams ethnographic work in the city is among the best accounts of how the hollowing out of social services and privatization of nearly every part of the city has damaged life for the most vulnerable, especially people of color. See, Vincanne Adams, *Markets of Sorrow, Labors of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).
- ³¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes* translated by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015): 4.
- ³² See, Eyerman.
- ³³ Anderson, October 10.
- ³⁴ Claude F. Jacobs, “Benevolent Societies of New Orleans Blacks during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 29/1 (1988): 21-22.
- ³⁵ Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., “Mapping Inequality,” *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/29.963/-90.163&city=new-orleans-la>.
- ³⁶ Katerine Jolliff Dunn, “The Pumps that Built (and Sank) the City of New Orleans,” *The Historic New Orleans Collection First Draft*, August 3, 2020, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://www.hnoc.org/publications/first-draft/pumps-built-and-sank-city-new-orleans>.
- ³⁷ Livia Gershon, “The Highway that Sparked the Demise of an Iconic Black Street in New Orleans,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 28, 2021, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/documenting-history-iconic-new-orleans-street-and-looking-its-future-180977854/>.
- ³⁸ Turner, 6.
- ³⁹ Rashauna Johnson, *Slavery’s Metropolis: Unfree Labor in New Orleans during the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 117.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.
- ⁴¹ Leo Touchet, *Rejoice When You Die* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998) 2.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ Stephanie McKee-Anderson (Executive Artistic Director Junebug Productions) in conversation with the author, February 2020.

- ⁴⁴ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).
- ⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, edited by Marcus Paul Bullock, Michael William Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 576.
- ⁴⁶ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 12.
- ⁴⁷ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 108.
- ⁴⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6-7.
- ⁴⁹ John Lennon and Malcom Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (Hampshire: Cengage Learning, 2010), 4.
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- ⁵² See, Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000).
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- ⁵⁴ See, Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).
- ⁵⁵ Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 20.
- ⁵⁶ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 15-16.
- ⁵⁷ David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 4.
- ⁵⁸ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Engagement* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 101-102.
- ⁵⁹ Vivian Patraka, *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 116.
- ⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 61.
- ⁶¹ Anderson, October 10.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Jennifer Griffiths, *Traumatic Possessions: The Body and Memory in African American Women's Writing and Performance* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009): 1.
- ⁶⁴ Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004): 3.
- ⁶⁵ There is important work done demonstrating the valuable role theatre can play, especially for vulnerable communities, in generating support networks. See, Miriam Bernard and Michelle Rickett, "The Cultural Value of Older People's Experiences of Theatre-making: A Review," *The Gerontologist* 57/2 (2017): e1-e26; Elaine Aston, "Agitating for Change: Theatre and a Feminist 'Network of Resistance,'" *Theatre Research International* 41/1 (2016) 5-20; Danielle Dickinson and Nick Hutchinson, "Changes in understandings and perceptions of individuals, significant others and community supporters involved in a theatre company for adults with intellectual disabilities," *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* 32/3 (2019): 691-705.
- ⁶⁶ Jack Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster* (London: Routledge, 2014): 104-105.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 39.
- ⁶⁸ See, Harry Elam, *Taking it to the Streets: The Social Protest Theatre of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Erika Fisher Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2008).
- ⁶⁹ See Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015).
- ⁷⁰ Andy Horowitz, *Katrina: A History, 1915-2015* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020): 91.
- ⁷¹ For information pertaining to the relocation of Isle de Jean Charles see, Coral Davenport and Campbell Robertson, Resettling the First American 'Climate Refugees,' *New York Times*, May 2, 2016, accessed October 3, 2021,

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⁷³ Spike Lee, *When the Levees Broke* (2006; Los Angeles: HBO), film.

⁷⁴ Dewan.

⁷⁵ See, Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

⁷⁶ Anthony J. Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism, 1918-1945* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2006): 25.

⁷⁷ Lynell L. Thomas, *Desire and Disaster In New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014): 7.

⁷⁸ Thomas Jessen Adams, Sue Mobley, and Matt Sakakeeny, “Introduction: What Lies Beyond Histories of Exceptionalism and Cultures of Authenticity,” in *Remaking New Orleans: Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity*, edited by Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Helen A. Regis, “Local, Native, Creole, Black: Claiming Belonging, Producing Autochthony,” in *Remaking New Orleans: Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity*, edited by Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019): 140.

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⁸² SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁴ Lisa d’Amour, *Airline Highway* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015): vi.

⁸⁵ Ann Maloney, “Meet Me Under an Old Oak.” *Times-Picayune*, April 20, 2007: 02. NewsBank: America’s News – Historical and Current, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/118A31E4AEC747E0>.

⁸⁶ John Biguenet, *The Rising Water Trilogy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015): 38.

⁸⁷ Catherine Campanella, *Lake Pontchartrain* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 8.

⁸⁸ Thomas Beller, “Don’t Call It Katrina,” *The New Yorker*, May 29, 2015, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/dont-call-it-katrina>. Sandy Rosenthal, “Levees.org supporters respond to NY Times editor’s defense of calling Katrina a ‘natural disaster.’” *Levees.org*, May 6, 2010, accessed March 25, 2020, <http://levees.org/2010/05/06/levees-org-supporters-respond-to-ny-times-editors-defense-of-calling-katrina-a-natural-disaster/>. Jarvis DeBerry, “‘Katrina,’ ‘Federal Flood,’ ‘Levee Failure,’ What Do You Call What Happened?” *Times Picayune*, August 20, 2015, Accessed March 25, 2020, https://www.nola.com/opinions/article_06fb27c6-3d40-53a8-849d-7a711c761c72.html.

⁸⁹ Richard Campanella, “A Katrina Lexicon: How We Talk About a Disaster so Monumental We Can’t Agree on what to Call It,” *Places* (2015), accessed 22 March, 2020, <https://placesjournal.org/article/a-katrina-lexicon/?cn-reloaded=1>.

⁹⁰ As Philip Auslander argues, liveness is often more tied to an act of temporality than physical presence. While there are certainly theatrical performances and forms which might exist in temporally “live” realms, the attenuation of the theatricality which I examine is based on simultaneous presence linked by *space*. For more on conceptions of liveness, see Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁹¹ For perhaps among the sharpest critiques against the role theatre plays within building community see, Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): x-xviii.

⁹² Jennifer Wallace, *Tragedy Since 9/11: Reading a World Out of Joint* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 4-5.

⁹³ I do not here mean to critique this approach, as it is a particularly useful one for scholars in the midst of an event to process and try to contextualize a tragic phenomenon. My interest in the role of tragedy, as explained in text, is, however, in the usage of the dramatic form rather than the genre as a philosophical approach to mirror current events. In particular here, I think of the work of many scholars post-9/11 who followed this strategy and produced fruitful theoretical work, chief amongst them the many theatre and performance theorists who contributed to *Theatre Journal*’s collection of essays responding to 9/11 and sociologist Jeffery Alexander’s provocative essay regarding

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- ⁹⁶ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998): 6-7.
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- ⁹⁹ Helene P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 28.
- ¹⁰⁰ Fred Moten, *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 85.
- ¹⁰¹ Wai Chee Dimock, "Homer, Euripides, Total War," in *Rethinking Tragedy* edited by Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008): 68.
- ¹⁰² Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Noonday Press, 1972): 142-143.
- ¹⁰³ Emily Wilson, "Introduction," in *The Cultural History of Tragedy in Antiquity* edited by Emily Wilson (London, Bloomsbury Academic: 2020): 1.
- ¹⁰⁴ Barthes, 108.
- ¹⁰⁵ Joshua Foa Dienstag, "Tragedy, Pessimism, Nietzsche," in *Rethinking Tragedy* edited by Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008): 111.
- ¹⁰⁶ Pamela McCallum, "Introduction: Reading *Modern Tragedy* in the Twenty-First Century," in *Modern Tragedy* (Toronto: Broadview Encore Editions, 2006), 17.
- ¹⁰⁷ Wallace, 8.
- ¹⁰⁸ Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," *New York Times*, February 27, 1949.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁰ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 3-4.
- ¹¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (Toronto: Broadview Encore Editions, 2006), 33-35.
- ¹¹² Nicole Loraux, *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy* translated by Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings (Ithaca: Cornell, 2002), 88-89.
- ¹¹³ Rayner, xix.
- ¹¹⁴ Wallace, 10.
- ¹¹⁵ J. Steven Picou and Kenneth Hudson, "Hurricane Katrina and Mental Health: A Research Note on Mississippi Gulf Coast Residents," *Sociological Inquiry* 80, no. 3 (2010): 520-521.
- ¹¹⁶ Saliha Bava and Jack Saul, "Implementing Collective Approaches to Massive Trauma and Loss in Western Contexts," in *Mass Trauma: Impact and Recovery Issues* edited by Kathryn Gow and Marek J. Celinski (New York: Nova Publishers, 2013), 10.
- ¹¹⁷ While there is significant evidence that Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) is particularly useful in PTSD communities, especially those which have experienced prolonged or multiple traumas (complex traumas), nearly all trauma therapists will require some elements of narrativizing the experience. My attention therefore is not on a specific form of therapy such as NET, but rather the role that narrative plays across therapeutic approaches.
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- ¹¹⁹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014), 74.
- ¹²⁰ For recent work on post-traumatic community theatre work, see Ivy I-chu Chang, "Theatre as Therapy, therapy as theatre, transforming the memories and trauma of the 21 September 1999 earthquake in Taiwan," *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Theatre and Performance* 10/3 (2005): 285-201; Phil Jones, "Trauma and dramatherapy: dreams, play and the social construction of culture" *South African Theatre Journal* 28/1 (2015): 4-16; Alisha Ali, "Theatre as a treatment for posttraumatic stress in military veterans: Exploring the psychotherapeutic potential of mimetic induction," *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 50 (2016): 58-65; George Belliveau, Christopher Cook, Blair McLean, and Graham W. Lea, "Thawing out: Therapy through theatre with Canadian military veterans," 62 (2019): 45-51; Armand Volkas, "Healing the Wounds of History: Drama Therapy in Collective Trauma and

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¹²¹ See, Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

¹²² Robert Landry, “The Future of Drama Therapy,” *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 33 (2006): 136-137.

¹²³ See Robert J. Landry, “Drama as a Means of Preventing Post-Traumatic Stress Following Trauma Within a Community,” *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*, 1:1 (2010): 12-14. Jack Saul, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster* (Routledge: New York, 2014): 134-140

¹²⁴ Mady Schutzman et al., “Therapy: Social Healing and Liberatory Politics a Round-Table Discussion,” in *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theatre and Politics* edited by Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (New York: Routledge, 2006), 64.

¹²⁵ Saul, 138.

¹²⁶ Kathleen M. Sands, “Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism in the Time After Time,” in *Rethinking Tragedy* edited by Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008): 83.

¹²⁷ Richard Dodds, “New Theatre Fest to Have Southern Feel,” *Times-Picayune* January 11, 1987.

¹²⁸ Richard Dodds, “Local Theatres Gear Up for Summer,” *Times-Picayune*, May 12, 1988.

¹²⁹ Richard Dodds, “Southern Rep Lands on Its Feet with ‘Cat’,” *Times-Picayune*, March 26, 1992.

¹³⁰ Ann Maloney, “Southern Rep seeking new home after changes at Canal Place,” *Nola.com*, January 9, 2012, accessed February 17, 2020, https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/arts/article_f14189d5-b02e-5fe0-9976-9ff5c9258abe.html.

¹³¹ “A new life begins for the former St. Rose de Lima Church,” *New Orleans City Business*, October 5, 2018, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://neworleanscitybusiness.com/blog/2018/10/05/a-new-life-begins-for-the-former-st-rose-de-lima-church/>.

¹³² Marlene Thian, “Southern Rep (Internship Report,” MA Thesis, (New Orleans: University of New Orleans, 2013), 6.

¹³³ The final commissioned play, *The Breach*, was a co-production with Seattle Repertory Theatre and written by Catherine Filloux, Tarell Alvin McCraney, and Joe Sutton. While *The Breach* is singularly focused on the storm and its immediate aftermath, it stands apart through the use of multiple authors (each of whom wrote separate scenes and stories which were then interwoven to make a cohesive play) who speak to different issues in the aftermath.

¹³⁴ Biguenet, 3.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

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¹³⁷ Cuthbert, David, “‘Rising’ to the top - World premiere Katrina play is a rich mixture of tragedy and humor,” *The Times-Picayune*, March 24, 2007: 01. NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current.

<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/11814BF0AF4443F8>.

¹³⁸ For a useful overview of the how the city has continually been forged through its relationship to the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River, see Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

¹³⁹ Claude Levi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 68/270 (1955): 429.

¹⁴⁰ Cuthbert, David. “Flood of emotions - Local playwright John Biguenet's 'Rising Water' revisits Katrina in the touching story of two aging New Orleanians trapped in their attic.” *Times-Picayune*, March 17, 2007: 01.

NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/117EFD361C04E5B8>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ David Cuthbert, “The Buzz on *Rising Water*’ - Southern Rep's Katrina play has the city talking,” *Times-Picayune*, April 20, 2007, NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current,

<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/118A31E454513B0>.

¹⁴⁵ Cuthbert, “Flood of Emotions,” 1.

¹⁴⁶ Darcy Courteau, “Deluge Trilogy,” *American Scholar* 80/1 (2011): 16.

¹⁴⁷ Cuthbert, “Flood of Emotion,” 1.

¹⁴⁸ Biguenet, 29.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 69-70.

¹⁵² Ibid., 71.

¹⁵³ Naomi A. Weiss, *The Music of Tragedy: Performance and Imagination in the Euripidean Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 4.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Campanella, "Analyzing New Orleans' New Footprint," *Time-Picayune* August 29, 2007: 01, NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/11B5662004D4D4E8>.

¹⁵⁵ Cristine McMurdo-Wallis (actress who originated the role of Camille) in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹⁵⁶ Chris Waddington, "Playwright John Biguenet: 'Death is Our Neighbor,'" *Times Picayune*, August 26, 2015: C-2.

¹⁵⁷ David Cuthbert, "The Buzz on 'Rising Water'-Southern Rep's Katrina Play Has People Talking," *Times-Picayune* April 20, 2007 NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current,

<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/118A31E454513BA0>.

¹⁵⁸ Biguenet, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Cuthbert, "The Buzz..."

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, Ann Maloney, "Meet Me..."

¹⁶¹ Cuthbert, "The Buzz..."

¹⁶² Tom Anderson, (audience member) in conversation with the author, January 2020.

¹⁶³ Cuthbert, "The Buzz..."

¹⁶⁴ See Loraux; Dimock; Page duBois, "Toppling the Hero: Polyphony in the Tragic City," in *Rethinking Tragedy* edited by Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008): 136-140.

¹⁶⁵ See, Campbell Roberston, "Racially Disparate Views of New Orleans's Recovery After Hurricane Katrina," *New York Times*, August 24, 2015, accessed April 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/25/us/hurricane-katrina-new-orleans-recovery-ten-years-opinion.html>; Jeff Adelson, "New Orleans Segregation, Racial Disparity Likely Worsened by post-Katrina Policies, Report Says," *Times Picayune*, April 5, 2018, accessed April 8, 2020, https://www.nola.com/article_aca9f922-8f59-5357-b420-66dc0fa300fb.html.

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- ¹⁹⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978), 199.
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- ²⁰⁰ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1996), 2.
- ²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 212-213
- ²⁰² Mark Routhier, director of *Mold*, in conversation with the author August 4th, 2021.
- ²⁰³ Simon Goldhill, "Generalizing About Tragedy," in *Rethinking Tragedy* edited by Rita Felski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008): 59.
- ²⁰⁴ *Rising Water* alone sold over 10,000 tickets, and *Shotgun* and *Mold* each reached audiences of over 4,000. While likely many of these viewers were repeat attendees or attendees of multiple productions, it is clear that the productions reached a significant number of New Orleanians.
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- ²¹⁷ Evan Imber-Black, "Rituals and the Healing Process," in *Living Beyond Loss: Death in the Family* edited by Froma Walsh and Monica McGoldrick (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004): 340.
- ²¹⁸ Rachel Carrico, "Second Line Choreographies in and beyond New Orleans," in *Futures of Dance Studies*, edited by Susan Manning, Janice Ross, and Rebecca Schneider (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 191-193.
- ²¹⁹ P.E. Moskowitz, *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2018), 15.
- ²²⁰ Ibid.
- ²²¹ Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed July 10, 2021, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/29.963/-90.163&city=new-orleans-la>.
- ²²² Toni Morrison, "Rememory" in *Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, Meditations* (New York: Penguin, 2019), 324.
- ²²³ It is worth noting here that the title of Jesmyn Ward's novel focused on Hurricane Katrina is *Salvage the Bones*—a fact that hints at the larger idea of salvaging that runs through this strand of Black feminist memory work. .
- ²²⁴ Yvonne Daniels, *Dancing Wednesday: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Vodou, and Bahian Candomblé* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 5.
- ²²⁵ Carol BeBelle, "Swimming Upstream: A Rain Dance," *TDR: The Drama Review* 57, 1 (2013): 26-27.
- ²²⁶ Sharpe's point ties the stateless quality of Black women and children in post-disaster environments through the history of partus sequitur ventrem "that which is brought forth follows the womb," "which dictated that the children of a slave woman inherited the mother's non/status. For more, see Cristina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 79.
- ²²⁷ In particular, Caroline Hellman, one of the co-founders of the Lower Ninth War Living Museum explored in the following chapter, relayed multiple stories of concerted efforts by male figures (both white and Black) that sought to discredit or marginalize community organizing and leadership by Black women in the Lower Ninth Ward. Stephanie McKee-Anderson, artistic director of Junebug theatre, also alluded to strong Black women who took on outsized roles in the recovery and received little or no credit for their labor.
- ²²⁸ I conducted no interview with an artist where some thanks or reference to Ashé did not come up. The other leading supportive organization is the Contemporary Arts Center, that has existed since 1976 and has served as the best endowed local arts organization for performance and interdisciplinary art in the city since its founding.
- ²²⁹ "Ashé's History," *Ashé Cultural Arts Center*, accessed July 2, 2021, <https://www.ashenola.org/history>.
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- ²³¹ Jan Cohen-Cruz (Professor and one of the project leaders of HOME, New Orleans) in conversation with the author, June, 2021.
- ²³² Aimee Chang, "New Models for Creative Public Practice," in *Transforma: 2005-2010* (New Orleans: Transforma Projects, 2010), 13.
- ²³³ The full list of major foundation support included: The Andry Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Joan Mitchell Foundation, Ford Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, National Performance Network, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Quixote Foundations, Inc., The Annenberg Foundation, and American Center Foundation. Additionally, nineteen New Orleans based non-profit groups provided financial or in-kind donations of space other resources.

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- ²⁵⁷ Fox: 73-75.
- ²⁵⁸ Bowling and Carrico, 192. In particular, the fact that the cemetery is below ground—the only fully below ground cemetery in New Orleans, marks it as a place of extreme poverty both because of the popular style of above ground crypts (a European influence that took hold of the city in the 18th Century) but also because of the water table that threatens to unearth and damage below-ground coffins in the city. For more on New Orleans cemeteries and burial traditions, see Joseph Roach, “Dreaming New Orleans: Desire, Cemeteries, and Elysian Fields,” *TDR* 65, no. 1 (2021): 18.
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- ²⁸² "Our Founding," Junebug Productions, accessed 14 April 2020, <https://www.junebugproductions.org/our-founding>.
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³⁵² Kevin Fox Gotham, "(Re)Branding the Big Easy: Tourism Rebuilding in Post-Katrina New Orleans," *Urban Affairs Review* 42/6: 823-850.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 825.

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³⁵⁵ Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998),

³⁵⁶ It is worth remembering that in the early weeks and months after the storm the literal survival of the city felt precarious. Public figures were often unsupportive or even derisive of the city in the aftermath. Then Speaker of the House and current convicted felon Dennis Hastert made now the infamous remark that New Orleans, "could be bulldozed" (see, Charles Babinton, "Hastert tries damage control after remarks hit a nerve," *Washington Post*, September 3, 2005, accessed 24 January, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2005/09/03/hastert-tries-damage-control-after-remarks-hit-a-nerve/b942a75f-a8d5-49fe-8fc9-54ae13d69647/>). President Bush's infamously late support of the city emerged most forcefully three weeks after the disaster during his Jackson Square national address on September 15th. Mayor Ray Nagin quickly grew tired of responding to questions regarding if the city would rebuild or not, saying, "we don't even think about not rebuilding Miami. We don't think about rebuilding Los Angeles, and they're on a fault line. We just do it. We don't talk about it. I don't want to talk about that foolishness. (see, Doug MacCash, "City must overcome disaster, mayor says," *Times-Picayune*, September 4, 2005).

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³⁶⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1999), 576.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ Eng and Kazanjian, 4.

³⁷⁰ In particular, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Engagement* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Andreas Huyssen *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003); Vivian Patra, *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2006).

³⁷¹ Tracy C. Davis, “Performing and the Real Thing in the Postmodern Museum,” *TDR* 39 (1995): 16.

³⁷² Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

³⁷³ For more on performance genealogies, see Roach, *Cities of the Dead*.

³⁷⁴ Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 13

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ Spielberg and Hanks developed a lifelong interest in the Second World War after working together on the hit film *Saving Private Ryan*. Following the success, they partnered with Stephen E. Ambrose for the HBO series *Band of Brothers*. The connection to Ambrose has led to the men financially and publicly supporting throughout its existence, and Hanks has repeatedly narrated exhibits and presentations for the museum. See, John Pope, “A War Story: the history of the National World War II Museum in New Orleans,” *Nola.com*, March 28, 2019, accessed February 4, 2021, https://www.nola.com/300/article_8dad66df-bcfe-56ce-ba8f-ff92c0551a8a.html.

³⁷⁷ For museum visitation numbers see National World War II Museum, “The National WWII Museum Sets Visitation Records,” Press release, January 4, 2018, accessed February 4, 2021, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/media/press-releases/national-wwii-museum-sets-visitation-records>.

³⁷⁸ Regardless of the kind of tour, a ghost story will likely be told in the square. A history-based tour might highlight the Creole Revolt of 1768 and the subsequent execution of its ringleaders in front of the Cathedral. A food tour will probably still point out that Muriel’s (the restaurant sitting directly next to the Presbytere) has long reserved a table for a ghostly resident that is visible as groups walk by. And a ghost tour will tell a story (among others) about a young Creole woman who froze to death waiting outside for her white lover after he promised to wed her, and how she can still be seen or heard wandering near the Cathedral on wintery evenings.

³⁷⁹ Indeed, one of the aims of the Katrina exhibit was to pull in local residents to help bolster the museum’s recognition locally (Jeff Hayward, “Evaluation of ‘Living with Hurricanes: Katrina and Beyond’: An Exhibition at the Louisiana State Museum, New Orleans Final Report,” *Informal Science* (Evaluation Report, Washington, D.C., July 2013), 12. Further, in my interviews and conversations with New Orleanians, very few knew of the existence of the museum at all, those who did were typically leaders of other museums.

³⁸⁰ For literature the state control of memory see, Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). For this topic within a performance context see, Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War”* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Suk-Young Kim, *Illusive Utopia: Theatre, Film, and Everyday Performance in North Korea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

³⁸¹ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 25.

³⁸² Patra, 123.

- ³⁸³ Associated Press, “Historic Presbytere in New Orleans Reopens,” *WAFB9* (New Orleans, LA), April 30, 2006, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.wafb.com/story/4832101/historic-presbytere-in-new-orleans-reopens/>.
- ³⁸⁴ Wayne Phillips (curator of Carnival Collections, Louisiana State Museum) in discussion with the author, July 2019.
- ³⁸⁵ Hayward, 4.
- ³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 12, 17.
- ³⁸⁷ The Louisiana Research Team, “Louisiana State Museum,” (Impact Report, Baton Rouge, LA, 2006).
- ³⁸⁸ Nora, 9.
- ³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹¹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹² *Ibid.*, 9.
- ³⁹³ Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, translated by Judy Rein and Marcial Godoy-Anatavia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 50.
- ³⁹⁴ When the exhibit opened many papers ran articles about it, and the hatchet appears nearly uniformly. The hatchet and attic are explicitly brought up as highlights in the following among others: Dallas Morning News, “Artifacts, Survivor Stories Power New Orleans Exhibit on Hurricane Katrina,” November 20, 2010, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/travel/2010/11/20/artifacts-survivor-stories-power-new-orleans-exhibit-on-hurricane-katrina/>; Columbus Dispatch, “Exhibit Recalls Hell Unleashed When Katrina Hit Gulf Coast,” October 31, 2010, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://www.dispatch.com/article/20101031/LIFESTYLE/310319841>; Guy Nagle Myers, “Tales of Ruin, Rebuilding in Museum’s Katrina Exhibit,” November 22, 2010, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://www.travelweekly.com/Destinations2001-2007/Tales-of-ruin-rebuilding-in-museum-s-Katrina-exhibit>.
- ³⁹⁵ Josephine Machon, (*Syn*) *aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (London: Palgrave, 2009), 14.
- ³⁹⁶ Davis, 16.
- ³⁹⁷ Meghan Kluth, “‘Are We Ready to Move On?’ Katrina and Beyond, 12 Years After the Storm,” WGNO (New Orleans ABC Television News), August 29, 2017, accessed November 23, 2019, <https://wgno.com/2017/08/29/are-we-ready-to-move-on-katrina-and-beyond-12-years-after-the-storm/>
- ³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹⁹ Dallas Morning News.
- ⁴⁰⁰ Hayward, 78.
- ⁴⁰¹ “Lower Ninth Ward Statistical Area,” *The Data Center*, <https://www.datacenterresearch.org/data-resources/neighborhood-data/district-8/lower-ninth-ward/>.
- ⁴⁰² Linda Robertson, “How Shall We Remember New Orleans?: Comparing News Coverage of Post-Katrina New Orleans and the 2008 Midwest Floods,” in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*, edited by Cedric Johnson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 293.
- ⁴⁰³ Juliette Landphair, “‘The Forgotten People of New Orleans’: Community, Vulnerability and the Lower Ninth Ward,” *The Journal of American History* 94/3, (2007), 839.
- ⁴⁰⁴ Juliette Landphair, “Sewage, Sidewalks, and Schools: The New Orleans Ninth Ward and Public School Desegregation,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 30/1 (1999), 37.
- ⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 841.
- ⁴⁰⁶ “Lower Ninth Ward Statistical Area.”
- ⁴⁰⁷ See, for example, David Lohr, “New Orleans’ Upper 9th Ward Resembles a Zombie Apocalypse,” *Huffpost* August 31, 2008, accessed January 2nd, 2020, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/new-orleans-urban-decay_n_57c05e53e4b085c1ff2910ab; Manuel Roig-Franzia, “A ‘resilience lab’: An Influx of Capital and Newcomers has Triggered Changes in New Orleans, a Fragile City That’s Used to Moving at its Own Pace,” August 22, 2015, accessed January 2nd, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2015/08/22/a-resilience-lab/?utm_term=.93f083422877; Greg Allen, “Ghosts of Katrina Still Haunt New Orleans’ Shattered Lower Ninth Ward,” August 3, 2015, accessed January 2nd, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2015/08/03/427844717/ghosts-of-katrina-still-haunt-new-orleans-shattered-lower-ninth-ward>; Jesse Hardman, “A Lower Ninth Ward Story: A Walking Tour of What Still Stands,” August 29, 2015, accessed January 2, 2020, <http://projects.aljazeera.com/2015/08/lower-ninth-ward/>;
- ⁴⁰⁸ Some of the scholarship that has addressed the idea of post-Katrina New Orleans in the context of necropolitics includes Bernie Cook, *Flood of Images: Media, Memory, and Hurricane Katrina* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015); Henry A. Giroux, “Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability,” in *College Literature* 33, 3 (2006): 171-196; Daina Cheyenne Harvey, “Social Policy as Secondary Violence in the Aftermath

of a Disaster: An Extension to Naomi Klein's Disaster Capitalism," in *Humanity & Society* 41, 3 (2017): 333-254; Holly Cade Brown, "Figuring Giorgio Agamben's 'Bare Life' in the Post-Katrina Works of Jesmyn Ward and Kara Walker," in *Journal of American Studies* 51, 1 (2017): 1-19.

⁴⁰⁹ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 40.

⁴¹⁰ For a more thorough explanation of the 1927 Flood, and how wealthy New Orleans businessmen coerced the government into dynamiting the southern levees, see John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America* (New York: Simon and Schuster): 245-258. For a more on post-Betsy attitudes and beliefs in the Lower Ninth Ward, see, Andy Horowitz, "Hurricane Betsy and the Politics of Disaster in New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward, 1965-1967," *The Journal of Southern History* 80/4 (2014), 913.

⁴¹¹ This is referenced explicitly in the museum, but also is a prominent theme in Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke*. Additionally, based on my time in the city, when I would explain my research to various people (sometimes interview subjects, but often Lyft drivers or parade goers, etc.) a large number would reference the "dynamiting of the levees" and tell me they weren't convinced it happened but were unwilling to dismiss the idea out of hand.

⁴¹² bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 42.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴¹⁴ Landphair, "The Forgotten...," 840.

⁴¹⁵ The number of visitors is listed in a electronic guestbook held by the museum, and was confirmed in conversation with museum staff.

⁴¹⁶ Ian Breckenridge-Jackson, "In the Lower Ninth Ward, a Museum Works to Preserve a Culture Washed Away," *The Conversation* August 21, 2015, accessed 3 January 2020, <https://theconversation.com/in-the-lower-ninth-ward-a-museum-works-to-preserve-a-culture-washed-away-46170>.

⁴¹⁷ Emma Willis, *Theatricality, Dark Tourism, and Ethical Spectatorship: Absent Others* (Houndsmills: Plagrave Macmillan, 2014), 17.

⁴¹⁸ Some of the classic examples of dark tourism in the city include visits to the numerous above ground cemeteries known as "Cities of the Dead," and in particular the visiting of Marie Laveau's tomb in St. Louis Cemetery no. 1. Additionally, ghost tours remain one of the most popular local tours, with literally scores of options for tourists to choose from (a particularly popular visitation site is the LaLaurie mansion in the French Quarter that gained national notoriety after the eponymous owner was portrayed by Kathy Bates for a season of *American Horror Story*). The Museum of Death in the French Quarter is also a popular spot for tourists seeking a macabre outing.

⁴¹⁹ While a copy of archive is held by staff members, members of the public must access the holdings through Louisiana State University that has not yet made the materials accessible to scholars.

⁴²⁰ Butler, 44.

⁴²¹ Leona Tate (who is a major figure within political activism today and she serves as the executive director of the Living History Museum) Tessie Prevost, and Gail Etienne are commonly referred to as the McDonogh Three. The three girls were the first to integrate McDonogh Three, an elementary school in the Lower Ninth Ward in 1960.

⁴²² Andrew Sofer, *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theater & Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 4.

⁴²³ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

⁴²⁴ In particular, Diana Taylor has elaborated on the criticality of pain as a means of championing social and political change in her work. See, Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Both Freddie Rokem and Vivian Patraka explore the ways performers attempt to channel the physical trauma of the Holocaust and demonstrate this to audiences. See, Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representation of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000). See, Vivian Patraka, *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre Fascism, and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999). Elizabeth W. Son's recent book highlights how centering reading pain through the body is a critical component for seeking redress from earlier trauma in her exploration of the "Comfort Women" of Korea and their sexual slavery during the Second World War. See, Elizabeth W. Son, *Embodied Reckonings: "Comfort Women," Performance, and Transpacific Redress* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

⁴²⁵ Butler, 32.

⁴²⁶ Son, *Embodied Reckonings*, 39.

⁴²⁷ Fred Moten, "Black Mo'nin'" in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* edited by David Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 64.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴²⁹ Sarah M. Broom, *The Yellow House* (New York: Grove Press, 2019): 4.

⁴³⁰ bell hooks, *Yearning*, 43.

⁴³¹ Sandy Rosenthal, (founder and President, Levees.org), in discussion with the author, 2 July 2019.

⁴³² Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2000), xii.

⁴³³ Stanford Rosenthal, "About," www.levées.org/about/.

⁴³⁴ Ken Connor, (Flooded House Museum set designer) in discussion with the author, 13 July 2019.

⁴³⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 61.

⁴³⁶ Stanford Rosenthal, "Educational Exhibits," Levees.org, accessed 12 August 2019, <http://levées.org/educational-resources/>.

⁴³⁷ Both plaques end with the sentence "In 2008, the US District Court, Easter District of Louisiana, placed responsibility for this floodwall's collapse squarely on the US Army Corps of Engineers; however, the agency is protected from financial liability in the Flood Control Act of 1928."

⁴³⁸ The plot of land is generally unnoticeable, indeed until I spoke with Rosenthal regarding the two sites did she inform me that the tract in between is separately owned. In the time I spent observing tourists visiting it did not seem apparent to anyone that the two spaces were discrete, and in general those visiting generally all observed both the FHM and Exhibit Hall.

⁴³⁹ Sandy Rosenthal, (founder and President, Levees.org), in discussion with the author, 2 July 2019.

⁴⁴⁰ Among the features within the exhibit is a section of "myth-busting" where popular Katrina narratives are laid out and then deconstructed. The most interesting item here is an omission: nowhere does the narrative acknowledge or deconstruct one of the most popular myths of the storm, that of the Army Corps deliberately dynamiting the levees to purposefully flood the city remains popular within many African-American communities in the city.

⁴⁴¹ Ken Connor, (Flooded House Museum set designer) in discussion with the author, 13 July 2019.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ The "X-Code" (also referred to as an "X" or sometimes "Katrina Cross") is a shorthand symbol utilized by search and recovery teams to alert others that a building has been searched or is in progress of being searched.

⁴⁴⁴ George Friedman, "The Ghost City," *New York Review of Books* September 8, 2005, accessed 7 December, 2020, <https://www.nybooks-com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/articles/2005/10/06/the-ghost-city/>.

⁴⁴⁵ This idea rose to national attention through activist Naomi Klein's work, where she strongly condemns an op-ed piece Milton Friedman wrote for the Wall Street Journal extolling the value of school vouchers. See, Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 2007). Some important scholarly contributions detailing the neoliberal takeover of the city include: Cedric Johnson (editor), *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Anna Hartnell, *After Katrina: Race, Neoliberalism, and the End of the American Century* (New York: SUNY, 2017); Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg, *Crisis Cities: Disaster and Redevelopment in New York and New Orleans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); *The "Katrina Effect": On the Nature of Catastrophe*, edited by William M. Taylor, Michael P. Leving, Oenone Rooksby, and Joely-Kym Sobott (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁴⁴⁶ Jackson does note the risks of Disneyfication that could occur with such a model, but points to a partnership between the business sector and tourism oriented entities as a critical step towards the survival of New Orleans cultural practices. See, Maria-Rosario Jackson, "Rebuilding the Cultural Vitality of New Orleans," in *After Katrina: Rebuilding Opportunity and Equity in the New New Orleans*, edited by Margery Austin Turner and Sheila R. Zedlewski (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2006), 55-62.

⁴⁴⁷ Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 7.

⁴⁴⁸ Nora, 9.

⁴⁴⁹ Andermann and Arnold-de Simine, 8.

⁴⁵⁰ Patraha, 127.

⁴⁵¹ Sofer, 10.

⁴⁵² See, Susan Bennett, *Theatre and Museums*; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*; Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Vivian Patraha, *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Facism, and the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death's Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

⁴⁵³ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 15.

⁴⁵⁴ Jens Andermann and Silke Arnold-de Simine, "Introduction: Memory, Community and the New Museum," in *Theory, Culture and Society* 29/1 (2012), 8.

- ⁴⁵⁵ Tracy C. Davis, "Performing and the Real Thing in the Postmodern Museum," *TDR* 39, no. 3 (1995): 16.
- ⁴⁵⁶ Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, translated by Adrian Jackson (London: Routledge, 2002): 250.
- ⁴⁵⁷ A useful explainer of the concept of memoryscapes is available in Christine DeLucia, "The Memory Frontier: Uncommon Pursuits of Past and Place in the Northeast after King Philip's War," *The Journal of American History*, 98, no. 4 (2012): 977.
- ⁴⁵⁸ Elizabeth W. Son, *Embodied Reckonings: "Comfort Women," Performance, and Transpacific Redress* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018): 149.
- ⁴⁵⁹ David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.
- ⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁴⁶² Jaques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 61.
- ⁴⁶³ This concept will be explored in more detail throughout the chapter, however for scholarship relating to how the city embraces an "out-of-timeness" to market itself to tourists, see, Lynell L. Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); and Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Patina: A Profane Archaeology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
- ⁴⁶⁴ Amongst scholars of New Orleans this point is well established. For monographs demonstrating how tourism has continually shaped and reshaped the city over the years. For excellent overviews of this point, see Anthony J. Stanonis, *Creating the Big Easy: New Orleans and the Emergence of Modern Tourism 1918-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006) and Kevin Fox Gotham, *Authentic New Orleans: Tourism, Culture, and Race in the Big Easy* (New York: New York University Press, 2007). For an excellent tracing of the European historical narratives the city promotes, see Dawdy, *Patina*. Lynnell L. Thomas's complication of traditional tourism narratives of New Orleans through a study of Black tourism and Blackness as means of attracting outsiders is a critical intervention into the field, see Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans*. Finally, Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny's recent volume challenging the exceptionalism of New Orleans offers an excellent critique of how "authenticity" is well manufactured throughout the modern city not only for the benefit of tourist dollars but to use myth to paper over true injustices and inequities, see Thomas Jessen Adams and Matt Sakakeeny (eds.) *Remaking New Orleans: Beyond Exceptionalism and Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
- ⁴⁶⁵ Athinodoros Chronis, "Between Place and Story: Gettysburg as Tourism Imaginary," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39/4 (2012): 1806.
- ⁴⁶⁶ Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this leisure and hospitality industry in the city represented the third largest employment sector, coming in only slightly behind the fields of trade/transportation/utilities and education/health services. See, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "New Orleans-Metairie, LA Economy at a Glance," https://www.bls.gov/regions/southwest/la_neworleans_msa.htm, accessed September 21, 2020.
- ⁴⁶⁷ NewOrleans.com, "New Orleans Tourism Visitation and Visitor Spending Break Records in 2018," <https://www.neworleans.com/articles/post/new-orleans-tourism-visitation-and-visitor-spending-break-records-in-2018/>, accessed September 21, 2020.
- ⁴⁶⁸ Thomas, 32.
- ⁴⁶⁹ Stanonis, 12-24.
- ⁴⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture/Movement/Continuité* October, 1984: 3.
- ⁴⁷¹ Dawdy, 148-151.
- ⁴⁷² The neighborhood of Tremé, a traditionally Black area immediately next to the French Quarter, has in particular been targeted by a number of city ordinances. However, since Katrina and the popular television program *Tremé* from HBO launched Tremé has seen both a rise in tourists visiting as well as gentrifying newcomers arrive in the area. For more see Thomas, 42-43.
- ⁴⁷³ Caroline Keegan, "Black Workers Matter: Black labor geographies and uneven redevelopment in post-Katrin New Orleans," *Urban Geography* (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2020.1712121>.
- ⁴⁷⁴ Thomas, 7.
- ⁴⁷⁵ Pelican Bomb, "Everything You Love," July 17, 2018, accessed September 26, 2020, <http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2018/everything-you-love>.
- ⁴⁷⁶ "One of the greatest processions ever seen in the country," *Cincinnati Daily Press*, "Inauguration of the Statue of Henry Clay in New Orleans," April 19, 1860: 1. "Altogether, we can confidently say, a more brilliant, imposing or enthusiastic ceremony has never been witnessed under any circumstances, any where within the limits of the Union," *Times-Picayune*, "Inauguration of the Jackson Memorial," February 10, 1856: 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things: Material Culture and the Performance of Race,” *Social Text* 27 no. 4 (2009): 73-74.

⁴⁷⁸ Son, 149.

⁴⁷⁹ Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010): 170.

⁴⁸⁰ Meagan Flynn, “New Orleans to apologize for lynching of 11 Italians in 1891, among worst in American history,” *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2019, accessed December 8, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/04/01/new-orleans-apologize-lynching-italians-among-worst-american-history/>.

⁴⁸¹ Nystrom, 225-226.

⁴⁸² Juliane Braun, *Creole Drama: Theatre and Society in Antebellum New Orleans* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019): 58.

⁴⁸³ Richard Campanella, “Culture Wars Led to New Orleans’ Most Peculiar Experiment in City Management,” NOLA.com, March 7, 2016, accessed September 28, 2020, https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/home_garden/article_9fb6fe16-8dd5-5b6f-a58c-c9fbef0de6c4.html.

⁴⁸⁴ Contemporaneous coverage in major US papers, as well as the *Daily Picayune* often call on Jacksons “universal love” within New Orleans, and a WPA history of the Jackson Statue echoes this language. Even today it is not difficult to find internet pages which proclaim Jackson as “New Orleanians’ Favorite President.”

⁴⁸⁵ Lawrence N. Powell, *The Accidental City: Improvising New Orleans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012): 356.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 357.

⁴⁸⁷ *Times-Picayune*, “Statue of Henry Clay,” September 20, 1858.

⁴⁸⁸ Take Em’ Down NOLA, “The Symbols,” accessed September 28, 2020, <http://takeemdownnola.org/symbols>.

⁴⁸⁹ *Times-Picayune*, “Statue of Henry Clay,” September 16, 1859.

⁴⁹⁰ *Times-Picayune*, “Know Your City’s Public Monuments,” December 6, 1925, 102.

⁴⁹¹ Charles Suhor, *Jazz in New Orleans: the Postwar Years Through 1970* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey Press, 2001): 29-31.

⁴⁹² Mike Scott, “Why Does New Orleans Have (Or Need) a Statue of Simón Bolívar?” *Times-Picayune*, July 22, 2019, accessed October 5, 2020, https://www.nola.com/entertainment_life/article_d5216537-ec7a-55e1-88f3-77a3023d8ddb.html.

⁴⁹³ Dawdy, 107-108.

⁴⁹⁴ “Our Story,” PreservationHall.com, Preservation Hall, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.preservationhall.com/about/>.

⁴⁹⁵ Suhor, 48.

⁴⁹⁶ Michael E. Crutcher Jr. *Tremé: Race and Place in a New Orleans Neighborhood* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010): 11-12.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁹⁸ Craig Hlavaty, “The story behind a lost statue honoring victims to Galveston’s deadly 1900 hurricane,” *Houston Chronicle* April 25th, 2018, accessed June 4th, 2021, <https://www.chron.com/neighborhood/galveston/article/The-story-behind-a-lost-statue-honoring-victims-12861181.php>.

⁴⁹⁹ SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 2.

⁵⁰⁰ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006): xi.

⁵⁰¹ Benjamin Morris, “Hurricane Katrina and the Arts of Remembrance,” in *Moment to Monument: The Making and Unmaking of Cultural Significance*, eds. Ladina Bezzola Lambert and Andrea Ochsner (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2009): 161.

⁵⁰² This is not to say that the trauma of Katrina has been fully processed. It is impossible to know when, or if, an entire community will successfully process a traumatic event. However, the erection of memorials serve as a public ritual meant to aid in this process: if trauma is the continual returning of a memory which comes on with harmful and disruptive power in life, firmly marking an event as completed and in the past is an artificial mechanism by which to establish a timeline—working to keep the past in the past. This is particularly clear with memorials such as the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Memorial in the Lower Ninth Ward, and the New Orleans Katrina Memorial where heavily impacted city leaders worked to end the legacy of the storm by creating public spaces which called attention to the completeness of the event (in the case of the New Orleans Katrina Memorial by literally laying remains to

rest, and in the cast of the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Memorial by establishing a future focused greenspace intended to showcase recovery rather than destruction).

⁵⁰³ Eng and Kazanjian, 2.

⁵⁰⁴ Robin Hamilton, "A conversation with architect M. David Lee," *The Bay Street Banner*, October 8, 2008, accessed June 8, 2021, <https://www.baystatebanner.com/2008/10/08/a-conversation-with-architect-m-david-lee/>.

⁵⁰⁵ Jaquetta White, "Place for the Pain: Following in the Footsteps of Other National Tragedies, Katrina is Giving Rise to Physical Tributes to Help People Heal After Incredible Suffering," *Times-Picayune*, August 27, 2006: 01.

⁵⁰⁶ Morris, 165.

⁵⁰⁷ Morris, 165-166.

⁵⁰⁸ Stull and Lee Inc., Hurricane Katrina Memorial Portfolio Page, accessed June 8, 2021,

<https://www.stullandlee.com/portfolio/hurricane-katrina-memorial/>.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ Jeff Adelson, "After Hurricane Katrina, a look at New Orleans' uneven recovery among its neighborhoods," *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge), May 23, 2019, accessed October 29, 2020,

https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/article_9906ab1b-a1e7-5eb7-8e52-824adb52d6a3.html.

⁵¹² John Simerman, "New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward is still reeling from Hurricane Katrina's damage 15 years later," *NOLA.com*, August 29, 2020, accessed October 30, 2020, https://www.nola.com/news/katrina/article_a192c350-ea0e-11ea-a863-2bc584f57987.html.

⁵¹³ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Freud Reader* ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989), 584-585.

⁵¹⁴ See Eng and Kazanjian, 5.

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APPENDIX I: Track List

Chapter Title/Lyric	Song Title	Composer	Recommended Version/s
Prelude: “Oh, Katrina, What Have You Done?”	Oh, Katrina	Anders Osborne	Anders Osborne
Introduction: “It Doesn’t Leave You, Just ‘Cause You Leave Town”	It’s a New Orleans Thing	Allen Toussaint	Allen Toussaint
Chapter 1: “If Ever I Cease to Love”	If Ever I Cease to Love	George Leybourne	Charmaine Neville
Chapter 2: “I’m a Good Neighbor, I’m a Good Friend, I’m a Good Neighbor, You’re in Good Hands”	Good Neighbor	John Boutté	John Boutté
Chapter 3: “They’re Tryin’ to Wash Us Away”	Louisiana 1927	Randy Newman	Randy Newman OR Aaron Neville
Chapter 4: “Anywhere I Go, There’s a Bit of Tipitina”	It’s a New Orleans Thing	Allen Toussaint	Allen Toussaint
Coda: “Do You Know What It Means (to Miss New Orleans)”	Do You Know What It Means (to Miss New Orleans)	Eddie DeLange and Louis Alter	Billie Holiday