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# "It's not just about the buildings, it's about the people": architecture practice, and preservation in post-Katrina New Orleans

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“IT’S NOT JUST ABOUT THE BUILDINGS,  
IT’S ABOUT THE PEOPLE”:  
ARCHITECTURE, PRACTICE, AND PRESERVATION  
IN POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
The Department of Geography & Anthropology

by  
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B.A., Centre College, Danville, KY, 1996  
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December, 2010

Creation,  
preservation,  
destruction –  
the three points of life.

*The Textbook of Yoga Psychology,*  
Ramamurti Mishra, M.D

For all those who  
returned to New Orleans  
after Hurricane Katrina  
or came for the first time  
to help her soul.

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## Abstract

Drawing on the legacy of architectural studies in cultural geography, this dissertation integrates traditional approaches to built environments that take seriously the physical form and presence of buildings with more recent scholarship that employs performance and practice theory to address the embodied, contingent, and ongoing practices through which buildings are endowed with meaning by those who use, inhabit, or identify with them. Using ethnographic and architectural-documentation methods to carefully apprehend the interrelationships between architecture and embodied practices, this dissertation presents a set of ethno-material case studies – four buildings and their community of users that were central to New Orleans’ recovery after Hurricane Katrina. The case studies reveal how architecture and embodied practices worked as systems of meaning that intersected in ongoing ways to produce or re-produce each building’s significance in post-disaster New Orleans. This dissertation also considers the often overlooked role of the city’s built environments in structuring and sustaining cultural practices and traditions after Hurricane Katrina. Because government-backed preservation processes were a principal arena where issues of architectural significance and cultural vitality were debated and addressed in post-Katrina New Orleans, this dissertation also considers the two major preservation controversies in the city following the storm and offers insight into the disconnect between various notions and understandings of architectural significance during these preservation debates, namely the material-centered emphasis of preservationists versus residents’ embodied, embedded, and often practical notions of place significance. While this dissertation offers insight on urban systems and policy in crisis, historic preservation policy and practice in post-Katrina New Orleans specifically, the research speaks to issues of redevelopment, recovery, and preservation in other American cities. Most fundamentally, the project offers cultural geographers, preservationists, and other place documentarians refined conceptual and methodological frameworks to more adequately assess

architectural significance and promote buildings that are important to the communities they work with.

Keywords: architecture, Hurricane Katrina (recovery), historic preservation, New Orleans, performance, place, practice

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction:**

### **Architecture, Practice, and Preservation in Post-Katrina New Orleans**

#### **Introduction**

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of preservation and recovery in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the Category Five hurricane that severely damaged much of New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast in August of 2005. This project closely examines the role of one of the city's iconic cultural landmarks, Preservation Hall, in serving New Orleans' musical community and revitalizing the city's jazz tradition after the storm. Two of the venue's regular performers, March Charles and Sonja Nast, live in the historic neighborhood north of the French Quarter in New Orleans known as Treme.<sup>1</sup> The neighborhood was developed and settled prominently by free people of color during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and a significant portion of the neighborhood's architecture, mostly Creole Cottages and shotgun houses, date to this period. In addition to being one of the city's oldest neighborhoods, Treme has historically served as the seat of the city's jazz, brass band, and parade cultural traditions (*Living with History in New Orleans Neighborhoods: Treme* n.d.). Due to this historic and cultural legacy, the neighborhood has been listed not only as a historic district as part of the National Register of Historic Places, our federal inventory of local, state, and national landmarks and historic neighborhoods that is managed and maintained by the National Parks Service, but also as a local historic district under the government-backed, regulatory purview of New Orleans' Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC).

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used in this dissertation to protect the identity of my research participants. In a few exceptional instances, I do use the real names of research participants and my reasoning is further discussed in the "Study Site" section below.

In January of 2008, I paid Marc and Sonja a visit at their single shotgun house in Treme. When I entered their house that afternoon, Marc was pacing around their living room clearly upset and Sonja was staring at some paper work over their dining room table – they had just been informed by the HDLC that two replacement aluminum windows halfway down the right side of their house were in violation of the HDLC’s regulatory ordinances on exterior architectural features. Sonja and Marc were distressed by the HDLC reprimand because, firstly, it was the previous owner of the house who had installed the replacement windows in question, and, secondly, because they had taken great care and endured notable expense after Katrina to maintain the historic clapboard siding, floor-to-ceiling windows, and bullseye adornments on their 19<sup>th</sup> century shotgun house. In the course of our one-sided conversation, however, Marc and Sonja dwelled on the obligation they felt as musicians to return quickly to New Orleans after the storm to restore the city’s displaced musical scene, one of New Orleans’ most treasured economic and cultural resources. And yet, they both insisted, hurdles like this HDLC reprimand were contrary to their efforts to return home and bring music back to the city. Just before my arrival, Marc had called the HDLC to protest their citation, and in recounting the conversation, Marc informed me: “I wanted to tell her [the HDLC staff member] that we’re both musicians, that everybody keeps saying, ‘Oh, the Road Home’<sup>2</sup> and ‘We want to bring our musicians home,’ but instead this is how they welcome us back.” In a similar vein Sonja added, “We’re about to lose a lot of people who used to live here and that should be more important than any buildings. I’m all for rules and regulations of preserving old historic buildings but where it doesn’t get in the way of people living, cause I mean foremost this should be a city where people live, not a museum” (field notes, 1.12.08).

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<sup>2</sup> Road Home is a federally funded grant program administered by the State of Louisiana to assist property owners and, in some cases, renters to rebuild and/or elevate their houses in areas that were hard-hit by Hurricanes Katrina or Rita, two Category Five hurricanes that ravaged southern Louisiana in 2005.

This exchange stands out as a moment that clearly illustrates a number of important tensions this dissertation will explore, including, most essentially, differing understandings about the nature and significance of architectural environments. The exceptional circumstances in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina brought explicitly to light tensions between notions of built spaces as material or physical resources, much like those upheld by New Orleans' regulatory agency for historic districts in this opening vignette, or notions of built spaces as containers of the social and cultural life of communities, much like Sonja and Marc articulated in their views about repopulating and rebuilding post-Katrina New Orleans. Many of these landscape frictions were underlined as part of architectural preservation debates in post-Katrina New Orleans as this vignette illustrates and this dissertation will further explore. My research considers the underlying circumstances and more fundamental concepts that have shaped these landscape tensions in post-disaster New Orleans, but it also explores how the built environment, contrary to these dichotomous understandings of architectural significance, produces and sustains meaning as both a material *and* embodied system of transmission. More pointedly, my research asks how do the material and embodied elements of buildings work in tandem to produce architectural significance? Using a conceptual frame grounded in the material emphasis of traditional architectural geography, but also incorporating a performative theoretical approach, this project is designed to explore how architecture and social and cultural practice (or ongoing, embodied acts and interactions) inform one another.

In order to empirically explore this research question, this dissertation highlights a collection of local landmarks in New Orleans, which speak in various ways to the interplay between the material form of buildings and the social practices that enliven them.<sup>3</sup> By examining the material

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of historic preservation, "landmark" is a term that indicates formal significance either as a site of exceptional architectural value or as a site that figures prominently in "official" histories – under the rubric of the National Register of Historic Places, a "landmark" is a site of national (as opposed to state or local) significance (National Park Service 2010). My use of the term "local landmark" is intended to indicate how the sites I feature in this

form of my study sites, I take seriously their layout, materials, and architectural features, particularly the ways in which they physically structure and also sustain social and cultural practices. By examining social practices, I emphasize the role of social actors and their everyday and more heightened uses of built spaces and how such embodied, emergent, and often non-discursive practices participate in the production and re-production of architectural “geographies of meaning” (Jacobs 2006). Like Peter Kraftl’s “pragmatic approach” to geographies of architecture, my use of the term “architecture” refers to the “creation of *individual* buildings” either by professionals (i.e. architect-designed buildings) or untrained builders (i.e. vernacular architecture) (2010: 403). In this dissertation I uphold the commitment of architectural geographers who delve into the rich and complex nature of individual buildings to illuminate broader historical, material, social, or political processes (Domosh 1989; Ford 2001; Jenkins 2002; Jacobs 2006; Kraftl 2009).

In order to elaborate the themes and theoretical contributions put forward in this dissertation, in this introductory chapter I first place my research within the geographic and cultural context of New Orleans and the temporal context of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. My work is placed and framed by issues of redevelopment and preservation in post-Katrina New Orleans, and in the second section of the chapter, I summarize the relevance of this research project for existing preservation policies and practices in New Orleans, as well as other American cities, since government-backed preservation practices are standardized nationally. Cultural geographers have long theorized and researched the built landscape and in the second section of this chapter I also delineate the legacy of scholarship in cultural geography that I draw from in order to refine and improve upon conceptual and methodological approaches to architectural studies. Once I have

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dissertation figure prominently in New Orleans’ built and cultural landscape, but it also indicates that the significance of these buildings, in large part, is constituted through routine or everyday uses by community members who inhabit, frequent, or directly identify with the site (see also Kraftl 2009).

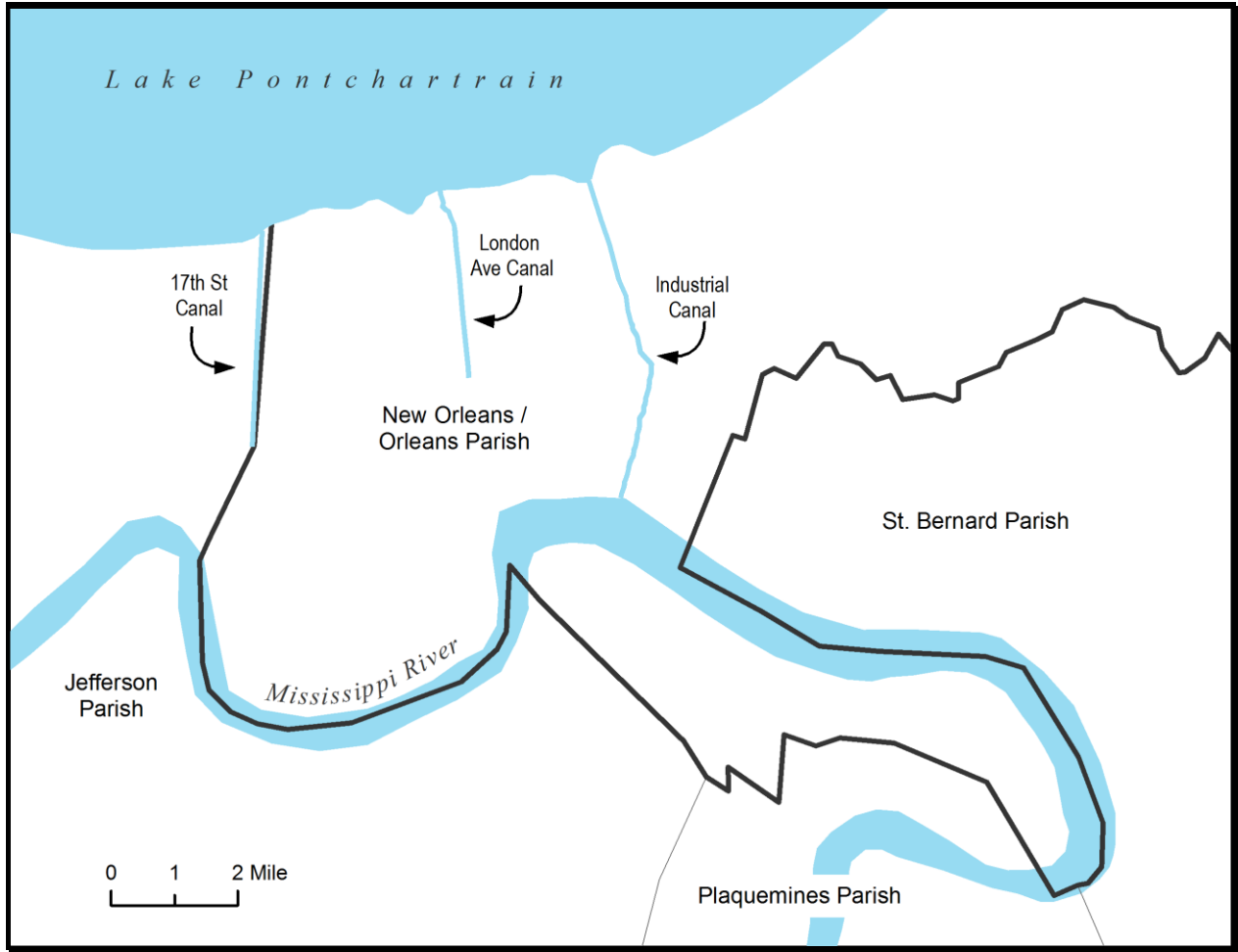


placed my research in its practical, theoretical, and methodological context, I offer an overview of my study sites and point to the insights each case study brings to the research themes that underpin this project and, finally, I outline the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

## **Heightened Awareness of Built and Cultural Environments in Post-Katrina New Orleans**

Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast of the United States on the morning of Monday, August 29, 2005 as a category three hurricane, but the large storm maintained category five winds until just before landfall and the storm surge that inundated communities along the region's coastline was catastrophic. The storm's eyewall landed about 60 miles east of New Orleans over Bay Saint Louis and Waveland, Mississippi, sparing much of the city from Katrina's devastating winds, since New Orleans sat on the eastern, weak side of the hurricane. By the following day, however, what had seemed a near-tragic miss turned into a harsh, post-storm reality – the city of New Orleans, much of which sits below sea level, was slowly flooding because of major breaches in the city's system of floodwalls (MacCash & O'Bryne 2005; MacQuaid 2005). A barge anchored in the city's large, navigable industrial canal tore through the manmade canal levee and caused severe flooding in the section of the city that sits east of the waterway and separate from the rest of metropolitan New Orleans, a community known as the Lower Ninth Ward. The two other major breaches at the city's 17<sup>th</sup> Street and London Avenue canals were due to faulty construction, and the failure of these floodwalls ultimately left eighty percent of the city sitting in a foot or more of flood water and three out of four homes citywide damaged or destroyed (Figure 1.1) (MacCash & O'Bryne 2005; Katel 2006b; City of New Orleans 2007).

Due to the post-Katrina flooding, the city lost much of its built heritage; estimates after the storm maintained that 25,000 historic structures collapsed or were threatened with collapse (City of New Orleans 2007). Hurricane Katrina also presented homeowners and major developers, notably



**Figure 1.1:** Map of New Orleans and waterways with major levee failures after Hurricane Katrina's landing in August 2005 (Source: Case Watkins and author).

including the City of New Orleans and the State of Louisiana, with insurance pay-outs and emergency federal assistance that supported the demolition or major renovation of flooded structures (G. Russell et al. 2006) or, in some cases, the means to undertake major redevelopment projects, like the current overhaul of the city's public housing complexes and the proposed construction of a major state and federal biomedical complex. Many of the city's major economic and political players supported demolition and new construction projects as indicators of recovery, particularly the City of New Orleans' "good neighbor" blight eradication initiative that was upheld by city officials as needed "preparation for the rebuilding of the city" (Krupa 2007a: A1).

Neighborhood activists and preservationists, however, quickly rallied to protest the efforts of the city's post-Katrina pro-development camp, arguing for the protection of the city's distinctive neighborhood architectural environments and, in some cases, individual sites of local or neighborhood import, especially since communities had already endured extreme architectural and social loss in the immediate wake of the storm (Brooks 2007; Krupa 2007c). New Orleans' historic architecture is also commonly upheld as one of the city's principal economic and cultural assets. New Orleans was a forerunner in this country's modern historic-preservation movement, and the city is one of the most "preserved" environments in the United States in terms of its listed and regulated historic housing stock (Gay 1998; Poche 2006; Shane Lanham interview, 6.25.08). All neighborhoods that were developed before the 20<sup>th</sup> century in New Orleans are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and in total the city currently has 25 historic districts on the federal inventory (Gay 1998; Poche 2006). In addition to the large number of properties listed on the National Register, the HDLC has more structures under its regulatory purview than any other local historic district in the United States (Shane Latham interview, 6.25.08).

In addition to the physical damage wrought by Katrina, the City of New Orleans also implemented a mandatory, post-storm evacuation of city residents, because the rising waters prevented emergency personnel from providing survival essentials to those who had endured the passing of the hurricane. Those residents who voluntarily evacuated prior to Katrina's landing and those who were forced to evacuate afterward, constituted a nationwide post-Katrina diaspora (Perlstein 2005). Due to the extensive architectural and infrastructure damage New Orleans suffered and the total displacement of the city's residents, the city was very slow to re-populate after Katrina (Moran 2005). When I entered the field in the fall of 2006, just after the one-year Katrina anniversary, the city's population was estimated to be approximately half of its pre-Katrina size and many public schools, the major public hospital, and some public services, like mail and garbage, had

yet to reopen or be fully restored (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center 2010). While on the one hand New Orleans is acclaimed for its historic and preserved architecture, the city's "creative" or "symbolic" economy is also constituted by prominent performance traditions, such as jazz music, second-line parades,<sup>4</sup> and Mardi Gras Indian processions<sup>5</sup> (Regis 2001; City of New Orleans 2007). Without the return of the city's residents, including tradition participants and members of the communities that support the city's defining cultural practices, the city's creative economy and its cultural landscapes were left vulnerable and potentially endangered (Spera 2005; City of New Orleans 2007).

The intensity of displacement, rebuilding, restoration and preservation in post-Katrina New Orleans thus brought to light various understandings about the meanings and importance of the city's architectural environment. Since personal and communal meanings associated with buildings and architectural environments are typically tied to ordinary and routine uses, they are often overlooked by those who inhabit or use the buildings (Latham 2003; Woo & Reaven 2004). In light of the desolation and displacement in New Orleans after the storm, however, many of these taken-for-granted meanings about community centers and local landmarks were brought to the forefront of residents' consciousness. Placing my research work in post-Katrina New Orleans thus allowed for rich explorations of the fundamental meanings of buildings according to the communities who use or associate with them, as well as those local officials charged with redeveloping or protecting the city's built environment following the storm. My research work focuses on historic preservation

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<sup>4</sup> Second-line parades are weekly performances that celebrate the anniversaries of the city's distinctive social aid and benevolent clubs, which consist of the sponsoring social club, a hired brass band, and the "second line" or willing participants that jump in and follow the procession (Regis 1999, 2001). The weekly performance events are an important component of the social and cultural life of New Orleans' black working-class communities, and they will be elaborated in chapter five.

<sup>5</sup> Mardi Gras Indian tribes are another street performance tradition of New Orleans' black working-class communities. The neighborhood-based tribes or gangs traditionally parade on Mardi Gras day and Saint Joseph's night, drumming, chanting, and posturing in elaborate beaded suits that aesthetically draw from both African and Native American traditions (Ya Salaam 1997). This tradition will be elaborated in chapter four.

as a primary arena in post-disaster New Orleans where preservation professionals and activists, community leaders, and residents were able to voice their understandings about the significance of the city's built landscape. Though this dissertation is structured to speak to current research endeavors on architectural spaces in human geography, as the next section will discuss, my academic and professional background and the nature of my research in New Orleans have also produced insights that speak to the academic field and professional practice of historic preservation.

### **Practical, Theoretical, and Methodological Context**

This dissertation project bridges divides between traditional approaches to the built landscape in cultural geography that focus on material form and distribution with recent performative approaches to built spaces that engage with the everyday and embodied ways people experience buildings and endow them with meaning. These twin conceptions of built spaces often stand in tension in the preservation process – the material-centered standards of historic preservation do not correspond to the fluid and embodied understandings community members hold about their community centers or local landmarks. Historic preservation, specifically historic preservation in the intensified climate of post-disaster New Orleans, thus offers a window to explore the tensions, but also productive overlap between the physical and embodied components of built spaces. While historic preservation is a fruitful avenue of critical inquiry for my research project, it is also central to my dissertation, because my own exposure to and work in preservation was the impetus to pursue my doctorate in geography and engage with critical architectural studies.

As a Masters student in Urban Planning at the University of New Orleans from 2000-2003, I was introduced to and became involved in issues of architectural and cultural preservation in the city by working at the New Orleans Regional Folklife Office, being a team researcher with the New Orleans Building Arts documentation project, and occasionally volunteering with the city's nonprofit

preservation advocacy agency, the Preservation Resource Center (PRC). My other professional and academic involvements in New Orleans have included a New Orleans-Quebec City urban planning academic exchange, administrative work at the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, and collaborations with the local documentary project the Neighborhood Story Project and the outreach arm of the Tulane School of Architecture, the Tulane City Center, all of which have helped me to cultivate professional and personal relationships with community members, cultural bearers, and important players in the city's preservation, living heritage, and cultural programming arenas. Also importantly, due to my academic focus on preservation studies at the University of New Orleans, I possess the qualifications upheld by the Department of Interior and the National Park Service to document and evaluate architectural sites according to the criteria of significance established by the National Register of Historic Places. Since earning my Masters degree and embarking on my PhD, I have been hired by cultural-resource-management firms to write property histories, conduct architectural surveys, and determine the significance or eligibility of properties for the National Register. These practical experiences have had a formative influence on the intellectual project of this dissertation.

My work carrying out architectural surveys and National Register assessments first introduced me to the writings of human geographers and other researchers interested in material culture studies and the built landscape, scholars like JB Jackson (1984, 1997), Donald Meing (1979), Paul Groth (Groth & Bressi 1997), Pierce Lewis (1975, 2003), Michael Conzen (1990) and Henry Glassie (1971). Preservationists, architectural historians, architects, and landscape architects uphold the work of this school of landscape scholars, because of their detailed concern for architectural forms and the more encompassing cultural landscape. This body of work also helped shape important concepts in the fields of preservation and architecture, notions such as historic districts and rural and historic landscapes that will be elaborated in chapter two (Riesenweber 2008). As a

preservation practitioner I likewise found this collection of fundamental cultural landscape writings impressive in its attention to architectural environments and its consideration of the ways in which the built environment shapes cultural life. The material culture and landscape scholarly camp was the conceptual inspiration for my decision to embark on a doctorate degree in a field I was coming to view as an important complement to urban studies and preservation – human geography.

The root of my motivation to undertake further graduate studies, however, was based on my frustration with preservation practices and assessments that focused on architectural histories and overlooked the often more meaningful, though less tangible social and cultural histories of buildings or architectural environments. As I dove into the world of human-geography literature as part of my doctoral studies, I was pleased to discover a wealth of scholarship that expanded considerations of built spaces to include not just the visual and material elements of landscape, but also the symbolic (Cosgrove & Daniels 1988), gendered (Rose 1993), classed (Mitchell 1996), politicized (Duncan 1993), embodied (Thrift 1997, 1999), and everyday (Lees 2001) facets of landscapes. Notably, the “performative turn” was at a height when I first undertook my doctoral studies. The rise of performance theory in human geography includes an effort to push the field beyond distanced, material, and structural analyses of the landscape to an approach that engages with the embodied, immediate, and contextual ways meaning is produced through individuals’ engagement with their environment, particularly through everyday, even unreflexive behaviors or “practices” (Thrift 1997; Dewsbury 2000; Gregson & Rose 2000; Harrison 2000; Smith 2000; Thrift & Dewsbury 2000; Crouch 2001; Lees 2001; Crouch 2003; Latham 2003).<sup>6</sup> The concepts and findings

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<sup>6</sup> Practice theory was introduced to American social sciences in the 1960s. Treating “practice” as an individual, concrete action, practice theories emphasize the agency of individual social players, and conceptually they served as a counter to the systemic theories of historical materialism and semiotics that were prominent in the social sciences during this period (Ortner 1984; Knauff 1996). Performance theory, which fully emerged in the social sciences in the 1990s (Ortner 1984; Drewal 1991; Bial 2002), has incorporated the conceptual notion of “practice” to acknowledge everyday and embodied social experiences. Often the terms and frames of performance and practice theory are used interchangeably in human

put forward by geographers upholding performance theory, and in particular Nigel Thrift's influential strand of performance theory – “non-representational theory” (1997, 1999, 2000, 2009), spoke to the visceral, contemporary, and relevant community meanings of built spaces I had longed to identify and address working as a preservationist.

Typically in New Orleans places have been identified as “official” sites of cultural, historical, or architectural worth through historic preservation surveys and listings on the National Register of Historic Places or as a local Historic District Landmark. Under the National Register criteria, buildings are usually only valid for historic listing or protection if over fifty years old and additionally associated with a historic event or person or meet architectural standards as embodiments of a distinctive architectural type, period, or method of construction (National Park Service 1998). Due to these established significance parameters, some of the city's more “commonplaces” (Morgan et al. 2006: 706), sites which lack aesthetic distinction, which are associated with minority communities, or which have more contemporary cultural and social meanings, have categorically fallen outside preservation protection parameters in New Orleans, as well as other American towns and cities because historic-register listings are standardized nationally (Lee 1992a, 2003; Low et al. 2005; Kaufman 2009). National Park Service employees David and Nancy Morgan and Brenda Barrett specifically considered the lack of federal documentation of “commonplaces” throughout the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina, prompting the preservation trio to assert that such a “lacuna” fundamentally “reflects an institutional misunderstanding of what makes the places we inhabit important” (2006: 715).

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geography literature though the genealogy and underlying principles of the approaches do vary in some significant ways, differences that will be carefully outlined in chapter three.



My ethnographic study of preservation in post-Katrina New Orleans builds on the findings of the Morgan research team by drawing attention to the deliberate efforts of local and national preservationists to overcome the field's "institutional misunderstandings" that are rooted in the historical and practical circumstances that gave rise to the modern American historic preservation movement (Morgan et al. 2006; Rottle 2008). As I have delved deeper into my studies and research, I have learned that a number of preservation academics and professionals have deliberated some of the field's practical, conceptual, and methodological impasses, and they have sought to expand preservation's relevance as a movement and social practice by incorporating a broader array of social and cultural histories, communities, and contemporary community values (Lee 2003; Low et al. 2005; Morgan et al. 2006; Longstreth 2008b; Kaufman 2009). A number of preservation scholars and practitioners have problematized existing concepts and methods employed in the field and their corresponding policies, and some have deliberated the field's basic assumptions about place, landscape, and community (Morgan et al. 2006; Longstreth 2008; Kaufman 2009).

Despite geography's long scholarly history of theorizing and operationalizing the nature of architectural spaces and places (spaces endowed with meaning) (Cresswell 2003), few scholars have actually evaluated preservation's definitions and standards of place through a geographic lens. Julie Riesenweber's (2008) essay on the conceptual overlap between geography's "cultural landscape" and the preservation resource category of "cultural landscape" is an outstanding exception, as well as Tim Cresswell and Garreth Hoskins' (2008) careful consideration of the material-centered evaluation standards for the National Historic Landmark evaluation process (see also Hoskins 2007). While the theoretical and methodological frame of this dissertation builds upon the legacy of architectural studies in human geography, in seeking to refine conceptualizations of built spaces, this work also seeks to inform preservation scholarship and practice.

Theoretically, this project builds upon the empirically rigorous work of human geographers within the Berkley landscape tradition, a school of research distinguished by a commitment to the documentation of landscape forms to determine cultural settlement patterns (Sauer 1925; Kniffen 1936, 1965; Lewis 1975; Newton & Napoli 1977). The work of Fred Kniffen is central to my consideration of this traditional material-landscape approach. The first scholar to publish an analytical piece on vernacular architecture (see Kniffen 1936), Kniffen upheld rural housing as the ideal cultural marker of cultural settlement patterns due to its persistence and abundance. Kniffen's vast and detail-oriented survey methods (Kniffen 1990) had lasting impact on architectural survey and classification methods in American cultural geography and material culture studies (Reisenweber 2008; see, for example, Glassie 1971; Lewis 1975; Newton & Napoli 1977; Jordan & Kaups 1987). This formative branch of American cultural-geography scholarship, however, has been critiqued for treating the landscape as a cultural artifact, something to be viewed and analyzed from an observable distance. The "new" cultural geography, which emerged in the 1980s as a response to the formative Berkley landscape school, was characterized by a number of theoretical and methodological approaches – humanism and "critical humanism" (Tuan 1976; Adams et al. 2001), historical materialism (Knox 1991; Mitchell 1996), and structuralism, post-structuralism, and semiotics (Cosgrove & Daniels 1988; Duncan & Duncan 1988; Duncan & Ley 1993; Cosgrove 1998) – that prompted a probing consideration of the economic, political, social, cultural, and even sensorial processes that produce the human landscape.

More recent research in cultural geography argues that even the theoretical treatment of the landscape as a product of social processes disregards a fundamental part of the placemaking process, which is "how ordinary people engage with and inhabit" places (Lees 2001: 55). This approach is well articulated in Loretta Lees' development of a "critical geography of architecture" (2001) and a small camp of architectural geographers have heeded Lees' call directly or indirectly to evaluate

individual buildings in order to highlight the agency of inhabitants or users in producing architectural spaces (Llewellyn 2003, 2004; Kraftl 2006a, 2006b; Adey 2008; Kraftl & Adey 2008; Kraftl 2009). Additionally, this research calls attention to the social, technological, and material webs that constitute a “building event” (Jenkins 2002; Jacobs 2006). The work of scholars under the banner of “critical architectural geography,” is central to my theoretical frame, but the conceptual underpinnings of this dissertation are shaped by a larger body of geography scholarship that principally subscribes to performance and practice theories and that upholds the embodied, ongoing, relational, and place-supported ways social life takes on form and meaning (DeLyser 1999; Smith 2000; DeLyser 2001; Bain 2003; Lathan 2003; Edensor 2005; Lorimer 2005; DeSilvey 2006; Watson et al. 2009; Bain 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming).

While this scholarship highlights the intangible or practiced elements of landscape, Tim Cresswell’s “landscapes of practice,” a concept that “simultaneously brings the fixity of structure and the flow of feeling into account” (2003: 270), sits at the heart of my theoretical frame, which seeks to clearly acknowledge the interplay between the lived, but also the material elements of built spaces. Many scholars who are conceptually pushing the field of cultural geography to incorporate theories of practice and performance to account for the embodied and emerging characteristics of the built landscape do not ground their work in the material form and function of spaces and the localized and powerful ways buildings structure and sustain performative geographies of meaning (see, for example, Thrift 1999; Lees 2001; Crouch 2001; Jenkins 2002; Cresswell 2003; Crouch 2003; Thrift 2004; Jacobs 2006; Kraftl 2009). Even architectural geographers who take the work of material buildings seriously, especially those concerned with the notion of affect, overlook the legacy of traditional architectural geographers and their deliberate and detailed engagement with the material landscape (Llewellyn 2003, 2004; Kraftl 2006a, 2006b; Adey 2008; Kraftl & Adey 2009). The conceptual frame of this project is thus unique because I combine foundational scholarship on

material cultural landscapes with a “critical geography of architecture” to apprehend these interrelationships between architecture and practice. It is important to point out that while my research emphasizes the interplay between the physical form of buildings and embodied, expressive practices, they do work alongside other systems that constitute buildings in ongoing ways, such as the symbolic, the technological, the political, and even the virtual (Jenkins 2002; Taylor 2003; Jacobs 2006). This dissertation focuses on architecture, practice, and performance, because such a conceptual lens provides a dynamic frame for understanding the immediate, but also ongoing importance of built spaces to those who use them, and it also speaks to the nature of competing claims of architectural significance made as part of the historic-preservation process.

The architectural survey or inventory is the principal documentary tool of material-landscape specialists, including traditional architectural geographers and preservation professionals (Riesenweber 2008). Depending on the detail of the survey, an architectural inventory can involve measured line drawings, photographs, and a written historical report of each architectural site (Fitch 1990). Although oral history interviews and archival research are employed in architectural surveys to augment the historical context of the written report, these methods are directed toward revealing the structure’s original construction, modifications over time, and various occupants (C. Russell 1990; National Park Service 1998). Traditional architectural surveys do not employ qualitative methods to reveal the local or ongoing meanings of buildings for those who inhabit, use, or visit them (Low 2002; Low et al. 2005). Qualitative methods, namely participant observation and semi-structured interviews, will thus be emphasized in the context of this research project as a means to apprehend the intangible elements of place, such as everyday use, cultural practice and traditions, historical associations, and emotional attachments. Qualitative methods are particularly helpful in the context of this research project, because they are designed to apprehend the *qualities* or feelings, affects, embodied acts, and heightened performances that are central to defining place significance

(Lees 2001; Low 2002; Denzin & Lincoln 2003). Archival methods are used in this project to creatively fill in data gaps not only about the material history of the buildings under study, but also how uses over time have endowed particular buildings with meaning. Architectural documentation, qualitative, and archival methods are braided together in this research project to produce greater insight about the complex nature of architectural spaces and the meanings they hold for those who use the spaces. In order to ground these theoretical and methodological explorations empirically, I established a collection of post-Katrina case studies that speak in various and significant ways to my research themes that I will now outline.

## **Study Site Selection: Local Landmarks and Sites of Preservation Friction**

### **Local Landmarks**

I established four of the case studies for this project within the first few months of fieldwork. I entered the field a year after Hurricane Katrina, and in consultation with my advisors, I determined that in order to explore the interplay of the city's cultural and built landscapes, I needed to select spaces that were active and integral to their communities in the early months after the hurricane, a period when many neighborhoods were still desolate and thousands of abandoned structures languished. I also selected the original four study sites, because they demonstrate, in varying ways, how buildings stay vital and meaningful to communities, a vitality all that more pronounced in the context of the city's post-disaster recovery. The handpicked field study sites include the Sound Café, a young coffee shop and civic and arts center in the Marigny neighborhood; Joyce and Tootie Montana's House, a residence, which is also a community museum and meeting place in the Seventh Ward for the Montana Mardi Gras Indian clan, one of New Orleans' most celebrated Indian families; the Sportsman's Corner, a modest barroom that is vital to the cultural traditions and everyday rhythms of the black working-class community in the Central City

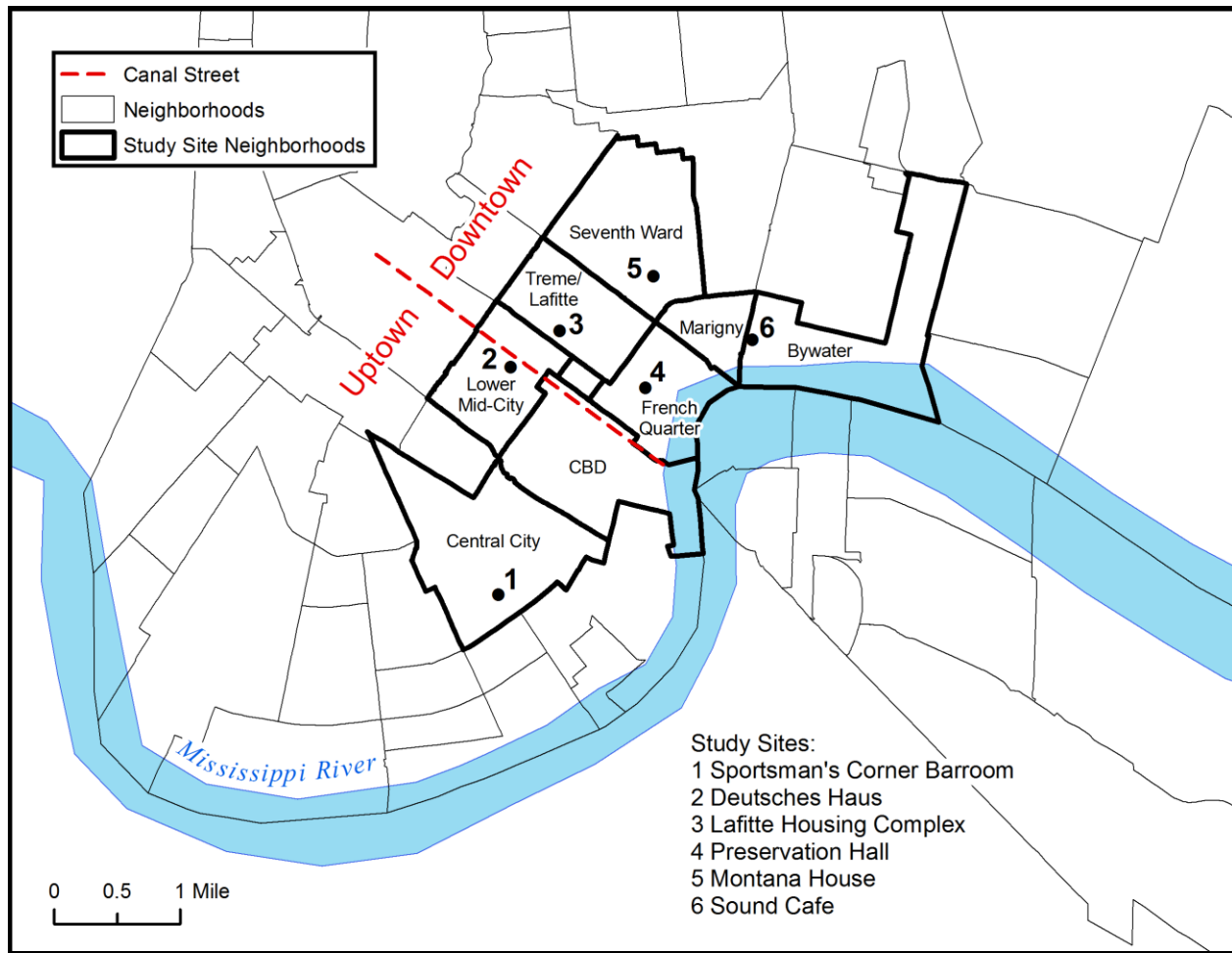
neighborhood; and Preservation Hall, an iconic landmark and traditional jazz venue in the French Quarter (Figure 1.2).

This collection of handpicked case studies was influenced by the flurry of social science research that descended upon New Orleans after the hurricane; some places and people were highly researched, since there were limited numbers of businesses and residents to consult in those months and first couple of years after Katrina. Initially, for example, I thought the House of Dance and Feathers, a neighborhood museum in the Lower Ninth Ward, would be one of the case studies, but Ronald Lewis, the founder and director, was the neighborhood's main spokesman for the right for residents to return and rebuild and he was not as accessible for partnering on my research as other residents, activists, cultural bearers, and business owners in the city turned out to be. My prior research experiences and existing community connections proved to be significant determining factors for my research access. Joyce Montana, for example, was willing to work with me because of her personal connections to Dr. Helen Regis, my co-advisor, and the research work I had done with her husband as part of the New Orleans Museum of Art Raised to the Trade exhibit several years prior. I had also already developed personal and research connections with the Elloie family, the proprietors of the Sportsman's Corner barroom, and Ben Jaffe, the owner and Creative Director of Preservation Hall, before entering the field in the fall of 2006.

In addition to personal and professional connections as a principal factor determining my research access and my original study sites, I also selected these four local, post-Katrina landmarks to account for a mix of racialized and gendered spaces, as well as different types of buildings and uses, and a range of New Orleans neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup> The Sound Café was the final study site I

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to the importance of neighborhood location in New Orleans, another important factor in place identity depends on whether a site is located east of Canal Street in "Downtown" New Orleans or west of Canal Street in "Uptown" (see figure 1.2). Historically, Canal Street served as the dividing line between the city's European sector, the



**Figure 1.2:** Map of study sites (Source: Case Watkins and author).

selected, and it offered a balance to the other three sites, not only because it was a space owned and operated by a female, but also because it is situated in a relatively affluent, white downtown neighborhood in New Orleans. As opposed to the Sound Café, the Sportsman’s Corner barroom and the Montana family house are sites of cultural vitality for the city’s black working-class communities and also traditionally male-dominated spaces. Preservation Hall complemented my original collection of study sites, because it is situated within the city’s tourist corridor and an

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city’s earliest neighborhoods, and Uptown or the American sector, the section of the city that flourished once Americans arrived en masse in the wake of the Louisiana Purchase (Lewis 2003; Campanella 2006). Differences in ethnic and cultural histories as well as settlement patterns have long-informed differing senses of place between these two major sections of the city and even today the notions of “Uptown” and “Downtown” define the territory and identity of a number of the city’s community centers and cultural practices, particularly Mardi Gras Indian tribal processions and second-line parades.

affluent residential neighborhood, as well as being a heralded site of preservation that attracts visitors from around the world.

### The Sound Café

The Sound Café is housed in a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century corner store and apartment building in the Marigny neighborhood. Though the building, with clapboard siding, an iron balcony, and floor-to-ceiling double doors blends with the architectural surroundings of the mostly 19<sup>th</sup> century Marigny neighborhood, the actual café is a newly established social and cultural landmark in downtown New Orleans. The building's interior was remodeled before opening up as a coffee shop in 2003, and the downstairs commercial space consists essentially of one large spacious room skirted by a series of exterior windows and multi-light double doors. The open nature of the space and the geographic location of the café on a prominent corner in the Marigny neighborhood, invites a regular flow of neighborhood customers. The physical accessibility of the space facilitated an essential shift in the role of the Sound Café: pre-Katrina the coffee shop was a casual public space for neighborhood residents and post-Katrina it became a vital resource center and civic space, accommodating the throngs of journalists, community activists, and residents who desperately needed a space to gather, exchange, and disseminate information. The Sound Café was able to physically and socially accommodate its rapid transition into a citywide community center after Katrina and the coffee shop served as an organizing space for a number of notable post-Katrina recovery efforts, importantly including a campaign launched by the owner of the café, Baty Landis, to call attention to the city's troubled criminal-justice and crime-enforcement systems that spurred the creation of the active citywide nonprofit Silence is Violence. The accessible space of the Sound Café also encouraged local artists, especially brass band and jazz musicians, to use the coffee shop as a much-needed practice and casual performance space following the storm. The Sound Café is important to this



dissertation, because the building reveals how the material form and features of built spaces correspond to the everyday uses, cultural practices, and more heightened performances that go on in within and around them, underlining the localized and profound ways buildings structure practices and performances and, similarly, how ongoing practices and performances participate in defining the nature and significance of built spaces.

### The Montana Family House

Joyce and Tootie Montana's house is a double shotgun in the Seventh Ward neighborhood, and while the house displays many of its original Queen Anne elements, it is also accentuated by unique architectural adornments, like distinctive arched openings in the handrails, decorative cut-aways in the transom windows, and, centered on the front of the house, a cast plaster relief of an Indian in a full headdress, a self-portrait of Big Chief Allison "Tootie" Montana. Through his architectural re-workings, Big Chief Tootie turned his home into a material tribute to the creative exchange between his work as a prized Mardi Gras Indian suit designer and an architectural craftsman. Big Chief Tootie passed just before the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, in July of 2005, and the loss of "the revered leader of the city's black Indian community" (L. E. Elie 2005: B1) coupled with the devastation and displacement of Hurricane Katrina, threatened the longevity and vitality of the Montana family tribe, the Yellow Pocahontas, and the city's Mardi Gras Indian tradition more broadly. Tootie's wife Joyce, however, made the commitment after the hurricane to return and restore her family's house in the Seventh Ward. Joyce's ongoing presence in the family double shotgun has facilitated the revitalization of the Montana's Indian tradition in very practical, but also heightened ways – from providing a space that physically accommodates the assembly of her son Darryl's suits (who replaced his father as the Big Chief of the Yellow Pocahontas tribe) to sustaining the annual Mardi Gras day ceremony when neighbors gather in front of the family's house for a street party and Big Chief Darryl's "comin' out." My ethnographic engagement with the

Montana family home considers how architectural meanings emerge through physical alterations and re-use. I underline the agency of Tootie, Joyce, and other family members in producing the significance of their family home, particularly how the family re-defined the importance of the house in the Seventh Ward and all of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.

### The Sportsman's Corner Barroom

The Sportsman's Corner is a modest, one-story white cinder block corner barroom in Central City, and it serves as a principal landmark in the second-line and Mardi Gras Indian parade traditions, which are cultural productions of the city's black, working-class community (Ya Salaam 1997; Regis 1999). The bar supports the second-line or social-aid-and-pleasure-club parading tradition by opening its doors as an official "stop" or gathering place along the city's many Uptown parade routes, as well as serving as a meeting and social space for a number of Central City social-aid-and-pleasure clubs, including the Young Men Olympian Junior Benevolent Association, the city's oldest parading benevolent society (founded in 1884), as well as more recent clubs, like the New Generation and Divine Ladies. The Sportsman's Corner, situated at the intersection of Second and Dryades, is also recognized by bar community members and residents citywide as the place in Uptown New Orleans to ritually observe the convening of Mardi Gras Indian tribes on Mardi Gras day and Saint's Joseph night. The Sportsman's Corner re-opened its doors in January 2006 and, as one of the few black working-class barrooms open soon after Katrina, the bar sustained the everyday social rhythms and needs of many Central City neighbors and residents from black, working-class communities harder hit by post-Katrina flooding. At the most fundamental level, the Sportsman's Corner serves its clientele by offering a supportive and safe environment to come together in a section of the city plagued by crime, violence, blight, and underemployment. The

Sportsman's Corner case study underscores how modest architectural sites can serve very significant roles in the social or cultural life of communities. More specifically, this dissertation considers how the humble and adaptable space of the barroom permitted Central City tradition bearers and supporting community members to carry out the wide range of daily and more ceremonial activities that sustain the second line and Mardi Gras Indian traditions, as well as offering community members a safe and accessible space so they can freely participate in these cultural practices.

### Preservation Hall

Preservation Hall was built as a two-story, brick stucco, Creole-styled residence in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Still retaining many of the building's original features and materials, the only major alteration to the building since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the conversion of the front and back parlors on the main floor into a one-room art gallery and performance space in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, a room that has come to serve as the spare, but sensual and intimate concert space of Preservation Hall. Formally opened in 1961, Preservation Hall was established as a venue to employ and promote the city's fading community of original jazz artists and to revitalize what is now known as the city's original or "traditional jazz" sound. Following almost exactly the same format today as when the venue opened to the public over forty years ago, the Hall features nightly sit-down concerts of traditional New Orleans jazz for an all-ages, mostly tourist audience. Programming tensions arose after Katrina when some often younger and less traditional players were booked to fill the venue's gaping music calendar, but, in time, and as part of their return to post-Katrina normalcy, the staff decided it was imperative to "get things back to the way they used to be" (John Tyler interview, 6.2.2008) and the programming was restored to a more traditional-jazz focus. In addition to maintaining a programmatic consistency, my research reveals how the Preservation Hall staff actively worked to protect the unaltered and even run-down physical setting of the venue. The pairing of such a sensual material space with traditional music performances has proven to be

evocative for audience members and performers alike and it invites them to meaningfully interpret their role in the transmission of the city's most heralded music tradition. The Preservation Hall case study considers how the physical and social continuity that distinguish the jazz hall, as well as the venue's uncommonly intimate and relaxed performance space, work together to encourage musicians and audience members to interact and share in the knowledge and embodied experiences of traditional New Orleans jazz.

### **Sites of Preservation Friction**

This dissertation project also considers how current preservation efforts in New Orleans are accounting for and promoting architectural spaces and my fieldwork also consisted of observation, participation, and the study of bigger trends and major players in the New Orleans preservation arena following Hurricane Katrina. For example, over the course of twelve months, I volunteered on a weekly basis with the Preservation Resource Center (PRC). From tasks as mundane as updating neighborhood association contact information to more active assignments of notifying homeowners that their property was slated to be demolished by the City of New Orleans as an “imminent health and welfare threat” (Brooks 2007: A1), I absorbed the quiet fervor and institutional activism at the PRC during a crucial period of their post-Katrina mobilization. My ethnographic fieldwork also consisted of attending monthly Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC) meetings, hearings about the feasibility of erecting a new medical complex in a highly residential section of the Mid-City National Register District, and rallies against the demolition of the city's major public housing complexes, to name a few of the formal or organized events I attended as part of my field work. Ultimately, this broader ethnographic engagement produced a pair of sites I highlight in chapter six that speak to the pressing post-Katrina political and preservation issues that emerged during my time in the field.

The biggest preservation issues that have surfaced in New Orleans since Katrina's flooding revolve around major redevelopment projects receiving substantial federal funds. The full evacuation of the city during and after Katrina and the receipt of federal emergency funds, permitted federal, state, and local officials to expedite or more easily initiate two major redevelopment initiatives – the conversion of public housing into mixed-income communities (Filosa 2006a, 2006b) and the construction of a more “state-of-the-art,” medical-teaching and public-hospital complex (Moller 2006; Pope & Moller 2006). Preservationists have been among one of the most vocal and even most powerful players in opposing these redevelopment projects. These issues thus brought to light the purview of concern and social and political power of New Orleans' post-Katrina preservation movement, as well as highlighting how preservation policy is executed, since these government-housing and public-hospital rebuilding initiatives are backed by federal funds and subject to historical-significance assessments as part of the Section 106 process.<sup>8</sup> Because of how these redevelopment controversies spoke so directly to preservation strategy, power, and policy and how, under these unique circumstances, preservation can be tied to important dialogues about built environments and community meanings, I began a year into my fieldwork, in the fall of 2007, to research two new sites preservationists rallied around to protect from redevelopment.

### Lafitte Housing Complex

The Lafitte Housing Complex is a public-housing community in the Treme neighborhood that was distinguished by its sturdy and well-built brick apartment buildings and long-term social networks. The Housing Authority of New Orleans with the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs closed Lafitte and three other major public-housing complexes immediately after Katrina,

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<sup>8</sup> Section 106 reviews are mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Any government agency or developer that receives federal funds to carry out a building project must assess the historical, architectural, or archeological significance of any site potentially affected by the project and either avoid, minimize, or mitigate damage to any site deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (National Historic Preservation Act 1966). Section 106 is the principal preservation policy at work at the federal level (King 2000, 2008; see chapter two).

denying residents the right to return to their homes and soon thereafter slating the complexes for complete demolition and redevelopment. Preservationists took exceptional measures to try to protect Lafitte's distinguished apartment buildings and displaced residents, but their material-centered articulations of significance did not resonate with the ways residents practically, though profoundly, valued their former housing community, illuminating fundamental shortcomings in how the field of preservation typically evaluates and promotes sites of historic or architectural significance.

### The Deutsches Haus

The Deutsches Haus is a German cultural center in Lower Mid-City and the last standing community center associated with one of the city's major European immigrant groups. The Haus is situated where local and federal officials have proposed to erect the new medical complex. The Haus was a successful participant in the Section 106 review process for the proposed medical complex – they were one of only five sites within the proposed hospital footprint declared by preservation officials to be historically or architecturally “significant.” Despite the fact that cultural center was determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, Haus members knew their protection was not mandated by law and they launched a practical and aggressive campaign to be incorporated as a restaurant and meeting space within the LSU/VA hospital campus to be spared from demolition. The Deutsches Haus is a revealing study site in this dissertation, because, despite their “successful” and articulate campaign to “Save the Haus,” their demolition is eminent. Crucially, the Deutshces Haus case study calls into question how over-simplified characterizations of architectural significance may help to reinforce preservation's exclusive undertones, despite recent efforts by preservationists to protect a more inclusive inventory of built resources and social and cultural histories (Morgan et al. 2006; Kaufman 2009).

Though my qualitative research design permitted me to account for the emergent importance of these spaces as sites of “preservation friction” in post-Katrina New Orleans, it is important to note my field engagement with these sites was more short-term and less involved than my four post-Katrina local landmarks. Initially, I was treating the sites as part of my broader ethnographic study of preservation issues in New Orleans and they were not intended to be individual case studies. Circumstances also dictated my level of engagement, particularly my research on Lafitte, since the community was already displaced and many former residents were angry or distraught and not willing to share their personal experiences of being denied the right to return home. Clearly, I was also not able to observe and participate in the social life at Lafitte, nor did I maintain a regular presence at the Deutsches Haus like I did my other study sites. As a result, my research on Lafitte and, to a lesser extent, the Deutsches Haus is also more reliant on secondary sources, namely local newspaper articles.

In total, I spent twenty-one months immersed in the field, but some of my personal and professional involvements with individuals and organizations are ongoing. My field work was enhanced by a Doctoral Dissertation Research Grant from the National Science Foundation and assistance from the Department of Geography and Anthropology, which permitted me to stay in the field longer and develop a very extensive collection of transcribed, in-depth interviews with 47 research participants. In order to protect the confidentiality of my research participants, I used pseudonyms and, in some cases, identifying information about a participant was altered in order to retain their confidentiality. Because this research is so profoundly place-based, however, and because the identity of the owners/proprietors of the local landmarks I feature in this dissertation are inextricably tied to those study sites, I have obtained their written consent to use their names in order to accurately represent them and my case studies in this dissertation – Baty Landis with the

Sound Café, Joyce Montana and her son Charles Andrews for the Montana house, Teresa and Steven Elloie with the Sportsman’s Corner, and Ben Jaffe with Preservation Hall. In the case of all my study sites I interviewed the owner and/or manager of the public space where applicable and then important figures in the community of users, from regularly booked performers to employees to immediate neighbors. For my research work on preservation, I interviewed staff and committee members associated with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, New Orleans’ Local Historic District Landmarks Commission, the New Orleans Preservation Resource Center, volunteers with the local demolition watchdog group Squandered Heritage, workers contracted by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to conduct Section 106 survey work, and community activists involved in small-scale preservation and revitalization initiatives (see Appendix A).

In addition to my long-term participant observation and in-depth interviewing, I also had the unique opportunity during my time in the field to collaborate with the Neighborhood Story Project and the Tulane City Center and School of Architecture on the *Cornerstones* publication (Breunlin et al. 2008) and documentation project.<sup>9</sup> The Cornerstones project is an effort to document some of the city’s post-Katrina social and cultural landmarks through ethnography and architectural drawings (namely measured floor plans and building footprints), and my participation in this collaborative outreach documentary effort inform the methodological deliberations of this dissertation. Now that the theoretical, methodological, and empirical context of this dissertation has been established, I will outline how my argument unfolds.

## **Dissertation Outline**

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<sup>9</sup> To-date my collaboration with the Neighborhood Story Project and Tulane City Center has resulted in a book publication (Breunlin et al. 2008), a web registry ([www.cornerstonesproject.org](http://www.cornerstonesproject.org)), and other creative media developed as part of our 2009 “Cornerstones of the Month” initiative (see Appendix C).



Exploring the geographies of preservation in post-Katrina New Orleans illuminates understandings about and conflicts over the nature of architectural significance. In chapter two I establish the practical and historical context necessary to understand the prominent preservation practices and policies at play in the post-disaster city. First, I provide an overview of the national preservation movement and introduce the federal preservation policies that are central to my critical deliberations on how the field evaluates and determines architectural significance. In chapter two I also outline New Orleans' preservation history and establish the city's legacy as a forerunner in the modern preservation movement in the United States. Because so many New Orleans properties are listed on national and/or local registers of historic significance, I examine how preservation policy factored prominently into the city's demolition, redevelopment, and restoration climate following the storm. Most fundamentally, chapter two establishes how preservationists' understandings of architectural spaces are traditionally conceived of as material and enduring, overlooking the embodied, relational, practical, and ongoing ways that buildings re-produce meaning for those who use them.

Research and theoretical deliberations on the nature of architecture and place in cultural geography speak to how place is conceptualized and operationalized in the field of preservation. In chapter three I outline the theoretical and methodological frameworks of this project by tracing the evolution of architectural studies in cultural geography. I dwell on the emergence of the "performative turn" in cultural geography and how theories of performance and performativity have offered geographers a lens to address the everyday, visceral, and emergent meanings produced through buildings. Though these theories of performance and performativity are central to my theoretical frame developed in chapter three, I purposefully draw on the work of traditional cultural geographers that pays careful attention to the physical and structuring nature of the built environment, so that in this dissertation I may address the interplay of the material and lived

elements of buildings. I then proceed in chapter three to develop a methodological frame that braids architectural survey, qualitative, and archival research methods together in order to convey the complex and dialectical nature of built and lived landscapes.

In chapters four and five, I employ my theoretical and methodological frames to illuminate how built spaces and cultural and social practices inform one another. In chapter four, I present the Sound Café and Montana house case studies as two sites that illuminate how buildings facilitate and structure practices and more heightened performances and how such embodied, ongoing uses work, in turn, to inform the nature of architectural spaces. In the case of both study sites, it is the intersection of their material and embodied characteristics that have produced and sustained these buildings as local landmarks. In chapter five, I delve more deeply into how the everyday cultural practices and more embedded cultural traditions of New Orleans need the physical and social space of my study sites to sustain them. Drawing on architectural geography, performance studies, and the scholarship of cultural geographers concerned with creative and cultural production, this chapter considers how the Sportsman's Corner barroom and Preservation Hall work in different, yet complementary ways to support the range of activities that constitute, but also perpetuate some of the city's principal performance traditions.

In chapter six I return to how the field of preservation conceptualizes and operationalizes architecture in order to illuminate points of intersection with how cultural geographers theorize and document buildings. In chapter six I first examine the historical and political circumstances that gave rise to a preservation movement marked by a focus on architectural aesthetics and monumental sites, and how, in recent decades, the field has pushed to develop a more inclusive purview. My close look at the preservation controversies surrounding the Lafitte Housing Complex and the Deutsches Haus illustrate how preservationists in post-Katrina New Orleans actively attempted to

dissolve the racial and classed lines that have traditionally delineated preservation, specifically by campaigning to protect the city's existing public housing communities and Lower Mid-City, a predominantly African-American and working-class recovery community. The case studies in chapter six reveal, however, that despite conceptual pushes forward in the field of preservation, existing strategies, policy, practices, and even professional language have not been correspondingly adjusted to implement more effective engagement with communities and more successful campaigns to safeguard their built heritage (Low et al. 2005; Mason 2008; Rottle 2008; Kaufman 2009).

In the concluding chapter, I synthesize my empirical findings and my engagement with the literature and practices of cultural geography and preservation to produce insights about how collectively, as architectural documentarians and place advocates, we might improve our concepts and methods to not only account more dynamically for the various ways buildings become and remain meaningful, but also to more effectively engage the users of these spaces so that these meanings can be better apprehended. In chapter seven, I put forward a collection of architectural meanings that weave through all the case studies and offer new and potentially fruitful avenues for developing more comprehensive understandings of architectural significance. I also deliberate how, as architectural documentarians and researchers, we must employ a responsive combination of qualitative and architectural documentation methods to apprehend the dynamic nature and significance of a building, and in the final section of the chapter I argue for inclusive architectural survey methods that can help us better understand the range of buildings necessary to structure, sustain, or even subvert the social, cultural, or political life of communities. On the one hand this chapter offers ideas to help refine existing policies, assessment practices, and professional language that characterize government-led preservation programs, but it also, crucially, offers preservationists and critical architectural geographers an avenue to better understand and promote sites of significance outside of existing formal preservation programs and policies.

## Chapter Two Preservation in Context, Preservation in Crisis

### Introduction

As part of their post-Katrina mobilization and in order to fulfill their obligations under the National Historic Preservation Act, the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) created a website that offered New Orleans residents an opportunity to identify sites that should be spared from federally-funded demolition because of their significance in local, state, or national history. The website was designed to encourage residents to present evidence to the federal agency that make a site eligible for the National Register of Historic Places due to its association with a historic figure or event which could possibly protect the site from being razed due to its federal classification as “historically significant.” While rarely was this formal web outlet effectively used by New Orleans residents to identify places or events that would make a site eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the occasional emotional response or cry to save a family house or community landmark revealed personal attachments and meanings associated with built spaces citywide. Here is the written request of a son to protect his family’s house in honor of his father’s legacy as a traditional jazz piano player:

2911 Conti Street is where my father lived, James Edward Miller Sr., better known as James Sing Miller. He was the vocalist and piano player for the Jazz Band at Preservation Hall. In which they traveled all over the world to play for many important people. The group also went to New York every year to play the old year out and the new year in, not to mention all the albums they made. He toured Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Carnegie Hall, Wolf Trap, China, Europe, London, England, and Paris France. You can also find a history of him on the internet under the search name “James Sing Miller”. Please take this into consideration. My father is now deceased he passed on May 18, 1990. Please keep his name alive. (Federal Emergency Management Agency n.d.)

Despite the plea put forward by James E. Miller, Junior for the importance of his family home, the Mid-City shotgun house is now a grassy lot – demolished, presumably, by FEMA in coordination with the City of New Orleans as part of an initiative to raze properties deemed as blight or

“imminent threats” to the welfare of the city’s neighborhoods (see the section on Historic Preservation and Post-Katrina New Orleans below).

James Miller’s effort to save his family house is one of numerous examples of residents in post-Katrina New Orleans attempting to protect places that are meaningful to them and their communities through existing preservation outlets. Because historic preservation was a principal forum in post-Katrina New Orleans for residents, preservation professionals, and other public officials to put forward their understandings of the significance of built spaces, my research closely examines how preservation policy not only provided public forums for residents to articulate the significance of buildings, but also how the nature of existing preservation policy has shaped such articulations of architectural importance. This dissertation will pointedly consider conflicts of place meaning and significance that sometimes arise between the ways preservationists operationalize built spaces as purely material and temporally bound versus the public’s understanding of buildings as lived and ongoing spaces (Low 2002; Low et al. 2005; Cresswell & Hoskins 2008). These popular understandings of and conflicts over the significance of the built environment speak directly to the theoretical and methodological frameworks I outline in chapter three and develop throughout the dissertation, which explore how the material and embodied, as two important systems of meaning-making, inform one another in the place-making process.

This chapter establishes the practical and historical context necessary to understand the prominent preservation practices and policies at play in post-Katrina New Orleans. I begin with a brief overview of the field of preservation, highlighting the primary federal tools and policies that dictate preservation practices not only in New Orleans, but in cities and towns nationwide. Once this practical context is established, I move to situate historic preservation within the unique historical circumstances of New Orleans, notably including the city’s groundbreaking forays into

regulated preservation policies and practices. In the third section of the chapter, I specifically consider how federal preservation policy was employed in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, paying careful attention to how buildings were evaluated as historically or architecturally significant as part of preservation-survey and public-review processes that were intensified in the post-disaster city. In the conclusion, I consider the exclusive historical undertones of historic preservation, and how, despite more progressive efforts by preservationists, existing policies and practices prevented professionals and activists from effectively promoting threatened landmarks in the heightened post-Katrina context of loss, displacement, and redevelopment. I also explain how recent scholarship and research in cultural geography on architecture and performativity offers the field of preservation helpful conceptual and methodological avenues for refining approaches to assessing and articulating architectural significance, themes that will be further elaborated throughout the dissertation.

## **Historic-Preservation Fundamentals**

Historic preservation is most broadly a movement, but it is also an academic program of study, a profession in practice, and a technical line of work. James Fitch, the first scholar to develop an academic program for historic preservation, considers the field to fall under the wide, overarching mission of “curatorial management of the built world” (1992: xiii). It is important to note that in the United States, historic preservation is typically used to refer to existing policies and practices designed to protect the built landscape. In simplistic terms, while historic preservation is principally concerned with built resources, the related, if not encompassing, field of “heritage conservation” includes the theories, policies, and professional practices that promote built and intangible resources, often with an emphasis on protecting larger environments or linkages that sustain both architectural and social and cultural histories (Mason 2002; Longstreth 2008b). In light of the closely related conceptual underpinnings of the fields of historic preservation and heritage conservation, the terms are often used interchangeably, but there are acute differences, and my research work engages

directly with existing historic preservation policy and practice (though it does offer research findings that also speak to the field of heritage conservation).

Historic preservation works at many scales and in many forms to promote and protect the built environment, from the technical restoration of a building's brickwork to the interpretation of a historic-house museum to the legislative designation of a historic district. While all these elements constitute the field and practice of historic preservation, my research is primarily concerned with how the preservation process conceptualizes and also identifies buildings as significant through its formal survey and registry-listing procedures. This dissertation closely considers how the National Register of Historic Places was upheld as the primary survey and evaluation tool of architectural significance in post-Katrina New Orleans. Because the National Register of Historic Places serves as the conceptual and methodological organizing structure for state historic-preservation offices and local-level historic-district commissions (Oaks 2002; Shull 2002), this project's examination of existing preservation policy and practices in post-Katrina New Orleans has implications for federal, as well as other state and local historic-preservation efforts.

Established as part of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act, the National Register of Historic Places is a federal inventory of sites or districts "significant" in American history, architecture, or culture at the national, state, or local levels (Lea 2003). In order to be eligible for listing on the federal inventory, sites typically must be over fifty years old and additionally be associated with a historic event or person or meet architectural standards as embodiments of a distinctive type, period, or method of construction (National Park Service 1998). The Register is largely honorific, but many communities use it as a cultural measuring stick and means to promote heritage tourism and investment (Hansen 2004). There are opportunities for listed properties to receive improvement grants and tax breaks, and all sites assessed as eligible for the National Register

receive special consideration to be protected from federally funded construction projects under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (Fowler 2003; Hansen 2004).

Section 106 review is the principal federal preservation policy at work throughout the United States and it figured prominently in formal preservation practices in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina (Meredith Campbell interview, 9.27.07; Richard Vogel interview, 11.12.07). Before any federally-funded development project or undertaking is carried out, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires that all sites (architectural and archeological) located within a project area must be assessed according to the eligibility criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. If, through Section 106 review, a property is determined to be eligible for the National Register, the policy advises developers to attempt to “avoid, minimize, or mitigate” any “possible adverse affects” on the historic resource under consideration in consultation with the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation (ACHP) Council of Historic Preservation (ACHP) (National Historic Preservation Act 1966; King 2000, 2008). Through its mandate to identify potentially threatened historic properties, Section 106 of the NHPA has generated massive amounts of architectural and archeological survey data for the National Register and state and local preservation offices throughout the United States, as well as providing the opportunity for communities to publicly comment on federal projects prior to implementation. Ultimately, however, Section 106 does not require developers to protect resources determined eligible for the National Register; the law’s language “to avoid, minimize, or mitigate” damage to historic resources is merely advisory (King 2000; Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 2002). As a result, the policy does not actively protect “historic” sites from demolition or encroaching development, a preservation reality underlined by the Lafitte and Deutsches Haus case studies presented in chapter six.



In addition to the National Register of Historic Places, the NHPA also established State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to administer federal funds, execute National Register listings at the state and local level, and develop state preservation plans (Wallace 1996). Preservationists Elizabeth Lyon and David Brook identify states as “the backbone of preservation,” noting that SHPOs have become the “central point and critical mechanism” in maintaining the country’s three-tiered national-state-local preservation system (2003: 81). As state preservation programs were established, they delegated their preservation authority to local governments by granting them the “police power” to regulate the use of property through the designation of historic districts and zoning ordinances (Stipe 2003). The development of local historic districts as the result of state enabling legislation has been very important to historic preservation in the United States, principally because they became the primary regulatory and planning tool of the preservationist (Confresi & Radtke 2003). Some state preservation programs or legislation did exist prior to the National Historic Preservation Act, such as the enabling legislation passed in Louisiana that designated New Orleans’ Vieux Carré or French Quarter as the nation’s second historic district in 1936 (So 1994; Lyon & Brook 2003). The city was a forerunner in the nation’s modern preservation movement, and the unique circumstances that gave rise to the city’s preserved built environment and government-backed preservation bodies is the consideration of the next section.

## **History of Preservation in New Orleans**

New Orleans has long been a fascinating lab for research questions concerning the city’s cultural distinction and well-preserved built environment. Geographer Pierce Lewis eloquently summed up New Orleans’ “individual identity” with the close of his 1976 edition of *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*:

For most of its history, New Orleans was an island, protected against national fads by the insulating swamps, by Creole aloofness, by poverty, by a host of natural and artificial devices

which kept the world at arm's length. Over that long time, New Orleans has had the leisure to plant and nurture the special qualities that made it a fine city. (2003: 102-03)

Many, like Lewis, acknowledge that much of the city's celebrated preservation did not come about through foresight or preemptive action, but simply through peculiar historical, social, and environmental circumstances – preservation “by default” as it were (Colten & Welch 2003). The traditional and conservative element of the city's elite has notoriously retarded progress in many of the city's important social arenas, yet, as Lewis strongly states, such tendencies did prevent “the orgy of downtown destruction that eviscerated so many American cities in the name of ‘urban renewal’” from the 1950s to 1970s (2003: 86).

Additionally, New Orleans' economic growth slowed by the 1960s and 1970s as heavy industry declined and the city's economic mainstay, the river port, shifted from manual labor to automation (Souther 2006). Though tourism and service industries were on the rise in New Orleans, these industries were less profitable and predictable, and the booming oil industry bottomed out in the 1980s, further compounding New Orleans' economic struggles (Blaine 1995). While development stalled in New Orleans in the 1980s and early 90s, construction and redevelopment projects were booming in most American cities (Blaine 1995). Craig Colten and John Welch's (2003) study of the effects of Hurricane Betsy on the historical housing stock in the Bywater neighborhood points to these economic realities. During the 1960s and '70s, the Bywater suffered economic decline and physical damage from Betsy, a category four hurricane that came up through the mouth of the Mississippi River and flooded much of metropolitan New Orleans area in 1965. In light of the economic climate, however, instead of replacing damaged homes, property owners repaired what they had or were forced to sell, often to absentee landlords who invested little in upkeep (Colten and Welch 2003). The neighborhood retained its historic architectural integrity and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but a sluggish economy and lack of federal

recovery assistance were historical factors that contributed to its current “preserved” character (Colten and Welch 2003).

Also contributing to this phenomenon of a neglected-yet-preserved built environment was the steady outmigration of residents to the suburbs from the 60s through the 80s (Campanella 2006) that often left inner city properties tied up in succession or under the minimal care of absentee landlords. The result of this outmigration was a qualitative difference in the social make-up and built environment of many New Orleans neighborhoods articulated by some of my research participants, such as Rudy Barthe, a local preservationist who grew up in the Seventh and Eighth Wards, neighborhoods to the northwest of the Bywater:

Over time you did see things change...it's only logical that when grandmother or grandfather dies the children inherit it and the mindset of people was that, 'I don't want to live in this neighborhood.... I wanna live in a modern house.' So you start renting it, but you and I both know you sometimes don't keep up. You put in a cheap fixture here, light fixture there. People just didn't put maintenance into the house, you had a lot of deferred-maintenance issues, and twenty years later you're like, 'Oh, I'll sell it' and somebody comes along and they buy it and they don't do any improvements to it. (interview, June 25, 2008).

This landscape of “deferred maintenance” adequately sums up the tentatively intact nature of many of the city’s more working-class historic districts, such as the Bywater, New Marigny, Holy Cross, Treme, and Central City, where blight and architectural continuity sit in contrary company.

To whatever degree New Orleans’ well-preserved architecture and distinctive character is the result of happenstance, however, something about its unique built landscape has inspired local activists to fight for the city’s architectural resources in momentous ways. The early emergence of a formal historic-preservation movement in New Orleans coalesced around the city’s oldest district, the “real and symbolic core” of the city – the French Quarter (Lewis 2003: 86). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Quarter faced development threats from impending riverfront rail lines and industry, and several important landmarks were lost to fire; the district also suffered from population loss as

many of the neighborhood's residents moved to the prosperous American sector up the Mississippi River (Hamer 1998; Leeman 2005; Sheehan 2006). A bohemian collection of artists streamed into the Quarter during this period of abandonment, and, quickly finding the intimate scale and picturesque environment of the historic district to be a "unique asset and source of creative inspiration," this nonconventional camp of preservationists joined with the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects and a small group of bourgeois Quarter activists to aggressively campaign for the neighborhood's protection (Sheehan 2006: 6-7; Lemann 2005; Vieux Carre Commission n.d.). The result was the passage of the nation's first municipal ordinance in 1925 to establish a historic district (Vieux Carre Commission n.d.). The Vieux Carré Commission, the body created to oversee preservation of the district, was merely advisory and it dissolved by the late 1920s (Murtagh 1997; Vieux Carré Commission n.d.). With an amendment to the Louisiana State Constitution in 1936, the Vieux Carré Commission was reestablished, but this time as a state-authorized legal body for managing architectural exteriors and reviewing new construction in the historic district (Hamer 1998: 7; Vieux Carré Commission n.d.). Though New Orleans was the national runner-up to Charleston in the race for the first legally-backed historic district, Charleston's district was protected through local zoning ordinances authorized by the city council, while New Orleans was the first city in the United States to receive state constitutional authorization for a preservation committee (Hamer 1998: 5-7).

The Vieux Carré Commission was a national forerunner in preservation and a force in safeguarding the Quarter's built heritage, but it was the introduction of federal policy and a stroke of grace that saved the historic district in the 1960s from a proposed elevated interstate that would have severed the north and river sides of the French Quarter (Baumbach & Borah 1981; Vieux Carré Commission n.d.). Though preservationists launched a well-funded and nationwide campaign to overturn the proposed plans for a "Riverfront Expressway," it was only the passage of the

National Historic Preservation Act and the establishment of the National Register of Historic Places in 1966 that kept the French Quarter intact (Baumbach & Borah 1981). As a result of the French Quarter's listing on the National Register, Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act required the Department of Transportation, since it would be allocating federal monies to the City of New Orleans, to consider any adverse effects the project would have on the historic district. In consultation with the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation, the Secretary of Transportation ruled that the proposed expressway would "severely impair the historical quality" of the Quarter and repealed funds for the sake of protecting the historic district (Baumbach and Borah 1981: 202). Without the financial backing of the federal government, state and local authorities were unable to carry out construction of the Riverfront Expressway (So 1994). The interstate battle was epic, marking the first time a neighborhood was protected from a federally funded transportation project in the name of historic significance (Preservation Resource Center n.d.).

While the momentum of the federal preservation movement and the crucial passage of the National Historic Preservation Act helped thwart future damage to the Quarter, they did not help protect New Orleans from the ongoing effects of suburbanization and the decline of the city's historic housing stock. In the 1970s, development and economic-growth pressures in the inner city triggered demolition of blocks of historic buildings to accommodate new shopping centers and parking lots. This considerable loss of architectural resources sparked a preservation consciousness among concerned citizens (Gay 1998). A series of architecture books initiated in the early 70s and compiled by the Friends of the Cabildo, a historical society based in the French Quarter, featured selected New Orleans neighborhoods, developing historical and architectural contexts and comprehensive building inventories of neighborhoods (see, for example, Wilson et al. 1971; Toledano et al. 1975). These published inventories led to a surge of interest and research on the city's historic properties (Gay 1998), even prompting the New Orleans Public Library to develop the

publication *How to Research the History of Your House (Or Other Building) in New Orleans* (Everard 1976).

Some neighborhood associations began to coalesce around concerns over preserving historic buildings and fabrics, and in 1974 this private-sector activism led to the founding of the Preservation Resource Center (PRC), a nonprofit organization developed to steward the city's historic properties and districts (So 1994; Gay 1998).

As the city's preservation movement grew in response to the loss triggered by these development trends, the city's disempowered and working-class communities were not incorporated into these active efforts to safeguard the city's architectural and social resources, and perhaps the neighborhood that experienced the most profound loss during the mid- and late-20<sup>th</sup> century was the black and Creole faubourg<sup>10</sup> to the north of the French Quarter – Treme. Due to out-migration, blight, and underemployment in the Treme neighborhood that typified the city's black working-class communities during this period, like the Seventh Ward discussed earlier in the chapter, Treme was targeted as an area prime for redevelopment or a “renewal area” (indicative of the broader national trend of “urban renewal” in the 1960s and 1970s that targeted declining, minority inner city communities as sites for major redevelopment projects, especially major government housing and transportation projects) (Gay 1998; Samuels 2000). The neighborhood became the site of three major redevelopment projects – the development of the Lafitte Government Housing Complex, the construction of Louis Armstrong Park, and the erection of Interstate 10, which severed the community and removed over 30 square blocks of Treme's historic neighborhood fabric over the course of three decades (Samuels 2000b: 71). The erection of a raised portion of Interstate Ten above Treme's North Claiborne Avenue in the 1960s stands in stark contrast to the public campaign

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<sup>10</sup> “Faubourg” was a French term used in New Orleans to refer to early districts or suburbs that developed outside the original core or French Quarter. Treme was thus referred to as “Faubourg Treme.” The term is prominently used by preservationists in historic district designations and it is also used generically to refer to the city's various and distinctive historic neighborhoods (Campanella 2006).

and success of French Quarter preservationists in averting the construction of a raised expressway route around the historic district's periphery. In fact, architect Daniel Samuels' archival and oral-history research on North Claiborne Avenue (2000) indicates there was no public outcry from informed residents or preservationists to prevent the routing of the expressway above the wide neutral ground, mature oaks, and family-owned businesses that once distinguished Treme's economic and civic corridor. The loss of North Claiborne Avenue and the swath of community razed for the construction of Louis Armstrong Park on North Rampart Street are still actively mourned by community residents, and they are upheld as examples not to repeat in recent campaigns against plans to redevelop the city's public housing and to erect a new public hospital complex (Tannen & Nathan 2007; see chapter six).

Nonetheless, the private-sector promotion of the city's historic architecture and neighborhoods during the 1970s not only helped raise a preservation consciousness citywide, it also generated critical legislation and public-sector involvement for more overt protection of New Orleans' older landmarks and landscapes. Two years after the creation of the PRC, the New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC) was established through state enabling legislation to oversee the process of designating local landmarks and historic districts in the city outside of the French Quarter (the purview of the still-active Vieux Carre Commission) (So 1994; Historic District Landmarks Commission n.d.). The HDLC adheres closely to National Register criteria for designating their own local landmarks and districts, since sites are eligible for listing if they (1) exemplify national, state, or local historic trends or movements, (2) are associated with a historic figure or event, (3) embody a distinctive architectural type or style, or (4) are representative of the work of a master builder or architect (Historic District Landmarks Commission n.d.). The HDLC has jurisdiction to regulate all work performed on the exterior of buildings visible from the public street, as well as proposed demolitions to designated landmarks or properties within local

historic districts (Historic District Landmarks Commission n.d.). Through these façade and demolition regulations, the Commission works to protect sites that “reflect elements” of New Orleans’ “cultural, social, economic, political, and architectural history” (Historic District Landmarks Commission n.d.).

Through a unique set of historic circumstances, pioneering advocacy efforts, and preservation bodies, New Orleans has fostered a notable legacy in historic preservation, a distinction that is upheld by local preservation officials and activists often by toting the considerable number of properties citywide that are designated as local, state, or national landmarks. New Orleans has close to 100 individual buildings and 20 sites and structures (such as cemeteries, park features, and statues) listed on the National Register, plus 25 designated historic districts that include historic neighborhoods, as well as the campuses of sites like Saint Louis Cemetery Number 1, Magnolia/CJ Peete Street Housing Project (see chapter six), and Tulane University (National Register of Historic Places n.d.); three districts – Pontchartrain Park, Edgewood Park, and the New Orleans Medical District – are pending listing on the national inventory of historic places (Poche 2006). All neighborhoods in the city built before the early 1900s have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places (Gay 1998). The city’s local historic commission has more listed properties under its jurisdiction than any other local historic commission in the country – over 14,000 properties spread among the 13 local historic districts under the HDLC’s purview (Shane Lanham interview, 6.25.2008).

## **Historic Preservation and Post-Katrina New Orleans**

In Lewis’ summation of New Orleans’ distinctive character cited earlier, he goes on to forewarn that New Orleans may fall into the homogenizing development trends of most American cities, especially since the insularity of the city is now a thing of the past. “The barriers are down,”



he observes, “and the world is crowding in” (Lewis 2003: 103). Though Lewis was referring specifically to suburban sprawl and modern development, his reflections evoke the failed levies and flooding that ensued with the passing of Hurricane Katrina – a literal breaking of the barriers, but also a figurative infiltration as the world watched the city’s history emerge in its stark inequity. The storm waters left eighty percent of New Orleans flooded and three out of four homes throughout the city damaged or destroyed (Katel 2006a; City of New Orleans 2007). While flooding and high winds categorically removed a notable portion of New Orleans’ built environment, many of the city’s older structures remained precariously intact and today their fates appear just as questionable. The Unified New Orleans Plan, published in the spring of 2007, estimated 25,000 of the city’s standing historic structures to be threatened. One of New Orleans’ most prominent preservation officials specifically identified this damaged and tenuous historic housing stock and its potential collapse or demolition as the biggest preservation concern in the city since the hurricane:

We have so many buildings that are just falling apart. I don’t foresee the influx of population or new building enough to fill all of them, so unless we can get some of these buildings on their feet and stabilized to a point. I think we’re going to continue to lose... The storm killed lots of people right away, but there was kind of that second wave of old people really dying much earlier [younger] they say. I think that we’re seeing the same thing in buildings. (Shane Lanham interview, June 25, 2008)

My dissertation field research revealed that the crux of preservation efforts and concerns in the immediate wake of Hurricane Katrina were not only to avoid unneeded demolition of historic structures, but also to take an advocacy stand counter to the many politicians and developers who upheld the demolition of the city’s damaged architectural stock as “progress” in an otherwise difficult post-disaster recovery. In the blunt view of preservation advocates like local architect Arthur Davis, “the [City of New Orleans] demolition count became a sign that something is being done, especially with the ineffective Nagin administration” (public lecture, February 7, 2008).

The “Good Neighbor” anti-blight program is a chief example of a demolition effort spearheaded by the City of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and actively supported by government officials and City Council members as “site preparation for the rebuilding of the city” (Krupa 2007a: A1). In the early months after Katrina and with the financial backing of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Army Corps of Engineers, the City of New Orleans razed any structures in the public right-of-way or collapsed, and also complied with homeowners’ voluntary requests to demolish their severely flood-damaged homes (Meredith Campbell interview, 9.27.07; Warner 2006). But since this federal assistance for demolitions and demolition clean-up was finite, approximately a year after the hurricane, the City launched the blight fighting initiative, the “Good Neighbor Program,” and the government carried out a series of involuntary demolitions that provoked preservationists and led to a true outcry of protest about the number of salvageable historic properties facing the bulldozer.<sup>11</sup> Because the Good Neighbor program was a federally backed undertaking, however, it was subject to public review, which presented preservation activists and concerned community members an outlet to voice concern about the loss of a specific historic property or the city’s redevelopment strategies more generally.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In July of 2007, this protest reached a pinnacle when the City published a small-print, seventeen-page list in the local newspaper of over 1,700 properties deemed to be “an imminent threat to the public health, safety and welfare” (Brooks 2007: A1), the largest in a series of public demolition notices. This extensive “imminent threat” list contained a notable number of controversial properties that had been considerably repaired, often with building permits to prove it, or that at a minimum had been gutted and secured until owners could move back to the city or receive insurance settlements or government assistance to carry out the necessary renovation work to make their homes livable again (Brooks 2007; Krupa & Elie 2007). The city’s inconsistent procedures for identifying properties as a threat to public welfare and the excessive bureaucratic maneuvering required of residents to get their houses or businesses removed from this demolition list came under such local fire that a special hearing of the City Council was called in August 2007 and new procedures were instated that slowed the rate of involuntary demolitions (Krupa 2007b). The “Good Neighbor” program completed close to 1,500 demolitions of residences deemed as public health threats before it was phased out in 2008 (City of New Orleans Department of Safety and Permits n.d.)

<sup>12</sup> As noted in the introduction, my research focuses on how federal preservation policy was employed in post-Katrina New Orleans, but properties slated for demolition under the purview of the City of New Orleans’ Historic District Landmarks Commission (HDLC), the Vieux Carre Commission (VCC), or the Housing Conservation District Review Committee (a demolition review body housed in the Department of Safety and Permits that oversees properties in New

Since their post-Katrina mobilization, FEMA has taken the lead in developing a number of key programmatic agreements to meet their Section 106 obligations with the Army Corps of Engineers, the Federal Advisory Council of Historic Preservation, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office, the City of New Orleans, and other concurring partners like the Preservation Resource Center and Historic District Landmarks Commission. One of these principal programmatic agreements involved Section 106 survey of sites proposed for demolition by the City of New Orleans just discussed (the Corps was also a federal partner in the demolitions for two years following the hurricane). The City was required to provide FEMA with a listing of properties proposed to be razed as part of the “Good Neighbor” program, so that they could carry out a National Register assessment of each site and determine if the structure was eligible for listing on the federal historic inventory (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2006). The second major programmatic agreement FEMA drew up was actually a mitigation measure under their Section 106 obligations to offset, in some documentary way, the removal of structures they have determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as part of the “Good Neighbor” demolition survey. The mitigation measure was a structure-by-structure resurvey of most National Register districts that endured a notable amount of Katrina flooding – New Marigny, Faubourg Marigny, Esplanade Ridge, Parkview, Mid-City, Broadmoor, Lower Garden, Central City, and Carrollton, so that the built landscape could be re-documented before major change ensued (Meredith Campbell interview, 9.27.07).

The methodology that FEMA developed in conjunction with the National Park Service (the federal custodian of the National Register) to carry out this large-scale survey of National Register district properties and structures proposed for demolition, has relevance for my critical

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Orleans older neighborhoods that are outside the control of the HDLC or the VCC), all local government bodies, were also subject to public review.

consideration of preservation-assessment standards.<sup>13</sup> This was the first time FEMA or the NPS developed such a large-scale architectural survey and global positioning survey (GPS) database in response to a major disaster (Meredith Campbell interview, 9.27.07). Designed in the very early weeks after the storm, when preservation specialists were needed to survey the intense damage to the Lower Ninth Ward and identify if any historic resources remained before clearing this heavily flooded section of New Orleans (Meredith Campbell interview, 9.27.07), FEMA and the NPS streamlined a database that assessed structural damage, the approximate age, architectural style, building form, and the presence and condition of exterior elements on surveyed buildings. Surveyors used handheld, Trimble computers to establish a GPS point for each site and then worked through a checklist database to determine the architectural history and post-Katrina condition of each site; high-grade, digital photographs of the façade, side elevations, and architectural details of each structure were the other principal components of the survey. The database also required surveyors to determine if sites were a “contributing element” in a National Register Historic District or independently eligible for the federal inventory if not located within one of the city’s 25 districts.

This large-scale, GPS survey only evaluated eligibility according to Criterion C of the National Register, the architectural merit evaluation criterion, excluding Criteria A and B that assess significance based on a site’s association with historical events or figures (Meredith Campbell interview, 9.27.07; National Park Service 1998).<sup>14</sup> In an effort to counter these shortcomings and to uphold FEMA’s obligations to evaluate sites according to Criteria A and B, the criteria that assess historic, social, or cultural significance, the federal agency posted lists of proposed demolitions in the local newspaper and, as discussed in the introduction of this chapter, on their Section 106 website

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<sup>13</sup> Privately-funded demolitions in National Register districts were not subject to this survey-assessment and public-demolition review process, only those backed with federal funds.

<sup>14</sup> Criterion D, which assess the importance of a site in history or prehistory, is typically used to list archeological sites on the National Register (National Park Service 1998).

(Warner 2006), giving residents an opportunity to comment with “specific, documented evidence of a property’s association with events or persons significant in local, state, or national history” (Federal Emergency Management Agency n.d.). Additionally, as part of their obligation to avoid or minimize damage to any sites eligible for the National Register, FEMA requested that residents offer alternatives to demolition for any sites in the City of New Orleans demolition database that have been determined eligible for listing on the federal inventory according to Criterion C through the demolition field survey. The public and consulting parties were asked to respond by mail or via the FEMA website for a fifteen-day period after the review appeal was posted (Federal Emergency Management Agency n.d.).

FEMA representatives acknowledged in the local press, however, that returns to their appeals for input were “minuscule”(Warner 2006). Activists from the preservation community also made note that the process did not engage residents (Sissy Corp interview, 10.20.07), and that was apparent when reviewing FEMA’s online posts of comments. As part of this comment process, with very rare exception, sites were identified as significant by residents for their architectural merit or for being part of their neighborhood’s architectural fabric, like this posting from February 2007 – “Please do not destroy this home. It is a classic example of New Orleans architecture and an important contribution to the uniqueness of our neighborhoods” (Federal Emergency Management Agency n.d.). Just as rare were instances of residents developing a reasonable alternative to demolition for the many severely damaged properties on FEMA’s list (Federal Emergency Management Agency n.d.). In March of 2007, for example, FEMA posted online a list of close to 225 properties proposed for demolition, seeking resident input on the significance of any listed sites according to National Register Criteria A or B; no community input was posted (Federal Emergency Management Agency n.d.).

In my interviews and conversations with preservationists, they took issue with the shortcomings of FEMA's large-scale survey methodology, namely its inability to effectively engage residents and assess the significance of buildings outside of very straightforward material parameters, which speaks directly to the conceptual and methodological approaches to built spaces I develop in the next chapter and elaborate throughout my dissertation. It is important to note, however, that preservationists did uphold the benefits of having a government review system in place during the heightened demolition and redevelopment taking place in the early months and years after Katrina. Preservationist Richard Vogel insists that the Section 106 process slowed the City's demolition recovery reflex and bought homeowners or concerned community members the necessary time to rescue some properties from the bulldozer (interview, 11.12.07). More crucially, preservationists value the Section 106 process, because it presented residents and preservationists with outlets to articulate and share their convictions about the significance of specific buildings or built neighborhood environments (Meredith Campbell interview, 9.27.07; Sissy Corp interview, 10.20.07; Jane Dupre and Susan Westbrook interview, 3.19.08). "Demolition, as it turns out, has been one of the occasions through which people can insert themselves into a sort of community dialogue about how their neighborhood is gonna look," preservation activist Susan Westbrook insisted in our interview (3.19.08). In addition to the Section 106 survey and public comment period developed to assess the significance of individual properties listed for demolition in National Register districts, some major redevelopment projects in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina funded by FEMA and other federal bodies, like the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development, were subject to more rigorous public review – a series of public meetings that permitted politicians, government officials, developers, preservationists, and community members to provide input and debate the potential impacts of proposed, federally backed construction projects on particular historic sites and neighborhoods ("historic" in this case meaning any building or

environment determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places). This intensive public review process illuminated fundamental understandings of and conflicts over the significance of the built environments in post-Katrina New Orleans, and it will be considered in detail in chapter six.

## **Conclusion**

The post-Katrina context of severe architectural damage and resident displacement shed new light on the tentative nature of the city's intact built environment and distinctive neighborhoods, and these realities prompted New Orleans' preservation community to fight for an array of built spaces and environments in monumental ways. As will be further explored in chapter six, the field of preservation is refining its purview and developing new concepts to promote buildings that play important roles not just in architectural history, but also in the social and cultural histories of communities. The existing federal preservation policies and practices just outlined in this chapter, however, did not permit New Orleans's preservation community to effectively promote and protect a more inclusive array of built resources. Like the work of cultural geographers Tim Cresswell and Gareth Hoskins and their critical deliberations of the National Historic Landmark listing process, my research findings indicate this disjuncture is principally based on the "awkward resolution" in the preservation process between the "experiential fluidity" of place as experienced by those who inhabit, use, or associate with the sites under consideration and the "material obduracy" of place as framed by the National Register's assessments of integrity and historic significance (2008: 392). The theoretical and methodological frameworks I outline in the next chapter draw from the legacy of architectural studies in cultural geography, and they offer preservationists, geographers, and other place documentarians a lens to frame, assess, and articulate place significance not only as material, but also, crucially, as embodied, ongoing, and meaningful.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Architecture and Practice: A Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

#### **Introduction**

“If we are to concern ourselves with the inhabitation of architectural space as much as its signification, then we must engage practically and actively with the situated and everyday practices through which built environments are used,” Loretta Lees declared in her manifesto on critical architectural geographies in 2001 (56). Lees’ call to incorporate a concern for the role of everyday practices in place-making while sustaining a commitment to apprehend the politics of meaning making structured by and stored in the built environment speaks to the theoretical lineage of one of human geography’s most influential sub-fields – architectural geography. Jon Goss first coined the specialized branch of landscape studies rooted in the material culture tradition and dedicated to studies of the built environment as “architectural geography” in the late 1980s (Lees 2001). Though only a limited number of researchers use the umbrella term “architectural geography” for the sub-discipline, a tradition addressing architectural form and environment in geographic scholarship can be traced. As I will show in this chapter, the field is pushing beyond epistemological views of the built landscape as a material artifact or a political symbol to also explore architectural “geographies of meaning” (Jacobs 2006) or how regular and often ordinary uses of built spaces inform place meaning in contingent, productive, and emergent ways.

In this chapter, I first outline the fundamental contributions of Geography’s material landscape tradition, which was principally premised on rigorous documentation of architectural forms and details to map cultural settlement patterns. In the second section of the chapter, I discuss the emergence of the “critical turn” in cultural geography and how corresponding epistemological shifts in landscape studies permitted cultural geographers to not only consider the social, political,



and historical processes that structure the built landscape, but also how the built landscape participates in overlooked, but essential ways in reproducing present-day social, political, even historical realities. In the third section, I delineate the rise of practice and performance theories in studies of the built landscapes and individual buildings in cultural geography, and I give careful attention to cultural geography's most widely embraced variant of performance theory – Nigel Thrift's "non-representational theory." I then consider how Loretta Lees upholds non-representational theory in her articulation of a "critical geography of architecture" (2001). Lees' pioneering efforts in employing ethnographic methods and performance theory to engage with how inhabitation and everyday uses of buildings produce geographies of meaning sit at the heart of my conceptual frame.

By outlining the genealogy of architectural geography in this chapter, I am able to articulate my own theoretical framework that is notably informed by Tim Cresswell's conceptual notion of "landscapes of practice" (2003), which he developed to bring forth both the "fixity of structure and the flow of feeling" when studying the built landscape (2003: 270). Cresswell's "landscapes of practice" is shaped both by the legacy of critical studies of the built environment in human geography and more recent efforts by scholars to apprehend the everyday and practiced elements of place. Like Cresswell I draw from two prominent approaches to the built landscape in cultural geography, but my theoretical frame incorporates a commitment to the material culture tradition of early architectural geography, while also upholding a performative conceptual frame, in order to explore how architecture and everyday practices work together to create places that are socially meaningful. Once I have established my theoretical frame, I outline my methodological commitment to apprehend the physical presence, form, and features of buildings, as well as everyday uses, performances, and emotional associations and the intersections of these architectural characteristics through the use of architectural documentation, qualitative, and archival research

methods. The theoretical and methodological framework developed in this chapter guide the research findings, interpretations, and reflections on my study sites that I present in the succeeding chapters.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Material Studies: The Foundation of Architectural Geography**

Carl Sauer's "Morphology of landscape," the cornerstone essay of the material landscape tradition, was an effort in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to supersede the popular notion of environmental determinism where humans are viewed as necessarily having to adapt to the physical environment. In its stead, Sauer argued for the "morphologic method," which took its epistemological cues from the biological sciences and sought to classify landscape forms, indicate their relation to other forms, and establish a development sequence (1925). While this approach was common to examinations of the physical landscape, Sauer extended the method to the human built environment and persuasively insisted that culture serves as the "agent" of landscape change with the environment as the "medium" and the cultural landscape as the "final result" (1925: 343). Sauer and, later, his adherents in the Berkeley landscape tradition, defined the cultural landscape as "the material impress of the works of man upon the area" (1925: 342), thus not accounting for cultural processes or intangible expressions of culture. Another defining characteristic of the landscape tradition was the view that a cultural landscape can reach the end of development and the diffusion of cultures, therefore, can be catalogued and cultural strata distinguished when examining the built record (Sauer 1925). These premises of the Berkeley landscape tradition set the course for architectural geography in America through the 1970s.

The "morphologic method" was adapted and rigorously applied by a lineage of geographers. Prominent among them (and important to Louisiana) was Sauer's student Fred Kniffen, whose work focused on establishing cultural patterns based on the vernacular built record first in Louisiana and,

later, in the eastern United States.<sup>15</sup> His 1930s *Annals* article on “Louisiana House Types” (Kniffen 1936) was the first published academic piece on vernacular architecture in geography, and, prior to his statewide survey of rural Louisiana homes, no researcher had developed a way to systematically document, classify, and analyze architectural forms and distribution patterns (Jay Edwards, class lecture, February 21, 2006). Kniffen’s preference for rural folk housing to determine patterns of regional cultural differentiation because of its “adherence to type” and relative abundance had lasting impact on the trajectory of the landscape tradition (1965: 552). In addition, Kniffen’s pioneering and rigorous field methods, notably his vast housing surveys and distribution maps, set a demanding methodological standard for architectural geography, aligning the field with the data diligence of positivism.

While some of Kniffen’s contemporaries and students adopted his model and worked on the regional scale to map house types and determine culture patterns (see, for example, Glassie 1971; Lewis 1975), other geographers engaged with architectural landscape studies during the 1970s found such a systematic approach to house types unable to “bring the elusive quality of sameness-in-diversity” that is found in vernacular architecture “under conceptual control” (Newton & Napoli 1977: 360). Milton Newton and Linda Napoli’s documentation of 19<sup>th</sup> century log homes in Louisiana led them to develop a historical theory to account for the wide variation in elements among the rare extant examples of this house type. In their 1977 *Annals* article, Newton and Napoli carefully developed the notion of log houses as “public occasion” or the product of collective building efforts that are shaped by relations both cultural (i.e. belief systems and attitudes) and economic (i.e. access to resources). Though still focused on the material landscape and employing detailed distribution maps and tables of architectural variation, Newton and Napoli’s historical

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<sup>15</sup> Another notable Sauer protégé that studied the built environment and settlement patterns was Wilbur Zelinsky (see Zelinsky 1953, 1958, 1973).

theory of log houses was an effort to move beyond the “ontogenic status” of the house type and take social context into account in order to better elucidate common deviations found among vernacular house forms (1977: 362).<sup>16</sup>

JB Jackson, though a less systematic field researcher on the material landscape, wrote prolifically and astutely on American vernacular architecture from the 1960s through the ‘80s. Jackson’s architectural essays, distinguished by close observation and reflection and his engaging writing style, elaborate the origins and possible meanings of a compelling array of American vernacular forms, such as Craftsman bungalows, trailer homes, strip shopping malls, and agricultural-field design. Like those in the Berkley tradition, Jackson relied on observation and focused on vernacular architecture and its change over time, yet Jackson’s look at the landscape was more probing to access meaning and underlying values, and, by way of contrast, Jackson’s documented landscapes were dynamic, not static. It was Jackson’s fascination with change, accessibility, and mobility in the vernacular landscape that allowed him to make the analytical bridge between the built record as material artifact and the built record as a lived space (Cresswell 2003). As Tim Cresswell has observed, “If the equation that links landscape to vision has frequently erased practice, then J.B. Jackson’s mobile view of landscape began to show how vision is a practice” (2003: 275). Among the many essays that developed Jackson’s more embodied study of the mobile human landscape was his 1957 essay on the “Abstract world of the hot rodder” in which he outlines the “new sportsman’s” relationship with a “moving, abstract world:”

The new landscape...is composed of rushing air, shifting lights, clouds, waves, a constantly moving, changing horizon, a constantly changing surface beneath the ski, the wheel, the

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<sup>16</sup> Similarly looking to improve on Kniffen’s model, Terry Jordan and Matti Kaups (1987) developed a contextual frame for analyzing individual architectural sites in their “cultural and ecological matrix” in order to more aptly determine culture patterns.

rudder, the wing. The view is no longer static; it is a revolving, uninterrupted panorama of 360 degrees. In short, the traditional perspective, the traditional way of seeing and experiencing the world is abandoned; in its stead we become active participants. (1997: 205)

Jackson acknowledged the political element of the landscape – the “infrastructure of a stable social order,” but still he was compelled to document the vernacular, which he identified as “local custom, pragmatic adaptation to circumstances, and unpredictable mobility,” because its creative and transitory nature reveals our response to and relationship with the environment (1984: xii, 275). Jackson rejected a metaphorical definition of landscape; he viewed the landscape as a “concrete,” “man-made” space, yet he was convinced vernacular architecture is a creative and ongoing reflection of who we are (1984: 5-6).

Sauer, Kniffen, Newton and Napoli, Jackson and other researchers working within the Berkley landscape tradition have stood at the foundation of an empirical approach to architectural studies, an approach espousing archival, survey, and observation methods to establish patterns of cultural settlement and change based on architectural distribution. Jackson’s work with the landscape was also premised on observation and a visual read of the vernacular, but arguably his informal training as a geographer led him to more particular and nuanced looks at the built landscape, as well as unconventional exploration of ways places are not static and fixed, but responsive and sometimes even mobile. Though Jackson began to explore the meaning behind landscapes, he nonetheless maintained the Berkley landscape tradition’s visual orientation and its focus on material expressions. The legacy of these material landscape scholars is in their rigorous attention to the physical presence of buildings – their floor plans, form, ornamentation, and the many compelling details found in vernacular architecture. Because the material culture tradition favored rural and vernacular studies, its pertinence faded as issues related to urbanism and urbanization took center stage in the social sciences in the 1970s, though ultimately it was the

school's lack of engagement with formal theory that served as the departure point for the critique within later built landscape scholarship now generally termed the "critical turn" (Cresswell 2003).

### **The "Critical Turn" in Architectural Geography**

By the 1980s, geographers turned to critical theory, such as post-colonialism, feminism, Marxism, and post-structuralism, to address the complex social relations developing as a result of shifts in the global economy and development patterns. Issues of gender, race/ethnicity, and class began to be seriously explored in landscape studies, and places, accordingly, were treated as sites contested by various and overlapping social groups. This transition into a "new" cultural geography used a more interpretive and theoretically engaged approach, looking beyond the material landscape in order to identify the social, political, and economic processes that resulted in these more "complex social geographies" (Holdsworth 1997: 49-50).

The various theoretical orientations in cultural geography's "critical turn" highlighted the ways in which the built environment participates in the reproduction of entrenched racialized, classed, and gendered relations of power. It was the scholars who embraced linguistic theory, however, who prominently came to characterize the architectural geography studies of the 1980s and 90s with their "read" of power relations stored in the built landscape. Prominent among such scholars were James and Nancy Duncan who adopted a structuralist approach to address the ways power, ideology, and symbolisms are stored in the landscape. The Duncan's article "(Re)reading the Landscape" (1988) posited that the built landscape is not reflective of social meaning, but, like language, is an active agent in constituting social relations and meaning. James Duncan used this approach to analyze a city-building program instituted by the king of Kandy in 19<sup>th</sup> century Sri Lanka (1993), which inscribed religious texts into the landscape in an attempt to equate the king's power with that of the divine and, ultimately, to restructure social readings of the landscape. But Duncan demonstrated how peasants protested these official readings through religious performances, leaving

the ultimate control of social meaning with those who lived within the material spaces of the king's kingdom (1993). This structuralist approach to the landscape allowed room for meaning and authority to be redefined by the social players that are "reading" their surroundings, yet the textual frame was also intended to convey the ways in which material environments "naturalize" power relations and thus the need to take the dynamic, but taken-for-granted nature of the built environment seriously (Duncan & Duncan 1988).

Other researchers in the critical turn, like Richard Schein, made the bridge between the "landscape-as-text" model to more adaptable approaches for analyzing the built environment. In his article, "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene" (1997), Schein argued that the built landscape articulates various networks of knowledge or, building on Duncan's work, "discourses;" the landscape according to Schein was, in fact, "discourse materialized" (1997: 663). Schein examined how the North American setting of an affluent urban suburb is the unique result of "countless individual, independent, self-interested decisions," yet these decisions are grounded in material-landscape discourses, such as zoning, architectural design, and consumption patterns, that collectively shape individual decisions and actions through their "disciplinary" potential (1997: 663-664). Schein's emphasis on the dual "disciplinary" and "emancipatory" qualities of the human landscape called close attention to individual decisions and actions, and he sought to convey, in more refined terms than the landscape-as-text model, the dynamic relationship between built landscapes and the people who use them. His work foreshadowed the shift sparked by the articulation of a "performative turn" in cultural geography that puts emphasis on the ways places are created through the ongoing and contingent exchange between social players and their built environment.

## The “Performative Turn” in Architectural Geography

The “performative turn” emerged in Geography in the 1990s in response to the structural and textual landscape interpretations of post-colonialism, feminism, Marxism, and post-structuralism. Though geographers rarely link this epistemological shift directly to practice theory, the emergence of this theoretical frame in American social science in the 1970s sits at the foundation of geography’s performance frame. Practice theory rose in prominence, initially in cultural anthropology and sociology, to highlight human agency and individual choice and to counter the depersonalized theories of systemic mechanisms and social structures upheld by Marxism and linguistics (Ortner 1984; Knauff 1996). Inherently political, practice theory actively explored relations of inequality and the ways in which human action responded to, but was also shaped in return by, existing social structures. The concept of “practice” as individual, concrete action, thus became valuable theoretically as a crucial social juncture that reveals how “symbolic and material-economic inequities influence each other” (Knauff 1996: 107; Ortner 1984). Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, is the most acclaimed practice theorist, and his very intricate explorations of how the social is inscribed on the body and reproduced through bodily movement and behaviors, have greatly impacted research under the banner of the “performative turn” in cultural geography, namely Nigel Thrift’s widely upheld “non-representational theory” (Cresswell 2002). In his theorizing, Thrift reflected on Bourdieu thus: “The medium really is the message in that if the body conforms then the doctrine follows on, as Bourdieu, in Pascalian vein, so often demonstrated (e.g. Bourdieu 1999). Belief is about sedimenting the body” (2004b: 126). It is important to note, however, Bourdieu never principally explored the role of space in his theorizations of the body (Cresswell 2002); Bourdieu’s spaces were conceived as “external and autonomous” in shaping social practice (Gieryn 2002: 37).



Closely related to the concept of practice – everyday behaviors that not only constitute the normative, but reproduce it – is philosopher Judith Butler’s highly influential notion of “performativity.” Taking her epistemological cues from linguistics, Butler (2004) was concerned with the ways in which gender is not predisposed, but the result of citational practices, which, due to their reiterative, layered nature, result in gender roles being perceived as inherently natural. Butler’s work has offered geographers and social scientists more generally, a more particular lens than practice theory to consider the active process of identity and subject formation through reiterative speech acts and corporeal practices. Feminist geographers like Nicki Gregson and Gillian Rose (2000) have theoretically explored social spaces as produced through reiterative behaviors, space as “a doing.” Butler’s performativity, however, has been criticized for developing an abstracted subject that neglects to account for individual agency and creativity (Nelson 1999), nor, with the exception of tentative examinations like Gregson and Rose’s (2000) (see also Rose 1999; Crouch 2003), have the spatial implications of performativity been actively explored in human geography (Thrift & Dewsbury 2000).

Closely related to concepts of practice and performativity is the use of performance as a theoretical metaphor in human geography to move from the distanced, textual and structural analyses of the landscape to an approach that conceptually and methodologically engages with the embodied, immediate, and contextual ways meaning is produced through individuals’ engagement with their environment (Pratt 2009). This research approach is linked to the emergence of performance studies, a field born out of the need to move beyond the confines of theatre programs and dramaturgical paradigms in order to more comprehensively account for the “drama of socially staged action and non-scripted performance” (Drewal 1991: 8; Bial 2002). Within this epistemological frame, performers are understood to engage in “practical methods,” to produce “tactical” and “improvisational” actions, as well as be capable of reflecting on their actions in the

“process of doing” (Drewal 1991: 2), an important contrast to theories of practice and performativity focused on more everyday, citational practices that can, in fact, “discipline” performances (Gregson and Rose 2000). Susan Smith’s “Performing the (sound)world” (2000) is one of numerous examples in human geography literature where performance was employed as a concept to convey the productive, sensual ways through which experiences bring spaces “into form.” As opposed to the concepts of practice and performativity in human geography, the performance frame calls more explicit attention to space, physical location, or the “scene.” Philip Crang’s classic article on restaurant serving work in southeast England (1994), as an example, used dramaturgical metaphors and Goffmanian analysis<sup>17</sup> to reveal the context-dependent, personalized nature of service work and how these “geographies of display” get entangled at a larger scale with post-industrial relations of production and consumption. While theories of practice, performativity, and performance underpin most current research in human geography, non-representational theory is the most widely embraced version of a practice theory in the discipline and thus deserves close examination.

Before Nigel Thrift’s non-representational theory is introduced, as an important aside, practice, performativity, and performance are terms that are frequently used interchangeably in human geography, though there are subtle and important differences in these conceptual frames grounded in the social sciences, philosophy and linguistics, and the performing arts respectively. Non-representational theory is not a self-contained school of thought (McCormack 2005) and research work adhering to this theoretical approach in human geography draws from all three epistemological frames. Some geographers have attempted to explicitly delineate among notions of

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<sup>17</sup> Goffmanian analysis employs the dramaturgical perspective developed by North American sociologist Erving Goffman to analyze symbolic social interaction. Crang uses Goffman’s concepts as a theoretical lens for exploring the character of service performances.

performance, performativity, and practice in their work (see Crouch 2003; Kraftl 2006), but it proves a difficult task because there is much overlap in the conceptual portent of these notions, namely in their emphasis on the importance of the expressive, physical body and its role in forging, reproducing, and potentially subverting social meaning and relations, as well as the shared emphasis on the processual, contingent nature of social meaning (Crouch 2003; McCormack 2005). Some human geographers have configured the performative (drawing from Butler's performativity) as unreflexive, habitual, mundane activities that also lead to or constitute conscious and tactical practices or "practices-as-performances" (Gregson and Rose 2000; Crouch 2003; Anderson 2006). "Performativity concerns the minutiae of practice," as David Crouch has insisted (2003: 1947), or, expressed in a reverse sense by Peter Kraftl, the concept of performance "applies to the *more-than-representational* (but perhaps not fully *performative*)" (2006: 929).

Though my research subscribes to the import of Butler's work in conveying the sedimented nature of social meaning that gets inscribed through repetitive acts over time, specifically in my work with built spaces, I find making the distinction between unreflexive activities or the performative versus everyday, but conscious, tactical practices beyond my abilities as a situated researcher and I do not give attention in my work to what would strictly be defined as the performative. I rely most heavily in my research work on in-depth interviews, field conversations, and archival work, all of which employ self, social, and political representation. In addition, since my research work took place following Hurricane Katrina, I have found that most of my research participants have been forced, through our post-storm diaspora, to explicitly consider and articulate the meaning of their once taken-for-granted neighborhood places. I will, however, heavily use the term and employ the concept of "practice" as everyday, often habitual behaviors and sensual expressions. When the term "performance" is used in my work it will refer to the conscious, but often improvised and creative staging of social activities that are part of New Orleans' ritual calendar, as opposed to the regular

rhythms of social life or “practices” at my study sites. This dissertation also looks closely at performance traditions in New Orleans, which are sets of ongoing performances that sustain a continuity with past performances and hold embedded symbolic significance for participants (Linnekin 1983; Hobsbawm 2003). Performance and the performative will be used as a noun and adjective throughout my dissertation to refer to the recent critical turn in built landscape studies just outlined that is embraced as a major component of my theoretical frame.

### Non-Representational Theory

Nigel Thrift named his theoretical brainchild, “non-representational theory,” to pointedly move away from textual representations of the landscape and views of everyday life as principally concerned with “consciously planned codings and symbols” (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000: 415). In Thrift’s turn from structural and linguistic reads of place, he pushes human geographers to apprehend “non-representational” expressions – improvised, visceral, situated, everyday practices – that constitute our social realities in partial and ongoing ways (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000: 415). Importantly, Thrift’s “theory of practices” is concerned with the ways people know the world without consciously knowing it – “inarticulate understandings” or “practical” as opposed to “cognitive” meanings (1997: 197, 2009). Thrift and his adherents are interested in how expressive practices do not have to “cross over a threshold of signification” to produce meaningful moments and, potentially, social or political effects (Harrison 2000; Thrift 2009: 504).

Importantly, Thrift’s focus on the “non-representational” or the “expressive process of becoming,” allows for more dynamic explorations on the nature of built spaces, theorizing buildings as ongoing, articulated moments “in which nothing signifies” (Thrift 1999: 296, 2009: 503). Of relevance for architectural geographers, Thrift dismisses what he calls the “building perspective” or the premise that built forms are empty containers “over which and in which meaning is placed,” a treatment of spaces common in the landscape-as-text school (1999: 301). Instead, Thrift (2000,

2009) draws heavily on Bruno Latour and actor-network theory to develop a frame that accounts for the ongoing ways expressive power and embodiment are used to generate networks of meaning among individual social actors, as well as architectural spaces and other inanimate objects. As Catherine Nash succinctly explains, non-representational theory is concerned with “practices through which we become ‘subjects,’ decentred, affective, but embodied, relational, expressive and involved with others and objects in a world continually in process” (2000: 655).

Thrift’s theoretical frame has made a notable ripple in human geography scholarship since the late 1990s, because, among other things, it recognized that knowledge is contextual and contingent and thus that research approaches can no longer grandly embrace impartial representations of the social world. Additionally, non-representational theory gave scholars permission to valorize ongoing, embodied, and productive practices that layer as social and geographic meaning, thus making geographers’ non-representational approach to the built landscape much more nuanced and dynamic (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). The literature contributions in the last decade from the strictly non-representational school have been heavily theoretical. Thrift’s adherents, such as JD Dewsbury (2000; Dewsbury et al. 2002) and Paul Harrison (2000), have produced purely conceptual writings that attempt to dance along the threshold of bodily experience and cognizance in order to apprehend the nature of experience for itself. Others, like David Crouch and Derek McCormack, have situated their performance/performative frames in empirical contexts in an effort to turn away from the non-representational tendency to work purely along the “edge of semantic availability,” and, in so doing, they brought into clearer critical view the “reconstitutive possibilities” of individual action (Crouch 2003) and fields of affective political power (McCormack 2005).

Work specifically with the concept of the “affective” register in non-representational theory has perhaps resonated most acutely in human geography (see Thrift 2004a; Anderson 2006; Kraftl & Adey 2008). While the use of “affect” seeks to acknowledge the visceral and emotive qualities of human experience, theoretically affect is distinguished from “feeling” or “emotion” as the drive of feelings or emotions – “the motion of emotion,” the push or pull of change in the body (Thien 2005: 451; Anderson 2006). Human geographers have employed “affect” to convey intensities of atmosphere and how this felt sense is often “modulated” by spatial transitions (McCormack 2008). Thrift qualifies these experiential shifts as follows:

So affect, defined as the property of the active outcome of an encounter, takes the form of an increase or decrease in the ability of the body and mind alike to act, which can be positive – and thus increase that ability (counting as ‘joyful’ or euphoric) – or negative – and thus diminish that ability (counting as ‘sorrowful’ or dysphoric) (2004: 62).

The conceptual use of “affect” has proven valuable to architectural geographers seeking to account for the qualitative differences users experience across and within built spaces or, stated in reverse, how buildings create and limit certain feelings among users, from “generic types” of architectural affects, such as homeliness or discomfort, to “definite, desired” uses that are achieved through effective design (Adey 2008; Kraftl and Adey 2008: 215).

As more human geographers have engaged with non-representational theory, some important critiques have surfaced. George Reville’s work with French folk dance and music led him to explore the process by which techniques, through years of practice, are “transformed into unreflected habit” (2004: 205). In such a case, the emphasis of non-representational theory on the “transcendent intersubjectivity born out of unspeakable mutual understanding,” disregards the years of “conscious practice” that lead to the emergence of such “second nature” moments (2004: 206). As such, Thrift’s “theory of practices” does not adequately account for the social nature of “precognitive” acts and performance (see also Nash 2000). Additionally, scholars have deliberated

the methodological and interpretive paradox of the non-representational approach, since academic research, reflection, and writing are to a certain degree inherently representational, particularly qualitative and historical research where personal reflection and archival materials are the principal empirical sources (Lorimer 2005; Kraftl 2006b). Reflective of his emphasis on the embodied and the emergent, Thrift urged scholars to look to the performing arts to enliven methodological and writing approaches in human geography, but Thrift never moved beyond employing such ideas as a “thought experiment” in his own work and there is no explicit discussion in his widely-cited writings about what performance methods are, nor how they can be empirically grounded (Crouch 2003; Latham 2003).<sup>18</sup> Again, however, Thrift’s work has presented cultural geographers with a fruitful conceptual avenue to apprehend the power of everyday practices in the ongoing reproduction of the built landscape, and Loretta Lees and other scholars who subscribe to a “critical geography of architecture” specifically uphold the potential of Thrift’s non-representational theory to refine and enliven architectural studies in human geography.

### A Critical Geography of Architecture

The definitive writing on a “critical geography of architecture” has been done by the Canadian geographer Loretta Lees (2001). Lees explicitly outlined her critical approach to the study of architectural spaces in the article “Towards a Critical Geography of Architecture: The Case of an Ersatz Colosseum” (2001), an archival and ethnographic study of Vancouver’s public library. In order to move beyond approaches that continue to read the landscape as a text, a symbol, or a two-dimensional product of social process, Lees argued in her 2001 article for theories and methodologies that engage with the “embodied and socially negotiated practices through which

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<sup>18</sup> As a proposition for a way out of this conceptual and methodological gridlock, Hayden Lorimer has pointed out that the “teleology of the original ‘non’” in the school’s label has “proven an unfortunate hinderance,” and so Lorimer urges for the better suited “more-than-representational” banner to encourage scholars to experiment with methods and data interpretation while further engaging in “busy, empirical commitments” to our “self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds” (2005: 84).

architecture is inhabited” (53). Lees’ site selection for her study was revealing, because the design, evocative of a Roman coliseum, and the actual construction project were extremely controversial. Lees was initially concerned with the politics behind and various interpretations of the coliseum-like library from its architectural renderings to its completion in 1995, yet she found it problematic to decipher meaning from the variable ways the civic building was valued and understood. This discovery led Lees to ask a new research question, instead of what does the library mean, she became interested, through her field observation, to simply ask “what does the library do?” for the various users of the space (2001). She found various instances of patrons creatively and subversively using the library as a site for connecting with distant homes, playing, dating, even bathing. Her incidental ethnographic data revealed that meanings of architectural sites are not inherent in their form or function, but rather they become sedimented through their ongoing use and appropriation (Lees 2001).

Lees’ call for attention to the role of the more-than-symbolic in the constitution of the built environment has been heeded by a number of prominent human geographers since her 2001 manifesto. Her work has resonated with and produced more active research in three notable areas of architectural studies: engagement with everyday practices and the often-overlooked experiences of inhabitants or users and their role in the ongoing process of place-making, the performative qualities of architecture and how they engender particular affects, and the treatment of buildings as part of multi-scaled, multi-temporal networks of association and meaning. The writings of scholars like Peter Adey, Jane Jacobs, Lloyd Jenkins, Peter Kraftl, and Mark Llewelyn under the banner of “a critical geography of architecture” are central to my theoretical reflections in the succeeding chapters and the relevant contributions of this body of scholarship will be outlined in more detail in chapter four.



## **Synthesis of Material Landscape Studies and Performance Theory**

Though Lees' critical architectural geography highlights the emergent qualities of places – their potential as developed through practice, it is important to note that in her article on the Vancouver Public Library she did not discount architectural form and the meanings it symbolizes – “the built form frames both representation and social practice simultaneously” (2001: 75). Lees and other architectural geographers have, in fact, reframed representations, texts, and architectural symbolism as practices – “representations are not simply ‘read,’ but are constructed through interaction” (Lees 2001: 75; McCormack 2003; Jacobs 2006; Kraftl 2006b). Two prominent critical architectural geographers, Peter Kraftl and Peter Adey, have further deliberated the potential politics involved in the design, maintenance and everyday interaction with the affective and sensual characteristics of buildings (Kraftl 2006a, 2006b; Kraftl and Adey 2008). Thus Lees' critical architectural geography does not abandon the commitment of geography's “critical turn” to pursue the politics of meaning-making embedded in and structured through the built landscape, it only seeks to develop a more sophisticated method to account for the range of processes, from the symbolic to inhabitation, through which built forms are endowed with meaning.

Tim Cresswell, in his chapter “Landscape and the Obliteration of Practice” (2003), however, articulated more fully the tension between more traditional approaches that view the landscape as visual and fixed, a text of social power already encoded in the environment, with the view of landscape as practice – the “antidote to the representational,” which accounts for the fluid and emerging characteristics of landscape (2003: 270). Cresswell developed the conceptual metaphor of “landscapes of practice” in order to make the meaning of landscape seem “less fixed, less reliant on the visual, less dependent on authoritative framing,” just as Lees emphasized the “embodied and socially negotiated practices” that define architectural spaces (Cresswell 2003: 277; Lees 2001: 57). Cresswell, though, through his notion of “landscapes of practice,” also intended to make practice

seem “less free-floating and more connected to the forces that shape our lives” (2003: 277). Unlike Lees, Cresswell sought to better inform theories of performance and practice through an intentional grounding of his conceptual frame in the material and visual qualities of the built landscape. The physical presence of the built landscape, Cresswell contended, can bring the “world of practice” into fuller view (2000: 279).

To better illustrate this relational process of place-making, Cresswell borrowed from the work of archeologists Michael Shanks and Chris Tilley to develop an epistemological frame that treats the material landscape as an objectified expression of social practice:

Landscape seen this way is a practiced landscape. Practices over time become embedded in the world and leave ‘traces of varying degrees of solidity, opacity, or permanence’ (1992: 131). These traces are ‘material culture.’ (2002: 278)

Material culture is viewed as a “trace” of the social practice that brought the object’s meaning into existence and, in return, material objects “act back to structure practices” (Shanks & Tilley 1992: 131). Buildings in particular powerfully enact this dialectic through their architectural craftsmanship and design that materially convey the former practices that shaped them and by the enduring ways buildings enable and constrain practices. Buildings are thus a “structured,” but also “structuring resource” (Shanks and Tilley 1992: 132).<sup>19</sup> These notions of relational materiality have been picked up by architectural geographers, such as Lloyd Jenkins (2002) and Jane Jacobs (2006) (see chapter four), but Cresswell’s notion of “landscapes of practice” conveys the reciprocal nature of the material and practiced elements of architectural spaces.

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<sup>19</sup> Important to architectural geographers is the work of sociologists John Law and Annemarie Mol who have actively explored how materiality and sociality are co-produced – “materials are interactively constituted; outside their interactions they have no existence, no reality...human actors are no different” (1995: 277). Another important contribution to architectural geography is the work of Sociologist Thomas Gieryn who specifically considers how buildings “stabilize” or “structure” social life, but also how they “stabilize *imperfectly*,” shaped in ongoing and unpredictable ways through their use and even material or semiotic deconstruction, situating buildings between the theoretical poles of structure and agency (2002: 35-6).

## My Theoretical Frame

In the succeeding chapters, I present a theoretical approach and empirical findings that heed Lees' call for innovation in architectural studies by taking seriously the productive and emergent nature of everyday practices, but I also look to Cresswell's notion of "landscapes of practice" to more clearly acknowledge the interplay between the material and practiced elements of the built landscape. Cresswell's use of "landscape," however, frames the built environment as a scene to be viewed; he principally calls on the semiotic and (post)structuralist approaches of geography's "critical turn" and focuses on the visual interpretation of power and symbolic meaning of the built landscape. My work, by contrast, takes the physical form of buildings and sensual encounters with built spaces more explicitly into account. Building upon the empirical determination of the Sauer-Kniffen material-culture legacy and more recent studies on the affective power of buildings, my research commitment to the physical presence and features of built spaces allows for an exploration of the ways in which many of New Orleans' valued neighborhood places are distinguished by unique craftsmanship, layout, and location, which produce compelling material forms and structure social experiences in ways both profound and idiosyncratic. The empirical findings I present throughout the dissertation, but particularly in chapter four, will highlight the intersections of New Orleans' built and cultural landscape and how they work together to produce geographies of meaning. My theoretical frame permits me, in chapter five, to further explore how built spaces facilitate the perpetuation of everyday practices and heightened performances, and the ways in which such embodied acts facilitate cultural transmission.

## **Methodological Framework**

In order to closely explore the interplay of the built and embodied elements of buildings, this project employs architectural survey methods to document the material presence, form, and features of buildings and ethnographic methods to apprehend the daily uses, performances, and emotional

associations that participate in defining build spaces, what I have termed an “ethno-material” approach. The polarization of these landscape elements and methods, however, is over-simplified. Archival methods balanced my dual engagement with architectural survey and ethnographic approaches by augmenting collected information on the original construction and physical development of buildings, as well as offering a means to apprehend how ongoing uses layer as social meaning over time. Additionally, to explore the relational ways material and practiced landscapes are produced, I used ethnographic methods to better understand the embodied experiences of material spaces and, by way of balance, I employed architectural survey methods to assess the ways in which material spaces shape everyday practices and performances. As such, I braided together architectural survey, ethnographic, and archival methods to produce a methodological frame that is in keeping with the intent of a critical geography of architecture: to “explore how built environments produce *and* are produced by the social practices performed within them” (Lees 2001: 56). Because this theoretical and methodological frame seeks to more dynamically and richly account for place significance, it has important contributions to bear on the survey methodologies and significance criteria used in preservation practices, namely those employed as part of the National Register survey process. This section considers the parallels in approaches to architectural documentation and research employed by geographers and preservationists, and it points to ways to enliven standard preservation documentation methodologies with the ethno-material approach to built spaces I develop in this dissertation.

### **The Architectural Survey and the Material Landscape**

The architectural survey or inventory is the principal documentary tool of the “traditional” architectural geographer. It was Kniffen’s ambitious research undertaking and published findings on Louisiana house types (1936) that set the methodological standard for architectural geography. Kniffen’s approach to the architectural landscape was most impressive in its thoroughness; he and

his research team traversed Louisiana's rural highway system and documented around 15,000 vernacular homes. Due to the scope of his statewide survey, Kniffen was necessarily innovative in his research design to be able to record and classify so many structures, working first with a card index system, recording all variations of vernacular house plans and features he encountered in the field, and, later, as he refined his survey, a more streamlined checklist system that permitted him to denote floor plan, siding material, and roof type, among other architectural features of each house surveyed, as well as social data, such as the race and class of home owners (Figure 3.1). The breadth and detail of his housing data enabled him to create a working typology of house types, an undertaking that was revolutionary in material studies – no academic prior to him had attempted to analyze and classify vernacular housing (Kniffen 1990; Jay Edwards, interview, 1.22.10).<sup>20</sup>

Kniffen's ultimate objective in so rigorously surveying Louisiana vernacular house types was to map an abundant and enduring cultural feature in order to develop "culturogeographic regions" with greater accuracy than his academic predecessors (Kniffen 1990), but, in so doing, he also profoundly influenced architectural documentation methods and classifications in human geography. His systematic approach was employed by other traditional architectural geographers who have charted and mapped common and curious vernacular built forms and details (Lewis 1975; Newton & Napoli 1977; Kaups 1981; Jordan 1985; Jordan & Kaups 1987; Blake & Smith 2000; Jordan 2003; Fry 2008). Kniffen's approach was also echoed in the checklist architectural survey method developed by British architectural historians R.A. Cordingley and R.W. Brunskill (1978), whose work influenced the development of national historic surveys in Canada and Australia (Jay Edwards interview, 1.22.10).

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<sup>20</sup> Kniffen's first submittal of his article on Louisiana vernacular housing was to the *Geographical Review*, but it was refused. The editor at the time informed him that "houses are not worth studying for their own sake" (Kniffen 1990: 37).

The rigorous and comprehensive nature of Kniffen's work informs my methodological frame developed here, but his "windshield survey" method does not offer the depth necessary for this research project. Other traditional architectural geographers, like Terry Jordan (1985, 2003), Matt Kaups (Kaups 1981; Jordan & Kaups 1987), Kevin Blake, Jeffrey Smith (Blake & Smith 2000), and Matthew Fry (2008), employ a more intensive approach to architectural documentation by precisely documenting the material lay-out and features of buildings through hand drawings and photographs. In addition, a material history and context is typically developed that involves archival research (see the sub-section below), but also includes careful observation and documentation of the

HOUSE TYPE SURVEY															Series no. <u>A</u>	
Fred Kniffen		Date <u>APR. 24, 1950</u>		Sheet no. <u>1</u>											E. BATON ROUGE Parish	
School of Geology		L.S.U.											Highway <u>887</u>			
O. D From HWY 63 - HWY 887 INTERSECTION to <u>N - NE</u>																
Plan	Roof	Front Porch	Back Porch	Appen- Age	Chim- ney	Side- ing	Piers	Height	Paint	Class	Age	Stairs	Window	Race	Remarks	
0.1R	1	✓	11	0	0	0	3	✓	✓	S	R	0	G	W	Members Gilbert Smith Kniffen. Gomley ✓	
0.1R	3	2	3	0	0	0	2	✓	gr	S	R	0	G	?		
0.1R	3	2	2	0	0	1	5A	✓	gr	S	R	0	G	?		
0.2R	5	5	105 115	0	?	2	3	✓	✓	M	R	0	G	W		
0.2L	2	2	2	0	1 1/2	1	2	✓	✓	X	M	0	S	C		
0.2R	5	2	✓	0?	2	1	2	✓	✓	M	R	0	G	?		
0.3R	6	4	11	0	✓	0	3	✓	✓	S	R	0	G	W	Slight break on grid corner of roof / No kitting part	
0.3R	3	2	3	0	0	2	3	✓	✓	S	R	0	G	C		
0.3R	5	2	3 1/2	3 1/2	3	2	5A	✓	✓	S	R	0	G	W		
0.4R	3	2	2	2	0	1	2	✓	✓	X	S	R	0	G	W	
0.4R	5	2	1/2	2	0	0	5A	✓	✓	S	R	0	G	W		

Figure 3.1: Kniffen's Checklist Field Survey Sheet (Source: Kniffen Cultural Resource Laboratory, used with permission).

contexts and portraits of individual buildings, and it is this more intensive methodological approach employed by traditional architectural geographers that serves as a template for my research.

Similar to traditional architectural geographers, preservationists and architectural historians document the material form and features of buildings, as well as developing written narratives that outline a site's architectural or historical importance. The two prominent systems of architectural documentation employed by preservationists, architects, and architectural historians in the United States are the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the less intensive, more commonly employed National Register of Historic Places survey, both of which are administered by the National Parks Service. HABS has developed articulate and uniform format standards for the three components of its historic-structure survey: large-format photographs, measured drawings, and written historical reports. The rigorous standards for the large-format photographs and measured drawings are intended to produce thorough, precise material documentation of historic sites, so that data is consistent for researchers and also able to be reproduced in the event that a historic property needs to be physically repaired or reconstructed (Burns 1989b; C. Russell 1990). The HABS report, which follows an outline format, is essentially two-fold; the first part traces the physical history of the building – the structure's original construction, modifications over time, and various occupants – and outlines a corresponding historical context. The second part of the report is a detailed description of the architectural character of the building that, much like the work of traditional architectural geographers, pays close attention to the structure's essential details (Hoagland & Fitzsimons 1989).

While not adhering to the detail outlined by a HABS historical report, the National Register survey form collects similar information on built structures, namely architectural style, building materials, setting, overall shape and plan, and specific features (National Park Service 1997). The

narrative description of the physical building and setting is further documented through photographs of the façade and side elevations and details of ornamentation and additions or alterations when pertinent (National Park Service 1997). The element that sets the National Register apart from HABS and other architectural surveys is the evaluation of significance based on the register's carefully developed criteria of historical importance that assess a site's association with historical events or patterns, important people, or a distinguished architectural design, type, or method of construction (National Park Service 1998). This statement of significance involves developing a historical context that chronologically outlines the physical development of the property with particular attention to the events, persons, historical or architectural trends that speak to the property's historic importance in relation to the National Register criteria of significance (National Park Service 1997).

Based on my own professional experience and training as an architectural historian, along with my archival research, namely chain-of-title searches, I was able to develop a basic material history and context for all of my study sites, in particular noting how material form, geographic location, even materials inform users' experiences and feelings about these significant architectural spaces. I have also incorporated some of the other prominent elements of traditional architectural documentation, namely photographic documentation and measured drawings. As a result of my collaboration on the Cornerstones project with Tulane's School of Architecture, we developed a collection of floor plan drawings of some of my study sites to convey layout and how the sites are used spatially by residents, customers, neighbors, or owners. We also developed a series of building footprint images where possible to not only help visually convey the form of the structures, but also to indicate their physical relation to neighboring buildings and their neighborhood context more generally (see Appendix B).



Architectural survey methods are impressive in their detailed attention to the physical form of buildings and their essential and sometimes curious features, and this model, the careful consideration of the material presence and features of architectural spaces, is central to my research methodology. At the same time, such material assessments disregard the fluid and ongoing meanings of sites, while the static, material elements of buildings are rendered as the only significant features. As a result, this project's methodological frame highlights alternative sources to traditional material-landscape survey methods, such as ethnographic observation, informal field conversations, in-depth interviews, and researchers' personal experiences of spaces to develop more nuanced accounts of the physical presence of built spaces, as well as to engage with how they are materially, historically, but also socially and culturally defined in emergent and embodied ways.

### **Ethnographic Methods and the Practiced Landscape**

Critical architectural geographers have actively attempted to improve upon the “mono-dimensional” surveys of architectural geographers (Jenkins 2002) through their use of ethnographic methods, which apprehend the situated, fluid, and meaningful practices through which places are endowed with significance. Critical architectural geographers Loretta Lees and Peter Kraftl, for example, carefully outline their commitments to and use of interviews and participant observation in order to document the “active practices and styles of embodied engagement” that mattered to processes of meaning-making at the Vancouver public library and an ecological, elementary school in West Wales respectively (Kraftl 2006: 930; Lees 2001). In his study of Kensall House, London's first modernist housing estate, Mark Llewellyn (2004) articulates a similar commitment to conducting oral histories and employing archival methods to construct a critical historical geography of architecture and recover the overlooked voices and experiences of inhabitants and their roles in actively adapting and co-designing or producing the built space of the Kensall House. While Lees, Kraftl, and Llewellyn flesh out their critical architectural geographies with rich empirical data, Kraftl

and Llewellyn in particular, their methodological deliberations are brief, and other researchers that fall under the conceptual umbrella of critical architectural geography only mention their methods or data sources in brief passing in the main text or within their footnotes (see, for example, Jenkins 2002; Jacobs 2006; Adey 2008; Kraftl & Adey 2008). This research project, by contrast, emphasizes ethnographic methods and the empirical findings produced by these research techniques that convey the embodied qualities of architectural spaces and the nature of their ongoing co-production.

It is important to note, that while ethnographic methodologies are not employed as part of standard HABS and National Register surveys, anthropologists working within the National Park Service's Applied Anthropology Program have developed a set of articulate qualitative methodologies and corresponding methods over the course of the last three decades as a means to account for the culturally-defined ways communities ascribe meaning to the Park Service's collection of heritage sites (Crespi 1987; Low 2002; Low et al. 2005). Through application, the National Park's team of anthropologists and consultants has determined a number of ethnographic techniques to be appropriate methods for gauging how heritage sites are used and valued by visitors. Of particular relevance to my project are the Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures (REAPs), a collection of qualitative methods, like behavioral mapping, transect walks, expert interviews, and participant observation, that are employed to produce a range of relevant data sets on contemporary uses (and disuses) and their corresponding meanings at the Service's heritage sites (Low 2002; Low et al. 2005). REAPs not only employ a responsive combination of methods to document heritage sites, they are also premised on the triangulation of data sets to develop a comprehensive portrait of the heritage site under study. According to the parameters established by the NPS, the REAPs methodology is necessarily employed by a team of researchers over a time frame of several months

(Low 2002; Low et al. 2005).<sup>21</sup> As a result, the REAPs methodology has relevance for my project, namely the development of a toolbox of architectural documentation methods and the triangulation of findings, but it proves too involved and impractical for individual researchers or small teams working with limited resources.

Principally, I employed two types of ethnographic methods in this project – in-depth interviews and participant observation. Thanks to the field support provided by the National Science Foundation dissertation research grant I received, I was able to conduct over 45 hours of recorded interviews and have them transcribed. This very rich and detailed data provided lots of insight into how the users, inhabitants, owners, and operators of my study spaces viewed their places of work, play, study, music, safety, and significance. Each of the post-Katrina landmark case studies merited or permitted a different set of interviewees. In all cases, I interviewed the owners of the buildings, who were also the owners of the establishments housed within the buildings. From there interview collections on sites varied and included dialogues with managers, employees, neighbors, performers, community activists, or current residents. The bulk of the interview questions were designed to apprehend notions about everyday use, cultural practice and traditions, emotional attachments, and community meaning (see Appendix C). As already mentioned, the physical destruction of neighborhoods and buildings, but also the damaged social fabric and ties that residents experienced as a result of Hurricane Katrina, produced an insight on the meaning of many of my study sites that would not have been understood in such explicit terms if the storm had not caused such environmental, material, and social damage. Cultural geographer Alan Latham has deliberated on how researchers of public spaces can develop techniques that allow research

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<sup>21</sup> In her overview of Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures, Setha Low points out that ethnographic projects are typically carried out by an individual researcher and take a year or more to complete, hence the “rapid” three to four month timeframe of a project employing REAPs (Low 2002; Low et al. 2005).

participants to “find a space for reflecting upon” the “practical” uses of places that are “not ordered through the discursive” (Latham 2003: 2001). In the case of New Orleans, this “space” was created through our post-Katrina diaspora, and many of us reflected on and defended our taken-for-granted, neighborhood places in new and articulate ways.

I also relied upon participant observation as a means to develop rich insight through immediate and extended contact (Herbert 2000) with the users, owners, managers, residents, and visitors of my study sites, as well as the physical buildings themselves. Participant observation or Nigel Thrift’s oft-cited “observant participation” (Thrift 2000), included personal exchanges with research participants and the “informal conversation interviews” that emerged in the field (Kitchin & Tate 2000: 214), as well as my own sensual experiences of the architectural spaces under study. While ethnography is distinguished as a research strategy that employs a range of qualitative and time-intensive methods, participant observation is the method that distinguishes ethnography, because it demands long-term engagements with places and the development of intimate relationships with research participants in order to better understand how people create and experience their worlds, including social experiences and affective encounters with built spaces not readily accessed through language (Watson and Till 2010).

Such an embedded ethnographic engagement with this project’s six study sites, which are situated in neighborhoods of various racial and socio-economic make-ups in New Orleans, made for a very demanding research schedule, as well as complicated interpersonal negotiations in order to develop and/or sustain very intimate connections to my study sites and prominent community members. I maintained a regular presence at the Sound Café, the Sportsman’s Corner, and Preservation Hall each week, observing and visiting with those who work at and/or frequent these spaces regularly and on occasion and documenting the everyday rhythms at these sites, like Leslie

Albert's daily appearance at the Sportsman's Corner before dinner or the clanking of keys and the swinging open of the Preservation Hall's iron gate each evening at 8:00 PM. Though a private residence and personal space, I visited Joyce Montana's house regularly; we undertook an archival project, organizing and storing all the photos and articles she has collected on her husband and her family's Mardi Gras Indian legacy, which was an involved collaboration that took over a year to complete. All of my post-Katrina landmarks also hosted a calendar of cultural events that are central to the life and identity of each place and their communities, and I participated in these events, such as the Young Men Olympian's second line parade "stop" at the Sportsman's Corner, the Silence is Violence youth music clinics at the Sound Café, or the Montana family house on Mardi Gras morning. At the height of my field work, from the spring of 2007 to the early summer of 2008, my weeks consisted not only of participant observation and in-depth interviewing, but also archival research, attendance at events and hearings related to preservation issues in post-Katrina New Orleans, the typing up of field notes and analytical memos, lots of driving around town, and a notable number of missed research connections or refusals by community members to be interviewed or consulted for my research work (see Appendix D).

Though ethnographic methods are emphasized in the context of this research project as a means to apprehend the practiced elements of place, they were also used to better account for the material presence of sites. Through in-depth interview techniques, I was able to collect information on the history and physical development of sites. In addition, I asked participants to consider what architectural features at their local landmark were important to them, if they felt the lay out, materials, or craftsmanship of buildings affected their experience of place and, if so, the importance they associated with it (see Appendix C). In this vein of questioning, but also through participant observation, I was able to approach the non-representational notion of "affect" – a physical sense of

change evoked by a building's material presence – in order to better understand how a building's material presence makes a difference to the people that use it.

### **Archival Methods and Filling the Gaps**

Archival methods are an essential complement in the work of traditional architectural geographers. Though Kniffen did not look heavily to the archive, many working within the Berkeley landscape tradition, such as Milton Newton and Linda Napoli (1977) and Terry Jordan and Matt Kaups (1987), saw the need for triangulating their field survey data with archival sources, since present architectural forms and patterns are not reflective of historic forms and patterns. “In this sense Kniffen placed too much emphasis on relics,” Jordan and Kaups insist (1987: 10), and they augmented their material landscape studies with historical records and oral history research to develop more sound links between past and present patterns in the built environment.

Historical methods also complement ethnographic methods by allowing researchers to uncover the processes through which buildings are often appropriated and used and endowed with significant meaning over time. Archival methods thus allow for a fuller exploration of how and why certain places are recognized as sites of community and cultural identity. Just as a “critical geography of architecture” calls on a broadening of theory and method to better apprehend the range of architecture's social potential, so too does Mark Llewlyn's “critical historical geography of architecture,” an extension of Lees' conception, call for an expansion of historical landscape studies to include “the complete and wide range of individuals who were implicated in the process of designing *and* inhabiting the built forms produced [emphasis added]” (2003: 264). While architectural surveys focus on documenting the designers or socially prominent owners of built spaces, this project, following Llewlyn's “polyvocal” historical method for architectural studies, has incorporated some voices of the past (see, in particular, the Montana house case study in chapter

four), as well as present inhabitants or users that have “re-produced” the meaning of places over time (2003: 265).

Historical methods have traditionally not been employed to reveal the regular and everyday uses of spaces, because there is a lack of such “pedestrian data” in the archive (Hanlon 2001; Kurtz 2001). This is a research challenge that has been well-deliberated by historical geographers like Matthew Kurtz (2001: 34-35) who has deliberated how the organizational and political structure of the archive, including the actual archival design, greatly influences what materials are available or easily accessible. In other words, certain people and places readily appear in the archives and others never surface, and the social, political, and organizational context of the holdings in the principal archives I consulted in New Orleans, namely the Louisiana Division at the New Orleans Public Library, the Registrar of Conveyances at City Hall, the Historic New Orleans Collection, and the Southeastern Architectural Archive at Tulane University, did limit the amount of historical materials I could find on some of my study sites, the well-documented Preservation Hall as a widely recognized jazz and French Quarter landmark being the principal exception. For example, topical searches on my study sites at the Louisiana Division at the New Orleans Public Library produced surprisingly little material and surprisingly less relevant material. The public library’s vertical files was one of the most fruitful source of information for my project, but they exist as donation repositories, so only those social groups or communities that consider their activities to be archive-able, in the first place, and archive-worthy, in the second, have submitted materials. This documentation system by extension neglects to include vernacular spaces and more embodied traditions (see discussion on Diana Taylor’s “archive” and “repertoire” in chapter five). For example, under the “Mardi Gras Indian” vertical file at the Louisiana Division, a tradition which is relevant to my study of the Sportsman’s Corner barroom and Joyce and Tootie Montana’s house, there is only one item archived.

As a result, a resourceful avenue for filling in data gaps in the historic record came through the evaluation of the physical structure of sites. The material traces of change at sites like Preservation Hall and Joyce Montana's house speak to the shifting uses and meanings of these buildings. More notably, however, my long-term, ethnographic research relationships provided me my most significant historical data, such as Joyce Montana's willingness to share an old photograph of Big Chief Tootie on Mardi Gras day or the Preservation Hall manager offering me a peek in a back, dark storage room with compelling "artifacts," like an old business sign and performance posters, or Theresa Elloie, proprietor of the Sportsman's Corner, offering personal remembrances about how her father used to run the family bar or how the original landlord took care of the building. These less conventional historical methods have allowed for an exploration of the material shifts and lived experiences of my case studies over time, thus weaving all of my research techniques together to create a comprehensive methodological frame that explores the material and practiced elements of place and how they produce significance in tandem.

### **Triangulate: Bringing It All Together**

My methodological frame produced a rich and assorted collection of data types that allowed for a comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the interactive elements that define buildings and result in meaning for the people who use them. My data principally consisted of the recording of my field observations in the form of typed up field notes and analytical memos, which were used to raise ideas about potential organizing themes for writing up my research and questions to explore more closely as I carried out my field work. Other important sources of data for this project included maps, photographs, architectural drawings, newspaper articles, and archival materials. The triangulation of data across sources and methods resulted in themes and findings across each case study that are presented in the following chapters.



I used coding as the principal analytical technique to identify and clarify some of the prominent and unifying themes across my various data sets (Watson and Till 2010). After compiling all my interview transcripts, my twenty months of field notes, and my additional archival and secondary materials, I had hundreds of pages and stacks of data. After an initial reading of all the data I created a loose set of themes to structure my findings for the interpretive part of the research process. It took several more readings of my data and revisions of these working themes, before I developed a list of 15 principal codes, such as architecture/materiality, use/practice, continuity versus change, nurture/social aid, language/concepts of preservation, and positionality/methods, and divided my sets of data on each study site and my additional set of data related to broader issues of preservation in post-Katrina New Orleans according to these principal research themes. The coding process permitted me to not only reflect on my study sites in new ways, but also to make more explicit connections to themes weaving through all my study sites and their connections to bigger preservation issues or some of the organizing conceptual notions underpinning this dissertation.

While several theoretical and corresponding methodological frames are tied together in this project, I embrace a performative methodological frame, because it instills the conventional research techniques employed in this project with sensitivity and creativity that respond to the emergent nature of architectural meanings, including current meanings that are tied to past geographies (Latham 2003; Llewellyn 2003). As a result, the empirical data and theoretical reflections presented in this dissertation are intended to highlight the necessarily different social, cultural, geographic, and material components of my study sites – the Sound Café, the Montana family home, the Sportsman’s Corner, Preservation Hall, the Lafitte Housing Community, and the Deutsches Haus – and how they interact in ongoing and contingent ways to define each site’s vitality. The intent is to produce a creative counter and complement to the “post-occupant” (Jacobs 2006) or “aesthetic and

mono-dimensional” (Jenkins 2002) conceptual frame and methods of the traditional architectural and preservation survey, while also grounding my performative approach to buildings by framing embodied and emergent practices and performances within the enduring and structuring context of everyday architectural geographies. The theoretical and methodological frames developed in this chapter underpin the rest of my dissertation and my explorations of how buildings participate in the process of producing and perpetuating community meaning and identity.

## Chapter Four

### “The Building Itself Goes with the Atmosphere”: Meaningful Intersections of Architecture and Practice

#### Introduction

On a steamy August evening in 2007, I gathered outside the Montana family house in the Seventh Ward neighborhood with a few dozen other people. We were awaiting the spectacle of a staged second line that would lead us from the Montana house to the Treme Community Center for the local premiere of the documentary *Tootie's Last Suit*, a full-length film that chronicles the close of Big Chief Allison “Tootie” Montana’s Mardi Gras Indian masking career and the personal and social complexities in granting his son, Big Chief Darryl Montana, leadership of the family tribe. At first, as I visited with onlookers outside the house, the only indication of the impending second line was the horse-drawn white carriage parked perpendicular to the front porch of the Montana house. Then Joyce Montana, Big Chief Tootie’s widow and the matriarch of the Montana Mardi Gras Indian clan, emerged on her front porch in a formal two-piece white suit and more friends, neighbors, and family members gradually appeared, taking photos with Joyce and visiting on the porch. The evening intensified when Big Chief Darryl and the Yellow Pocahontas Mardi Gras Indian tribe gathered at the west end of North Villere Street in their full Indian regalia. The tribe proceeded to slowly move toward the Montana family house with a pack of drummers and onlookers, chanting traditional Indian tunes as they approached – “Indians here they come.” Soon after, overtop the drumming and tambourines, I heard a tuba in the distance and looked in the other direction down North Villere Street to see the Black Men of Labor Social Aid and Pleasure Club marching toward us in their bright yellow tee-shirts with the Treme Brass Band in back of them. Those of us standing in front of the Montana house were soon sandwiched between the circle of Indians and the marching second line club, as they converged at the foot of Joyce’s front porch (Figure 4.1).



**Figure 4.1:** Black Men of Labor Social Aid and Pleasure Club at *Tootie's Last Suit* Second Line, August 2007 (Source: photograph by author).

This convergence at the Montana house at the height of my field work embodied the productive tensions explored in this chapter in several significant ways. As will be explored in detail later in the chapter, Big Chief Tootie was celebrated in New Orleans for his skills as a Mardi Gras Indian costume designer and for his work as an architectural craftsman, which explains his prominent association with both the Yellow Pocahontas Mardi Gras Indian Tribe and the Black Men of Labor Social Aid and Pleasure Club. Big Chief Tootie's significance to the cultural legacy of New Orleans is thus embedded in the city's built and performance landscapes, but so too is his family house, the tangible centerpiece of the ceremonial moment just described. As this vignette illustrates, the house serves as a physical site where community members and cultural organizations continue to ceremoniously stop or pay visits in tribute to his contributions in both traditions. Importantly, as this opening vignette illustrates, Joyce Montana's continued and active presence at

the family house has helped to sustain the house as an important site of tribute, but also as an ongoing source of cultural vitality for the Seventh Ward in post-disaster New Orleans.

In order to intimately explore how two of my original study sites, the Sound Café and the Montana family house, have gained or maintained significance in the post-Katrina landscape, I look specifically to the contributions of those cultural geographers heeding Loretta Lees' call to incorporate non-representational or performative approaches into critical studies of architecture. As noted in chapter three, within this small camp of cultural geographers, qualitative methods are upheld as a means to carry out three main objectives in studies of individual buildings: one, to attend to the users and inhabitants of buildings and their everyday and more heightened practices that layer as social and cultural meaning (Lees 2001; Llewellyn 2003, 2004; Kraftl 2006a, 2006b); two, to identify the work of buildings in engendering particular affects, practices, and meanings (Adey 2008; Kraftl & Adey 2008); and, three, to consider how buildings participate in multi-scaled and multi-temporal transhuman networks that work collectively and productively to constitute and sustain built spaces (Ford 2001; Jenkins 2002; Jacobs 2006).

Mark Llewellyn (2004), for example, purposefully documents the voices not only of architects, but also inhabitants of a modern housing estate in London, the Kensal House, to illustrate the messy and complex co-production of built spaces. Llewellyn's polyvocal, historical research approach to the Kensal House (2003, 2004) reveals practical ways residents re-worked the carefully designed flats of this corporate-sponsored housing estate to better accommodate their working-class lifestyles, highlighting residents' agency in adapting architects' formal plans and design intentions to suit their practical and shifting needs. In a slightly different vein, Peter Kraftl has produced ethnographic studies of individual architectural spaces to highlight Lees' notion that "everyday practices matter to the critical processes of meaning-making" (2006b: 929). Kraftl's

ethnographic study of the everyday uses and geographies of an ecologically constructed school in Wales (2006a, 2006b), allows him to explore practices of alternative education and, compellingly, practices of the construction and maintenance of the school building itself, to consider how the school's designer, teaching staff, and parents collectively produced a particular ideal of childhood.

Kraftl's research also, however, takes seriously the power of buildings to "do particular things" (2006a: 495). He considers the "gestural" and nurturing qualities of the architecture at the ecological Pembrokeshire School and how such visceral effects are "more-than-symbolic" and vital to defining users' experiences and ideas about the school building (2006a: 495). Kraftl invokes non-representational theory, in particular the notion of affect, to explore the noncognitive, intimate, and meaningful relationship between architecture and human bodies, but Kraftl's collaborative research partner, Peter Adey (2008), in his research on the John Lennon Liverpool Airport, more pointedly examines the ways in which the airport's architectural design promotes particular bodily effects and, further, instills specific beliefs and inspirations among users. Adey specifically considers the cinematic design of the airport's original observation balcony and the ways in which the three-tiered, open-air, and concave structure promoted particular visual and haptic experiences among users, such as permitting them to view the design and shape of airplanes in detail or feel the rumble of plane engines. While the architectural design of the airport encouraged a specific set of beliefs within airplane viewers, namely awe and enthusiasm for the burgeoning and ultramodern field of aviation, Adey is also careful to point out that some of the activities which ultimately defined the space, such as the transmission of aviation knowledge from old to young watchers, actually exceeded the airport designers' intentions. In their collaborative article "Architecture/Affect/Inhabitation: Geographies of Being-In-Buildings," Kraftl and Adey (2008) further analyze the ways in which both the Pembrokeshire School and Liverpool airport were successfully engineered to engender specific visceral qualities and bodily actions. Their ethnographic approach permits them to pointedly

deliberate the ways buildings create and limit particular practices, such as studying, playing, or praying, in very exact and localized ways, and to highlight how such emotive experiences render certain buildings as “uniquely meaningful” by those who use or inhabit them (2008: 213).

For the third vein of research in recent critical studies of architecture, Lloyd Jenkins (2002) and Jane Jacobs (2006) articulate a geography of architecture that highlights the network of human and nonhuman actors that forge a “building event.” Through their archival studies of specific buildings, a nineteenth-century Parisian commercial building and two modern high-rises respectively, Jenkins and Jacobs reveal how the various socio-technical elements of a building, from sewer and gas systems to architectural floor plans to building owners and users, are held together as shifting assemblages that continually constitute architectural spaces. The materiality of a building is a “relational effect,” Jacobs maintains, its “presence” is “stitched into place by fragmented, multi-scaled, and multi-sited networks of association” (Jacobs 2006: 11, 13). Jacobs’ and Jenkins’ work explores how the physical presence of a building is not pre-determined or self-evident, but, rather, how it *becomes* through elaborate human and non-human processes.

In this chapter I employ my ethnographic findings to weave together these three approaches to everyday geographies of architecture. I explore how both everyday practices in and around the two case studies featured in this chapter, the Sound Café and the Montana family house, and the specific material features and details of the buildings are constitutive of their local significance. In order to tease out the interplay between architecture and practice, I focus on how the intersections of the physical and practiced elements of buildings actively produce meaning for the residents, customers, neighbors, artists, community activists, and onlookers who regularly interact with these sites. Though my embedded ethnographic study of these two local landmarks does not permit me to comprehensively explore the multi-temporal and multi-scaled transhuman networks that

constitute and sustain built spaces, like the work of Jacobs (2006) and Jenkins (2002), I do, however, stress the productive relationship between the architectural design, material features, geographic workings, and social actors that imbue the Sound Café and Montana House with significance. As explained in chapter one, while various systems of meaning participate in defining the exceptional (or mundane) character of buildings, such as the visual, the political, and even the virtual, this dissertation and this chapter specifically upholds the material and the performative as two immediate and contingent systems that resonate with how users (as well as preservationists and professionals in related fields like architecture, architectural history, and heritage management) sense, understand, and articulate architectural importance.

In the next section of this chapter, I present the Sound Café, a coffee shop and civic and arts center in the Marigny neighborhood. I consider the ways in which the building, by design and happenstance, has engendered an “open” feel and customer “flow” that corresponds to the café’s post-Katrina role as an information hub, accessible community space, and arts display and performance space. While the detailed and performative elements of the building’s material form helped to facilitate the transformation of the young coffee shop into a local landmark in the immediate wake of Katrina, my ethnographic research also reveals the crucial efforts of the café’s proprietor, Baty Landis, and her community of employees and regulars to encourage a variety of daily and more heightened activities that have been essential to defining the space’s recent citywide significance. Following the Sound Café case study, I re-visit the home of the late Big Chief Tootie Montana and his wife, Joyce Montana, located in the Seventh Ward neighborhood. Big Chief Tootie Montana altered the physical details of his double shotgun house to convey, in a performative material sense, the dynamic exchange between his work in the building trades and his legendary skills in Mardi Gras Indian suit design. While the house serves as a physical testament to the Chief’s artistic legacy, I also consider the mundane, but essential ways in which the family house



has physically accommodated and grounded the Montana family's Mardi Gras Indian traditions post-Katrina. While the case study underscores the architectural inhabitations and affordances of the family's shotgun house, it also emphasizes the ongoing performances that take place there and mark the home as one of the city's most prominent cultural landmarks. Since Katrina, Joyce Montana has taken on an active role in restoring the house and sustaining the family's Mardi Gras Indian legacy by hosting major activities of the family tribe, the Yellow Pocahontas, and promoting her family's contributions to the city's larger Indian tradition by maintaining an informal archive. While Tootie's acclaim originally marked the Seventh Ward shotgun as a prominent New Orleans site, Joyce has figured prominently in the reproduction of the home's significance since Hurricane Katrina. In the final section of this chapter, I reflect on how the intersections of everyday material and performative practices have constituted and reproduced the importance of these sites in post-Katrina New Orleans.

## **The Sound Café**

### **The Material and Geographic Workings of the Sound Café**

When Baty Landis bought 2700 Chartres Street in 2003, many neighbors still identified the space with Bird's Grocery, a corner store that served the Marigny neighborhood for several decades, and a few immediate neighbors preferred to hold on to memories of the building's incarnation as the home of local R and B star Jon Cleary, who lived in the entire rambling building during the '80s and '90s. Because the corner building was a notable architectural space to her neighbors, Baty made careful choices about how to physically connect 2700 Chartres Street to what had existed in the space prior to her purchase of the building, but also how to make needed material changes in order to transform the space into the café and rehearsal space for the nearby creative-arts magnet high school she envisioned when purchasing the building.

2700 Chartres was built as a frame two-storey residence and corner store in the early 1840s (Toledano et al. 1974). Baty has maintained the building's original exterior features – a balcony, six-over-six-light windows, and floor-to-ceiling, glass-paned double doors with transom windows (Figure 4.2). The outward appearance of the Sound Café blends with the architectural environment of the Marigny neighborhood, a local and national historic district with a considerable collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century shotgun houses, Creole Cottages, and corner stores, so it is a notable transition stepping from the sidewalk through the historic double doors of the café into the newly, renovated modern interior. Originally two units (the west side was commercial space and the east side was an apartment), all the interior walls on the ground floor have been removed to create one open room (Figures 4.3 & 4.4). The east half of the café, what was the apartment, is elevated about a foot-and-a-half above the west half, creating a stage-like effect that immediately struck Baty in her vision for creating an arts-and-music-performance space. Because all the walls have been removed, the space is well-lit by the series of exterior windows and glass-paned doors that skirt the outside walls. The natural light of the café is toned down by the deep red and yellow interior walls and the orange-brown wood floor on the “upper” story.

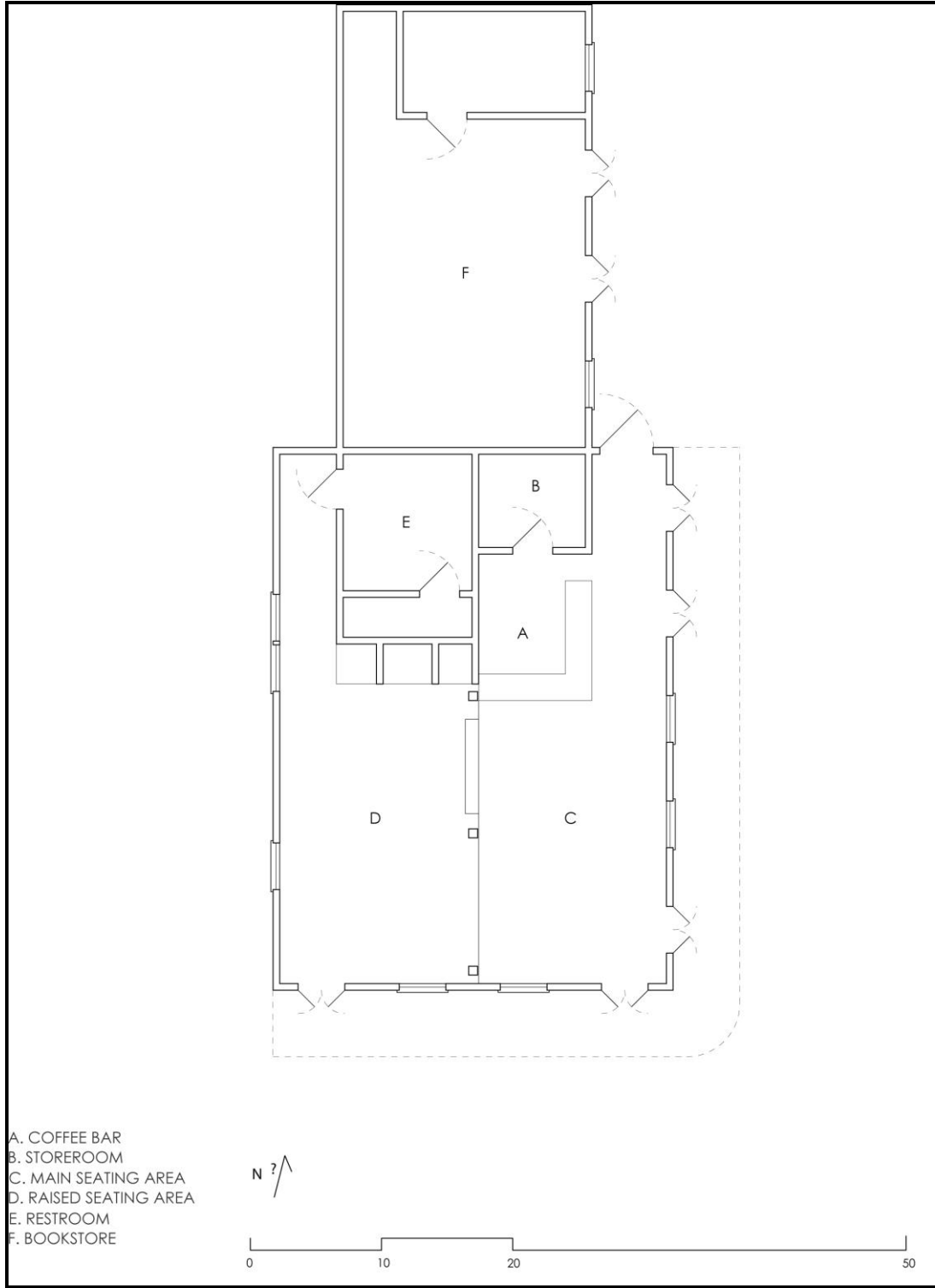
This cool and understated interior helps to showcase the visual art that is regularly displayed on the café walls. Other material features, like track lighting, have been installed to enhance the gallery-like effect of the coffee shop space. Another movable, but essential material feature of the arts coffee shop is the piano situated in the northeast corner on the upper, stage level, which is central to many of the Sound Café's live music performances. Depending on the day, other musical instruments, like bass drums, trombones, and guitars can also be found tucked away in corners or propped against walls available for casual performances or impromptu practice sessions as will be further explored below (Figure 4.5).



**Figure 4.2:** The Sound Café and a small crowd for an art showing, May 2008 (Source: photograph by author).



**Figure 4.3:** Interior of Sound Café, 2007 (Source: photograph by author).



**Figure 4.4:** Floor plan of the Sound Café (Source: Helen Juergens/Cornerstones project).

Baty had conscious intentions for the look and feel of her arts café from the outset — “Some things I realized, like the stage possibility, and I knew the acoustics were special in there,” but much of it, Baty acknowledges, came about as “the space settled into itself” (interview, 1.24.08). According to Baty, the building’s location at the intersection of Chartres and Port Streets, just two blocks off the Mississippi River, turned out to be the principal element in creating the “energetic” feel of her café: “I think that there’s something about this corner. There’s some sort of fresh breeze through this corner...there’s something particular about this spot”(Figure 4.6). As a result, when the Sound Café opened up in May of 2004, contrary to Baty’s original intent to principally serve the students and staff at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts (NOCCA), the café quickly grew into a community space for the Marigny and adjacent Bywater neighborhoods.

Baty recalls that once she opened in May 2004, neighbors began “to float through easily,” and neighborhood musicians, writers, and visual artists adopted the café as a practice and event space and gallery (interview 1.24.08). The building’s location, as well as the café’s series of windows and double doors and the open interior space, lured neighborhood residents to pass through the shop for a coffee or for one of the café’s many arts or community events. I observed this casual and constant passing of neighbors through the Sound Café during my time in the field. One brief passage from my field notes regarding an evening brass band concert at the shop captured this neighborhood flow: “There were about a dozen of us watching the band at any given time. The tall, double, window-like doors were splayed open and people would sometimes peek in or step in for a few minutes and then step out at their leisure with little disruption to what was going on in the café” (field notes, 12.5.06). The physical and geographic workings of 2700 Chartres Street helped constitute the Sound Café as a neighborhood coffee shop and arts space, and the building’s design and material features were essential to facilitate the café’s quick transformation into a crucially needed information, civic, and arts hub for all of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.



**Figure 4.5:** Bass drum propped against wall, 2008 (Source: photograph by author).



**Figure 4.6:** Footprint of Sound Café (Source: Helen Juergens/Cornerstones project).

## A Space to “Get a Feel for What’s Going On in the World”

The Sound Café was the second high-ground coffee shop to re-open downtown after Hurricane Katrina and not just residents, but researchers, journalists, planners, and politicians flocked to the café for coffee, company, wireless internet, and information. Baty reflected on the dramatic shift in the role of her café not only in the Marigny neighborhood, but all of New Orleans from its existence pre-Katrina: “[Before the storm] it was a luxury, basically. But after the storm it was essential. It felt like water and air. It just felt elemental really” (interview, 1.24.08). When the café re-opened just over a month after the storm in October 2005, it served some very “elemental” needs, like providing residents with running water and electricity, but, importantly, it was a space to comfortably and safely gather in the still-devastated city. The political and social fall-out from the city’s mass evacuation left the Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods and all of New Orleans in dire need of basic resources and reliable information, and the open physical and social space of Baty’s coffee shop easily served as a city-wide and international “magnet” for residents, public officials, and the many journalists seeking to gather, exchange, and disseminate information and resources (David Pass interview, 6.20.08). One of the café’s baristas, Michelle Glass, recalls the café feeling like the “center of the universe” in those early months after Katrina:

After the storm, I was back in Mid-City, and it was just still completely bombed out there. I just really didn’t really have hope for that neighborhood at that time. And coming down here to the café felt like riding into civilization every day. And it was interesting because it was all these people at the café that were involved in city planning. There’s a lot of talk about stuff like that that happens here. So I was getting a lot of inside information about what was happening, and what was being planned. I felt like I went from living in a cave to suddenly being just full of information. I’ve never been so excited to come to work. (interview, 4.12.08)

When I entered the field in the fall of 2006, other coffee shops had re-opened in the Marigny and other nearby neighborhoods and business at the Sound Café had slowed from being wall-to-wall customers, to more of a steady customer trickle, but the shop still remained a hub of

information and resources for its patrons and neighbors. In formal and informal interviews, several of the baristas at the Sound Café articulated that they felt an important part of their role working behind the counter was to gather information and pass it along to other patrons that needed it or to point them in the direction of the community bulletin board, believing the shop was a space where customers and neighbors come “to get a feel for what’s going on in the world” (Shirley Green interview, 5.17.08; field notes, 6.1.08). And similarly customers have commented that they value the coffee shop as “a place to share information” – “we [Sound Café patrons] know what’s going on,” one café regular declared to me in an informal conversation (field notes 5.28.08).

I continually observed and documented such simple, but important acts of information sharing and networking at the Sound Café. One entry from my field notes describes a fall morning when Michelle was working and visiting with two café regulars across the café counter, one was a neighbor, local author, and co-founder of the Silence Is Violence (SIV) non-profit (see below), David Pass, and the other was associated with one of the city’s popular brass bands, the Hot 8. During the course of their morning coffee visiting session, the trio informed other neighbors and patrons about yoga classes at a nearby arts warehouse, an ongoing series of neighborhood walks sponsored by SIV, the Hot 8’s upcoming performance schedule, and plans for David’s upcoming book release party at the café (field notes 10.3.07). The open space of the café is well-suited to facilitate this informational and social exchange and in conversation and interviews it was explicitly noted by several employees and regular customers: “I feel like here everybody is kind of having this very communal event because of the way the space is” (Michelle Glass interview, 4.12.08). The communal and open space of the Sound Café proved to be the most crucial resource the coffee shop offered post-Katrina, and it was the impetus for the creation of one of the city’s most prominent post-Katrina non-profits, Silence Is Violence, and other, small-scaled civic engagements



that have distinguished the coffee shop as a significant community space in New Orleans since the storm.

### **The Café as an “Accessible” Meeting and Civic Space**

Silence Is Violence (SIV) cohered as an organized group to oversee a major protest march to City Hall in January 2007 that was a collective response to a string of violent murders that winter, which culminated in the loss of two residents connected to the Sound Café community – high-school band instructor and Hot 8 bass drum player Dinerral Shavers and a Marigny resident and documentarian, Helen Hill (Maggi & Filosa 2007; Nossiter 2007). Baty and co-founder David Pass insist that SIV would never have grown to have the organizing power and presence it has in New Orleans without the space of the coffee shop at their disposal. To begin with, David decided to go to the Sound Café when he received the stunning news of Susan’s death on January 4th (just one week after Dinerral’s passing), knowing he could, in his words, “find community and like-minded people there” (interview, 6.20.08). When he arrived at the Sound Café, David found Baty mulling over the sad development of Helen’s death with another neighbor and musician, and he sat down with the two ladies and exclaimed, “I think we should do something” (interview, 6.20.08). The three neighbors proceeded to brainstorm on how to advertise, coordinate, and execute a march to City Hall. In the days leading up to the march of approximately 5,000 alarmed residents on Thursday, January 11<sup>th</sup> (Maggi & Filosa 2007; Nossiter 2007), the Sound Café served as the meeting space to collectively work-out the logistics of the march and promote the group’s efforts. “From having a place where we could meet to having a place where the mayor’s office could send someone to come find us to having a public space where the media could flow through...I think it all helped things fall in place,” Baty recounted in our interview (1.24.08) about the inception of SIV and its ties to the space of her coffee shop.

Since the success of Silence Is Violence in spearheading one of the greatest collective protests and public dialogues on the city's recovery after Katrina (Maggi & Reckdahl 2008), active members insist the non-profit has "sustain[ed] their stature as an organization" because they have a physical headquarters (Baty Landis interview 1.24.08; field notes 1.11.08). "The media and the community were already connected to this place and you had that network going," David explained in our interview (6.20.08), and so concerned residents knew they could come to the coffee shop for information on the group or the latest issues on the city's justice system and journalists felt comfortable to "flow through" and set up to get a media byte or an interview with a café community member. Interestingly, it was widely noted by my interviewees that coffee shop staff and regulars were willing and comfortable to talk to media when Baty or David are not around, because members of the café have become, in Michelle Glass's words, "conditioned" to have such conversations, since the open space of the Sound Café is where "so much awareness was brought to issues of violence and the city's justice system" (interview, 4.12.08). The café also simply provided the physical space needed to host much of the non-profit's continued public outreach, from one-time events, like a criminal board judges debate, to their ongoing programming that is focused on youth arts programming as a way to counter the city's culture of violence, including weekly brass-band music clinics that will be highlighted in the subsequent section.

While Baty originally intended for her coffee shop to be an accessible community and arts space for others, after Katrina and especially through her work with SIV, she has come to use it in a way that she was making it available for other people to use:

To have a space that's just available, it's really a luxury to have, as I've discovered especially with Silence Is Violence. Anything I want to do, basically, whether it's activist in nature or socialist in nature, I have a space....And so now, I'm very aware of how powerful that is, and I'm very aware of wanting to really be as open and generous about that as I can. (interview, 1.24.08)

Baty's generosity to share her space, but also her own ability to harness the power of her accessible coffee shop, prompted café regulars, but also residents citywide to use her coffee shop in perhaps smaller, but similar ways. During my field study, David, for example, held a release party for his nationally popular book *My Travels with Dogs*, an event which included live music by the Hot 8 Brass Band, wine and dog treats for guests, and a public awareness piece and booth on responsible pit-bull ownership (field notes 10.03.07). Other examples from my field notes of residents and out-of-towners capitalizing on the available space of the coffee shop include a group of Marigny residents holding a neighborhood safety meeting, a Katrina recovery non-profit organizing a fundraiser, and an out-of-town volunteer group using the café as their mobilization point for gutting and rebuilding a nearby, flood-damaged home (field notes 6.01.07, 12.05.07, 3.11.08). Notably after Katrina, the city's artistic community was left without spaces to commune creatively, display their work, practice, or perform, and artists actively utilized the open and welcoming space of the Sound Café, in particular musicians connected to the city's brass band and traditional jazz traditions.

### **“A Place to Practice Publicly:” The Café and the City's Music Community**

The Sound Café supports an array of artists and artistic mediums from regularly sponsoring visual art showings to hosting book and poetry readings,<sup>22</sup> but Baty's personal appreciation for the “immediate” nature of New Orleans brass-band music and “the way it intersects with community and society” (interview 1.24.08), her involvement with the second-line parade tradition which is intimately tied to brass-band music (see also chapter five), and her personal connections to the Hot 8 Brass Band specifically, all helped to generate an important relationship between New Orleans' brass band and related musical traditions and the community of the Sound Café (these factors also

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<sup>22</sup> At the rear of the café on the first story is a separate space Baty has converted into a bookstore, Beth's Books (see Figure 4.4), that is the organizing headquarters for the numerous literary events the café hosts. While the café displayed the work of visual artists before Katrina, Baty's more recent role as Director of the Young Aspirations/Young Artists (Ya/Ya), a non-profit geared to empowering disadvantaged youth through arts training, has encouraged greater use of the coffee shop by visual artists, especially participants in the Ya/Ya program.

contributed to the central role of the Sound Café in the inception and growth of Silence is Violence). For example, in the immediate days after Katrina, the Hot 8 regularly met and practiced at the café. Because many typical performance venues in New Orleans were slow to re-open or were only open on a limited basis after Katrina, the Sound Café also offered the band a casual space to regularly perform. For their coffee shop concerts, the brass band typically sat in chairs on the upper or “stage” level of the café, playing for a small and shifting audience (field notes 4.4.07, 5.2.07). During one of their concerts, I documented a father arriving with his two young daughters halfway through the performance. The girls seemingly already knew the band, because they swiftly proceeded to crawl up and down on the two steps between the upper and lower levels of the café, moving in and out of the musicians and sometimes tugging on the lead trumpet player and vocalist known as Big T. In turn, Big T dedicated songs to the two young girls and they sat just inches from the bell of his horn as he played to them (field notes 4.4.07), a performance intimacy he later described in our interview (6.18.08) as “a real homey feeling.” These informal concerts were a departure from the parade and night club gigs the band typically performs, and they offered the Hot 8 a subdued environment to play for new audiences, but also, importantly, to play new material. After Katrina, the Hot 8 was writing and playing new songs inspired by their post-disaster experiences, but additionally the band was collaborating with traditional jazz figures, like clarinet virtuoso Dr. Michael White. For the Hot 8, part of this musical exchange involved learning brass band “standards” or songs characterized as traditional New Orleans jazz (see chapter five), so the coffee shop concerts were an opportunity to practice their expanding repertoire and occasionally, even, to perform with Dr. Michael White (Toby Hudson interview, 6.18.08).

The Hot 8’s bass drummer, Dinerral Shavers, also temporarily stayed at the Sound Café after Katrina and, like most of band’s members, he maintained a regular presence at the café in the early months after the storm, so his death in December of 2006 was a profound loss to the coffee shop

community (Baty Landis interview, 1.24.08). The youth brass band clinics were developed by Silence is Violence and supported by café community members as a tribute to Dinerral and his commitment to youth and music (Venita Andrews, interview 6.27.08). These weekly brass-band clinics were the apex of musical practice, performance, and transmission at the Sound Café during my fieldwork from the spring of 2007 to the summer of 2008. The participants, male and female, white and black, ranged in age from as young as about four to fourteen years old. Professional brass-band musicians worked with the enthusiastic and instrumentally eclectic groups of participants (one night I noted a harp, cello, violins, and an electric guitar in addition to standard brass-band instruments (field notes 10.30.07)) in “break out” groups according to the same instrument family, teaching them basic techniques and the melody lines of two performance numbers. The clinics culminated every week in the recital portion of the program, when each participant performed a freestyle solo for the small, supportive café audience of parents and interested neighbors, while the team of instructors played a strong melody to support their forays into improvised performance (Figure 4.7).

In addition to these casual, but formally coordinated musical events, I also observed brass band and jazz musicians using the café as a venue for unannounced or impromptu performances or practice sessions. One hot July afternoon I stepped into the café for a quick drink and a quartet of young players were assembled by the piano, pulling out their instruments and playing their repetitive warm-up sounds. I asked Shirley, the barista working there that afternoon, “Who’s about to play?” “I don’t know,” she answered, “They just showed up.” The show, like many musical performances I saw there, was characterized by a casual intimacy (Figure 4.8). The young musicians chatted with one another between songs and experimented with their play lists and sounds; the immediacy of the musicians also prompted conversations and song requests by the dozen or so customers in the café variously watching, listening, reading, or passing through. I later spoke with the piano player, the



**Figure 4.7:** Youth music clinic, October 2007 (Source: photograph by author).



**Figure 4.8:** Jazz concert on upper/stage level of café, May 2008 (Source: photograph by author).

leader of the band, and learned that the jazz quartet regularly plays at Snug Harbor, the city's premier modern jazz venue. "We just need a place like this to practice publicly," he explained to me about their unannounced afternoon concert, "so we can experiment with our sound in a low-stress environment" (field notes, 7.10.07). A particularly poignant example of an impromptu practice session from my field experiences was the day I interviewed Venita Andrews, Dinneral's cousin and another co-founder of SIV. As Venita and I talked about her cousin's commitment to music education and the youth music clinics sponsored by SIV, Dinneral's youngest son who came to spend time at the café with Venita, found a trombone tucked away in the back of the bookstore where we were seated doing our interview. He promptly took it outside and started practicing scales and simple melodies on the horn for the café audience sitting at the outdoor tables on the Port Street sidewalk (field notes, 6.27.08).

"Most coffee shops don't make connections to these cultural traditions in New Orleans," Baty acknowledged in our interview (1.24.08), referring specifically to the relationship between the Sound Café and brass-band music. The Marigny is a predominantly white and middle to upper-middle-class neighborhood, while New Orleans brass-band music is a performance tradition rooted in the city's black, working-class communities. The meshing of the activities of SIV, the Hot 8 and other local jazz and brass bands, and the Sound Café community has thus produced unique social relationships that are recognized and appreciated by café employees and regulars:

A lot of the people that were involved with the Silence Is Violence thing are coming in, and family members of Dinerral and a lot of Hot 8 guys are always coming in – and I don't know if they would normally be hanging out at a coffee shop in the Marigny, but they have a big connection here because there's a lot of music going on, which is really nice. It helps with the diversity of the place. It's definitely far more diverse than other coffee shops that I go to. (Michelle Glass interview, 4.12.08)

The ties between the Sound Café and the brass band tradition, has thus offered coffee-shop goers the opportunity to meaningfully engage with New Orleans brass-band music and the musicians in

intimate, new and even unexpected ways. By providing a space to meet and conduct business, learn new music, experiment with new sounds, and play for new audiences, the Sound Café, in turn, has fulfilled unique and necessary needs for brass band and jazz musicians in post-disaster New Orleans.

### **“The Building Itself Goes with the Atmosphere:” Intersections of Architecture and Practice**

“For architects and their buildings to be taken seriously,” Kraftl and Adey insist, “buildings must be imbued with the power to make a difference to their inhabitants” (2008: 213). While Kraftl and Adey focus their work on the execution of architects’ designs to create spaces that effectively “facilitate inhabitation,” my intimate look at the Sound Café supplements the other piece of their claim that the buildings themselves house an array of overlooked, “nitty-gritty material-performative details” that make an *affective* difference to users and inhabitants (2008: 214). My research has revealed a significant relationship between the material details of the Sound Café and users’ experiences of the shop that is sensed, felt, and even articulated by those who regularly frequent the space, like neighbor and daily customer Jennifer Moran:

I think the building itself goes with the atmosphere. It makes it very welcoming because of all the windows and doors, so you don’t feel like you’re enclosed. You don’t feel claustrophobic in there, and you can see what’s going on, either outside or coming inside. You can see all around you from in there. It has a great location in the Marigny.  
(interview, 5.28.08)

“Access,” “flow,” “comfort” are all affective terms that patrons and employees of the Sound Café regularly employ to describe their active physical and emotional encounters with the space. While the architectural form and features of the café are constitutive of particular bodily sensations and emotional experiences, the space of the café also promotes particular everyday practices (Adey 2008; Kraftl & Adey 2008), like coming together and sharing information, which helped constitute some of the café’s more heightened activities, such as facilitating the organization of the city’s largest post-Katrina protest and the passing down of a brass-band musical repertoire as part of the performance exchange between the Hot 8 Brass Band and Dr. Michael White.



This section also deliberates how the “welcoming” physical sense created by the material nature of the Sound Café is further enhanced by Baty’s business philosophy to provide an “atmosphere” that “*feels* very accessible” [emphasis added] (interview, 1.24.08). This social accessibility is recognized and valued by café employees and regulars: “If you want to do anything [at the café] you can go ask Baty [and] she will be supportive of that” (Jennifer Moran interview, 5.28.08). Regulars articulated this accessibility in other ways, as well: “the café is directed by its customers” (David Pass interview, 6.20.08) or “this is the kind of place where you have the freedom to make it what you want” (Venita Andrews interview, 6.27.08). Producing such an accessible community center within the context of her coffee shop is an ongoing negotiation for Baty (Lees 2001; Kraftl 2006a, 2006b). Our interview (1.24.08) revealed that at the most fundamental level, she has to actively balance the profitability of her coffee house with her desire to sustain it as an arts and civic center (see also chapter seven). The many events the Sound Café hosts, from club meetings to media events to youth music clinics to the more formal concerts and gallery receptions at the shop, have interesting implications for the “business” of the Sound Café. During these more heightened uses of the cafe, my field notes indicate a substantial number of customers were pushed outside or opted to leave all together. Baty is aware of the impacts of having a combined coffee shop, arts performance space, and community center on her sales. In reference specifically to the casual or unannounced musical performances in her coffee shop, she asked me rhetorically: “Do I serve my ideals or do I think about the ears of the customers and the fact that I have to pay the rent at the end of the month?” (interview 1.24.08).

Baty’s efforts and struggles to create and maintain an arts and community coffee shop, however, are only one piece of the messy co-production of the coffee shop (Llewellyn 2003, 2004). The interactions of café employees, customers, musicians, artists, journalists, and politicians with the Sound Café have also been integral in generating the social activity that has defined the coffee shop

as a very significant building in the post-Katrina landscape (Kraftl 2010). In his exploration of the different “practices of watching” that regularly took place on the original airport balcony at the Liverpool John Lennon Airport, Peter Adey concludes that viewers’ “performances appropriated the space and exceeded the intentions of the airport designers” (2008: 42). In a similar vein, the Sound Café community exceeded Baty’s original intent to principally serve the nearby creative-arts-magnet-high-school population. Since Katrina specifically, her space has been appropriated as a welcoming meeting and performance space by residents citywide, and, during my fieldwork, accepted uses ranged from customers boldly turning off the café’s radio and then proceeding to perform dramatic impromptu numbers on the piano (field notes 10.11.07) to the day I sat next to a homeless woman who poignantly talked with me about her struggles to stay clean and dry and then quietly napped undisturbed at her table all afternoon (field notes 2.18.08). In this section, I have pointedly engaged with the tactile, material details and the situated, everyday practices of the Sound Café to highlight the ways in which these material and embodied intersections have not only created meaning for those who use the space, but, importantly, how these intersections fulfilled crucial needs in post-disaster New Orleans, prompting an important shift in the building’s significance. While the Sound Café quickly became an important local landmark after Hurricane Katrina, the next section examines how one of the city’s most prominent local landmarks, the Montana family house, was re-produced as a significant space in New Orleans after the storm.

## **The Montana Family House**

### **“Putting My Work in It:” Architectural Geographies of Adaptation**

Joyce and Tootie Montana were both raised in the Seventh Ward, a neighborhood that sits just north of the Marigny neighborhood where the Sound Café is located. The neighborhood has historically been characterized as the Creole section of the city, home of the city’s Euro-African descendents, many of them light-skinned, French-speaking, and Catholic, that began to migrate to

this area northeast of the French Quarter in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century (Campanella 2006; Breunlin & Regis 2009). The Seventh Ward is prominent locally and even nationally as a community of jazz musicians, black entrepreneurs, civil-rights leaders, and, of particular relevance to the Montana family legacy, Mardi Gras Indians, and architectural craftsmen (Claiborne Avenue Design Team 1976; Samuels 2000a; Hankins 2003). The late Big Chief Tootie was renowned in New Orleans for his skill as an Indian suit designer and a master lather (lathers traditionally laid down wood or metal lath – rows of wood or metal strips that formed a substructure for applying plaster). When Big Chief Tootie and his wife purchased their historic double shotgun on North Villere Street in the Seventh Ward (Figure 4.9), he set about to transform the family house into a unique and concrete expression of his skills in the building trades and Mardi Gras Indian suit design.<sup>23</sup> “He used to say, ‘I have to put some of my work into my house,’” Joyce recalls (interview, 11.06.07), and he began renovating the house in 1975 for his family to move-in, initiating a long and impressive chain of alterations and embellishments still underway when the Big Chief passed in the summer of 2005.

On my first visit to the Montana House, Joyce gave me a complete and detailed tour of Tootie’s interior and exterior architectural projects, a running list that is substantial: arched entryways, dentil work, fireplace ledges, closet additions, a rear shed-roof addition, a bathroom counter with a built-in hamper, a backyard fish pond, built-in façade planters, and, Joyce’s two favorites, the impressive ceiling dome in her living room and the plastered border and practical built-in light above her kitchen sink (field notes 3.14.07). The exterior of the house most dramatically displays the compelling ways Tootie embellished or reworked the historical features of his house.

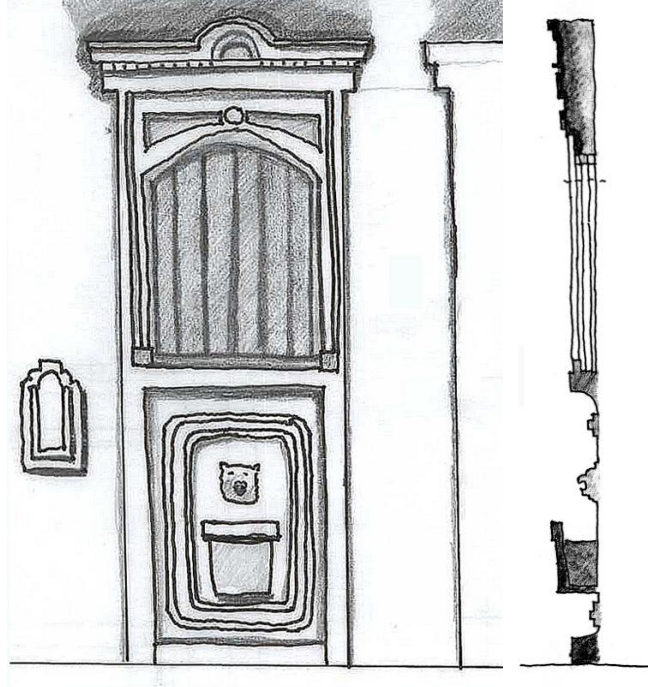
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<sup>23</sup> The community of Seventh Ward Creole architectural craftsmen participated in cooperative house raisings through much of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Hankins 2003). Though Tootie contributed his labor to many of these communal house raisings, by the time he and Joyce bought their first home in 1975, the cooperative system had dissolved (Joyce Montana interview, 11.6.07). Much like his mentors and colleagues, however, Tootie was compelled to “put his work” into his personal residence, in this case applying not just his ability in the building trades, but also his skill in Mardi Gras Indian suit design.



**Figure 4.9:** Joyce Montana on the porch of her family's double shotgun house, spring 2008 (Source: photograph by author).

On the front of the house, Tootie incorporated a durable, concrete step and porch rail with unique arched openings. For his treatment of the façade, he closed in the lower half of the windows and constructed semi-circular, built-in planters (Figure 4.10). Although a common Victorian architectural feature on other shotguns in the Seventh Ward, the bullseye detail on the Montana house was not original; it was an adornment Tootie later added by hand. He placed decorative wood cut-aways in the transom windows that are echoed in mirror design on the porch ceiling. The geometry of those designs are evocative of the symmetry the Chief used in his Indian suit design (see below), and similar wood pattern pieces were placed in the corners of the gable and along the outside of the gable window. The definitive architectural marker of how “Tootie worked it in the building trades and worked it in the streets,” as his wife Joyce describes (interview, 11.6.07), is the cast plaster relief centered on the façade, a self-portrait of Tootie wearing a Native-American-style headdress (Figure 4.11).



**Figure 4.10:** Master Lather Allison “Tootie” Montana’s embellishments to the facade windows, fall 2008 (Source: Sarah Cloonan/Cornerstones project).



**Figure 4.11:** Plaster self-portrait relief of Big Chief Tootie Montana on façade of house, winter 2007 (Source: photograph by author).

Tootie explicitly outlined the relationship of his work in the building trades to his skills in designing Mardi Gras Indian suits in an interview for a New Orleans Museum of Art documentary project on the Creole building arts:

My way of making the suit and getting the points, just designing the suit as a whole, my trades helps me, you see. It's no different. The only thing I'm working with cardboard and with my trade I'm working with iron, light iron and wire, metal lath. It's no different. That's why I can make a design, break it down, get it to square inches, but I can do the same thing with my trade. (Montana 2000)

Tootie's work with measurements and a center line in the building trades complemented the kind of geometry, as well as creativity, needed to craft the dazzling, three-dimensional Indian suits Tootie is famed for. "He was always carrying a measuring stick," Joyce remembers (interview, 11.06.07), and, with his house as his medium, Tootie managed to concretely express the dynamic professional and artistic exchange that informed his skill in both the building trades and Indian suit design (see also Spitzer 2003). The shotgun on North Villere is a testament to the dynamic tension between tradition and innovation in the Chief's artistry as a lather and Indian suit designer. Several of his architectural embellishments, many of them practical, sitting in compelling juxtaposition with original details, like the porch handrail severing the original columns and the built-in façade planters enclosing the original façade windows. The Montana house also stands as an incomplete, but ongoing tribute to Tootie's legacy as an innovator. "Every time you look, he was looking to do something else to beautify it [the house]," Joyce fondly recalls about the Chief's architectural projects (interview, 11.06.07), and several of his later-life endeavors still remain only partially complete, like his rear fish pond still encased in metal lath. Just as the material form, features, and significance of the Montana family house has been re-defined in ongoing and contingent ways (Jenkins 2002; Llewellyn 2003, 2004; Kraftl 2009), so has the social and cultural significance of the building continued to evolve with its everyday and more ceremonial uses.

## **Grounding a Performance Tradition: The Montana House and the Yellow Pocahontas**

The Mardi Gras Indian tradition emerged in New Orleans in the late 1800s as a creative and subversive response to the racial repression of the post-Reconstruction era. Tootie's great uncle, Becate Batiste, is remembered as one of the founding members of the Creole Wild West Indian tribe, identified as the city's first Indian tribe to parade through the streets of New Orleans posturing in tribal wear, drumming, and chanting in styles that aesthetically drew from both African and Native American traditions (Ya Salaam 1997; Reckdahl 2005). This African-American street performance from its earliest days emphasized the empowering beauty of Indian songs and suits, but the neighborhood-based tribes were also territorial and the Indian parades were often marked by violence. Tootie's father, Alfred Montana, was the chief of the Yellow Pocahontas tribe for many years and his gang was infamous for carrying guns and initiating tribal street wars (Ya Salaam 1997). Tootie first masked under his father in 1947, but two years later he formed a new tribe, the Monogram Hunters, and stepped immediately into the role of Big Chief at the young age of 26. In 1956, Tootie designated his tribe the Yellow Pocahontas, because the original gang had lost all its members and he wanted to maintain the historic family association with the tribe (Joyce Montana interview, 11.06.07).

Tootie quickly established the Yellow Pocahontas as a Seventh Ward cultural institution that closely adhered to a ritual calendar, like the weekly practices of traditional drumming and Indian chants and hymns at Packy's and other neighborhood barrooms that always commenced the Sunday after New Year (Joyce Montana interview, 11.06.07). The sewing of Yellow Pocahontas suits also became ritualized, starting months before carnival. At the family house on North Villere, Joyce and Tootie would sew over the dining room table with the help of family and friends night after night, year after year. Joyce recounts how the fellowship of food and sewing were always married at the Montana house:

I used to have a lot of food, a lot of drinks and sew. I used to sew in the kitchen. But then we had so many people that was comin' to sew, they'd all be at the dining room table, so I'd sew up front with them, unless I was back in the kitchen cooking. I'd be back there cooking and making trips going back and forth. But it was fun, cause you always had a lot of company. (interview, 12.04.07)

Quickly the Chief's suits became elaborate works of art, growing in their complexity with each passing year. Using his mathematic and artistic skills from his building trade, he revolutionized Indian suit design. His innovations included introducing abstract geometric beaded patterns, developing the full-length trail crown, and incorporating three-dimensional figures (Ya Salaam 1997; field notes, 11.15.07).

Tootie's mastery in suit design began to move the emphasis of the entire tradition from one of violence and street territory to one of competitive artistry (Ya Salaam 1997; Reckdahl 2005), but just as importantly the Chief's "comin' out" on Mardi Gras day grew into a Seventh Ward celebration when residents gathered outside the family home on North Villere Street to see the Chief step out grandly in hot pink or aqua, peacocks or butterflies (Figure 4.12) (Charles Andrews interview, 7.3.08). Tootie also sparked an elaboration of Mardi Gras Indian pageantry by processing through the Seventh Ward with his Queen, Second Chief, Wild Man, Spy Boy, and other tribal members, sharing the art of their suits and their music with the neighborhood (Ya Salaam 1997). Based in the heart of the Seventh Ward on North Villere Street and committed to his presence in the neighborhood, Tootie established the Yellow Pocahontas as not only a cultural, but also a community-based institution. "Honey, everybody in the Seventh Ward was looking for Tootie Montana on Carnival," Joyce insisted, "And so he said that's why he had to mask every year, cause he knew the people was looking for him to come out" (interview, 12.04.07).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Big Chief Tootie was also recognized for his artistry far beyond the Seventh Ward – featured in the 1997 New Orleans Museum of Art exhibit "Isn't he the Prettiest," granted a National Heritage Fellowship by the National Endowment of the Arts in 1987, even duplicated in New Orleans' Ripley's Believe It or Not wax museum. Onlookers, documentarians,





**Figure 4.12:** Big Chief Tootie Montana on his porch in his gold “last suit,” Mardi Gras Day 2005 (Source: Montana family, used with permission).

### **Architectural Affordances, Continuity, and Post-Katrina Significance**

Big Chief Tootie passed heroically in the summer of 2005. He suffered a heart attack during a special hearing of the City Council while he was at the podium protesting police violence that had occurred earlier that year during another important Mardi Gras Indian parading holiday, the Feast of Saint Joseph (L. E. Elie 2005; Reckdahl 2005). Known as the “Chief of Chiefs,” Tootie was regarded as one of the Indians’ great leaders and his passing (L. E. Elie 2005; Reckdahl 2005), coupled with the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, severed social networks crucial to the tradition, historians, and artists from other parts of New Orleans, the country, and the world came to North Villere Street to pay homage and glimpse the work of Chief Tootie.

including the Montana family's own. Aside from Joyce's son Charles Andrews who lives directly next door on North Villere Street, Joyce's other four children, including Big Chief Darryl Montana, her son and the new head of the Yellow Pocahontas tribe, all lived in New Orleans East before Katrina. New Orleans East is a mostly professional, African-American suburb that was developed on former swamp land starting in the 1960s (Souther 2008), and the suburb endured extreme flooding after Katrina. At the completion of my field work in the summer of 2008, only one of Joyce's displaced daughters had been able to return to her family house in the East. It was thus extremely important for Joyce post-Katrina to stay based in the Seventh Ward and carry on with her role as matriarch of the family's Indian traditions.

Joyce's commitment to maintain her house post-Katrina has crucially provided a place for displaced family members to gather, and in almost all instances those gatherings are centered around Joyce's cooking. Family members have told me in informal conversations that her continued hospitality for all big family events from Christmas to birthdays, as well as Friday or Sunday night dinners is what has held them together through the hard post-Katrina years (field notes 2.2.08, 6.6.08). And Joyce proudly acknowledges how she continues to lure her family over through the power of her tasty potato salad, gumbo, fried fish, and red beans and rice: "They always come over looking for something to eat, 'cause they know I always have it" (interview, 12.04.07).

Importantly, because all Joyce's family members except Chalres were temporarily living in apartments, they had no space for gathering or working on Mardi Gras Indian suits after Katrina besides Joyce's house in the Seventh Ward. Joyce explained to me one day why I would often see Darryl working on his suit in the other half of the double shotgun that the family uses to store Indian suits and accessories: "The apartment Darryl's still living in, that's the reason he had to come here to set his crown up, cause the apartment ceiling is so low, he couldn't do his crown in his

house” (interview, 12.04.07). Darryl also continues to work next door in the west half of the house, because Joyce and her son Charles next door contribute significantly to the intricate bead and sequin work on his suits, and their physical proximity promotes the practical and ongoing creative exchange that have been essential to making Montana family suits over the years (Figure 4.13). On a hot July afternoon, I was leaving Charles’ house and we both noticed Darryl on his mother’s porch knocking on the door with a brown paper bag in his hand. “I’m going to come over and see what you got,” Charles shouted at him and then he turned and winked at me, “I’m about to get my first look at what I’m going to be working on this year.” I reflected on this simple, but profound moment later that day in my field notebook: “This morning’s exchange between Joyce, Charles, and Darryl on North Villere Street kicked off the family’s annual sewing rhythm – already the Montanas are laying out next year’s suit in this year’s summer heat” (field notes, 7.03.08).

Interestingly, some newer buildings like the one Darryl lived in post-Katrina, simply cannot physically or socially accommodate the sewing and assembling rituals necessary to produce a regal Indian Chief costume, nor are they geographically situated within the city’s older neighborhoods that have come to define the contemporary landscape of Mardi Gras Indian territory. When I asked Charles (interview 7.3.08) why Darryl continues to “come out” on Mardi Gras Day at his parents’ house, he responded, “See, that’s a tradition where you put your costume on and you walk, okay?” Since Michael’s home is in New Orleans East, that walk would be so far that, as Charles informed me, Darryl’s got to have a place where he can “come out in town where they really have Mardi Gras.” He later refined that definition of Mardi Gras to refer specifically to the Indian tradition: “They got Mardi Gras all over the city, but I’m saying the biggest portion, where you’ll be able to see Indian stuff is right here at Claiborne, [to the north] and Saint Claude [to the south], Elysian Fields [to the east] and Washington Avenue [to the west].”



**Figure 4.13:** Joyce sewing on Big Chief Darryl's suit at her dining room table, winter 2008 (Source: photograph by author).

In addition to practically accommodating the family's Indian tradition, the continued presence of Joyce and Charles next door on North Villere Street is also important for residents of the Seventh Ward and other nearby downtown neighborhoods who, especially post-Katrina, long for the meaningful ceremony of gathering outside the Montana home on Mardi Gras day. Over the years the gathering of neighbors on Mardi Gras day has been transformed into a block party hosted by Charles and his wife to keep the crowds entertained while they wait for Big Chief Darryl to appear in his new suit. Joyce described this Mardi Gras synergy between the neighboring North Villere Street shotguns when she summarized the importance of her house for me during a field visit:

People start gathering in front of our house from early in the morning. Sometimes they [Big Chief Darryl and other supporting members of the Yellow Pocahontas] are still working on their suits until midday and people stay right in this block waiting for the Indians. Some other tribes pass in front the door. My son next door is a dee-jay and he plays music and sells food and people leave when the Indians leave or some stay in front the door dancing

and having a good time until the Indians return in the evening. They did that when my husband was chief and they do that now that my son Michael is chief. They know if they want to see Indians, they can always see them here. (field notes, 5.14.08)

Though crowds initially were smaller after Katrina, the Mardi Gras day combination of Big Chief Darryl emerging on his parents' porch and his brother spinning tunes next door provided an enduring sense of community and tradition for neighbors, other Indians, and residents citywide (Figure 4.14). "The year after Katrina, I wish you would have seen it here," Joyce insisted in our interview (12.4.07), "People were on the sidewalk, just dancing, and I told Darryl, 'You know something? Those People needed that.'" While the significance of the Montana house after Hurricane Katrina was defined by a physical and performative continuity, Joyce also had to make exceptional personal efforts to maintain the family house on North Villere Street and the collection of Indian artifacts housed within it, which, ultimately, redefined not only the importance of the Montana house, but also Joyce's role within the Indian tradition.



**Figure 4.14:** Big Chief Darryl's "comin out" on Saint Joseph's Night, the other major masking holiday of the Mardi Gras Indians, March 2007 (Source: photograph by author).

## **“This Is Like a Museum:” Joyce’s Informal Archive<sup>25</sup>**

The Seventh Ward and Joyce’s block on North Villere Street specifically were slow to repopulate after the storm. Many times during our field visits Joyce noted the challenges of coming back to the same, but different neighborhood: “It’s very few people [here now] that was living here before the storm... It was just nice to live in that atmosphere with everybody you knew and everybody was so nice. But it’s different places, different times” (interview, 12.04.07). Though Joyce, as a recently widowed home-owner, struggled with not having as many familiar neighbors and home owners back on her street, she nonetheless diligently undertook many projects to physically repair the family house, such as fixing cracking plaster and replacing buckled flooring, in order to maintain it as the central gathering place for the Yellow Pocahontas during my time in the field. As opposed to selling, leasing, or boarding up the family house on North Villere Street, like many of her neighbors chose to do, Joyce’s return to and active restoration of the house helped to restore the activities of her family’s Indian tribe and bring needed social activity to the Seventh Ward (Figure 4.15). Restoring her house and actively participating in the activities of her family’s tribe also led her to serve as a “self-taught” archivist, curator and cultural translator for the Yellow Pocahontas, as well as the city’s Mardi Gras Indian tradition more broadly (Breunlin et al. 2009).

When Joyce and Tootie bought their double shotgun on North Villere Street, they first rented the west half of the house. In 1987, Tootie received a National Heritage Fellowship from the

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<sup>25</sup> By using the term “informal archive,” I am referring to Joyce’s collection of material artifacts, as well as Joyce’s personal connections to and oral interpretations of her “archived” objects that also constitute the experience of her artifact collection (see below), an experience which sits in contrast to the removed and controlled spaces of formal archives (Taylor 2003; see chapter five). Similar to Rachel Breunlin and Helen Regis’ research and reflections on the small collection of intimate and personal museums in New Orleans (Regis et al. 2009), I also submit that the “informal” nature of Joyce’s archive permits her to exercise autonomy and creativity in the collection and interpretation of her family’s artifacts, while also providing a platform to legitimize her insider knowledge and the value of her family’s cultural practices. Joyce’s archive and the other, small personal museums in New Orleans speak to the tradition of community museums, which work outside the structure of state museums and heritage and provide independent public spaces for cultural articulation and contestation (Camarena & Morales 2006; Rassool 2006; Regis et al. 2009).

National Endowment for the Arts and the value newly placed on his work as a Mardi Gras Indian suit designer, prompted the Montanas to make the significant transition from disassembling and recycling each year's suit to preserving each one. Several years later, Tootie and Joyce decided to convert the west half of their double shotgun into a storage space to house the Chief's large and elaborate suits (Joyce Montana interview, 12.4.07). When I began regularly visiting Joyce in the spring of 2007, she had ten of Tootie's suits, eight suits her grandchildren had masked in over the years, and one Wildman suit in the storage half of the house. She was concerned about the declining condition of her suit collection because she did not have the resources to turn the electricity back on in that part of the house after Katrina, and she was actively seeking outside help to remedy the situation. I had the opportunity, during our early weeks together, to watch Joyce gently request help from the many local figures that passed by her house to visit or make arrangements about an upcoming event they wanted her to participate in. One such visit by a newsman from local TV station WVUE resulted in a feature on Joyce and her house of suits; the news piece caught the attention of a local business man who restored her electricity and installed an air conditioning unit to keep the suits in a climate-controlled space (Figure 4.16) (field notes 3.29.07, 4.10.07).

In addition to securing and caring for the family suits, Joyce had a wealth of photos, posters, and articles all about the house – framed on her walls or tucked away in storage boxes and scrapbooks. At the start of my fieldwork, she was concerned about maintaining her personal archive, especially after so many of her friends and family lost personal valuables in Katrina, so for over a year we collaborated on cataloguing and sliding into plastic archival bags an array of objects, from a US copyright office application for Tootie's 50<sup>th</sup> Mardi Gras Indian suit to the Big Chief's funeral program. While much of what we catalogued we stored away, Joyce also proudly displayed was a shifting homage to the legacies of her husband, extended family, and the Seventh Ward community, and it included pictures of Tootie's father masking Indian in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, an



**Figure 4.15:** A block in the Seventh Ward near the Montana family home after Hurricane Katrina, spring 2008 (Source: photograph by author).



**Figure 4.16:** Joyce Montana with the family collection of Indian suits she safeguards, winter 2007 (Source: photograph by author).



image of AP Tureaud, a Seventh Ward civil rights activist, and photos of Joyce or Tootie with local and national figures, like former mayor Dutch Morial, jazz trumpeter Kermit Ruffins, and filmmaker Spike Lee (field notes 6.26.07). One day we talked about her ever-growing photo display:

One of my daughters say, “Oh Joyce, don’t you put another picture on that wall.” I said, “It’s my house and I’ll put as many pictures as I want.” Everybody say, “Well this is like a museum.” Some of my [other] daughter’s friends came [to visit me], cause they had heard about Tootie, but they had never met him. They were so excited when they came and saw that I had so much to show them. (Joyce Montana interview, 12.4.07)

Just as essential as Joyce’s efforts to preserve and showcase her family suits, photographs, and other collectibles is her willingness to host visitors in her personal “museum” space and share the stories she has gathered and the experiences she has accumulated. This was perhaps best exemplified for me personally when I was doing architectural survey work in Joyce’s neighborhood on a spring week day, and stopped by unannounced in the morning to quickly say “hello.” She came to the door in her house slippers and hair curlers and insisted I invite my team of colleagues to step inside, first to view some of her historic photos and then to admire Tootie’s suits next door (field notes 4.21.08). In another visit to the house, Joyce informed me a group of documentarians from Europe were in town producing a film on Mardi Gras Indians. “So,” she explained, “they were brought to the Chief’s house. When a visitor comes and asks about Mardi Gras Indians,” she added, “they’re always brought here” (field notes 9.12.07). On many occasions, I witnessed Joyce offering a tour of her house to an interested passer-by or willingly agreeing to an interview with a filmmaker, journalist, or researcher.

While Tootie’s legacy as an architectural craftsman and Indian chief gave rise to the prominence of the family home on North Villere Street in recent decades, it has been Joyce’s steadfast commitment to maintaining a physical presence and, further, actively providing for her family and her community since Katrina that has re-produced the local significance of the family home since Hurricane Katrina. The Mardi Gras Indians are a principally male-dominated

performance tradition and the Montana house has typically been viewed as the male domain of Big Chief Tootie. Since the Chief's passing, however, Joyce has stepped into a prominent role in the Indian tradition citywide – accepting honors on the Chief's behalf, serving as a spokeswoman on panels and at community events, and actively promoting her husband's and family's Indian legacy through her informal archive. This shift in her role within the tradition is significant and another important way the role of the family house continues to be re-defined.

### **Inhabitation, Adaptation, and Performance: The Ongoing Production of Built Spaces**

Like the work of other architectural geographers, my ethnographic study of the Montana house highlights the role of “user participation” (Llewellyn 2003, 2004; Kraftl 2010) in architectural design, and how architectural meaning emerges through users' acts of possession, inhabitation, adaptation, and performance (Lees 2001; Llewellyn 2003, 2004; Kraftl 2006a, 2006b). My intimate look at the significance of the Montana house conveys the agency of the residents, namely Tootie and Joyce, but also Big Chief Darryl, Charles and his wife Wanda next door, and the Montana's Seventh Ward neighbors, in re-defining the material and social importance of the house, moving “beyond the territory of architectural ideals” where meaning is solely produced as material form by the architect/designer of a space to the visceral, fluid, and engaging ways inhabitants and users of spaces continually re-produce meaning in personal and resonant ways (Jenkins 2002: 226; Llewellyn 2003, 2004). With an emphasis on the micro-geographies of inhabitation and adaptation, this section highlights how the acts of the Montana family, from the ordinary and routine, like installing a pulley system in the front parlor to hold the Big Chief's large, regal Indian crowns off the ground, to the more active and heightened, such as Joyce's aggressive efforts to protect her family's collection of suits and Indian artifacts after Hurricane Katrina, have sustained the house as a space that is practical and relevant to the needs of their family and participants and onlookers in the Mardi Gras Indian tradition more generally.

The Montana family house further illustrates how the significance of the house derives from the various geographic, historic, and socio-cultural networks in which it is situated (Jenkins 2002; Jacobs 2006; Kraftl 2009). Tootie's participation in the Mardi Gras Indian tradition and the geometric rhythm of his suits inspired some of his architectural designs; other designs were inspired by the older architectural context around him, like the added bullseye detail. The house also physically conveys the constant creative exchange between his personal work as a building craftsman and a Mardi Gras Indian Chief, as well as the broader context of creative exchange between the artistic and performance traditions and community groups of the Seventh Ward. Because Tootie pointedly modified his house to physically convey the constant creative exchange between his personal work as a building craftsman and a Mardi Gras Indian Chief, as well as the broader context of creative exchange between the artistic and performance traditions and community groups of the Seventh Ward, we can also see with the unique case of the Montana family house how architecture is performative – imbued with significance through and as performance (Spitzer 2003; Kraftl 2006a).<sup>26</sup>

The material, but also the social significance of the house is determined by a changing assemblage of actors, performances, and socio-cultural contexts (Kraftl 2009, 2010). With the case of the Montana house, we specifically see how the significance of the building is constituted in relation to these various fields, as just pointed out, but also, importantly, in relation to the persistent, yet shifting built landscape. The immediate physical and social relationship of the Montana's house to the single shotgun owned by Joyce's son, Charles, directly next door, for example, is an important component in the building's significance. In our interview, Charles described this important interplay:

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<sup>26</sup> Nick Spitzer (2003) has explored the performative relationship between musical and architectural masters in New Orleans more closely.

See I've been a deejay for 35 years and a lot of people know me. When they pass here, they say, "That's Brother Charles' house. That's Tootie Montana's house." When they come around here for Mardi Gras, Brother Charles plays the music next door to the Tootie Montana house. You got the people dancing in the street, so that comes like a combination. (interview 4.3.08)

Since Katrina, the house has also become significant as an important site of local Indian history and Joyce's informal archive, but, compellingly, the Montana family has been bequeathed a lot on North Claiborne Avenue (close to the house on North Villere Street) for the erection of a formal museum dedicated to the life and work of Big Chief Tootie (field notes 12.4.07). Joyce is not actively involved in the creation of this museum; her son Darryl and his wife Sabrina have taken up the efforts to collaborate with the City of New Orleans and the Tulane City Center to establish, design and build this space (field notes, 6.10.08). When completed, the Tootie Montana Museum will serve as another interesting node or counter-point to Joyce's living archive on North Villere Street, redefining the family house in new and contingent ways.

## **Conclusion**

### **Everyday Geographies and Architectural Significance**

Architectural geographers uphold the value of carefully delving into the complex nature of individual buildings to better understand the localized and powerful ways through which built sites become the locus of identity, contestation, stability, or fascination (Domosh 1998; Ford 2001; Lees 2001; Kraftl 2010). Adhering to this research commitment, this chapter focuses on the process through which particular buildings come to represent and serve as sites of local significance for communities. I look to Peter Kraftl's very recent work on the *Hundertwasser-Haus* in Vienna, Austria (2009) and his conceptualizations of how the "extraordinary" or significant nature of built sites is produced through a "meshing" with the mundane. Kraftl's deliberations on Vienna's most visible and visited social-housing apartment building (2009: 113) leads him to consider how his subject matter departs from the "near hyper-ordinariness" of recent geographic research that seeks

to illuminate the routine, ordinary, and even non-discursive workings of the built landscape. And yet, Kraftl submits, significant architecture gains meaning through the work of the precise and idiosyncratic performative details of built sites and the routine uses of and performances in and around buildings by those who inhabit, use, or associate with them. Much like Kraftl, in this chapter I have deliberately explored how the everyday material and performative practices of the Sound Café and the Montana house intersect to produce these buildings as significant sites in New Orleans' post-Katrina built landscape, and how this “coproduction of the extraordinary” is constituted by users' “recursive” and “repetitive” interactions with my study sites (2009: 126).

The Sound Café and the intersections between the affective material features of the building and its everyday uses highlight the recursive nature of the extraordinary that Kraftl identifies. The tie to the “open,” everyday nature of the café and the broader-scaled impact of the Sound Café post-Katrina was noted in an interesting, offhand way by one of my interviewees: “all the steps that we're taking towards making our city a better place is showcased right here at the Sound Café” (Nakita Shavers interview, 6.27.08). Indeed the open, communal space of the Sound Café regularly offered a literal and figurative stage for all sorts of activities and events that were central to New Orleans' recovery after the hurricane, from youth music clinics, to non-violence media conferences, to formal political debates, to neighborhood safety meetings. The Sound Café is thus a valuable study site because it reveals how the recursive nature of material features, geographic location, and everyday practices (between and within these different elements) can quickly produce resonant meanings among a community of users (an important and contrary notion of place significance to the architectural age minimums upheld in standard preservation assessments).

With the Montana family house, by contrast, we more clearly see how repetitive acts endow a site with meaning over time. Situating the house within its various historical, geographic, material,

and performative contexts, we see how the meaning of repetitive everyday acts and the acts themselves have shifted over time to correspond to the evolving role and significance of the Montana house. The house today exists as a monument to the Seventh Ward's Creole architectural arts legacy, the home of Big Chief Tootie Montana (arguably the city's most prominent figure in the Mardi Gras Indian tradition), the workshop for Big Chief Darryl Montana, the site of a Carnival day block dance party, and the space of Joyce's informal Mardi Gras Indian archive. An ethno-historic study of the Montana family's double shotgun on North Villere Street helps to "make sense of the everyday architectural geographies played out in the present, but which are tied to the past" (Llewellyn 2003: 269).

My intimate explorations in this chapter on how the Sound Café and the Montana House have gained or maintained local importance in post-disaster New Orleans contributes to the small, but growing collection of studies in cultural geography that employ a performative frame to produce refined understandings of architectural import. This chapter also intentionally speaks to existing policies and practices in historic preservation that typically operationalize buildings as material, monumental, and temporally-bound (Cresswell and Hoskins 2008). By exploring the micro-geographies at play in defining the significance of the Sound Café and the Montana house, this chapter offers preservation scholars and practitioners a conceptual and empirical lens to address the performative material and embodied qualities of buildings and the active, visceral, relational, and often pragmatic ways built spaces become important to communities. In the next chapter I further explore the interrelationships between architecture and practice, looking specifically at how particular buildings in post-Katrina New Orleans facilitated the perpetuation of cultural practices and larger-scaled cultural traditions.

## Chapter Five

### **“That Place Goes Along With What We Do”: Architecture and the Perpetuation of Cultural Practices and Traditions**

#### **Introduction**

##### **“That Place Goes Along with What We Do”**

Big Chief Gerard Albert of the Uptown Guardians Mardi Gras Indian tribe grew up in Central City near the intersection of Second and Dryades streets, home to several neighborhood barrooms over the last few decades, including the H and R, the headquarters for the Uptown Guardians and Wild Magnolias Mardi Gras Indians, and the Sportsman’s Corner. As a teenager, Gerard snuck into Indian practice at H and R to learn the traditional songs, and when he was of age (or close), Gerard, like many Central City Indians, split his time between H and R and the Sportsman’s right next door, both bars serving a primarily black, working-class clientele. Because of the strong association of the bars and all the social activity on the block, Gerard (like many Central City residents) refers to the area generally, including both bars, as Second and Dryades. Today, only the Sportsman’s Corner remains, a modest, one-story white cinder-block building on the northeast corner of the intersection. During my interview with Big Chief Gerard, he discussed how the small barroom still manages to house some big activities, including two of the city’s most important cultural performance traditions – Mardi Gras Indians and second-line parades (Figure 5.1). “I tell you one thing, Second and Dryades will always be there. It will never die,” the Chief insisted. He continued:

That’s one place and one neighborhood that will always be the same, no matter how they try to tell you, because it goes along with what we do. You hear people on Mardi Gras go, ‘We’re going on Second and Dryades, the Indians are going to be down there’ or ‘We’re going to Second and Dryades, the second line’s going to stop over there....’ Something’s always going on. (interview 4.13.06)

Building on the conceptual explorations and empirical findings presented previously in my dissertation, this chapter explores Big Chief’s Gerard insight, which is how particular places in New



**Figure 5.1:** Golden Eagles Mardi Gras Indian tribe outside the Sportsman's Corner barroom on Mardi Gras Day, 2006 (Source: Andy Solevev, used with permission)

Orleans “go along with” what artists, performers, and tradition bearers “do.” In the case of the two study sites presented in this chapter, the Sportsman’s Corner barroom, just introduced, and Preservation Hall, a formal jazz concert hall, we see how the routine activities and performances that take place in and around these buildings also constitute the everyday workings of some of the city’s most prominent and closely related performance traditions – traditional jazz and brass band music, second-line parades and Mardi Gras Indian processions. I specifically consider the fundamental ways these traditions are sustained and passed on through embodied practices and more heightened performances and the role the Sportsman’s Corner and Preservation Hall play in this process of transmission.



While the practices and performances that take place in and around my study sites participate in the making of these places, as will be illustrated, the buildings also structure the nature of the activities that take place within them and, importantly, they mediate the coming together of like-minded or concerned individuals so that the practices and performances that define these places are supported, shared, and continually reproduced (Roach 1996; Adey 2008; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming). “Even at their most intimate moments of birth, creative moments and episodes connect with concrete social conditions,” Alan Watson, Michael Hoyler, and Christoph Mager contend in their overview of recent geographic scholarship on music and the city (2009: 860). My empirical findings resonate with the trio’s conceptual framing of the dynamic and dialectical ways creative or cultural production interacts with the built environment (see also Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming). This chapter thus attempts to situate cultural production within its material and social context (Watson et al. 2009), but, even more pointedly, to highlight the often overlooked and fundamental role of built spaces (both their material and lived elements) in enabling and perpetuating embodied practices and the more formal New Orleans cultural traditions they sustain.

Most of the literature in geography on the production or reproduction of cultural practices has focused on the making of cultural economies or cultural industries in urban environments (Scott 1999, 2000; Drake 2003; Hutton 2008, 2009). This body of research concerning cultural economies is principally invested in the predominant urban regeneration model that upholds the development and promotion of a “creative class,” a sector of skilled workers who straddle artistic and technological fields and produce the images, symbols, and concepts that fuel postindustrial, “knowledge” economies (Hutton 2009; Edensor et al. 2010a). As Tim Edensor and his colleagues have revealed in their recent edited compilation *Spaces of Vernacular Creativity: Rethinking the Cultural Economy* (2010b), underpinning the “creative class” model is the alignment of local cultural or artistic practices with market-ready activities. Economic-regeneration practices and policies centered on the

notion of “creativity” are thus invested in cultural expressions that are commodifiable and have explicit economic instrumentality, like fashion and web design, software development, and film and music production. Urban planners, policy makers, and academics have thus overlooked and even “disenfranchised” other meaningful cultural practices, which may not have direct market value, but foster community cohesion, distinction, or self-worth, as well as possessing expressive and affective value in their own right, practices Edensor and his cohorts have termed “vernacular creativity” (Edensor et al. 2010a: 18). While I do not use the term “vernacular creativity” in this chapter, I conceptually employ the same parameters in my use of cultural practices and performances to explore how routine and embodied activities transmit social values and meaning and also sustain New Orleans’ embedded cultural traditions.

Additionally, Norma Rantisi and Deborah Leslie (2010, Forthcoming), and Alison Bain (2010), among a number of cultural geographers, have attempted to remap the geographies of creative and cultural production. The “creative class” or “creative city” model upholds the primacy of urban environments and the “cultural (bohemian) quarter” or state-supported “creative cluster” for creative production, because, most essentially, such proximity mitigates the financial risks and professional failures that are “intrinsic to aesthetic experimentation” and the making of cultural industries (Edensor et al. 2010a; Rantisi & Leslie 2010: 35). Geographers interested in everyday or vernacular creative practices have thus also pushed beyond privileged considerations of the urban and formal (often state-sponsored or promoted) spaces of creativity to “informal sites” or mundane, peripheral, or marginal built spaces and environments, “the physical and social resources of everyday life” that sustain not just the economic, but also the social and aesthetic dimensions of cultural production and reproduction (Hoyler & Mager 2005; Watson et al. 2009; Bain 2010; Bromberg 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010: 35, Forthcoming). This chapter thus builds on burgeoning efforts by cultural geographers to highlight the embedded, informal, or ordinary built spaces in which creativity is

pursued and produced. My research approach and ethnographic engagement with the Sportsman's Corner and Preservation Hall, however, permits me to augment this body of research work by taking an intimate look at how localized cultural practices and performances are produced and reproduced within the context of everyday architectural geographies.

My conceptualizations in this chapter on the perpetuation of embodied practices and performances are strongly influenced by Diana Taylor's work with knowledge transmission in her 2003 book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. As a performance-studies scholar, Taylor upholds expressive, embodied culture as a system of "learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge" (2003: 16). Focusing on Latin America, Taylor outlines the legacy of the colonizing project on indigenous and, ultimately, new world systems of knowledge in the western hemisphere. Though, Taylor posits, cultural practices have long been a means to conserve and perpetuate social meaning and identity in Latin America, such expressions did not easily fall under European colonial control. As a result, colonial powers valorized the written word, which was allotted to the work of a specialized, elite few and able to be easily contained and controlled even from their overseas posts. During the colonial conquest of the Americas, the written word, thus, was endowed with authority, and embodied practices, in turn, were devalued as legitimate knowledge systems, a worldview that carries over into contemporary, postcolonial settings. Taylor outlines how the "rift" in knowledge transmission is not between the written and spoken word, but, more precisely, "between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)" (2003: 19). The archive of "enduring materials" is typically the place where such records are kept, and because the archive as a material place can be monitored and controlled, it can also "sustain power" across distance and over time (2003: 19). The repertoire of "ephemeral" performances and materials, on the other hand, "requires presence" in order for knowledge to be

reproduced; the improvised and “nonreproducible” nature of the repertoire typically resists regulation and can even elude authority (2003: 20).<sup>27</sup>

In Taylor’s conception, the archive and the repertoire are not simply a binary system; they work in tandem to convey meaning alongside other systems of knowledge and power, such as the visual and the virtual. Taylor’s work, however, does not deliberate explicitly on the role of spatial systems in the social act of knowledge transmission. While the built environment transmits meaning in ways very different than Taylor’s “archive” and “repertoire,” architectural spaces, as this dissertation explores, also profoundly structure social relations and the embodied acts that perpetuate systems of knowledge. Taylor’s “repertoire” is a valuable conceptual tool, because it accounts for the knowledge and meaning that is stored and sustained through embodied acts, and it speaks to the ways in which some of the everyday practices and routine performances that take place in and around my study sites participate in the perpetuation of the brass-band and jazz music, second-line parade, and Mardi Gras Indian masking traditions, but also, importantly, how these embodied practices have been devalued or overlooked despite their fundamental role in sustaining some of the city’s iconic cultural traditions. In order to bridge performance theory more explicitly to spatial practices, however, I look to the work of another performance studies scholar – Joseph Roach.

Roach, like Taylor, embraces embodied practices as a system of knowledge transmission, more specifically social memory, through his notion of “kinesthetic imagination” (1996: 26). Roach, though, by contrast, calls attention to the crucial role of architectural sites or “vortices of behavior” in facilitating acts of “kinesthetic imagination” (1996: 28). According to Roach, “vortices of

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<sup>27</sup> While Taylor’s (2009) repertoire underlines the improvised, contingent, and subversive characteristics of embodied practice, she does also acknowledge how performance systems can be used as tools of transfer and dominance by those in political power.

behavior” are necessary to stage performative practices in order to share them, to legitimize them, to intensify them, and to *reproduce* them. While Roach’s “vortices of behavior” result from the “pull of social necessity,” the material form and figuration of these sites also have profound influence on the performances that take place within them (1996: 28). According to Roach, buildings channel practices into collective events or performances, they choreograph movements and practices through their restrictions and access to space within the building themselves and as part of larger built environments, and they foreground relationships of users and social networks. Geographers interested in the role of the material environment and “place-based attributes” in cultural and creative production have similarly produced conceptual reflections and research findings that highlight the ways buildings “mediate the embodied practices and social encounters that underpin creative experimentation,” and, ultimately, wider processes of cultural production and reproduction (Hoyler & Mager 2005; Watson et al. 2009; Bain 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming).

In the next section I present the Sportsman’s Corner barroom, which, as noted, is celebrated for its prominent role in the Mardi Gras Indian masking and second line traditions in Uptown New Orleans. The barroom, however, is significant to participants in these traditions, many of whom come from Central City or other marginalized, black, working-class communities, because it fundamentally offers a space of support and safety that permits tradition bearers and supporting community members to participate freely in the activities that define and sustain their cultural traditions. Additionally, the Sportsman’s Corner case study considers how the simple architectural space of the barroom is adaptable and facilitates the array of everyday activities that constitute the defining cultural activities of the Central City community it serves. As opposed to the modest space of the Sportsman’s Corner, the succeeding section presents Preservation Hall, an iconic and formal jazz hall that was the seat of the city’s traditional jazz revival in the 1960s. Situated in the French Quarter and housed in a converted 18<sup>th</sup> century Creole-styled townhouse, the venue is distinguished

by its long-running calendar of intimate, traditional jazz performances and a run-down, but captivating ambience. This chapter highlights how the physical and programmatic continuity of Preservation Hall grounds musicians in the experience of recreating New Orleans' traditional jazz for new listeners, while concert-goers generate meaning and a connection to jazz perpetuation through the ways they viscerally and emotionally engage with the evocative building and the intimate jazz concerts that take place there. The Preservation Hall case study reveals how a run-down and tactile material environment participates in and even encourages the passing on of traditional jazz. In the concluding section of the chapter, I consider how different types of architectural spaces are needed to accommodate the diverse activities necessary to sustain New Orleans' cultural traditions, while also highlighting how, at the most fundamental level, buildings are needed to generate the social relationships and everyday practices that constitute these traditions.

## **Sportsman's Corner**

### **Second and Dryades: The Cultural Crossroads of Uptown New Orleans**

2433 Dryades Street or the Sportsman's Corner barroom is a humble space – a low-rise, one-story cinderblock building with tinted plate-glass windows and doors (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). Mr. Louis Elloie, the original proprietor of the Sportsman's Corner, bought the building from his landlord in 1978, after a small fire damaged the building, and he refurbished the interior to be just as unpretentious as the building's exterior. The low black ceiling and wood-paneled walls create a cool, cozy feel, and the actual barroom consists essentially of an eight-foot long bar along the east wall and a scattered collection of two-top tables and padded chairs that make up the seating area (Figure 5.4). The walls are decorated with photos of the second-line parade groups that use the space for meetings and other regulars of the barroom community, and often the low-lit room is accentuated with a sparkly banner or ceiling streamers still hanging from one of the many weekend parties, celebrating a customer's birthday, wedding, graduation, or the like.

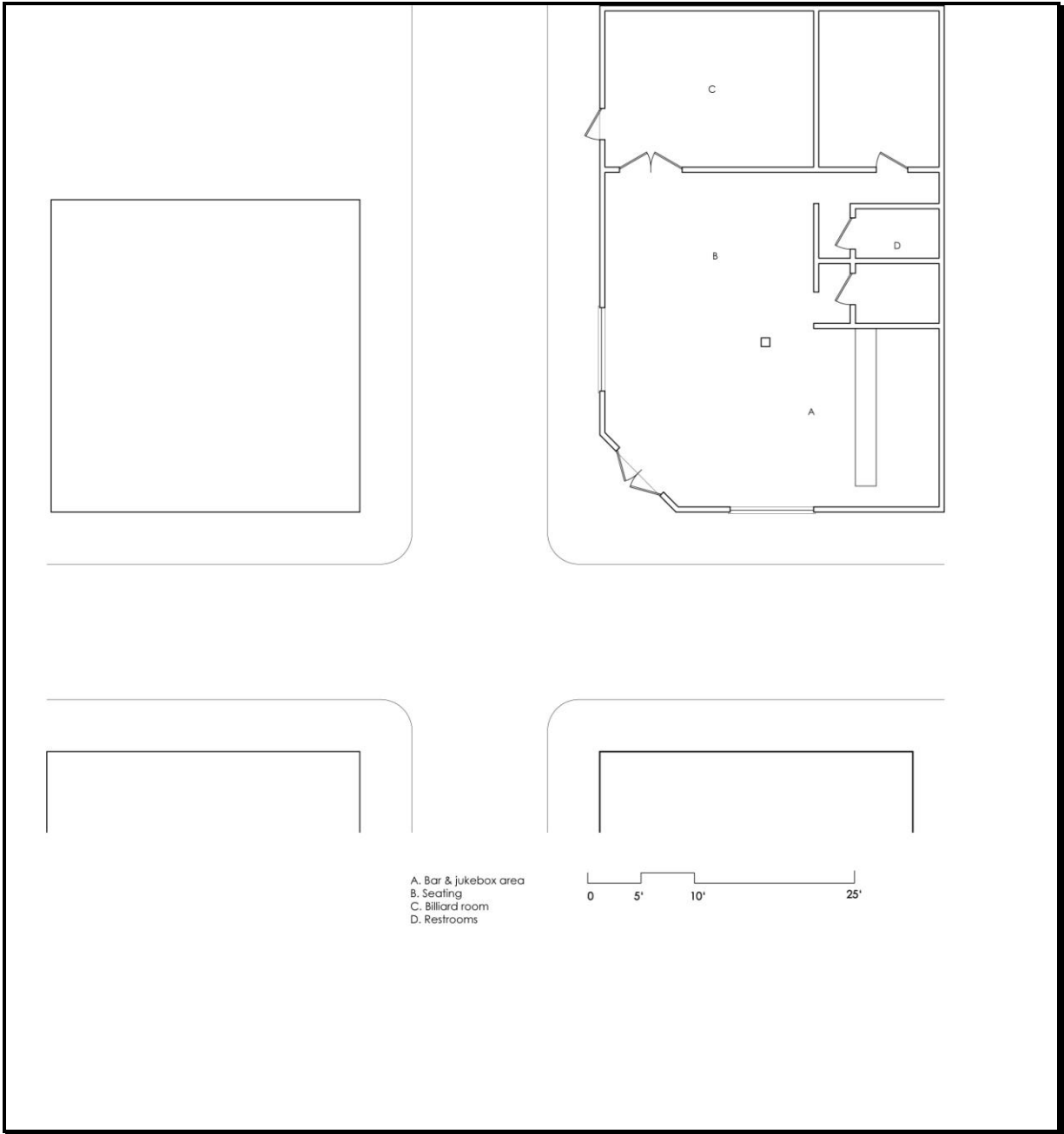
The Sportsman's Corner building was built in the 1960s, a more contemporary structure than many buildings in the Central City neighborhood (also a National Register Historic District) that were built in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The built landscape of Central City has been identified as a "historic resource" and National Register Historic District, home to a significant collection of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century shotgun houses (Central City National Register Historic District Nomination 1982), but the black working-class neighborhood is commonly identified today as the Uptown seat of New Orleans' African-American performance traditions, specifically the Mardi Gras Indian masking and second-line parade traditions.<sup>28</sup> As this section will elaborate, while this inner-city New Orleans neighborhood has suffered more than many in the city from under-population,



**Figure 5.2:** Exterior of the Sportsman's Corner, winter 2007 (Source: photograph by author).

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<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, the Central City National Register Historic District nomination (Central City National Register Historic District Nomination 1982) does not mention the legacy of the African-American ethnic community that helped build the neighborhood and has defined the lived landscape of the area for decades. Only the early European settlement history that includes the Irish, Germans, and Jews, is noted, skirting the contemporary make-up of the neighborhood, which points to the racialized and classed critiques of preservation that will be presented in chapter six.



**Figure 5.3:** Floor plan of the Sportsman's Corner barroom (Source: Helen Juergens/Cornerstones Project).





**Figure 5.4:** The main bar at the Sportsman's Corner, winter 2007 (Source: photograph by author).

blight, disinvestment, and crime in recent decades (Maggi 2007), it is also celebrated for its cultural vibrancy and the Sportsman's Corner serves a formal role in facilitating both the Mardi Gras Indian and second line parade traditions. "I wouldn't want to live anywhere but this part of town because of all the happenings, especially at Second and Dryades... We've got Mardi Gras Indians and second lines and regular parades," Leslie Albert, a longtime Sportsman's regular, declared in our interview (5.21.08), articulating an enthusiasm for the barroom's role in the area's prominent cultural traditions that was embraced by all members of the Sportsman's community.

The Sportsman's Corner and other participating barrooms near the intersection of Second and Dryades are recognized by regulars and New Orleans residents not associated with the bar as the place Uptown to ceremonially observe the convening of Mardi Gras Indian tribes on Mardi Gras day and Saint Joseph's Night, the other principal masking holiday. "Mardi Gras, it's very nice,"

Sportsman's regular Jacob Forstall explained in our interview (6.21.08), "cause the Mardi Gras Indians, they always stop right in this door" (Figure 5.1). Second and Dryades also facilitates the ritualistic gathering that takes place in the weeks leading up to Mardi Gras day, particularly the weekly sessions of Mardi Gras Indian practice when tribal members gather to practice their drumming and traditional chants and the Indians and the many on-lookers go "backward and forward" between the Sportsman's and other nearby barrooms that house the actual practices, like Handa Wanda, the barroom of the Wild Magnolia Mardi Gras Indians directly next door to the Sportsman's Corner on Dryades Street (Gerard Albert interview, 4.13.06).

While the Mardi Gras Indian tradition is marked annually by two principal holidays,<sup>29</sup> the second-line parades are weekly performance rituals, Sunday afternoon "moving street festivals" that celebrate the anniversaries of the city's distinctive social aid and benevolent clubs, consisting of club members, one or more hired brass bands, and the "second line" or willing participants that jump in and follow the procession (Regis 1999: 472, 474). The Sportsman's Corner used to serve as a meeting space for the city's oldest parading benevolent society, the Young Men Olympian Junior Benevolent Association (YMO), but since the YMO established their own physical headquarters just blocks away on South Liberty Street, the Sportsman's has become the organization's "official barroom" and members of the club are regularly found socializing at the corner bar (Troy McCowan interview, 4.14.06). The Sportsman's also serves as the organizational meeting place for much younger Central City parade clubs, like the New Generation and Divine Ladies. The bar regularly hosts "comin' out" parties that precede the weekly second-line parades and honor the club's designated queen or king of the year. Following the weekly Sunday afternoon second lines, the

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<sup>29</sup> Another important annual component of the Indian tradition in recent years is "Super Sunday" – two organized street parades, one with Uptown Indian tribes and one with Downtown Indian tribes and brass bands, which take place mid-to-late spring.

barroom hosts a post-parade party with a dee-jay, and sometimes more formal get-togethers are coordinated by the second-line clubs that include food, decorations, and large crowds of friends and family. Other heightened uses of the Sportsman's Corner by social aid and parading organizations include weekend dances or fish fries that double as fundraisers and many of the regular celebrations that happen at the barroom, just noted above, are in honor of participants in the second line tradition.

Due to its central role in the organizational and social life of the Uptown second line tradition, the Sportsman's has also become a tangible and significant point of reference in the lived landscape of the Uptown second line, serving as a starting point or "stop" in most parades. A "stop" is an important component of the second line parade performance that in one sense is very practical, because it provides a needed break for the parading clubs as they march for hours, snaking through their neighborhoods and temporarily reclaiming their streets from the "quotidian order of inner-city poverty" (Regis 1999: 472, 2001). The stop or second-line starting point, though, also serves a more symbolic role as a deliberate, "collective gesture" of tribute to the neighborhood barroom and, more generally, the importance of the neighborhood the barroom serves (Regis 1999, 2001).<sup>30</sup>

The Sportsman's Corner was the third black working-class barroom Uptown and the second in the Central City neighborhood to re-open after the storm. The Sportsman's Corner was not only one of the first barrooms to open for business in New Orleans post-disaster, it was also one of the

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<sup>30</sup> Helen Regis' ethnographic work on the New Orleans second-line community explores in-depth the way the performance of the second line serves not so much as a contemporary tribute to cultural vitality and significance as asserted here, but as an "important locus of historical memory and consciousness" for the city's black working-class communities (1999: 494). Through commemorative practices within the second-line, like a "stop" at the home of an esteemed member of the community who passed or sporting t-shirts in memoriam of a lost friend or family member, Regis demonstrates how parade performances keep the memory and meaning of important people and places alive within the community (2001: 756).

few places in the city after the storm that offered black, working-class residents in the city's severely flooded and desolate neighborhoods a space to gather, watch, and participate in the second-line tradition (Figure 5.5). The Sportsman's Corner has, thus, become a crucial space for Uptown second-line clubs to acknowledge the hard-hit, but still vibrant cultural legacy of Central City and other black, working-class neighborhoods that participate in the tradition. While the Sportsman's Corner is a significant part of the heightened and highly visible activities of the Mardi Gras Indian and second-line parade traditions, it is through providing a supportive and safe environment for tradition bearers and supporting community members, that it has become a crucial component in the cultural vitality of Second and Dryades.



**Figure 5.5:** VIP Ladies and Kids second line literally parading into the barroom, winter 2007  
(Source: photograph by author).

## **“You Just Try to Help Everybody:” The Elloie’s Legacy of Generosity**

In 1973, Louis Elloie opened the Sportsman’s Corner as a barroom for African-American professionals in the Central City neighborhood. After his day job at the Van Huesen shower door company, Mr. Louis, as he is known to the Sportsman’s Corner community, would click open his front barroom door and welcome his regular and committed set of customers for evening drinks. He quickly established a legacy of hospitality and generosity characterized by his willingness to provide the use of his barroom to neighborhood cultural groups and organizations, as just illustrated, and also to provide work, money, or other forms of assistance to help customers through hard personal situations. Mr. Louis was regularly overheard asking a customer, “How much do you need?” (Teresa Elloie interview, 4.14.06; field notes 5.30.08) During my fieldwork, barroom regulars repeatedly recounted instances of Mr. Louis’ benevolent assistance. Mr. Louis’ daughter remembers him covering customers’ late home-insurance payments and hiring and paying a roofer to fix one neighbor’s fire-damaged home (field notes 6.5.08). The only person longtime regular Leslie Albert (interview 5.21.08) knew to call for help when she was stranded in the middle of the night with a flat tire was Mr. Louis. A neighbor and Mardi Gras Indian elder with the Seminole Warriors, Shawn Landry, respectfully recalls the repeated occasions Mr. Louis would cut him off from drinking at the bar: “He used to tell me, ‘You’re spending too much of your hard-earned money. Now how many bar owners will tell you that?’” (field notes 5.30.08). Even in more routine ways, the Sportsman’s Corner proprietor created a space of generosity and assurance by, for example, walking customers to their cars at night, offering free drinks to his regulars on Christmas day, or handing out candy to the neighborhood kids on Halloween (Cheryl Pierre interview, 6.8.08; Shelley Houston interview, 5.21.08).

Mr. Louis suffered a massive stroke after Hurricane Katrina and a second stroke after Hurricane Rita, the category five hurricane that landed in southwest Louisiana three weeks after

Katrina. Steven Elloie, Mr. Louis' grandson, had worked with his grandfather some prior to the storm, but the former truck driver never believed, in his own words, "my profession would be in the barroom business" (interview 6.28.08). The only family member available and capable to assume management of the bar, Steven took over daily operations in the fall of 2005, while his mother, Teresa, took care of Mr. Louis, which, importantly, included bringing him to the barroom on a regular basis (Figure 5.6). Under Mr. Louis' management, the barroom was known as an "old-timers hangout," functioning mostly as an after-work spot for middle-aged professionals in the neighborhood (Teresa Elloie interview, 4.14.06). Steven, only 25 when he took over the barroom after Katrina, extended the bar's hours of operation, converted the back kitchen into a pool room, hired weekend dee-jays, and introduced "upgrades," like wireless internet, a big flat screen TV, a new jukebox, and an ATM machine, pulling a younger crowd into the fold of the "real settled bar" and making for interesting new inter-generational dynamics post-Katrina (Figure 5.7) (Teresa Elloie interview, 4.14.06; Cheryl Pierre 6.6.08).

Yet, longtime regulars still consider Steven's business manner and philosophy to be in keeping with the work and generosity of his grandfather – "You can see Steven and say, 'I need' or 'I don't have' or 'Can I get a drink until this date?' and, you know, he's really the same person as Mr. Louis is, like a second Mr. Louis'" (Shelley Houston interview, 5.21.08). I have watched Steven willingly open his bar early when he had customers standing outside or calling him on his cell phone. "I just needed somewhere cool to come," one man said in thanks to Steven when he pried his front door open early on a summer afternoon (field notes, 6.19.07). Customers have shared personal accounts of Steven loaning them money, and Steven hires regulars at the barroom to help with various, odd jobs, like Jacob Forstall, one of the central Sportsman personalities:

[Jacob] don't have a degree, but he's a great worker and that's just something he picked up in him. And that's something he picked up by being around here. And that's something that I picked up here, you just try to help everybody. You see somebody with a flat out here [by



**Figure 5.6:** Three generations of the Elloie family – Steven, Louis, and Teresa Elloie (left to right), spring 2006 (Source: photograph by author).



**Figure 5.7:** Mr. Louis' Jazz Funeral brought out the bar's "old timers" and younger regulars in honor of the bar's original proprietor, May 2008 (Source: photograph by author).

the barroom], you might see five or six people helping them. I think that's one of the things that basically holds everybody together around here. (Steven Elloie interview, 06.28.08)

This sense of “being held together” was especially poignant after the city’s post-Katrina mass evacuation when basic public services and normal business operations were slow to be restored, and Sportsman’s customers needed a source of stability and support. My research findings also revealed that the Sportsman’s Corner was crucially viewed not only as a supportive or stable space, but also a “safe” one for Central City residents and barroom regulars in post-Katrina New Orleans.

### **“Inside the Bar I’m Safe:” Violence and Vitality in Central City**

While the intersection of Second and Dryades is celebrated for its cultural vibrancy, it is also an area of New Orleans prominently flagged as a hot spot of crime and violence (Maggi 2007). During my fieldwork at the Sportsman’s Corner, police cars were constantly patrolling past the barroom with their lights flashing and the area was also monitored by a system of crime surveillance cameras installed by the New Orleans Police Department. The footage from these cameras led to the arrest of one suspect for a shooting at the intersection in the spring of 2008 and the prosecution of eight drug dealers that operated out of a house on Second Street near the barroom in the spring of 2007 (McCarthy 2007, 2008), but instances of crime and violence regularly occurred and went undocumented around the barroom during my almost two-years of participant observation, including a shooting that happened just outside the barroom in November of 2007 (Shooting Victim Dies Hours Later; Also, Two People Shot in Uptown Carjacking 2007; field notes 9.10.07).

The constant policing of the area has important social repercussions to be discussed below, but the violence that is often used to characterize Second and Dryades and Central City as New Orleans’ “epicenter of crime” (Maggi 2007: B1) also defines Sportsman’s regulars’ understandings of their barroom as a protected space from what happens “on the corner” (Jacob Forstall interview, 6.21.08). “As long as I’m inside the bar I’m safe. It’s people that bring the violence around here.



They might run from somewhere else and come around here, but it's really no violence actually taking place here," Shelley Houston explained to me in our interview (5.21.08), conveying a sense that the Sportsman's Corner physically shields customers from street violence, but also that the community of regulars actively participates in sustaining the barroom as a safe haven. Sportsman's customers indicate that safety at the barroom over the years has been about developing an intimate and regular crowd, so, in the words of Jacob Forstall (interview 6.21.08), "you know somebody is always going to be watching over you." He continued,

If I go to another club, they're not going to see that I get to my car safe or what's going on either [i.e. noticing threats to his safety]. If I have too much to drink in the Sportsman's lounge, Steven will take me home... People show more care. They just won't let me walk out the bar or not show me concern.

I personally was "watched over" on a number of occasions at Second and Dryades, including a spring afternoon in 2007 when I was supposed to meet Teresa at the barroom before it opened for business that day. I arrived before anyone else and was waiting by the front door for only a moment when a neighbor and friend of Steven's came up to me: "I just called Steven and told him you're here. I don't want you outside by yourself." He waited with me until Steven arrived a few minutes later and promptly escorted me inside the back door of the barroom (field notes, 4.20.07).

Since Katrina, there have been violations of the safety that the Sportsman's Corner provides, including one extreme instance on the night of June 23, 2006 when a team of police officers with the Special Operations Division was pursuing a pair of African-American men up Dryades Street (Finch 2007; Reckdahl 2007). According to customers at the Sportsman's Corner that night, like Leslie Albert (interview 5.21.08) and Jacob Forstall (interview 6.21.08), the officers stormed into the Sportsman's Corner and held them and the other customers and two bartenders on-duty at gunpoint, while they aggressively questioned them about the whereabouts of the two suspects. Because of the commotion, as Leslie recalls (interview 5.21.08), "Steven came out the back and

asked them could he help them, what was the problem? The police said to Steven, ‘We want the manager.’ Before Steven could tell them he was the manager, they just started beating him, and we saw them flip him on that floor and Lord, that was a hard flip, because we heard the flip.” Steven was arrested that night and charged with “battery of a police officer” and “resisting arrest,” but the charges against Steven were dropped when the arresting officers failed to appear in court (Finch 2007; Reckdahl 2007). Recently, in January of 2010, the City of New Orleans settled with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as part of a lawsuit the civil-rights organization filed on behalf of the Elloie family, charging the New Orleans Police Department for falsely arresting and violently beating Steven, as well as carrying out an insufficient and biased investigation of the arrest under the department’s Public Integrity Bureau (McCarthy 2010). The trauma of the episode that summer, however, threatened the stability and safety of the Sportsman’s Corner so carefully maintained by the Elloie family and the barroom community. “In 35 years, we never had any trouble, no fights, no nothing. The police never crossed the seal of the door,” Teresa was quoted as saying in the local newspaper after the family filed the lawsuit against the New Orleans Police Department in the spring of 2007 (Reckdahl 2007: A22). Since the incident, Steven and his mother have invested in security cameras and an entry system for the bar that requires anyone on the street to ring a doorbell before being “buzzed in” or let into the barroom.

These tensions between combating violence in the Second and Dryades area and subjecting innocent community members, including cultural tradition bearers, to regular and sometimes unfair policing is an ongoing struggle. During my fieldwork, police sometimes badgered second-line club members and participants after a Sunday afternoon parade, turning on their sirens and aggressively forcing people immediately off the streets and into the Sportsman’s Corner or other nearby barrooms. On Mardi Gras day 2010, during an evening convening of several tribes outside the Sportsman’s Corner, six squad cars swarmed the Second and Dryades intersection with lights

flashing and sirens wailing, forcing all the Indians and others participating in the annual block party to clear the streets. Officers told bystanders they were responding to a neighbor's complaint about "Indians with guns," while Central City residents and Mardi Gras Indians felt the force used by police was unnecessary and also that it undermined the sanctity of their long-held cultural tradition since Mardi Gras Indian tribes, like Big Chief Gerard's Uptown Guardians, have been closing their Mardi Gras day celebrations at Second and Dryades for over five decades (Reckdahl 2010).

In light of these struggles for tradition bearers to sustain a space where they can participate freely in the cultural practices and ceremonial performances that constitute their cultural traditions, at the most fundamental level these community members need a space where they can safely and easily come together. When I asked Big Chief Gerard Albert how the Sportsman's Corner is important to the Mardi Gras Indian tradition, he simply replied, "It is important, because that's where we first began. That's where we started up as kids, growing up in the neighborhood. That was the bar where my mom and dad [hung out]" (4.13.06). In a similar way, Troy McCowan, a contemporary of Gerard's and an almost lifelong member of the Young Men Olympians (YMO) Junior Benevolent Association, considers the Sportsman to be important to his club simply because it sits at the crux of his club's Central City community: "I think it's really important, because a lot of them [YMO members] are from around that way. We all bummed around there. Weekends you see all the members around there. You can go around there and call the roll. Most all of them will be there" (interview, 4.14.06). Big Chief Gerard and Troy are two of the bar's "old-timers" who can state with authority that "the Sportsman's is the only one of the old bars left" in Central City, now that joints like Big Crips, the Third Base, and the H and R are no longer (Gerard Albert interview, 4.13.06; Troy McCowan interview, 4.14.06). The Sportsman's Corner is thus one of the only operating Central City barrooms that has provided tradition bearers across several generations, from Gerard's and Troy's predecessors who lived near the barroom to interested community members

that are part of the bar's "younger crowd," a safe and accessible space to convene and participate in the everyday practices and more heightened performances that constitute their cultural traditions.

### **"Flexible Spaces," Accessibility, and Perpetuation**

During my recorded interviews, I had the opportunity to ask barroom regulars, in different variations, "Is there anything about the Sportsman's Corner, the building itself, that makes it special or different as a barroom?" Consistently, customers named the bar's simple amenities as important "architectural" elements that "make everybody feel comfortable" (Shelley Houston interview, 5.28.08), like security cameras and the juke box. Cheryl Pierre's (interview 6.8.08) response to my question was a typical one: "I mean the rest of the bars have the same – TVs and jukeboxes....and I've been in all the bars around there. It's just the fact of that being Mr. Louis' bar." What makes the humble building Mr. Louis refurbished over three decades ago different from other barrooms in New Orleans, according to regulars, is that it is a supportive, safe, and comfortable place for Central City residents to gather and also participate in a number of traditions that culturally distinguish the neighborhood, as well as New Orleans. Customers thus do not identify the space of the building nor any of its actual architectural features as relevant to its significance, which speaks to my findings and reflections in the previous chapter about the role of practices and performances in constituting architectural meaning.

With the case of the Sportsman's Corner, however, we also see how such a simple space permits a wide range of uses and performances that are important to sustain some of New Orleans' most prominent cultural traditions, what Norma Rantisi and Deborah Leslie (forthcoming) have termed "flexible spaces" (see also Watson et al. 2009; Bain 2010). Beyond the performances and daily uses already described, in the course of my field study, I recorded second-line clubs transforming the back pool room into a dressing room to get ready for their parades, community members using the barroom as a meeting point to jump in and join a passing second-line parade, or

Mardi Gras Indian elders and interested community members exchanging information about events and issues concerning the tradition after Katrina (field notes 4.6.08, 3.4.07, 5.8.08). The building thus facilitates a wide array of activities that constitute the second line and Mardi Gras Indian traditions, but it also, crucially, encourages these activities to happen “in a social way” (Adey 2008: 40). The Sportsman’s Corner mediates the coming together of people similarly concerned and passionate about the second line and Mardi Gras Indian traditions, so that the embodied practices that sustain these cultural traditions (Taylor 2003), can be observed, performed, and, crucially, shared among all those present (Roach 1996; Adey 2008).

As this case study carefully illustrates, many of the participants in these cultural traditions and the communities in which they are rooted are marginalized, a marginalization that was further intensified in post-Katrina New Orleans. The fact that the Sportsman’s Corner could facilitate such a range of daily uses and more heightened performances thus became more poignant, since there were few venues in Central City and even all of Uptown New Orleans after the storm where participants in the Mardi Gras Indians and second-line traditions could find the assurance, safety, and sociability needed to encourage and nurture their cultural practices (Edensor et al. 2010). Additionally, the Sportsman’s Corner, the building itself, is marginalized. Because the Sportsman’s Corner is architecturally so humble and because many of the activities it houses are mundane, it is a site that is undervalued or overlooked as crucial to New Orleans’ cultural-performance traditions. In discussing my research with New Orleans residents not associated with the barroom, for example, while many recognized Second and Dryades as a popular spot for the convening of Mardi Gras Indians on Carnival day, few actually identified the Sportsman’s Corner as a significant component of this or other heightened events at the intersection. Also of relevance to this research project, the barroom has never been identified as a significant built and cultural resource in formal preservation, planning, or cultural economy assessments, assessments that were reinstated or intensified as part

of the city's recovery efforts following Hurricane Katrina. And yet, the Sportsman's Corner case study underlines how "informal sites" of cultural production (Rantisi & Leslie 2010: 34; see also Hoyle & Mager 2005; Bain 2010; Rantisi & Leslie Forthcoming), due to their ordinary and embedded nature, crucially offer marginalized communities accessible routes to sustaining and transmitting cultural practices. While the Sportsman's Corner is a modest and informal site of cultural perpetuation in New Orleans, the following case study considers how Preservation Hall, as a formal landmark and physically commanding and evocative space works to perpetuate New Orleans' jazz and brass-band traditions.

## **Preservation Hall**

### **Presenting Traditional Jazz in "the Truest Way Possible"**

In 1954, Larry Borenstein opened the "Associated Artists Studio" on the ground story of 726 Saint Peter Street, a converted early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Creole-styled townhouse just two blocks off the Mississippi River in the heart of the French Quarter. In addition to housing a gallery space, 726 Saint Peter Street was the temporary residence of a number of local and nationally renowned artists in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, such as documentary photographers Woods Whitesell and Dan Leyrer, Swedish painter Knute Heldner, and famed portraitist Noel Rockmore (Long 1968; Jenny Perez interview, 5.19.08). The artistic activity that characterized 726 Saint Peter Street also grew to include regular music concerts in the back, bricked courtyard that featured the underemployed and fading masters of the city's original jazz traditions. These informal performances met with such delight among Borenstein's "bohemian" social circle, that in 1961 the art collector converted his gallery space into a concert hall devoted exclusively to New Orleans' traditional jazz (Sancton 2006; Souther 2006; John Longenecker interview, 2.25.08). Many of New Orleans' traditional jazz virtuosos had left the city decades earlier to tour with prominent big jazz bands during the swing era of the 1930s and '40s, but as that musical style was pushed to the periphery in the 1950s and 60s, the former

touring musicians returned to New Orleans out of work and, many of them, in poor health (Sancton 2006; John Longenecker interview, 2.25.08). Out of fervent concern for New Orleans' aging community of traditional jazz musicians and their dying craft, regulars at Bornenstein's informal jazz concerts formed the "New Orleans Society for the Preservation of Traditional Jazz" (Jupiter 1975; Sancton 2006). As the society formalized as a self-identified, "non-profit cooperative" to revive traditional jazz by reinvigorating the careers of some of the city's earliest jazz musicians, the name and mission of the society's music venue took hold – "Preservation Hall" (Jupiter 1975: 3).

Two of the prominent jazz-lovers in this preservation circle were Allan and Sandra Jaffe, a newlywed couple from Philadelphia, who were handed over the workings of the jazz venue in 1961. Allan and Sandra Jaffe continued to develop an environment that encouraged the venue's community of performers, mostly African-American men, to play their music with comfort and respect (Sancton 2006). As Allan's son Ben, the Creative Director and heir to the Preservation Hall legacy since Allan's passing in 1987, reflected in our interview (4.3.08):

I mean if you look at other New Orleans bands during that period of time, or other New Orleans jazz bands, they would be promoted as Dixieland jazz bands.... They were wearing striped vests and garters on their arms and straw hats, you know. My dad was completely bucking everything to have the band presented in a completely different way. In the truest way possible.

This commitment to a natural playing environment led to a presentation of the artists regularly described in early articles about the jazz venue as "respectful," having a "pared-down elegance" (Jupiter 1975; Allen n.d.). The musicians, often dressed in suits and ties, sat in straight-backed, wooden chairs at the front of the music hall, not raised up on a stage or platform, so audience members were "confronted with earth level music" (Figure 5.8) (Allen n.d.). The mostly white audience members seated on the wooden benches or the cushions directly at the feet of the performers, thus had a direct engagement with the musicians and their music. John Longenecker



**Figure 5.8:** The Kid Sheik Band performing at Preservation Hall circa the 1970s (Source: Preservation Hall archive, used with permission)

(interview 2.2.508), a writer and musician who experienced Preservation Hall in the early '60s as an adolescent and fledging clarinet player, recalls that in a still racially segregated New Orleans, such physical proximity and intimacy between the audience and the performers was profound.<sup>31</sup> Also during these early years of operating Preservation Hall, the Jaffes made the decision to keep their concerts courteously focused on the performers, and opted, contrary to typical business logic, to not sell drinks or food.

As the Jaffes introduced more traditional jazz players into the fold of this nurturing music scene, a basic, predictable music calendar was quickly established. Handbills from as early as 1962

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<sup>31</sup> Still today, most performers at Preservation Hall are African-American, while most of the staff and listening audience are white. During my fieldwork, racial dynamics were only occasionally noted in passing by the black performers. Based on these conversations, more important to the performers than concerns about racial divides at the Hall is exposure to the venue's international audience and being part of the venue's revered musical community (field notes 10.8.07, 1.26.08; Troy Doucet interview, 3.19.08).



show a different band for every night of the week and a performance rotation that stayed in place with little variation. The predictable calendar lent an established air to the business, buttressing the careers of the Hall's rotating musicians with an important, consistent gig while also providing audience-goers a reliable opportunity to experience traditional New Orleans jazz. The Hall gates opened every night of the week at 8:00 and the shows always started at 8:30, going to 12:30 with four 50 minute sets and 10 minute intermissions.

While the trademark Preservation Hall character and concert calendar format was quickly established with only slight variation, what did change with the performances were the large crowds that began streaming through the gates on a nightly basis. After two years of working in the red and struggling to support the performing musicians on union wages, the Hall's popularity suddenly ballooned, thanks in part to the unique physical appeal of the venue and Allan Jaffe's brilliant business decision to expose a worldwide listening audience to the sounds of traditional New Orleans jazz and make a name for his venue by sending out a touring band under the Preservation Hall name (Sancton 2006; Souther 2006). As the tourist traffic through the Hall began to increase in the mid-1960s, the French Quarter itself transitioned from being a principally working-class, residential and Sicilian neighborhood to an increasingly touristy and commercialized section of the city (Souther 2006), and the audience make-up at the Hall shifted from being mostly locals to being mostly out-of-towners, with the exception of the staff and roster of local traditional jazz players that were booked to perform there (John Longenecker interview, 2.25.08). Over the years, the Hall has continued to sustain a widespread national and international listening audience for New Orleans' many traditional players, providing them not only with meaningful and reliable work, but also opening them up to larger markets of jazz enthusiasts, which performers and those who work at the Hall consider to be the venue's crucial contribution in revitalizing traditional New Orleans jazz. In our interview

(4.3.08), Ben reflected on the idea of a New Orleans without Preservation Hall and then he replied, “I think jazz in New Orleans probably would have died out.”

### **Presenting more than Traditional Jazz**

Hurricane Katrina marked the biggest break from Preservation Hall’s standard format and calendar in its forty plus year history. The Hall staff had a “soft” opening or brief run of shows in the late spring of 2006, but the tourist traffic was so slow, the venue was not officially opened until about the one year anniversary of the hurricane. In its first two years open after the storm, the Hall, on average, only held shows four nights a week, and the monthly calendar lacked its trademark predictability. In keeping with the original mission of Preservation Hall, Ben Jaffe and the Hall management made a commitment after the storm to spread the work among the city’s many struggling musicians. It was also out of necessity a new collection of players were booked, since many of the regularly featured artists at the Hall could not get back to the city straight away. As Ben explained in our interview (4.3.08), “The storm gave us that luxury. It gave us the opportunity to do [book] something different without it being questioned as much.” New faces at the Hall after Katrina included young brass band musicians that straddled the traditional and street sounds of the genre,<sup>32</sup> like Glen David Andrews and the Lazy Six, and some even leaning mostly toward the street tradition, like the Soul Rebels and Hot 8 brass bands. Even gospel choirs, vaudeville performance troops, and modern jazz ensembles made the Hall bill as part of the post-Katrina calendar (Figure 5.9).

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<sup>32</sup> Most fundamentally, the distinction between a traditional New Orleans jazz band and a “street” or nontraditional brass band is the musical repertoire. Traditional jazz bands mostly play early jazz and gospel standards that adhere to a formal composition structure, while street brass bands draw from more contemporary and free-form musical styles, including popular funk, R & B, and hip hop (Sakakeeny 2008). Many New Orleans jazz and brass bands play music that incorporates both repertoires and musical styles and these classification parameters have become very problematic, as the Preservation Hall case study illustrates.



**Figure 5.9:** DJ Puestlove from the Roots performing a special dee-jay set at Preservation Hall post-Katrina, winter 2006 (Source: Photograph by Shannon Brinkman, used with permission).

The decision to veer from the traditional programming, however, was met with objections, and the most vocal camp was the traditional jazz players that were regularly booked at the Hall pre-Katrina. Marc Charles, a distinguished trombonist who has played at the Hall for over two decades, disclosed his feelings about the programming shift in our interview (4.3.08):

They say if something isn't broken, there's no need to fix it, which I think is a good idea.... There have been instances since Katrina where they've had totally different genres of music in there that have nothing to do with traditional jazz, and good music, and that's fine. But the place's reputation, it's established. If it's Acme Oyster House, you're not putting Popeye's fried chicken in there. It's famous for the oysters, as an analogy.... I guess they were trying to do some different things to attract maybe different audiences and maybe get younger people coming in there. From my experience, I've always seen young people coming into the Hall. I mean always, even if their parents had to drag them in. I mean the place is just so famous. The name speaks for itself.

Troy Doucet, on the other hand, is a young trumpet player who was booked with his own band for the first time at Preservation Hall after the storm. When asked if he felt some musicians at the Hall

considered his music out of place at the venue, he replied, “You might have a bunch of people say that about me, but the fact of the matter is I’m the only person fronting a traditional jazz band at my age [27], so whatever they say about me, I think I’m keeping something going and remembering what I’m doing at the Hall and how I got to do it” (interview 3.19.08).

Yet, as tourism reestablished itself in New Orleans and as the Hall’s numbers worked up to pre-Katrina totals, the Hall staff was able to restore its standard 7 nights-a-week calendar and with that return to normalcy came the decision to get the music “back to the way it used to be” (John Tyler interview, 6.2.08).<sup>33</sup> “With these business decisions, the groundwork is laid out,” explained one Hall staff member, “Making a simple thing complicated is not the best approach to a place such as Preservation Hall. It’s been rolling and working since 1961” (John Tyler interview 6.2.08). This logic guided the re-workings of the calendar in the spring of 2008, which removed most of the musicians making new appearances at the Hall following Katrina from the rotation of artists. For example, despite Troy Doucet’s (interview 3.19.08) reverence for the traditional jazz upheld at the Hall – “you can’t stray too far from what you’re supposed to be doing in there,” and though his shows were met with lots of enthusiasm – he would often sell out of his cds and have the audience on its feet by the end of his final set – his interactive call and response vocal style and his repertoire did not meet the Hall’s programming cut.

Some of the Hall staff and regular performers insist, nonetheless, the recognition and experience for the young artists booked at the Hall after Katrina was valuable. “In that respect, the Hall has done a lot, because I know for a fact there’s a lot of young musicians who know some traditional numbers and maybe never really thought of learning much more, but then they get a gig at the Hall and then all of a sudden they have to,” was Sonja Nast’s reflections on the matter

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<sup>33</sup> Since my fieldwork, the Hall has settled on a five night a week concert schedule, which reflects lower overall visitor numbers to the venue than during the pre-Katrina years (field notes 5.5.10).

(interview, 4.3.08), a clarinet player who was never booked at the Hall until after Katrina, but has stayed in the rotation through the calendar transition. The Soul Rebels Brass Band, for example, is famed for its hip hop, brass sounds, but after several appearances at the Hall, the young street band altered their typical play list for the intimate space at the Hall, playing mostly instrumental versions of their original numbers, as well as a few popular, traditional tunes, like “What a Wonderful World” (field notes 12.12.07). The new calendar also brought some younger brass band players to Preservation Hall for the first time. The drummer in Glen David Andrew’s Lazy Six Brass Band, Rob Dillon, had never played at the Hall until after the storm. “Before Katrina I thought only old people played here,” he insisted to me one night during a set break (field notes 10.10.07).

“I used to get grief about the age of musicians that were playing there,” Ben explained in our interview (4.3.08), as if in direct response to Rob, “Now I just get grief about the musicians that are playing there.” While the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and programming struggles brought these tensions to the foreground, the Hall staff continues to negotiate how to remain faithful to the types of music the venue is meant to nurture, but also how to sustain a listening audience and support an ever-expanding, but also displaced New Orleans musical community. During my fieldwork, for example, the Preservation Hall Jazz Band played the national anthem for the 2008 BCS college national championship bowl game in New Orleans, and recently the band released an album that features collaborations with mainstream musical rock, country, bluegrass, and crossover artists, exposing the musicians and the music of Preservation Hall to audiences in unprecedented ways and numbers (Ben Jaffe interview, 4.3.08; field notes 2.10.10). While the programming struggles and more recent efforts at the Hall to bridge age and aesthetic divides in order to reach a larger audience is a major piece in the venue’s efforts to perpetuate New Orleans’ traditional jazz, my research is specifically concerned with everyday architectural geographies and the ways in which the physical space of Preservation Hall mediates the transmission of traditional jazz.

## Physical Continuity

My first visit to Preservation Hall was in December of 2006, several months after the music venue re-opened officially following Hurricane Katrina. The following entry from my field notes describes my initial encounter with the physical interior of the building:

I first had a seat on the long wooden bench in the carriageway. I felt a very easy breeze from the river brush across me; it flew in from the shadowy, back, bricked courtyard that had a softly trickling fountain I could only hear. Across from me were double wooden doors flanking the rear entrance to the concert hall, flaked with old paint and marked with layers of etched names and messages. The musicians began teasing their sound with quick warm-up phrases, so I took the big step up and into the concert hall first standing at the back, behind the rows of wooden benches and the casually placed cushions at the feet of the musicians. The wobbly ceiling fans with their bare bulbs cast an erratic shadow on the audience and the performers. The stripped walls had a bare, but brown-warm feel to them; they perfectly showcased the dark painted portraits of musicians and framed vintage concert posters, many of them hanging at slightly off angles and matching the room's raw and somewhat mysterious beauty. (field notes, 12.15.07)

While Hurricane Katrina temporarily ruptured Preservation Hall's trademark consistency in its programming and format, the physical building I experienced as a researcher at the Hall in the first year after the storm strikingly parallels historical accounts, like this one of a visitor's experience at Preservation Hall in 1967 chronicled by a journalist from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*:

[The visitor] sits on the battered wooden benches and dusty red pillows, or on the ancient movie theater chairs placed along the wall. Perhaps he stands in the back, as many do, listening and taking it all in.... [he/she gets] the chance to be a part of a musical experience provided by five aging negro musicians playing to an audience in a small, poorly lighted wooden room, decorated by paintings hung randomly about. (They Have Made Preservation a Way of Life Here 1967: 64)

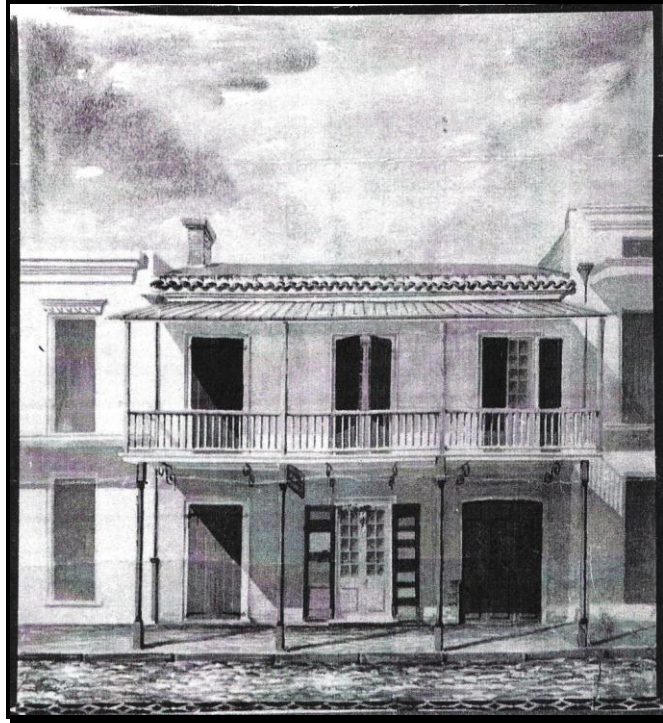
During my research at Preservation Hall, I came to see how, significantly, many of the vintage or peculiar physical elements of the venue have been part of the workings of the business from the beginning. The bench on which I was seated in the carriageway in the passage above is an old cypress pew that Allan Jaffe bought from a nearby church in the early '60s. The wicker basket used to collect entry fees, which struck me as an impractical method on first visiting the Hall, was the

same method Sarah used to collect kitty donations for musicians during the music venue's earliest days. In addition, the physical building itself has not undergone any notable alterations since the venue officially opened as Preservation Hall in June of 1961. In fact, since the building on Saint Peter Street was constructed as a two-story stuccoed brick Creole-styled townhouse in 1866, it has undergone few major alterations, excepting, for example, the removal of the double gallery on the façade and the conversion of the downstairs double parlor into one large room that serves today as the concert hall (Figures 5.10 & 5.11) (Long 1968). The building also has not been actively restored as evidenced by the greenish-pink patina of fading paint on the building's exterior and the cracked plaster on the walls of the concert hall (Figures 5.11 & 5.12). This simply maintain approach to the music hall's physical building, as well as the preservation of the vintage interior furnishings, evokes a sense of continuity that couples with the venue's focus on preserving a traditional style of music, a combination this is meaningful both to those who work at and visit the Hall.

### **“Flashbacks:” Continuity and Meaningful Connections**

Preservation Hall, by holding its trademark look and sound over the past forty years, has generated a sense among musicians who perform at the Hall that they are participating in an ongoing act of passing on traditional New Orleans jazz to new listeners. For some players who have performed regularly at the Hall, the physical continuity of the space evokes a connection to the musicians who have come before. John Longenecker explained in our interview (2.25.08) that since so little has changed from the Hall's earliest years, including the dusty, sweaty smell of the venue, it is easy to experience “flashbacks:”

So when I play there...it's almost like these flashbacks. And since the décor hasn't changed at all – it's very easy to do. Just imagine that those people out there are there in 1962 and I'm not George Lewis [Longenecker's clarinet mentor], but I'm experiencing what George Lewis experienced when he was there, seeing those people close up and how much they appreciate it and how much is shared between them.

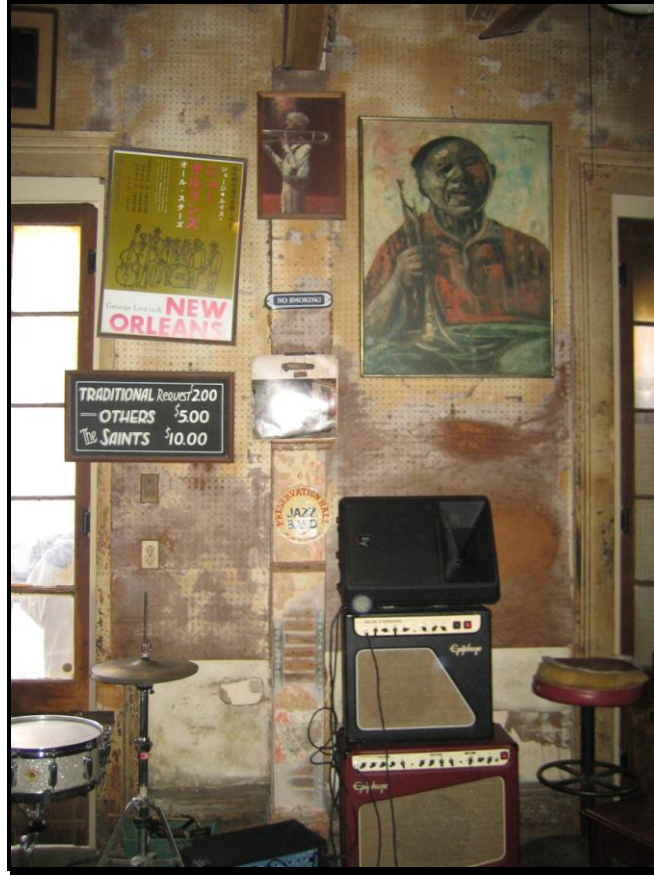


**Figure 5.10:** Drawing of 72 Saint Peter Street (today's Preservation Hall) in 1866 (Source: Historic New Orleans Collection, used with permission).



**Figure 5.11:** Exterior of Preservation Hall in 2007 (note how few alterations the building has undergone) (Source: photograph by author).





**Figure 5.12:** The run-down, evocative ambience of Preservation Hall (note the cracked plaster and exposed wood lath), winter 2008 (Source: photograph by author).

This physical connection to performers’ musical mentors is very significant to most of the musicians at the Hall. For example, John holds reverence for the act of sitting in the same chair as George Lewis, one of Preservation Hall’s original performers and his clarinet mentor. Troy Doucet made a similar assertion in our interview (3.19.09): “Harold Dejan, Tuba Fats, my idols, I’m sitting in the chairs, touching the same piano. You got to feel good about that.” The physical connection facilitated by the Hall to past musicians enhances the sense among performers that they are not just recreating the sounds of New Orleans’ traditional jazz, but embodying its transmission. John Longenecker describes his performances at the Hall as a physical bridge between the presence he always feels at the venue with the people he met, heard, and learned from who are “no longer with

us” and today’s audience – “I want to try to give the people who come – if they come there, they come there because they want to somehow be in touch with what that place was when I first discovered it” (interview 2.25.08).

In addition to the evocative nature of the physical space of the Hall, the predictable performance calendar and format are appreciated by the music community who knew for many years they could find Harold Dejan of the Olympia Brass Band on a Sunday night if they wanted to drop by the venue to discuss business or socialize (the Hall always welcomes local musicians free of charge). Ben Jaffe fondly recalls the days when a pay phone was tacked up on the wall of the carriageway (used today as the venue entrance and side hallway), and friends, fellow musicians and family members knew what night and what time to call performing musicians to talk about business or personal matters that naturally, according to Ben, became “everybody’s business” (interview 4.3.08). Aside from the social exchange and familiarity that grew out of the jazz hall’s consistent concert format and performance schedule, musicians also appreciate the programming predictability in order to watch, listen, and learn from one of the Hall’s many musical masters. Sonja Nast, a European jazz pilgrim, knew on her first trip to New Orleans 14 years ago she would be able to listen to her clarinet idol, Ralph Lewis, playing, as always, on Friday night at the Hall (interview 4.3.08). Kirk Lewis, a professional drummer and player at the Hall, knew what time and nights as a kid to show up at the Hall and peer through the double glass French doors situated behind the drum kit to watch, listen, and learn from his favorite drummers (field notes, 11.17.07).

Since the material environment of the Hall has been sustained, as well as a consistent music calendar and style of music, the building, its physical and embodied aspects, evokes the era of the revival of the city’s most prized musical tradition among those who perform there. This feeling of connection to the city’s most acclaimed musical tradition, as well as the opportunity to participate in

recreating it, is upheld with reverence by those who perform at Preservation Hall. Toby Hudson of the Hot 8 Brass Band remembers his one performance at the acclaimed jazz venue:

It just felt different because it was my first time actually playing there, in my adulthood, and I heard so many stories and so many other people that had played there, all the real popular musicians, so many other bands, and musicians that I found to look up to in my later days and it was just like the feeling that I had – it was just an honor for me to even just be there; it was so different to me. Because it was, like, one of the few venues that had me, like, actually shocked; I was like kinda nervous to perform. (interview 6.18.08)

The immediate and continued commitment of those who manage Preservation Hall to hold the look and sustain the daily operations of the venue has grounded musicians who play at the Hall in the musical legacies they draw from, as well as connecting them in ongoing ways to the community of musicians that perform, socialize, and learn there (Adey 2008).

The atmosphere created by the material space and the musical performances that take place at Preservation Hall also encourage visitors to meaningfully link their personal experiences to New Orleans' jazz history. To begin with, I have observed the physical continuity of the venue prompt visitors to recall prior pilgrimages to the jazz venue (field notes 12.10.07) or, on occasion, to make, indirect personal connections to the venue's earliest years since the physical space mirrors the widely available archival images and historical accounts of the well-documented jazz venue (field notes 1.20.08) (see, for example, Carter 1991; Byrd 2000; Sancton 2006; Preservation Hall 2010). In addition, the venue's state of "arrested decay," the material traces of the passage of time, such as the cracking plaster and layers of names etched into the wooden doors of the concert hall, invite visitors to imaginatively extend their personal engagement with New Orleans jazz beyond the confines of the actual history of Preservation Hall. I have overheard many visitors, when first stepping into Preservation Hall, exclaim to friends or their children "this is where it all began" or "Louis Armstrong learned how to play here" (field notes 6.6.07, 2.2.08), linking their Preservation Hall experiences to the original emergence of jazz from New Orleans' musical cauldron in the 1910s or

mythical jazz personas, like Louis Armstrong. These observations point to Dydia DeLyser's insights on geographically induced acts of social memory, namely that landscapes of decay, prompt users to imaginatively insert their own interpretations to fill physical absences and explain "fragmentary details" (1999, 2001: 27, 2003; see also DeSilvey 2006). The material gaps and fissures at the Hall not only serve as "spatial triggers" for visitors' imaginings, they also permit visitors to liberally construct narratives that meaningfully connect them to the history of traditional New Orleans jazz in the present-day (DeLyser 1999, 2001: 27, 2003; DeSilvey 2006).

The weathered, exposed jazz venue also invites visitors to engage with the building in sensual and unique ways. One night an enthusiastic middle-aged woman was the first customer to enter the jazz hall. "I've waited forty years to get here," she exclaimed in her excited British accent and directly proceeded to take off her sandals. During set breaks she actually jogged around the venue, still bare foot, as if she could absorb musical vibrations stored in the weathered wood floors through her feet (field notes, 12.1.07). Other ways I have observed audience members physically and even playfully interact with the venue include: a young couple standing inside the nook on the rear wall (an enclosed exterior window) to better view the concert (field notes, 4.22.07); a trio of teenagers pressing their bodies against the outside of the double French doors behind the drum kit for an entire set (field notes, 11.11.07); an Asian woman listening to the muted sounds of the concert sprawled out and lightly napping on the bench in the carriageway next to the church pew (field notes, 2.12.08).

In addition to the physical space of the venue, the performances at Preservation Hall encourage free and emergent encounters and exchanges. One evening I was seated on one of the front benches to see the Blind Boys of Alabama perform a few gospel numbers with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. The Blind Boys were escorted to the front of the room, and the

woman next to me reached out and grabbed the hand of one of the men in the group who was standing directly in front of us. “I just can’t help it,” she murmured in reverence, as the poised performer, in his bold red suit, gave her hand a soft squeeze in return (Figure 5.13) (field notes 9.16.07). Physical contact and dialogue occur between the musicians and visitors during performances because they are in such close proximity (Figure 5.14), and, additionally, the regular intermissions offer audience members opportunities to directly interact with musicians, particularly since there is no separate backstage space in the jazz hall. Concert-goers take photos with performers or recount other occasions they have seen a musician perform at the Hall (field notes 4.6.07, 11.11.08), and more avid jazz enthusiasts often carry on technical conversations about musical repertoires or the execution of instrumental techniques (field notes 3.23.08). As a fledgling trombone player myself, on numerous occasions I have sat in the carriageway taking notes while one of the Hall’s trombonists mapped out the horn positions of a melody line or a basic warm-up set to practice (field notes 5.20.08). Both the physical space of the venue and ongoing and intimate performances at Preservation Hall facilitate free and emergent encounters and exchanges that permit visitors to develop their own personal and meaningful understandings of the music and space of the jazz venue, as well as actively engaging them in the ongoing transmission of New Orleans traditional jazz.

### **“*Living History:*” Continuity, Freedom, and Perpetuation**

Initially, the pared-down elegance of Preservation Hall was predicated on Allan Jaffe’s signature thriftiness, a thriftiness based on his own personal disposition, but also his avid commitment to turn a nonprofit cooperative to safeguard New Orleans’ traditional jazz into a thriving musical enterprise. Ben also believes his parents’ decision to minimally invest in physical repairs to or renovations of the venue, was their desire to keep the concert hall true to the look and



**Figure 5.13:** Blind Boys of Alabama performing with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, fall 2007  
(Source: Photograph by Erika Goldring, used with permission).



**Figure 5.14:** View of concert hall from side hallway/carrageway; audience members are seated on benches and cushions lined-up at the feet of musicians, 2006. (Source: photograph by Shannon Brinkman, used with permission).

feel they experienced when they first discovered Bornstein's art gallery and concert hall. Today, as the venue's care taker, Ben feels a similar commitment to maintain the physical continuity of

Preservation Hall:

I mean unless I had to change something I don't really see any point in changing anything. Nobody's really ever given me a good reason to change it. If I put in air-conditioning suddenly I'm gonna get 201 people as opposed to 198 people through the door? Or the peoples' experiences inside are going to be that much better? And for a long time I tried to be much more accommodating and explain to people when they complained, "There's no place to sit?" And I'd be getting frustrated with myself like, "God, why don't we just have seats for everybody?" But if you don't want to come in for that experience, I mean come on. How much more pure of an experience can you get than that? It is part of the, you know, of the whole thing.

While on the one hand, Ben's practical and personal deliberation on how to maintain the space of Preservation Hall are revealed in the passage above, we also see his recognition that the physical atmosphere at Preservation Hall has become "part of the whole thing," an essential component in the venue's success.

The Preservation Hall case study reveals that the staff's involved efforts to sustain the jazz venue's run-down, yet elegant ambience, such as the conscious decisions noted by Ben to maintain ragged benches and wobbly ceiling fans over modern amenities, are a crucial component in the ongoing process of cultural perpetuation that occurs at the venue. The physical continuity of the venue grounds musicians in their embodied and ongoing act of performing traditional jazz at Preservation Hall, while the run-down and evocative ambience invites visitors to extend their imaginative capacities and meaningfully connect their personal experiences at Preservation Hall to earlier periods of New Orleans jazz history (DeLyser 1999, 2001, 2003; DeSilvey 2006). Additionally, though, the staff's ongoing and sometimes complicated negotiations, especially following Hurricane Katrina, to maintain the consistent and straightforward traditional jazz performances at the venue, are an important complement to the weathered and evocative space of the Hall. The concerts

permit performers and audience members to actively seek out and sometimes even unexpectedly participate in encounters that promote new or refined understandings of and personal connections to traditional New Orleans jazz. While my Preservation Hall case study echoes the findings of geographers who have carefully explored how sites of decay and ruin prompt imaginative and meaningful re-workings of historical meaning in present-day contexts (DeLyser 1999, 2001, 2003; DeSilvey 2005; Edensor 2005; DeSilvey 2006; Edensor 2007), it also further points to the role of embodied, iterative practices and performances, and how such “once-againness” sustains a social continuity that foregrounds the process of transmission that is so significant to performers, visitors, and staff at the jazz venue (Roach 1996; Taylor 2003: 28).

The weathered material space of Preservation Hall and the long-running, traditional jazz concerts are widely recognized by users as a tangible and/or emotive link to the history and importance of the performances that take place at the jazz hall, but the building also promotes the less apparent, but crucial freedom and flexibility that is central to cultural perpetuation.

Geographers like Tim Edensor (2005, 2007), Allison Bain (2003, 2010), and Watson et al. (2009), uphold the value of peripheral, marginal, or alternative spaces and the flexibility they offer to engage in improvised, creative practices, particularly in contrast to the increasingly ordered and regulated realms of heritage and tourism spaces that are designed to keep “harsh sensations” and unexpected social encounters at bay (Edensor 2007: 218). Despite being an iconic New Orleans landmark and a prominent tourist space in New Orleans, Preservation Hall is effective as a site of preservation and perpetuation precisely because it does not order the physical and social encounters that take place within it. As the section has carefully illustrated, the evocative, exposed physical space of the jazz venue and ongoing, intimate performances, promote unhindered and emergent expressions and encounters with the physical building and among users that permit everyday, creative expressions



and practices to be brought out in the open and shared (Roach 1996; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming).

Preservation Hall is so effective and widely celebrated as a site of preservation because the jazz venue provides the dynamic combination of continuity and freedom that are central to cultural perpetuation. While on the one hand the evocative physical space paired with the traditional jazz concerts serve as vehicles for users' interpretations of their connections to the history of New Orleans jazz, the unhindered and emergent nature of the encounters that regularly occur at the venue instill a sense among musicians, visitors, and even staff members that they are actively participating in the perpetuation of one of New Orleans' most significant cultural traditions. This combination of continuity and freedom is the underlying reason why Ben Jaffe insists his family's jazz venue is so significant as a site of "*living* history [emphasis added]" (interview 4.3.08), and why others who work at the Hall insist the jazz venue is heralded as a site of preservation: "[We're] not just trying to hold the skeleton up, and put a frame behind it, and keep it, you know? Preserve means to nurture, preserve means to perpetuate" (Carlos Ford interview, 4.10.08).

## **Conclusion**

### **Architecture and the Perpetuation of Cultural Practices and Traditions**

This chapter reinforces the work of those geographers who have demonstrated the importance of built spaces for generating and facilitating cultural production and exchange (Hoyler & Mager 2005; Watson et al. 2009; Bain 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming). My work contributes to this scholarship by employing a performative approach to architectural geographies in order to explore how buildings facilitate the perpetuation of cultural practices in localized and profound ways. Due to its understated physical nature, the Sportsman's Corner has a practical and significant versatility for the Mardi Gras Indian and second-line parade communities, serving as a gathering space, meeting facility, fundraising center, dance hall, and a concrete expression of creative

vitality in a disadvantaged, African-American community. In Peter Adey's historical study of the critical architectural geographies of the original observation balcony of the Liverpool John Lennon Airport, he determined the conscious design of the outdoor viewing area enabled social and meaningful acts of watching because the architectural structure did not command viewers' attention – "The airport structure disappeared to make itself visible" (2008: 42). The vernacular and small-scale Sportsman's Corner differs notably from Liverpool's original airport balcony, but the building does similarly "disappear" because of its simple form and features. While the building's lay-out and features, even the actual structure itself, often goes unnoticed by users and onlookers, at the same time the understated environment of the barroom foregrounds the social exchange, regular practices, and more heightened performances that take place there. The evocative physical space of Preservation Hall, by contrast, centrally serves as a vehicle for perpetuating New Orleans' traditional jazz. The material environment of the jazz hall prompts performers and visitors to extend their imaginative capacities and actively engage in the re-interpretation of their role today in the ongoing transmission of traditional New Orleans jazz (DeLyser 1999, 2001, 2003).

Not only do these buildings work differently to encourage the ordinary activities and more heightened performances that constitute some of New Orleans' major cultural traditions, they also support different, but complementary social acts in the maintenance and perpetuation of the city's performance traditions. The Sportsman's Corner, most fundamentally, offers a gathering space where tradition participants and supporters can meet formally or informally and discuss, plan, or exchange information and sustain social relationships, which are the everyday working of New Orleans' Mardi Gras masking and second-line parade traditions. Preservation Hall, at the most basic level, promotes traditional New Orleans musicians by connecting them to an international listening audience and generating appreciation and commercial demand for their work. Also of note, my two case studies presented in chapter four participate uniquely in the second line, brass band, and Mardi

Gras Indian traditions. The Sound Café, for example, provides informal and impromptu practice space for New Orleans brass band and jazz musicians and the Montana House serves as an informal archive of Mardi Gras Indian history. Together my post-Katrina landmark case studies speak to the diverse ways buildings foster the social support, creative exchange, refinement of skills, and performance experiences needed to sustain cultural practices. My findings point to the work of other geographers who submit that a range of buildings and their corresponding everyday and more heightened uses are necessary to support and sustain cultural practices (Hoyler & Mager 2005; Watson et al. 2009).

The Sportsman's Corner and Preservation Hall are two very different types of landmarks in New Orleans' cultural landscape and they serve different roles in the perpetuation of the city's performance traditions, but at the most fundamental level both venues work as what Peter Adey has termed "universalizing spaces" (Adey 2008: 41; see also Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming). In the case of the Sportsman's Corner, the barroom pulls together New Orleans residents with a common interest in and concern for the city's second line and Mardi Gras Indians traditions, while Preservation Hall brings listeners and performers from different classes, races, and origins together in the shared experience of live music. The Sportsman's Corner and Preservation Hall mediate the meeting of Mardi Gras Indian elders with young Central City community members interested in the masking tradition or traditional jazz virtuosos with jazz enthusiasts. Both buildings are effective as "universalizing spaces" because of the small-scale and intimate nature of the interior spaces, and the physical proximity of users in these spaces promotes social interaction – the brushing of shoulders and face-to-face dialogue and debate. Though accomplished through different means, the Sportsman's Corner and Preservation Hall also offer supportive, accessible, and reliable environments necessary to facilitate the ongoing and dynamic social interactions, as well as individual creative expressions that underpin cultural perpetuation (Bain 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010,

Forthcoming). The Sportsman's Corner and Preservation Hall thus mediate the coming together of a variety of social actors that participate in transmitting New Orleans performance traditions, but, additionally, the buildings, their material and social elements, foster free, emergent, and affective cultural expressions, the ongoing, everyday practices that sustain expressive culture and more embedded cultural traditions (Roach 1996; Taylor 2003; Adey 2008; Bain 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming).

Built spaces are a crucial, but often overlooked component in the perpetuation of New Orleans' embedded and significant performance traditions. This chapter has illuminated how embodied practices and social relationships rely on the physical and social space of buildings to promote and sustain them, and additionally how buildings structure these embodied practices and social exchanges in localized and profound ways. While the Sportsman's Corner and Preservation Hall have structured and promoted the everyday cultural practices that take place in them, they have also been defined by the cultural practices that take place there. Users of these buildings typically name the parades, live jazz concerts, or other performances that take place within and around them as the elements that distinguish them, which points back to the previous chapter that underlines the importance of everyday practices and more ceremonial uses in defining the nature and significance of built space. This chapter also speaks to the fields of preservation and heritage management and how efforts to protect built environments can be fruitfully linked to efforts to promote intangible community resources, such as cultural traditions and neighborhood pride and identity (King 2003, 2008; Kaufman 2009). In the next chapter, however, I look specifically at the recent push by scholars and professionals in historic preservation to better promote and protect a more comprehensive range of architectural resources and how they face practical impasses to these

more inclusive efforts, because existing policies and practices have not been correspondingly adjusted.

## Chapter Six

### **“Speaking for the Community and the Buildings”: Preservationists’ Protective Efforts and Impasses**

#### **Introduction**

##### **“Speaking for the Community and the Buildings”**

In the summer of 2008, Marcus Stallworth walked me through the grounds of the Lafitte Public Housing Complex. On that June afternoon, most of the complex’s apartment buildings had recently been razed as part of a citywide and highly contentious public housing redevelopment initiative that will be carefully outlined in this chapter (Figure 6.1). Marcus had lived in the complex for over forty years, and, as we walked, he mapped many of his memories onto the demolished or abandoned remains of the Lafitte housing complex and his former community. Marcus also recounted the series of public meetings held over the course of two years after the storm when residents and housing and preservation activists decried the plans of local and federal housing authorities to entirely raze Lafitte in order to make way for newer public housing. Describing the presence and efforts of preservationists at these public meetings, Marcus insisted, “They [preservationists] were speaking for the community and the buildings, because they know the community needed the places.” Marcus’ feelings that preservationists in post-Katrina New Orleans defended and “spoke for” historic communities and their threatened built spaces together, but also, crucially, as separate entities, corresponds to my own research findings elaborated in this chapter that consider how, on the one hand, preservation professionals and activists made impressive efforts to protect a wide array of social and architectural sites and environments, but, on the other, how the overriding material and monumental emphasis of their protective efforts prevented effective engagement with the historic communities they worked so hard to safeguard.

Traditionally, historic preservation has been categorized as an “elite” activity, carried out by and for the interests of the wealthy and powerful (Duncan & Duncan 2003; Lee 2003). James Fitch



**Figure 6.1:** Marcus Stallworth in front of his former Lafitte apartment building, June 2008 (Source: photograph by author).

grounds this bias in the early emergence of preservation as an “urbane pursuit” to purchase and restore “monumental sites” (1990: 23-24). The United States preservation movement emerged in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as a wealthy women’s grassroots movement to restore colonial monuments, and it remained the domain of affluent, private philanthropists through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Wallace 1996; Morgan et al. 2006). As the historic preservation movement coalesced politically in the 1960s, however, it was mostly a response to urban renewal trends, major blight-fighting redevelopment initiatives that were razing swaths of American inner-city communities, many of them ethnic and working-class neighborhoods (Wallace 1996; Samuels 2000b). This loss of historic, inner-city neighborhoods during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, was the impetus for the development of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) discussed in chapter two (Murtagh 1997). Despite the broader and more inclusive heritage protection aims preservationists officially articulated with the

passage of NHPA in 1966, the language, framing, and criteria that were encoded through the establishment of the National Register of Historic Places only further entrenched the early patrimonial bias of the preservation movement (Lee 2003; Morgan et al. 2006).<sup>34</sup> Strongly flavored by the aesthetic interests of the American Institute of Architects and a historical framing yet to be shaped by the more inclusive, everyday interests of a “new social history,” the establishment of the National Register codified eligibility through standards of architectural merit and a historical significance based on national events and personages at the expense of everyday social and ethnic histories (Lee 2003).

By the 1980s, however, preservationists began to understand and emphasize the need to evaluate places within a broader historical and social context (Riesenweber 2008). Of particular importance was the careful development of new cultural resource categories – historic and cultural landscapes and traditional cultural properties – that accounted for the interrelationships between people and places and began to shift National Register assessment standards away from measurements based solely on aesthetic distinction (Morgan et al. 2006). The cultural-resource notion of “historic” or “cultural landscape” was developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s under National Register and National Park Service rubrics to be more comprehensive by expanding the geographic and temporal limits of what makes built spaces significant through the consideration of more contextual components, such as natural features and circulation networks, as well as processes

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<sup>34</sup> Like, Morgan, Morgan, and Barrett (2006: 715), I use the term patrimony to refer to landmarks that meet traditional preservation standards as outstanding examples of an architectural style, design, or form or as markers of “official” histories, which sit in contrast to everyday community landmarks or “symbols of subaltern histories.” The term patrimony, literally meaning inheritance from one’s father, subtly points to the power and politics involved in the caretaking and bequeathing of official landmarks, and it also upholds the physical value of landmarks while devaluing the embodied qualities associated with them (see also Taylor 2003).



like land-use patterns and cultural traditions (Mc Clelland et al. 1999; Rottle 2008).<sup>35</sup> Prompted by an amendment to the National Historic Preservation Act in 1980 geared to more systematically identify “traditional cultural resources” and the properties associated with them – “traditional cultural properties,” the National Park Service and the National Register also began to more carefully identify natural features and unexceptional architectural sites endowed with cultural meaning by the native or ethnic communities associated with them (Parker and King 1998).

By the late 1980s major funding and programming shifts were also initiated by politicians, scholars, and preservation officials to reverse the exclusionary tide of the preservation movement. In her essay “The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation” (2003), Antoinette Lee, the Assistant Associate Director of Historical Documentation Programs at the National Park Service (and an Asian-American), outlines the emergence of federally-supported programs in the 1990s to protect and promote the heritage of minority groups, such as the establishment of the Underground Railroad Preservation and Education Initiative and the Tribal Preservation Program. By the early 1990s, National Preservation conferences and National Park Service publications centered around themes of cultural diversity (Lee1992b) and, as more minority groups were engaged through this increased multicultural programming, enthusiasm flourished among minority groups to revitalize their historical resources, as indicated by the creation of the National Association for African-American Historic Preservation in 1995 and the Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Project Heritage Project in 1992 (Lee 2003; Kaufman 2009). Despite these more comprehensive efforts, progressive preservationists, like Antoinette Lee (2003) and the nationally-prominent activist and author Ned Kaufman (2009), lament that very few minorities have entered the professional ranks of

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<sup>35</sup> In England and Australia, where parallel shifts in heritage and built resource management have occurred, “historic environment” is similarly employed as a more inclusive concept to identify the continuous and comprehensive nature of heritage sites (Gibson & Pendlebury 2009; Schofield 2009).

the field, which has bearing on how social and ethnic landmarks are assessed and managed by preservation officials. Perhaps of more crucial concern is that despite these pointed conceptual efforts for inclusiveness, there still remains a systematic bias for the types of buildings the U.S. systems preserves (Morgan et al. 2006; Rottle 2008).

While some preservationists have called attention to and actively campaigned to reverse the exclusionary trends of their field (Lee 1992a, 2003; Morgan et al. 2006; Longstreth 2008b; Kaufman 2009), some social scientists have lent their critical eye to the ways in which class and ethnic bias is couched in the movement's controlling ideologies and often masked through its language and mechanism of aesthetics (Greenbaum 1990; Duncan & Duncan 2001; Hoskins 2004; Cresswell & Hoskins 2008; Pendlebury et al. 2009). Geographers and anthropologists have researched the ways in which preservation zoning ordinances and historic districts in particular contribute to this phenomenon. This approach is exemplified in James and Nancy Duncan's analysis of restrictive zoning in the wealthy bedroom suburb of Bedford, New York. The Duncans' research centered on how the built landscape participates in establishing class distinction, particularly how "landscape taste" effectively delineates along class lines and how such attention to landscape aesthetics successfully obscures and therefore depoliticizes class relations (Duncan & Duncan 2001: 387; Duncan & Duncan 2003). The Duncans (2001, 2003) demonstrated that in Bedford rigorous zoning and environmental policies highly restrict housing options and, consequently, the community's demographic make-up, but such land use mechanisms are "innocently" dismissed as preservation, while quietly serving the interests of wealthy land owners.

Preservation has also been used to mask issues of race, as Susan Greenbaum (1990) found in her investigation of the racial and ethnic politics surrounding the revitalization of Ybor City, a historically Cuban quarter of Miami. Greenbaum's work revealed the ways in which the creation of

Ybor City as a historic district allowed city officials to skirt present-day racial issues – “the emphasis on history permits the identification of Ybor City as a Latin neighborhood, based on the way it used to be, rather than as a black neighborhood, which it presently is” (1990: 67). Garreth Hoskins’ similarly found that in order for Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay to be enlisted as a National Landmark (and eligible for increased development funding), the narrative of the immigration station had to be repackaged as a landmark representative of all groups who have been racially oppressed in the United States versus a local site of “pain and shame” that tells the explicit story of the country’s persecution of Chinese immigrants in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (2004: 692). “A troubling history can be silenced by the very act of our public engagement with it,” Hoskins poignantly sums up, echoing Greenbaum’s conclusions that preservation practices can effectively conceal past and present racial realities (2004: 698).

Economic, political, and social development interests can be veiled as preservation, as the Duncans, Greenbaum, and Hoskins reveal, but the exclusionary tendencies of the process are often apparent to those who have continually fallen outside the parameters of official designations of historic and cultural worth, typically working-class or ethnic communities. As architect and public historian Delores Hayden has noted (1988), the failure to account for these important social and cultural meanings and histories is plainly attributable to the process’s focus on architectural history, despite the criteria in place to assess significance based on broader historical and social patterns. The result is that the preservation process feeds the politics of aesthetics detailed by the Duncans with its emphasis on architectural merit, and, in turn, architectural standards have remained the measuring stick to gauge all historic significance (Longstreth 2008a). One outcome of this codification of “architecture” versus “history” through the National Register criteria and survey methods, has been to reduce history to “its intangibles...robbing it of any physical dimension,” hence making it, through the material-centered process of National Register evaluation, a more difficult

standard of significance assessment (Longstreth 2008: 12). Of greater concern to preservationists like Antoinette Lee, this rift overlooks many social and cultural ethnic and working-class community centers that work as “purely functional sites” and lack aesthetic distinction, though they clearly possess design, as well as historical and cultural significance to those who use them (1992a: 96). Additionally, as Ned Kaufman points out, not only are working-class and ethnic landmarks “undistinguished as architecture,” they have also often “been poorly built, altered, and generally used hard” (2009: 17), so the architectural merit emphasis of the listing process neglects to account for adaptive and meaningful reuse of spaces, as well as the intangible processes that endow particular sites with significance over time.

The result has been a National Register inventory still characterized more by “patrimonial icons” than “commonplaces” (Morgan et al. 2006: 706, 715), which not only embody the histories and cultures of under-represented minority and ethnic groups in the United States, but also physically constitute the character and heritage of neighborhoods throughout the country. David Morgan, Nancy Morgan, and Brenda Barrett (2006), staff with the National Center for Preservation Training and Technology Center and the National Park Service, have closely considered the social inequities in our national preservation system, particularly the lack of documentation of our more everyday landmarks or “commonplaces,” a deficiency the research team argues was brought to public view as preservation officials attempted to inventory the resource damage wrought throughout the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the fall of 2005. Crucially, the Morgan research team (2006) and preservationists like Nancy Rottle (2008) have noted that some of the more recent and inclusive cultural resource categories, namely traditional cultural properties and cultural landscapes, do not fit within the material-centered and temporally static frame of National Register assessments and, in many cases, these special heritage resources do not meet National Register eligibility requirements, thus further exaggerating discrepancies between our

knowledge and appreciation of traditional landmarks versus sites that tangibly mark and perpetuate community identity and social and cultural histories, such as the Sound Café, Montana house, and the Sportsman's Corner barroom presented in chapters four and five.

Morgan, Morgan, and Barrett (2006) do acknowledge that the systematic lack of documentation of more everyday landmarks in the Gulf Coast region and throughout the United States is practically attributable to the lack of political and economic resources needed within State Historic Preservation Offices to educate communities about the value of federal or local preservation surveys that inventory built resources and, additionally, the sometimes exceptional ethnographic documentation necessary to record resources lacking traditional material qualities of significance. While clearly these practical issues of staffing and funding profoundly affect the capacity of State Historic Preservation Offices and other preservation bodies to carry out more inclusive advocacy work, my research is more concerned with the disconnect between preservation's more progressive conceptualizations of built spaces and existing policy and standard assessments in historic preservation and how they speak to the nature and significance of built spaces in conflicting ways.

This chapter specifically explores how New Orleans' preservation community fought for the city's built resources and the communities associated with them after Hurricane Katrina in new and momentous ways. As the two case studies presented in this chapter will reveal, existing preservation policy and practices and standard professional language prevented preservationists from fully engaging with community members in order to not only better apprehend what places are important to them and why, but also, crucially, to use these deeply-rooted meanings of place and community to better mobilize and serve these communities. The Lafitte Housing Complex case study will show that activists did not gauge the preservation concerns of the black working-poor residents of the

complex, which hampered building effective alliances to successfully protest the razing of the complex and the displacement of this deeply-rooted community. The second case study on the Deutsches Haus in Mid-City demonstrates that preservationists must assess and address the unique qualities and circumstances of all historic communities, even those traditionally protected through existing preservation practices and policies, in order to successfully mobilize and promote them. These case studies point to the challenges preservationists face in using fluid, comprehensive, and embodied conceptualizations of architectural significance within the parameters of existing policy and practices that are shaped by a traditional emphasis on the material, monumental, or historical qualities of architectural significance.

### **Lafitte Public Housing Complex**

Almost immediately after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) made the blanket declaration to close all the city's government housing, citing "safety and security concerns" as their motive for barring residents access to their apartments (Filosa & Russell 2005: B1).<sup>36</sup> For months after the forced post-Katrina evacuation of the city's public housing, residents clamored to gain re-entry into their homes and re-connect with their belongings and, more importantly, their communities, while HUD and HANO took extreme measures to lock down all housing facilities, installing security hardware on the doors and windows of all apartment buildings and erecting barbed-wire fencing along the perimeter of most complexes to keep residents at bay (Figure 6.2) (Filosa 2005). In June of 2006, HANO and HUD revealed their plans for the future of New Orleans' public housing: the city's four major housing complexes – Lafitte, Calliope/BW

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<sup>36</sup> In 2002, HANO was declared so corrupt and mismanaged that HUD took over operations of the local housing authority (Filosa 2006a), which has since directly tied New Orleans public housing policies to federal political and funding mandates.



**Figure 6.2:** Lafitte apartment building with security hardware installed on doors and windows after Hurricane Katrina, spring 2008 (Source: photograph by author).

Cooper, Saint Bernard, and Magnolia/CJ Peete – would be entirely demolished and redeveloped into lower-density, mixed-income apartment and single-family housing (Filosa 2006a). The announcement came as no surprise to public-housing residents and activists (Filosa & Russell 2005). Prior to Katrina, other housing complexes in New Orleans, such as Saint Thomas in the Lower Garden District, Desire in the Ninth Ward, and Fischer on the West Bank, had already been subject to the clean-slate demolition and lower-density redevelopment initiatives driving the federal HOPE VI mandate, passed by congress in 1992, to eradicate concentrated poverty and crime in public housing (Breunlin & Regis 2006; Filosa 2006b).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> As a result of recommendations put forward by the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, legislation was passed in 1992 to create the HOPE VI program under the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development (Department of Housing and Urban Development n.d.). The program was a response to the

Local and federal authorities made no attempts to hide their convictions for eliminating most of New Orleans existing public housing in the early days after Katrina. Mayor Ray Nagin was quoted in his support of rebuilding and de-densifying the city's public-housing communities in the local newspaper just as residents were being officially denied re-entry into their apartments (Filosa & Russell 2005). While crime, violence, and poverty rates were disproportionately high in New Orleans public housing (Filosa 2006b), local and federal politicians and housing authorities equated those social ills with the apartment buildings and housing complexes themselves. "These are dangerous properties," Scott Keller, the Deputy Chief of Staff of HUD, pronounced publicly in June 2006 (Filosa 2006a).<sup>38</sup> Couched within HUD's overarching philosophy that existing public housing perpetuates danger, crime, and poverty is the HOPE VI funding imperative that extant housing complexes must be entirely razed and built anew. In fact, a vote by New Orleans' Historic Conservation District Review Committee (HCDRC) in December of 2007 to consider saving the Lafitte Housing Complex on social, cultural, and architectural merit, provoked HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson to threaten to withhold \$137 million in federal housing funds from the City of

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blight and concentrated poverty that had come to characterize the nation's large-scale public housing complexes, much of it built post-World War II and distressed because of declining government investment and repair over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ouroufsoff 2006). The principal objective of the HOPE VI program is to promote mixed-income development in these blighted inner-city communities by physically transforming government housing into developments that reflect mainstream American urban residential patterns: duplexes and rowhouses with their own private yards and pedestrian streets (Ouroufsoff 2006; Department of Housing and Urban Development n.d.). Though HOPE VI has revitalized blighted sections of American inner-cities, the lower-density and mixed-income mandates of the program have also displaced a significant portion of the nation's working poor who once lived in these targeted redevelopment communities (see Breunlin & Regis 2006).

<sup>38</sup> By attributing the social ills of government public housing to the design and density of the existing buildings, public housing officials also disregarded the historical factors dictating the existing social realities in public housing communities, namely declining federal investment since the rise of "white flight" in the 1960s that ultimately led to the physical deterioration of public housing and reduced social services (Ouroufsoff 2006; Reckdahl 2006b).



New Orleans if the HDCRC ruling was not overturned (H.U.D. Says Lafitte Housing Project Must Go or \$137m Does 2007).<sup>39</sup>

While public-housing authorities remained staunchly committed to the eradication of most government housing in New Orleans post-Katrina, housing and community activists and, notably, preservationists, actively criticized their logic. “The problems facing these projects have more to do with misguided policy and the city’s complex racial history than with bad design,” New York Times architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff (2007a: E1) pronounced in his column for a national audience at the height of the New Orleans public-housing debate. Preservationists also dwelled on HUD’s “tabula rasa planning mentality,” the organization’s refusal to consider alternatives that could be less disruptive to the city’s suffering, but also distinguished built fabric, and the federal organization’s insensitivity to the plight of traumatized, working-poor residents struggling to get back to New Orleans (Ouroussoff 2007b; Richard Vogel interview, 11.12.07). In chorus with community activists, preservationists further called out the classed and racial undertones of HANO and HUD’s redevelopment policies. “It [HANO] is using the promise of ending concentrated poverty as an excuse for shutting out working families,” James Dugan of the Louisiana Landmark Society, a New Orleans preservation nonprofit, declared in *The Times-Picayune* in February of 2007 (Filosa 2007).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> In 2007, both Jackson and Keller were subject to a criminal investigation as part of New Orleans’ public housing redevelopment that claimed Keller rigged bids and awarded construction contracts to companies with financial ties to Jackson (L. Elie 2007). Though neither were convicted, both Jackson and Keller have since resigned from their posts (Alpert 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Though preservationists did invoke a campaign to protect Lafitte on social-justice, as well as architectural-significance grounds, most invoked a classed, as opposed to a racialized critique of HANO’s redevelopment agenda. This observation reflects Preservationist Ned Kaufman’s view that “the heritage discussion needs also to admit the harder language of race” (2009: 11). According to Kaufman, this will involve deliberations over discrimination and inequity in the preservation process, not just new strategies to promote cultural diversity, as the field expands its relevance to minority and ethnic communities.

Meanwhile, displaced and disempowered residents of the housing complexes responded with arguments infused with emotion and desperation. “You need to stop playing politics with people’s lives” one middle-aged African-American woman warned HANO representatives at a public hearing in November of 2006, while another elderly woman simply protested in song – “I shall not be moved” (Jane Dupre & Susan Westbrook interview, 3.19.08). To the particular dismay of residents was the HUD and HANO claim that the sturdy apartments, which had grounded decades of community and family life for many and had survived numerous hurricanes and floods, were damaged beyond the point of repair and not worth saving. Lafitte, of all the housing complexes, was a well-maintained development that suffered very little flood damage after Katrina,<sup>41</sup> leading former Lafitte residents to question HUD’s motives with pure despair: “They can sustain a category 3, 4, 5 [hurricane], you know. They’re stone...really strong buildings...and I mean that’s why I really can’t understand why demolition is even taking place” (Sharon Woods interview, 6.5.08).

### **“Lafitte Heights:” Significance in Community and Safety**

“Right, all over there where that yellow tractor is, those were units. That’s where I grew up. That’s where I was living at, right over there,” Marcus Stallworth informed me as he pointed to a pile of dirt (interview, 6.19.08). “Lafitte Heights. Be sure to note that when you write about us,” he urged as we hiked across the plowed field in the June heat, what until just a few weeks before had been the closed and forlorn, yet still somehow dignified Lafitte apartment buildings (Figure 6.1). “We used the name, because we named ourselves,” Marcus added with a note of self-pride and determination, as we proceeded to scope the few extant apartment buildings still eerily frozen in an

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<sup>41</sup> While HUD-sanctioned reports declared the extent of Katrina damage at Lafitte merited complete redevelopment (United States Risk Management Inc 2007), an independent facility report conducted by John Fernandez, a professor of Building Technology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), found the Lafitte buildings “in good condition and easily repaired” (2007: 2). Residents’ visual observations of the apartment buildings confirmed Fernandez’s findings – “you can see where the water line sat, just below the top of the foundations,” former resident Marcus Stallworth noted many times when we toured the few remaining Lafitte buildings in June of 2008 (field notes, 6.19.08).

overtaken Katrina evacuation panic. “Even though some of the units are torn down I know the area and I can use my imagination and remember the different things that have transpired,” Marcus explained. He remembered when his family moved into Lafitte around 1970: “It seemed so quiet. You had shrubbery all around it. We had benches out in the courtyard and played ball. We played football and then we had lifeguards there at the NORD pool teaching us how to swim.” The vitality of Marcus’ memories exceeded the dismal scene of demolition that day on our walking tour, yet Marcus was one of a number of former residents I documented in the spring of 2008 who conveyed the deeply-rooted significance of their community in conversation, print, or protest, even as the very place that defined them was being torn down (Figure 6.1).

Violence statistics indicate that crime plagued Lafitte prior to Katrina (Reckdahl 2006b; Maggi & Reckdahl 2008),<sup>42</sup> and journalist Cynthia Brooks insists residents openly acknowledge the hard social realities of the drugs and violence that always loomed on the periphery of their community (interview, 2.23.08). But Cynthia, in her professional ties with the community, has also documented a genuine sense among Lafitte residents that “on the inside” it was a “stable community” where residents looked after one another and operated under a special code of conduct (interview, 2.23.08). “In my neighborhood, it was a crime not to speak to someone you walked past,” Sharon Woods, a former resident, declared in our interview (6.5.08) in retort to statements commonly made in the redevelopment debate that characterized the Lafitte community as a “violent underclass” (Filosa 2006b: A1). “So with that in mind you spoke to everybody” and, eventually, Sharon explained, you got to know everybody and “it was like one big family” (interview, 6.5.08).

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<sup>42</sup> Four people were killed in Lafitte in 2003 and seven in 2004 in a community of about 1000 households (Reckdahl 2008). While crime and homicide rates were comparatively high in Lafitte, it suffered less violence than other public-housing communities in New Orleans (Reckdahl 2006, 2008b).

Despite long-term structural oppression and the grim social realities facing the city's overwhelmingly African-American public-housing community, Lafitte residents feel they created an alternative space of safety and support that made their neighborhood special (Breunlin & Regis 2006). Various anecdotes of safe, supportive community run through my primary and secondary data: neighbors feeding kids when parents were late getting home from work, sisters playing every afternoon on their balcony and looking after each other and sometimes watching weekend parades pass by, and able residents carefully evacuating Lafitte elders as Katrina's floodwaters rose (Reckdahl 2008; Sharon Woods interview, 6.5.08). "I want to remember Lafitte how it was when I left," Sharon insisted in our interview, "everybody still hanging outside on the porches, girls getting braids on the stoops, boys getting haircuts, the candy lady selling frozen fruit cups...just little nice things that made our neighborhood to us the best neighborhood ever." These simple elements and everyday interactions of Lafitte life constituted a space of support, even vibrancy for a disadvantaged community, but they also, importantly, constituted residents' views of their historical and even architectural significance, as will be explored below.

### **Quality Housing and Craftsmanship: Lafitte's Architectural Significance**

In 1937, the Wagner-Steagall or United States Housing Act was passed under the banner of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the Public Works Administration (PWA) to help pull the nation out of the Great Depression and remedy the impoverished and unsanitary conditions lingering in urban centers (Lusignan 2002). The housing act mandated the creation of municipal housing authorities to design, construct, and operate their own local housing developments, but local authorities had to adhere to the funding, design, and programming directives of the newly sanctioned federal housing body, the United States Housing Authority (USHA) (Lusignan 2002).<sup>43</sup> The City of New Orleans aggressively capitalized on the funding opportunity to improve their

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<sup>43</sup> The USHA was the federal predecessor to HUD, which was created as a cabinet level agency in 1965.

substandard and overcrowded housing conditions. HANO was the first local housing authority in the United States to collect federal monies under the Wagner Act, and the agency erected six major public housing complexes by 1942 – the Lafitte, Magnolia/CJ Peete, Calliope/BW Cooper, and Saint Bernard for African-Americans in a still-legally segregated city, and the Iberville and Saint Thomas developments dedicated to the city’s white working poor (*Magnolia Street Housing Project National Register Nomination* 1999).<sup>44</sup> In addition to overseeing construction and physical maintenance of the housing complexes, HANO, under the directives of USHA and the PWA, also developed and promoted an array of public services (Figure 6.3). HANO reports from the 1940s lists a plethora of social programs that would seem almost alien in today’s public-housing context, premised on individual households and minimal public assistance: a credit union, childcare services, health clinics, home-nursing clinics, sewing and garden clubs, outdoor movie showings, and sport leagues (Ouroufsoff 2006; Reckdahl 2006b).<sup>45</sup>

All New Orleans New Deal public housing adhered to the social and design principles of the USHA, which promoted innovative, quality housing and planned green space for the “physical and moral well-being of tenants” (quoted Reckdahl 2006b: para 37). The “garden city” model put forward by USHA was reflected in all national public housing of this era (Lusignan 2002). New Deal government housing complexes in the South, however, were distinguished by a regional flair,

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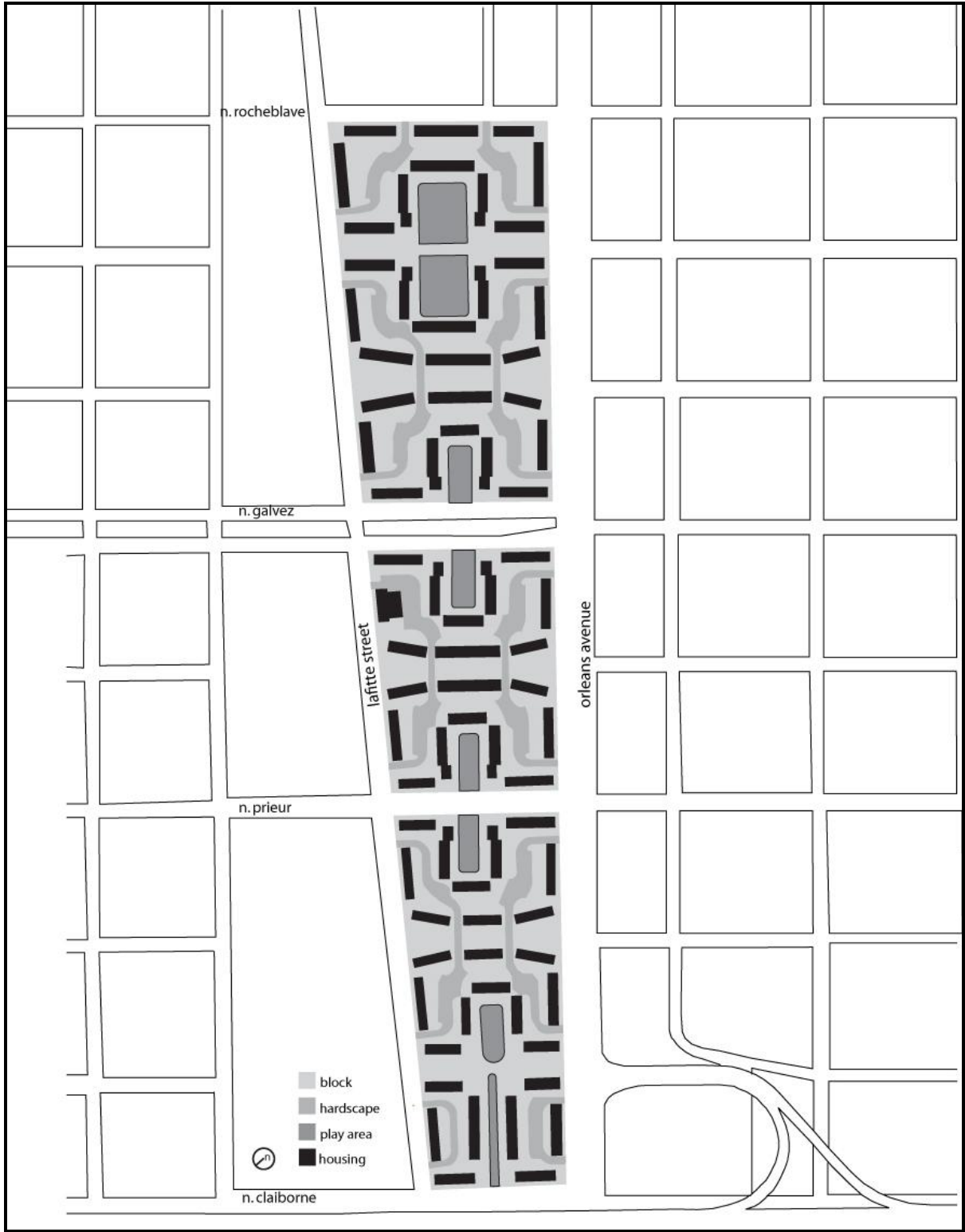
<sup>44</sup> In addition to New Orleans’ ballooning population and its small and withering manufacturing sector that was stressing the city’s housing situation in the 1930s, a conflict between Senator Huey Long and Roosevelt’s Secretary of the Interior prevented New Orleans from garnering housing funding under the PWA Housing Division. The City of New Orleans pushed to make up for lost housing projects after Long’s assassination in 1935 (*Magnolia Street Housing Project National Register Nomination* 1999).

<sup>45</sup> As the federal and local philosophies guiding housing and social services shifted in the 1960s, the network of public programming in New Orleans’ government housing was steadily stripped away. Cuts in social services corresponded with the movement of upper and middle-class New Orleanians to the suburbs, resulting in larger trends of disinvestment and increases in crime and poverty that have now come to characterize the city’s public housing developments, which was explored in sub-section III.A (Ouroufsoff 2006; Reckdahl 2006b).



**Figure 6.3:** WPA photo of a story circle at Lafitte in 1940 (Source: Louisiana Division, New Orleans Public Library, used with permission).

because local architecture firms were typically hired to plan and design the federally-backed public housing (Reckdahl 2006b). New York Times architecture critic, Nicolai Ourousoff, insists that even among southern public housing complexes, New Orleans' earliest government housing developments were markedly distinguished by their community courtyards and "garden-style apartments," low-rise, two-to-three-story brick buildings that also suited the neighborhood-scale of New Orleans (Figure 6.4). According to Ourousoff, New Orleans' New Deal public housing "rank[s] among the best early examples of public housing built in the United States, both in design and in quality of construction" (2007b: E1). In the fight to protect all four of the city's New Deal housing complexes in the ensuing months after Hurricane Katrina, local preservationists echoed Ourousoff's views. "These buildings are unique nationally and fit with New Orleans' built



**Figure 6.4:** Diagram of the Lafitte Housing Complex indicating the courtyard design of the complex (Source: Sarah Cloonan & Alison Popper/Cornerstones Project).

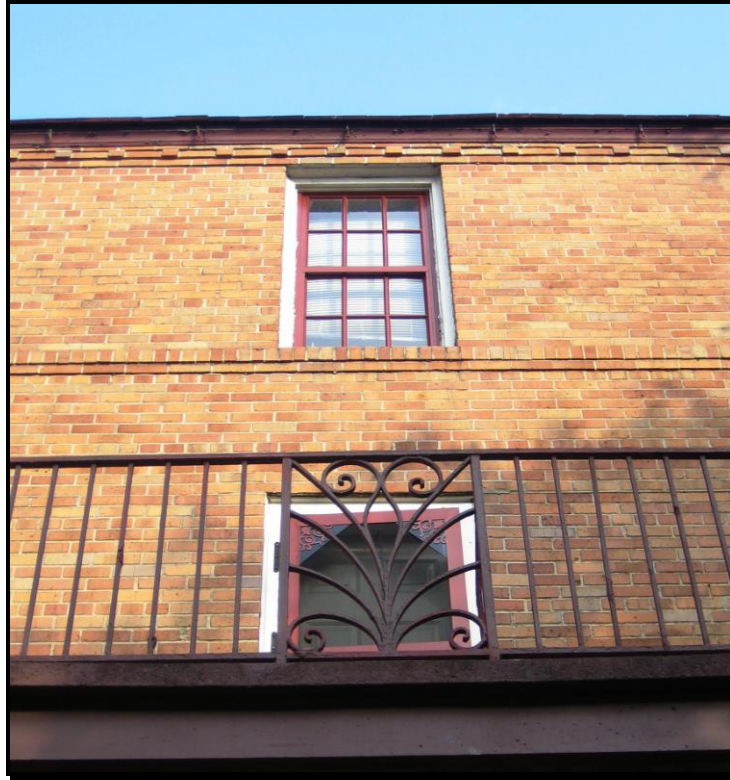
environment,” one local preservation activist stated at a public symposium in January 2008 (field notes 1.11.08). Upholding the “New Deal, garden apartment” model, preservationists argued that Lafitte, CJ Peete, BW Cooper, and Saint Bernard were durable and quality apartment buildings that embodied the exceptional social philosophies and design guidelines just outlined that characterize the nation’s early federal housing policy. Importantly, these New Deal characteristics physically embodied in the city’s “big four” public housing complexes prompted the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office to determine all of the threatened sites as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, which in turn required HUD to carry out a Section 106 historical review for each site and consider ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to each historic community.<sup>46</sup>

Of all the city’s New Deal housing developments, however, Lafitte possessed an architectural elegance that prompted national architecture figures like Ouroussoff and representatives from the National Trust, as well as local activists, to rally for its protection in exceptional ways. Though all of the city’s “big four” housing complexes had distinguishing stylistic elements like gable and hip-roof porches, eave returns, and ironwork balconies, according to Walter Gallas, the National Trust’s New Orleans Field Officer, “Lafitte was given the most care in terms of its design” (Reckdahl 2008: A1). Designed by local architecture firm Rosenthal, Kessels, and Jones, Lafitte’s buildings were visually modeled off the city’s famous, high-style Pontalbla Apartment buildings in Jackson Square, inspiring the subtle intricacies of the buildings’ decorative elements: the balcony ironwork, the lines of the pitched terra cotta roofs, and the brickwork punctuated with quoins and a beltcourse (Figure 6.5).

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<sup>46</sup> Magnolia/CJ Peete was actually already listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999 under Criterion C as an important site of local social history, because it was the first of the city’s large-scale, federally-funded housing projects to be built (*Magnolia Street Housing Project National Register Nomination* 1999).





**Figure 6.5:** Decorative ironwork on apartment balcony and brick belt course under the eave of the roof, spring 2008 (Source: Photograph by author).

It was the execution of these designs, however, by the city’s community of African-American and Creole master craftsmen that, in the views of residents, imbued the buildings with architectural significance. Housed within Treme, the neighborhood surrounding Lafitte, and the adjacent Seventh Ward neighborhood, the city’s black craftsmen “put their work” into Lafitte’s stately buildings. The light-brown bricks of Lafitte were “Slidell common;” made just across the lake in Slidell, and they were “placed expertly” within the Lafitte walls, according to Seventh Ward craftsman Earl Barthe (quoted in Maggi & Reckdahl 2008: A1). “Lafitte was built for us,” is how one former resident simply described the architectural importance of Lafitte, also underlining how that significance was rooted in personal connections residents had with the adjacent community of African-American craftsmen (quoted Reckdahl 2006a: para 3). The extra care employed by the neighboring black and Creole “master mechanics,” instilled Lafitte with an architectural significance

that captured some residents. It also, according to Gallas, made for a loss even those outside the community could tangibly grasp – “It’s easy for even the uninitiated observer to look at it [Lafitte] and say, “This is insane to loose this”” (quoted Reckdahl 2008: A1). Ultimately, though, Lafitte’s exceptional architecture did not prove to be a productive rallying point in the fight to protect the housing complex and the community.

### **“It’s About the People, not the Buildings” or Is It?: Aesthetic Versus Practical Architectural Significance**

“They talk about the bricks and the mortar, we’re talking about lives,” Emelda Paul, president of the Lafitte Council and a proponent of redevelopment, stated in *The Times-Picayune* (Filosa 2007: B1) as a counter to the various claims for protection of Lafitte put forward by preservationists in the flurry of public meetings during the winter of 2007. During our interview (6.5.08), I asked Sharon to summarize what made Lafitte a special place. She responded: “It wasn’t the buildings, you know...it wasn’t the windowsills. It was the people, and if all of those same people were moved into an apartment complex, it would be the same way, because it was the people.” Both of these comments are clearly direct critiques of arguments to protect Lafitte based principally on its architectural merit. While the everyday interactions and long-term social networks that Emelda and Sharon acknowledge made Lafitte a significant community to those who lived there, particularly within the larger context of racism, crime, and poverty that confronted so many of New Orleans poor, black, inner-city population, as this section will show, my research also reveals a less apparent, but important relationship between the buildings and the thoughtful community-oriented design of the complex, and the social and cultural qualities of life that defined Lafitte.

As mentioned, former Lafitte residents acknowledge they lived in a pretty place, and those familiar with the history take great pride in the legacy of the city’s Creole and black craftsmen who so artfully built their apartment buildings. But in my research, I found it was the emblematic light-

brown-and-orange “Slidell bricks,” the sturdiness of the construction that was particularly important to residents. When I asked Sharon in our interview (6.5.08) if the Lafitte buildings were special, different from others in New Orleans, she hesitated and, ultimately, in the course of her response, she did note their “brick architectural construction.” “Those walls were really hard. You could take a sledgehammer to those walls and maybe a small piece would come down,” Sharon continued, going on later to talk about the durability of the buildings and how, unlike many other buildings in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, they were “still standing.” Made of concrete frames, dressed in brick, and situated on high New Orleans ground, residents like Sharon and others frequently point out the Lafitte apartment buildings survived almost seven decades of hurricanes and flooding with little structural damage. Another resident, Jeffrey Hills, a professional tuba player who performs frequently at Preservation Hall, noted the practical value of being able to practice his tuba in an apartment with thick, solid walls – “I could practice my horn inside and no one could hear me on the outside” (quoted Reckdahl 2006a: para 9) Sharon and Jeffrey’s reflections are of interest, because they value the quality of the architecture, not for its aesthetic distinction, but for its more practical and needed purposes – hard-to-come-by stability and privacy in inner-city New Orleans.

In addition to the solid and cared for buildings, Lafitte’s central location in New Orleans also lent the community an extra facet of stability. Among the city’s major housing complexes slated for demolition after Katrina, Saint Bernard was located toward the lakefront and City Park, Magnolia/CJ Peete was situated Uptown in the Central City neighborhood, and B.W. Cooper sat west of the Central Business District. While Saint Bernard and Magnolia/CJ Peete residents had little to no mass transit access to the city’s downtown business district, even residents in the B.W. Cooper were not as ideally located as Lafitte residents for downtown work commutes. Situated close to the French Quarter, the Hospital Corridor, and the Central Business District, Lafitte

residents had manageable pedestrian and mass transit access to the city's major service and medical centers, and the Lafitte community made up a substantial segment of New Orleans' downtown work force (Reckdahl 2006a; Marcus Stallworth interview, 6.19.08). Of the three major complexes slated for redevelopment after Hurricane Katrina, Lafitte had the lowest vacancy rate, by far – three percent compared to a citywide thirty percent average (Maggi & Reckdahl 2008). Lafitte's central location in New Orleans was likely a major factor in the complex's high occupation rates and because Lafitte had significantly higher occupation rates, the complex did not physically suffer as much from neglect as others citywide (Reckdahl 2008; Fernandez 2007). In informal conversations and in the local media, Lafitte was regularly purported by residents and housing and preservation advocates as being “well-maintained” (Reckdahl 2008; field notes 12.3.07). A report produced in 2007 by John Fernandez, a Professor of Building Technology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), did find Lafitte to be the best maintained of the “big four” complexes; Fernandez's findings also indicated that Lafitte suffered the least amount of storm-related architectural damage.

The stable community and central location of Lafitte within New Orleans also infused the complex with a cultural significance over the decades. Claiborne Avenue, the once grand commercial and civic boulevard of black New Orleans, still remains the principal corridor for black Carnival celebrations, and Lafitte sits at the heart of the festivities as indicated by the ceremonial passage of the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club parade and the convening of downtown Indian tribes on Mardi Gras day (Figure 6.6). Jerome Smith, director of the nearby Treme Center, a youth club he established to promote African-American cultural traditions, purposefully launched the Tambourine and Fan Super Sunday Mardi Gras Indian parade in the early 1970s with Lafitte as its centerpiece – “That is why we came off that bayou onto Orleans Avenue, so that we can embrace

our folk” (quoted Reckdahl 2008: A1) (Figure 6.7). While under-recognized by some residents, the physical qualities of Lafitte, namely its durable construction and the central location of the complex, helped to spawn and perpetuate the stable nature of the Lafitte community and even the cultural significance that has distinguished the neighborhood over the decades, and these realities have important implications for preservationists.

### **“It’s Not Just About the Buildings, It’s About the People” or Is It?: Preservationists’ Articulations versus Residents’ Views of Significance**

“It’s not just about the buildings, it’s about the people,” a local preservation activist acknowledged in our informal conversation about concerted efforts by the Preservation Resource Center and the National Trust for Historic Preservation to help protect the city’s threatened public housing complexes (field notes 12.3.07). While the country’s preservation camp made public declarations at meetings, protests, and in the local and national print for the architectural value of the Lafitte buildings, they also actively called attention to the wasteful and biased policies of federal and local housing authorities. In a scathing critique in his national architecture column, Ouroussoff condemned HUD’s post-Katrina public housing redevelopment initiative because of “the trauma” it caused by “boarding up and then eradicating entire communities in a reeling city” (2007: E1). The National Trust, along with other notable preservation bodies, like the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) and New Orleans’ Preservation Resource Center, also protested the public-housing-redevelopment initiative on social-justice grounds. The ACHP, for example, composed a formal letter of dissent, condemning HUD’s inadequate Section 106 historical assessment procedures that did not allow “time and opportunity for meaningful consideration of alternatives to demolition” (personal communication, 9.18.07). In 2008, the National Trust sued HUD in the hopes of halting demolition of Lafitte and the other complexes on the grounds that



**Figure 6.6:** Carnival-goers actively using the closed Lafitte apartment buildings during Mardi Gras 2007 (Source: photograph by Laura Ayers, used with permission).



**Figure 6.7:** A weekly second line passing the Lafitte complex in tribute to the cultural significance of the community, 2004 (Source: Neighborhood Story Project archive, used with permission).

HUD did not carry out an adequate social-impact assessment, which is mandated under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) (Richard Vogel interview, 11.12.07). These formal objections, however, took place within the bureaucratic preservation and environmental-protection processes, processes that typically have not involved working-class and minority communities, like Lafitte, as outlined earlier in the chapter (Lee 2003; Morgan et al. 2006). As a result, many Lafitte residents were unaware of the impressive protective efforts put forward by the preservation community. More fundamentally, though, the Lafitte case study illustrates the need for shifts in preservation strategies to focus on the embedded and everyday meanings of buildings for communities that also inform understandings of historical importance.

“The stakeholder involvement necessary to identify the subtle vital markers of community identity has been cultivated poorly,” Morgan, Morgan, and Barret insist about the U.S. preservation system (2006: 715), and this case study underlines the need for preservation professionals to effectively engage with residents and identify points of historic or architectural significance that generate passion and concern among the “stakeholders” or communities involved. The frequent “New Deal, garden apartment model” argument for protection put forward by preservationists did not resonate with Lafitte residents. Residents’ feelings of architectural significance were actually grounded in more practical uses and everyday meanings, and notably, in the case of the now displaced Lafitte community, “stability” was an underlying theme of importance. Stability not only defined the architectural importance of Lafitte, according to Sharon, it also defined the community’s historical importance. At the end of our interview and without prompting, she added a final thought: “There are people with friendships going on 35 and 45 years because of that neighborhood, because they live in that same neighborhood together, and that to me, that’s historic” (6.5.08).

Preservationist Ned Kaufman has noted that in development debates, the force of change is typically

upheld as progress, while the value of persistence and stability, the ways places nurture communities through their “capacity for remaining the same” is undervalued, if not overlooked altogether (2009: 30). In the context of the architectural and social loss of post-Katrina New Orleans, Lafitte’s durability was as tangible as the material beauty of the buildings, and that stability also corresponded to residents’ views, like Sharon’s, of the social importance of the community. Such a practical and essential architectural value could have been used as a rallying point in the fight to protect the threatened community (Low et al. 2005; Kaufman 2009).

In his recent publication *Race, Place, and Story*, a constructive critique of historic preservation in the United States, Kaufman acknowledges that the material form or features of a building may not constitute its significance, yet, he advises, “architecture in its broadest meaning, as the physical shaping of space and place, is extremely important. Architecture in this sense, and more broadly the physical environment, is both the container of stories and their embodiment” (2009: 54). Kaufman’s insight speaks to the research work of cultural geographers who address the fundamental and typically taken-for-granted role of the built landscape in structuring social and political realities (J. Duncan & Duncan 1988; Duncan 1993; Schein 1997). As a result, geographers have carefully articulated and put forward research agendas that endeavor to “denaturalize” the built environment, to highlight the ways in which the built environment is an active agent in constituting social relations and meanings (Duncan and Duncan 1988). Kaufman’s insight and the research work of geographers thus point to a potentially fruitful preservation strategy – public outreach and education on the overlooked qualities and benefits of the built environment.

In addition, while social and cultural resources are given some credence in federal and local preservation policies, challenges in conceptualizing and documenting these intangible resources have prevented the development of any legislation formally mandating their protection (Parker & King



1998; King 2003). Kaufman goes on to advise in the passage from above that architecture, as opposed to living heritage, is often “what the law may be invoked to protect” (2009: 54). If preservationists could make this technical link for residents unfamiliar with the field’s policies and procedures, it would cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of what “the buildings” offer in terms of protection, a protection that ultimately does not just safeguard “bricks and mortar,” but also “the people,” or at least the environment that supports the people – the “container” that holds their stories, their living culture, and their ongoing meanings. While the Lafitte case study puts forward insight on how the field of preservation can better serve minority and working-class communities, the succeeding case study considers how a refinement of existing practices and methods is also important to successfully safeguard resources and communities that have traditionally fallen under the field’s purview.

## **Deutsches Haus**

Hurricane Katrina not only presented local and state housing authorities with the opportunity to collect emergency federal funding and initiate the redevelopment of four of the city’s major government housing complexes, it also offered local and state players the opportunity to garner federal monies due to the storm and flooding damage inflicted on the city’s only major trauma center and public hospital, a massive Art Deco structure and regional medical icon known locally as Charity Hospital or “Big Charity.” The State of Louisiana and Louisiana State University (LSU) Medical System earmarked the still-pending federal payout in the immediate wake of Katrina as a substantial portion of the needed funds to build a new, “state-of-the-art” teaching medical complex in conjunction with the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) (Moller 2006; Pope & Moller 2006).<sup>47</sup> According to current plans, twenty-five square blocks of a mostly residential, 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> One of the many major issues surrounding this redevelopment medical project is that while the Department of Veterans Affairs has committed the allotted funds necessary to erect its new regional hospital, the State of Louisiana has

century neighborhood known as either “Lower Mid-City” or “Tulane-Gravier” will be replaced by the LSU/VA hospital complex (Eichhorn 2007; National Trust for Historic Preservation n.d.).

The proposal to raze the historic Lower Mid-City neighborhood has sparked controversy since its public airing in early 2006 (Farwell 2007), but protests have also erupted over what residents claim to be the unnecessary closure and neglect of Charity Hospital that, they argue, feasibly can and should be repaired, updated, and reopened within the city’s already existing medical district (Barrow 2009). While the complex issues tied up in this redevelopment dispute are beyond the focus of my case study on the Deutsches Haus, it is important to understand that while many New Orleans residents applaud the proposed medical center as a necessary development engine in the city’s recovery, preservationists, residents of Lower Mid-City, and public-health activists have actively criticized the medical-complex-planning process as “non-transparent,” “inefficient,” and “misguided,” needlessly halting essential public-health services and potentially razing an entire historic community though less damaging alternatives exist (Moran 2007; Barrow 2009).

During my time in the field, preservationists made exceptional pleas to restore Charity Hospital and protect all of Lower Mid-City from being razed. In 2008 the National Trust named the neighborhood and closed public hospital as one of the nation’s “11 most endangered historic places” (National Trust for Historic Preservation n.d.) and they also launched a “save Mid-City” petition (<http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/southern-region/charity-hospital/>). In the fall of 2007, the Preservation Resource Center developed a series of articles in their monthly magazine, *Preservation in Print*, that highlighted the potential historical and architectural loss in Lower Mid-City (Eichhorn 2007; Farwell 2007). Local preservation activists were powerful

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not been able to secure the funds to construct a new teaching hospital, the pending FEMA damage pay-out notwithstanding. Preservationists and neighborhood activists contend the State therefore does not have the right to move forward with their aggressive land acquisition and demolition phases of the development project (Barrow 2009).

and articulate voices at all public meetings concerning the proposed development of the city's regional biomedical complex, protesting the unnecessary loss of historic residences and local landmarks like the Deutsches Haus.

### **“[It’s] the Charm of What We’ve Made the Architecture to Be:” The Deutsches Haus and Cultural Significance**

The current plans for the LSU/VA medical complex are squarely centered on South Galvez Street in Lower Mid-City, home of the city's preeminent German social and cultural center – the Deutsches Haus. The Deutsches Haus organization was founded in 1927 to house the various German societies throughout New Orleans, namely some of the city's popular German singing groups, like the *New Orleanser Quartett Club*, and social groups, like *Die deutsche Gesellschaft von New Orleans* (German Society of New Orleans), *Der Turn-Verein* (Turners' or Gymnasts' Society), and the *Deutsch-Amerikanischer National Bund – Staatsverband für Louisiana*, (German American National Bund – Louisiana State Chapter), organizations that emerged in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to support the city's burgeoning German immigrant population (*Deutsches Haus: Our History* n.d.; Adam Racke interview, 9.27.07). Though by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century German immigration to New Orleans had substantially slowed, the Deutsches Haus originally served a purpose much like its organizational predecessors as a benevolent and social aid club, providing meals, housing, employment, and, importantly, a gathering place for German immigrants and New Orleans residents of German heritage (*Deutsches Haus: Our History* n.d.). Over the years the mission of the Deutsches Haus has shifted from “new world” assimilation to the promotion of German and German-American heritage in New Orleans, and the Haus has evolved into a non-profit and member-supported organization with a volunteer board of directors and officers (*Deutsches Haus: Our History* n.d.; Max Reinhold interview, 9.27.07). Membership currently consists of approximately 600 members, most of whom live in the greater

New Orleans metropolitan area or adjacent communities, like Slidell, Chalmette, Hammond, or Mandeville.

Since its inception in 1927, the Deutsches Haus has occupied the commanding two-story brick building at the corner of South Galvez Street and Cleveland Avenue in Lower Mid-City. As a result, the “Deutsches Haus” refers not just to the city’s foremost German cultural organization, but also its physical headquarters, which is marked by the organization’s red and yellow eagle crest that dangles from the building’s entry portico and a stone eagle perched on the northeast corner of the parapet roof (Figure 6.8). On my first visit to the Deutsches Haus, I was struck by a feeling that was identifiably “old world,” but not quite. Part of this “old world” feel I sensed as I first stepped inside the Haus, derived from the physical presence of the massive building and its notable adornments: the bronze bear in the entry given to the Haus by the city of Berlin in the 1960s, the heavy wooden 18<sup>th</sup> century furniture pieces in the front meeting room, the Alp mural stenciled on the wall of the barroom, and the long wooden bar dotted with beer taps (Figure 6.9). Adding to the ethnic ambience were the goings-on and my sensual experiences of the interior space: the warmth of the wood floors and yellow walls, the smells of cooking and clanging coming from the back kitchen, the German occasionally erupting from the small group lesson in the front room, and the rolling conversations of friends visiting over beers in the main barroom (field notes, 9.27.07).

Two of the friends visiting over beers were prominent officers of the organization, Adam Racke and Max Reinhold, who quickly greeted me and took me on a tour of their compelling building, originally constructed as a Cumberland Telephone and Exchange building in 1910 (it is now one of only two telephone exchange buildings still extant in Orleans Parish). Since the Deutsches Haus occupied the telephone exchange building on South Galvez Street in 1927, they



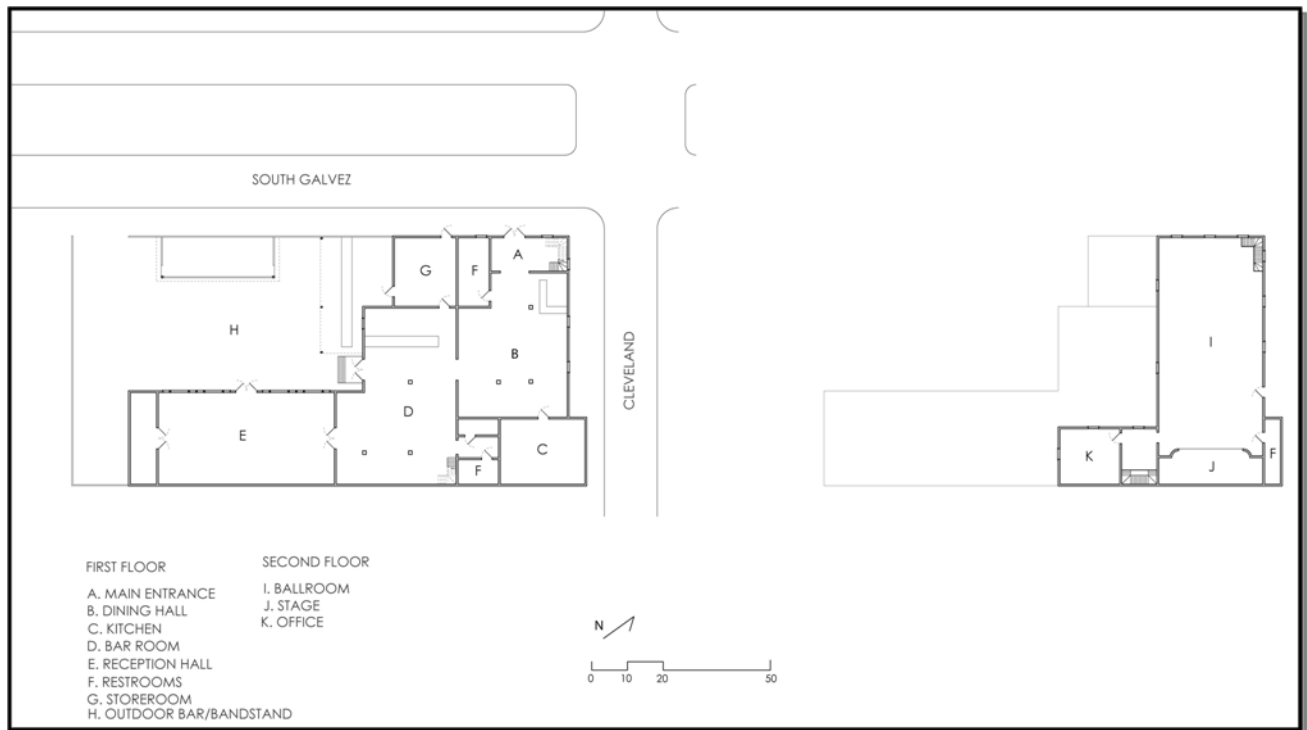
**Figure 6.8:** Exterior of the Deutsches Haus, fall 2007 (Source: photograph by author).



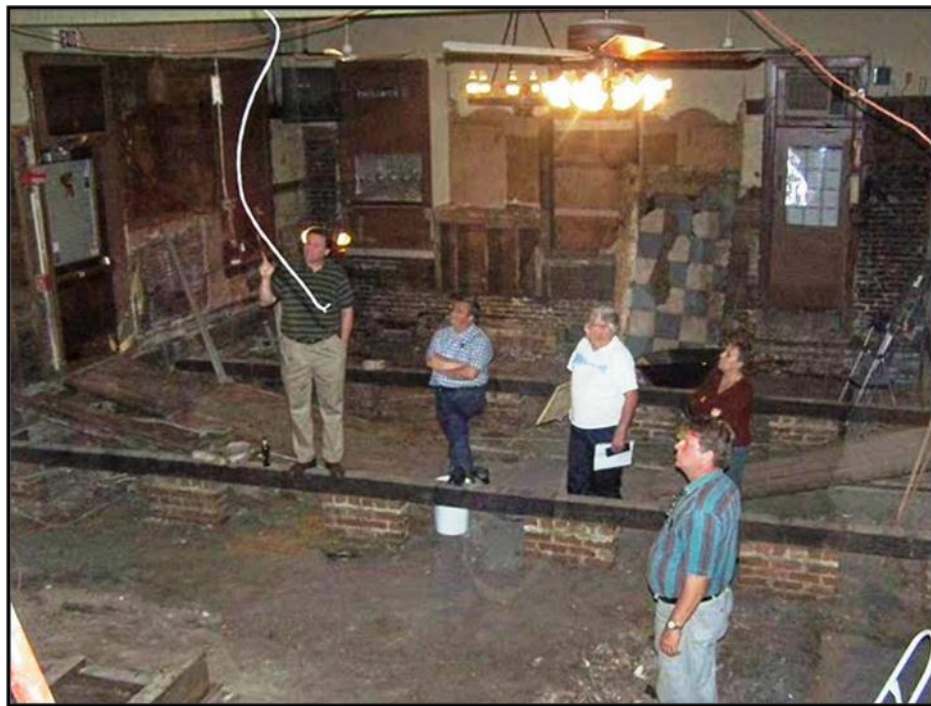
**Figure 6.9:** Old world décor in dining room, fall 2007 (Source: photograph by author).

have altered the space to suit their shifting organizational needs. Notable among the organization's remodeling efforts is the incorporation of a ballroom and stage on the second story, which dates to the 1930s. In the 1940s, the organization added a west wing, three-lane-bowling-alley addition, making it one of the first bowling alleys in the city. Today the bowling alley is a multi-purpose room and rental space, but a bowling pin insignia still marks the main entry. Adam and Max walked me through the upstairs ballroom and outside to the courtyard and bowling-alley addition before guiding me back to the main barroom, the center of everyday life in the Deutsches Haus (Figure 6.10). I was informed not just by my guides, but the many Haus members I spoke with that evening and on subsequent visits, that the barroom and all the downstairs had been restored post-Katrina through the volunteer effort of members (Figure 6.11). The centerpiece of the barroom – the long, wooden bar, for example, had been re-built out of salvaged joists and floorboards (field notes, 9.27.07).

A number of Haus members lost their own homes to Hurricane Katrina, so the sacrifice and commitment of club members to rebuild the cultural center was especially notable. “It was tough after Katrina,” Joseph Hennrich explained in our interview (9.27.07), “because I had two homes to put back together.” This emotional capital invested in the Deutsches Haus' post-Katrina recovery was a primary reason put forward by members of why they did not want to see their gathering space razed: “That would probably be the hardest thing if we did have to leave would be seeing the Haus destroyed and then rebuilding it only to see it come down again” (Jacob Hennrich interview, 9.27.07). The Deutsches Haus is an uncommon building in the New Orleans landscape as an extant early 20<sup>th</sup> century telephone exchange building, but Haus members insist what makes their space worth protecting is “the charm” of what members over the decades “have made the architecture to



**Figure 6.10:** Floor Plan of the Deutsches Haus (Source: Helen Juergen/Cornerstones Project).



**Figure 6.11:** Volunteer restoration of the Deutsches Haus, fall 2005 (Source: Deutsches Haus archive, used with permission).

be” – the layers of alterations that physically convey the history of the organization, the post-Katrina restoration being the most recent (Max Reinhold interview, 9.27.07).

Members submit that the “charm” of the Haus is also constituted by the everyday uses and heightened performances at the cultural center: “I think it’s the use over the years that has given something of an irreplaceable character to this building, because inside of these walls quite a few generations of people and various German organizations have come together to form what we know as the Deutsches Haus today” (Max Reinhold interview, 12.13.07). In their campaign to “Save the Haus,” members link the importance of preserving the organization’s physical headquarters to the need to sustain the special events and cultural programming that have come to characterize the organization (Figure 6.12) (Save the Haus! Press Release 2007). Some of the Haus’ distinguishing cultural activities include: German choir practice – the *Damenchor* for women, *Sagenchor* for men, foreign-film nights, German group-language lessons, *Schlaraffia* fraternal rituals, Crescent City *Volkssport* (hiking and walking society) outings, gatherings of the *Bayou Stein Verein* (beer stein collectors), and the major production and fundraiser, the Oktoberfest celebration, that now welcomes thousands of visitors annually for beer, bratwurst, *kuchen* (cake), the polka, and the frenzied Chicken Dance (Figure 6.13) (field notes 9.27.07, 10.12.07).

While members value the events and programming they sponsor that promote German and German-American heritage, those I spoke and interacted with also strongly feel the cultural center provides a space where members or visitors can forge very personal understandings of and connections to their German heritage. Most Haus members are several generations removed from their direct German ancestry, and typically their involvement with the organization was spawned by a growing interest in their family genealogy and their German heritage (Adam Rack interview, 9.27.07; field notes, 12.12.07). “I mean I never really knew my family was German...and it was





**Figure 6.12:** Concert at the Deutsches Haus circa the 1980s (Source: Deutsches Haus archive, used with permission).



**Figure 6.13:** The chicken dance at Oktoberfest 2007 (Source: photograph by author).

because the circumstances of the war years. For me, [the Haus] is an extension of the family that lost part of their culture and it's here for me not to forget it," one active member reflected in our interview (Jacob Hennrich interview, 9.27.07). Such reflections call attention to the struggles of the organization to sustain the center's cultural legitimacy, particularly when Germans were ostracized in the United States following World War II, and endure as an active presence in Lower Mid-City. Importantly, as well, some members are first generation immigrants and they consider the Haus to be their "home away from home," a space that has simply been integral to their assimilation (Raymond Hagan interview, 10.10.07; Hannah Kappel interview, 10.10.07). In this sense, the Haus has helped to safeguard an at-times threatened German-American heritage, while also sustaining a community that forges connections to their German heritage in ongoing ways.

The area surrounding the Deutsches Haus was home to a significant Catholic German community from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century up until the "white flight" out of the area in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which has since transformed the neighborhood into a predominantly black, working-class neighborhood (Eichhorn 2007; Farwell 2007; Richard Vogel interview, 11.12.07). Deutsches Haus members note the legacy of the community of German immigrant laborers that once surrounded their cultural center: their predecessors, they explain, who "built this city" (Jacob Hennrich interview, 9.27.07). This immediate and physical connection to what was a predominantly German neighborhood is upheld as another principal reason members do not want to see their building demolished or moved to another location as part of the medical-complex-redevelopment project:

We would lose that link back to the [German] immigrants that helped put the city together, worked here, had families here. It would just be another thing that we would lose that we just can't get back again... [the] direct lineage here to the club from the immigrants. (Adam Racke interview, 9.27.07)

In order to survive as a Lower Mid-City cultural institution, however, Deutsches Haus members catered to the historic preservation process as part of the hospital redevelopment initiative, while

also developing their own practical strategy to safeguard their cultural center, both of which, compellingly, steered the organization toward a self-preservation campaign at the expense of a more comprehensive strategy to protect the environs that give rise to the Deutsches Haus in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Section 106 Success**

In formal and informal conversations with Haus members, the Section 106 historical-review process was genuinely acknowledged as the one bureaucratic procedure that could protect the Haus from being demolished as part of the LSU/VA medical complex project. “At some point we will be involved and have an opportunity to make sure they know the significance of us and talk about what could be done to mitigate the impact on the historic structure. Whether it’s build around it, relocate it, rebuild it, or take pictures and document it,” Max Reinhold stated in our interview (12.13.07), using the language and noting the mechanisms most often used by government and preservation officials to mitigate damages to historic resources as part of the Section 106 process. Haus officers acquired a keen understanding of the Section 106 process, and, in light of my stated research interests, the organization’s spokespeople regularly articulated the importance of the Deutsches Haus to me in terms that reflected the underlying measures of National Register eligibility criteria. “The value of the Haus is not so much in its architecture, it’s in its cultural significance,” an organizational officer informed me one night during a casual conversation at the bar (field notes, 11.29.07).

When the Section 106 review was carried out for the LSU/VA medical complex project in the fall of 2007 and again in the summer and early fall of 2008, the Deutsches Haus was an informed and active participant in the process.<sup>48</sup> Officers, at least one lawyer, and sometimes, additionally,

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<sup>48</sup> A preliminary Section 106 review was conducted for the State of Louisiana by United States Risk Management in the fall of 2007. The complete Section 106 review for both the LSU and VA hospitals, as well as all federal agencies

involved members, were in attendance at the hearings, making the public case for the historical significance of their cultural center (field notes 11.25.07, 6.24.08, 6.26.08). “This is the last landmark of the German citizens of New Orleans,” members pointed out, arguing that the organization plays an exceptional role in sustaining New Orleans’ European immigrant history (field notes 11.25.07). The Haus also managed to cultivate the support of local historians, preservationists, and cultural documentarians who acknowledged the Haus is very significant to New Orleans not only as the last standing cultural center of any of the city’s major European ethnic immigrant groups, but also an active site of heritage and cultural programming (Warner 2007; Richard Vogel interview, 11.12.07). “The cultural significance of the institution is enough to merit saving the building. A society like this needs a home in order to fulfill its role as a cultural standard-bearer,” a representative of the Historic New Orleans Collection (HNOC) stated in the local press in support of protecting the physical headquarters of the Deutsches Haus (quoted Warner 2007: A12). Crucially, groups like the HNOC, the Preservation Resource Center, and the Louisiana Landmarks Society were active advocates for the Haus and forceful participants in the Section 106 review process (field notes 11.25.07, 6.24.08).<sup>49</sup>

The organization’s informed and aggressive involvement in the Section 106 process proved a success. In the final draft of the Section 106 report presented to the general public in November 2008, of the approximately 200 structures in the proposed footprint of the biomedical complex campus, five were found to be individually eligible for the National Register and worthy of special measures to avoid negative impacts to those properties as part of the biomedical development if

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involved in the project, was carried out by a separate cultural resource management firm, R Christopher Goodwin, in the summer and fall of 2008.

<sup>49</sup> The Louisiana Landmarks Society also named the Deutsches Haus as one of New Orleans’ nine most endangered landmarks in 2008 (Louisiana Landmarks Society 2008).

possible. The Deutsches Haus was the only structure determined to be significant solely under Criterion A of the National Register of Historic Places (which assesses a site's significance based on its association with historical events) for its role in New Orleans' German history and culture (Federal Emergency Management Agency and U S Department of Veterans Affairs 2008). Despite their active involvement and apparent victory in the Section 106 process, however, the Haus' preservation strategy revealed skepticism for Section 106 review and mitigation policies from the outset, the consideration of the next sub-section.

### **“The Haus and the Hospital Together:” A Practical Preservation Strategy**

As discussed in chapter two, while assessment of the historical significance of standing structures is mandated for any development project using federal public funds under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the mitigation recourse for damage to historic resources is *not* mandated, and, in most cases, even structures determined to be significant historical resources are razed if in the path of any major development project (King 2000). This reality was well-understood by Haus leadership who noted to me in various ways the “discretion” involved in the Section 106 review process, and how, ultimately, to be protected through existing preservation policy the Haus had to rely on the “benevolence” of people in authority (field notes 12.13.07, 10.10.08). “We have to prove our worth” is the way one member described the organization's survival strategy (field notes 10.10.08). Inherent in this and other statements was the view that, ultimately, historical and cultural significance would not be the Haus' saving grace, but, rather, that the Haus' practical or economic value would be their “selling point” for survival.

“The Haus and Hospital together” was the preservation slogan developed by the Haus that declared the organization to be a partner in the city's economic development, as well as a social and cultural asset to the new medical complex if permitted to be incorporated into existing plans (Save the Haus! Press Release 2007; field notes 9.27.07, 11.5.08). During my fieldwork I documented

various instances of Haus members articulating and asserting the “Save the Haus” campaign philosophy. “The Deutsches Haus will be a positive asset to the VA/LSU hospital complex with its ambience, meeting facilities, and refreshments, as well as its significant contribution to New Orleans’ historic culture and architecture,” wrote William Axtman in the editorial section of *The Times-Picayune* on October 4, 2007. “Please let us co-exist,” another member stated at a public meeting about the hospital development in November of 2007 (field notes 11.29.07). These Haus members and many others were making the public case to incorporate their cultural center as a restaurant and social space at the dividing line between the proposed VA and LSU teaching hospitals on South Galvez Street, a practical proposition to avoid being razed as part of the major hospital development initiative.

During my field work I noted some Haus members questioning the logic and appeal of being situated within the biomedical complex: “Do we really want to be surrounded by tall buildings and all that noise?” I overheard one older and disgruntled member ask an officer one night in his thick German accent (field notes 11.8.08). Most members, however, genuinely felt their quirky and culturally significant building was not only worth protecting despite the possible loss of the historic German community that gave rise to the institution, but also that the Haus would be a colorful and perhaps poignant addition to the biomedical complex. “I’ve never been one to stand in the way of progress, but I think you can co-exist with a modern city and still not get rid of all of your remembrance of the past,” one Haus member explained to me (Jacob Henrich interview, 9.27.07). In informal conversations, some members even noted that being centrally located in a medical district could give the Haus a real financial and membership boost that would enhance their capabilities as a meeting and cultural center (field notes 10.15.08, 11.5.08). While on the one hand the Deutsches Haus is a “remembrance of the past,” this at-times-struggling cultural organization is still, in Jacob’s words (interview 9.27.07), “kicking and moving,” and since Hurricane Katrina the

organization has experienced a resurgence. Haus membership numbers, in fact, have more than doubled under the cultural center's threat of being razed or relocated, and incorporation into the hospital complex potentially presented an opportunity to experience more growth and popularity (field notes 11.5.08).

In addition to developing a clear and thoughtful strategy to survive the proposed demolition of much of Lower Mid-City, the organization also managed to mobilize and gain the attention and interest of German-American and other concerned residents in the New Orleans region. The Haus earned coverage in the local press about their threatened future (Warner 2007; Johnson 2008; McNutty 2009) and, even with demolition imminent, the organization's "Save the Haus" signs are still staked and tacked up throughout the city (Figure 6.14). As just mentioned, the Haus' membership numbers have jumped significantly since Katrina, but the turn-out for their annual Oktoberfest celebration has exploded: the event now spans an entire month and hosts over 20,000 visitors (field notes 11.08.08, 2.16.10). In fact, officials with the LSU Medical System and State planners of the medical complex were noted as attending the Oktoberfest celebration and being in contact with the Haus' "legal team" during my time in the field (field notes 10.12.07, 12.13.07). At the time of this writing, however, despite the Haus' eligibility for the National Register and despite the widespread attention the organization has received in honor of its cultural significance, including the diplomatic consideration of hospital authorities, the Haus is not part of current renderings for the hospital complex. The State of Louisiana is currently acquiring all property within the project area and, after "one last dance" for Oktoberfest 2010, the Deutsches Haus will temporarily re-locate to Metairie, a suburb that sits northwest of the city (field notes 5.15.10).



**Figure 6.14:** Save the Haus campaign sign held up by the bronze bear, a gift to the City of New Orleans from West Berlin, fall 2007 (Source: photograph by author).

### **Lessons of the Deutsches Haus Preservation Campaign**

As this chapter has demonstrated, New Orleans' camp of preservation officials and activists have made a number of impressive efforts to protect historic communities and properties threatened by the flurry of demolition and redevelopment after Katrina.<sup>50</sup> Much of this active outreach in New Orleans has involved efforts to protect sites associated with the history and culture of the city's African-American poor and working-class communities who are celebrated for their rich performances traditions (Regis 2001), but who typically have not been incorporated into the

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<sup>50</sup> Examples of such notable efforts include the Ethnic Heritage Preservation Program at the Preservation Resource Center. The program was expanded after the storm to include an education and outreach component, which has consisted of workshops and seminars for home owners in the city's black, working-class historic communities on how to invest in and restore their properties (Rudy Barthe interview, 6.28.08). The Historic District Landmarks Commission is working to make their architectural standards more accessible for residents in their predominantly African-American and working-class historic districts in the city, as well as providing some financial assistance to property owners to help them keep their historic homes up to HDLC code (Shane Latham interview, 6.25.08; field notes, 9.1.10).



processes and politics of protecting their spaces of culture and heritage (Kaufman 2009). All the preceding case studies in this dissertation in some way serve as sites of African-American cultural practice and performance in New Orleans, so my own dissertation research is reflective of such efforts by preservationists to correct for the ways built spaces used by and associated with minority communities have been overlooked, misunderstood, or inadequately assessed. As a result, the Deutsches Haus case study is as an uneasy fit in my collection of case studies, particularly because the failure of the Haus' articulate and aggressive preservation campaign problematizes simple characterizations of historic preservation's exclusive undertones.

Importantly, the Deutsches Haus is the only site and community of users I examine in this dissertation that had to fight to protect their physical headquarters and cultural center (Lafitte was already demolished when I took up research on that community). As a result, the case study offers important insight on the aggressive and creative tactics necessary to try to safeguard a building and its associated community from a major and impending redevelopment initiative. Arguably, because the Deutsches Haus was so articulate and well mobilized in their campaign to "Save the Haus" and because their historical importance fit comfortably within existing preservation criteria for local historic significance, local preservation leaders did not actively collaborate with the organization on their survival strategy and, in turn, they uncritically embraced the Haus' powerful campaign to safeguard their cultural center. For example, in a conversation with a local documentarian and preservation activist who has worked with the German organization, she commented that the "Haus and the Hospital Together" campaign is a "pretty narrowly focused kind of thing, but," she added, "it's not surprising [because] they don't live there anymore" (field notes 11.02.07). Such accepting views by preservation leaders ultimately led to a bifurcation in the campaign to protect Lower Mid-City. On the one hand, there was the call to protect the Deutsches Haus as a marker of the German history of Lower Mid-City, and, on the other, there was the call to save the rest of Lower Mid-City

as the historic, but predominantly African-American and working-class recovery community that it is today (Farwell 2007; Richard Vogel interview, 11.12.07). Ironically, this dynamic reinforced the racial and classed divides that have traditionally characterized historic preservation's purview, despite exceptional efforts by New Orleans' preservation community to overcome these barriers by giving voice to the value of Lower Mid-City in the Section 106 review process and other public forums.

As a middle to upper-middle-class European cultural institution, the Deutsches Haus is not characterized as the type of landmark the preservation system typically fails (Morgan et al. 2006). As a result, if the Deutsches Haus had not been threatened by the LSU/VA hospital complex, it may have been overlooked by preservationists and other cultural advocates as a vulnerable resource. Without growing membership numbers and the extreme success of their annual Oktoberfest fundraiser after Katrina, due in large part to the impending development of the LSU/VA medical complex, the organization likely would have faced extreme challenges in physically renovating their cultural center, reassembling a community of members, and reestablishing their role as a cultural programming institution in New Orleans. In other words, the Deutsches Haus has and continues to face its own unique challenges to remain an integral component of New Orleans' cultural landscape. As a result, the Haus case study calls to light how preservation needs to refine their conceptualizations and methodologies for apprehending architectural significance, not just to serve communities that typically fall outside the field's purview, but also to more effectively promote communities that have traditionally been protected by the field's existing policies and practices.

It must be acknowledged that the Section 106 review process reinforces the traditional monumental frame of historic preservation by calling for a structure-by-structure survey of resources within a project area and assessing each site's individual eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (King 2000). While it is not standard Section 106 review protocol to treat a project area as a comprehensive historic resource, if preservationists had carefully engaged with the

Deutsches Haus and the area's other various community groups to help them author an inclusive and meaningful strategy, there would have been debate and discussion at the series of mandated public meetings about the connections between the area's history, its built resources, and its contemporary significance (Lee 2003; Morgan et al. 2006; Longstreth 2008; Kaufman 2009). Importantly for the Deutsches Haus, such a preservation strategy could have linked the organization to a broader community of support, especially their Lower Mid-City neighbors, which could have strengthened their preservation campaign as part of a bigger effort to protect a historic community, as opposed to a stand-alone marker of their German heritage. Such a strategy could also have made for a more unified and perhaps more effective campaign to protect the entire neighborhood, as well as softening the racial and classed lines that emerged over struggles to save Lower Mid-City. As preservationists and other place documentarians (myself included) push to promote and protect new histories and built resources, we must not reinforce the types of categorical conceptualizations and approaches that originally delineated preservation's exclusionary purview. The concepts and methods upheld in this dissertation speak to ways for preservationists to move beyond facile categorizations of built spaces and to engage communities like the Deutsches Haus in order to identify the rich, complex, and relational ways buildings are important, as well as more effective strategies for promoting them. This underlying research commitment will be reviewed in detail in chapter seven.

## **Conclusion**

The Lafitte and Deutsches Haus case studies point back to earlier episodes in New Orleans preservation history that were discussed in chapter two, episodes that are also reflective of preservation history in other American cities and towns. The demolition of the Lafitte Housing Complex evokes the urban renewal projects that bulldozed square blocks of the black, working-class Treme community in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, most notably the construction of Interstate 10 overtop

the community's principal civic and commercial corridor, North Claiborne Avenue. The Deutsches Haus' campaign to survive a massive redevelopment project endorsed by major political and business figures is reminiscent of the efforts of preservation activists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> to protect the French Quarter from the proposed Crescent City Expressway.

These particular historical precedents, as well as the exclusionary underpinnings and failures of preservation outlined in the introduction of this chapter, informed the different mobilizations of the Lafitte and Deutsches Haus communities as part of the formal preservation processes. In the case of Lafitte, the community residents did not initiate participation in formal preservation surveys or hearings concerning the fate of their complex, nor did they, as a community, develop a strategy to protect Lafitte based on existing preservation policies or qualifications as a site of architectural or cultural importance. Some community members felt estranged by a process that emphasized the architectural value of their former homes over the practical and emotional ways they valued and longed for Lafitte. The Deutsches Haus, a more privileged community, had the social means to inform themselves about and actively participate in the federal preservation survey process. Though both sites were determined eligible for the National Register under the Section 106 survey process, the Deutsches Haus had to make a powerful case for its significance as a center of German history and culture, as opposed to a building of notable architectural merit. Despite different access and approaches to the preservation process, however, it appears the fates of both sites are soon to be the same. Crucially, even before their razed fates were certain, both communities demonstrated a distrust of the preservation process. While Lafitte residents did not mobilize as active participants in the preservation review process, Deutsches Haus members strategically decided to launch an independent and pragmatic preservation campaign to be incorporated into existing hospital plans as a cultural and economic asset.

In spite of the more inclusive work of New Orleans' preservation community after Hurricane Katrina, historical and exclusionary trends continue to re-surface, and preservationists must more effectively identify cross-cutting, community-based notions of historical, cultural, or architectural significance as resources to gain the interest, trust, and involvement of all threatened communities, not just those traditionally excluded from the preservation process. As earlier chapters of this dissertation have demonstrated, critical architectural geography offers preservationists an avenue for adjusting existing policies, practices, methods, and professional language to correspond to their more progressive outreach efforts. In the final chapter, I build on the productive overlap between the work of critical architectural geographers and progressive preservationists and put forward a set of conceptual and methodological commitments that would permit researchers, place advocates, and public officials to more effectively identify, articulate, and promote architectural geographies of meaning.

## Chapter Seven

### Intimacy, Flexibility, Continuity, and Generosity: Conceptualizing and Documenting Architectural Significance

#### Introduction

As illustrated in chapter four, Joyce Montana and Charles Andrews are very active in the cultural life of the Seventh Ward, sewing every year on the beaded, three-dimensional suits that distinguish their family's Mardi Gras Indian tribe as one of the most prominent in New Orleans and hosting the "comin' out" of Big Chief Darryl every Mardi Gras. In addition to being socially active in the Seventh Ward, Joyce and Charles were part of the first wave of residents to return to the neighborhood after Hurricane Katrina, quickly repairing their homes and creating vibrancy on their block where many structures stood damaged or abandoned for months to years after the storm. When I asked Charles in our interview (7.3.08) how his early 20<sup>th</sup> century shotgun is important architecturally, he responded, "When a person pass on this street that have an eye for people upkeeping their property, people look this way because every time they pass here we always got flowers in the garden. The houses are well-kept and painted." As part of the upkeep of his home, however, Charles has invested in updates to his shotgun that prevent it from being individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, like enclosing his front porch with security bars and replacing his original windows. Similarly, the creative embellishments and upkeep carried out by the late Big Chief Tootie and Joyce on their double shotgun disqualify the house for individual listing as a "significant" local landmark. Yet Charles' and Joyce's involvement in the cultural life of their neighborhood, their restoration and active maintenance of their houses since Katrina, and their pride in the quality of care they have applied to their shotgun houses stand contrary to National Register standards of significance and preservation policy more generally, guidelines that characterize their houses as *not* "historic," as places lacking in the qualities that define architectural significance.

The Montana family is a particularly poignant case from this dissertation that calls into question this bifurcation of architectural and historic significance, because they have been especially active in their efforts to care for their homes and keep the architectural and cultural landscapes of their community vibrant, as well as consciously sustaining a link between the Seventh Ward of today and the legacy of Mardi Gras Indian clans and the community of architectural craftsmen that historically characterized the neighborhood.

One of the principal contributions of this dissertation project is that it engages a variety of New Orleans residents that have very different relationships to and understandings of the preservation process, and, more fundamentally, various understandings of what constitutes architectural significance. In this concluding chapter, I consider how the values and standards of researchers or preservation professionals, or an “etic”/outsider perspective, versus the views and values of community residents like Charles and Joyce or an “emic”/insider perspective, can be better bridged, how apprehending intersections of physical and embodied meanings of buildings could not only produce more sophisticated understandings of what makes buildings meaningful, but also more effectively engage community residents as part of place documentation or preservation efforts (Low 1987, 2002; Low et al. 2005). As preservation professional and advocate Randall Mason (2002) points out, “outsider” and “insider” understandings of the built landscape do not necessarily conflict. It is often the case, however, that researchers and preservation professionals carry out their work within a separate professional culture and climate, so that research findings or preservation assessments about built spaces do not correspond to community residents’ everyday realities and experiences of their built environment. Further, this dissertation reveals that while preservationists typically articulate and measure architectural significance in material-centered terms and residents, by contrast, usually express their understandings of a place’s significance in more fluid, emergent, and

embodied ways, it is often, in fact, the intersection of the physical and embodied elements of places that work together to inform their ongoing importance.

In addition to bridging “insider” and “outsider” viewpoints, this chapter also draws out the conceptual and methodological overlap in research on the nature of architecture and place in both cultural geography and historic preservation. As has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, there are parallels in how these fields have traditionally conceived of buildings as material and enduring, and how they are currently working to account for the contingent, embodied, and ongoing ways communities ascribe meaning to buildings, and these productive points of intersection need to be further explored. In refining a performative approach to conceptualizing, operationalizing, and documenting built spaces, this dissertation not only has insight to bear on the fields of cultural geography and historic preservation, but also the fields of architecture, architectural history, history, material culture studies, folklore, anthropology, performance studies, urban studies, and urban planning. Before I articulate the overarching findings of this research project, I will briefly review each chapter to indicate their contributions and how they permit me to develop the reflections and suggestions for future research I present in this concluding chapter.

Chapter one of this dissertation situates this research in its practical, theoretical, and methodological contexts. Extra attention is paid to the exceptional circumstances that define my research – the loss and trauma endured by residents after Hurricane Katrina and their struggles and motivations to return, rebuild, and restore their homes and community centers. As a result of the flurry of demolition, redevelopment, and restoration after the storm, debates and struggles over protecting built resources and their associated histories, practices, and meanings were intensified. Government-led preservation processes were a principal arena through which these debates and struggles were both articulated and acted upon post-Katrina, and my careful look at these local



processes underlined the extraordinary measures taken by preservation officials, political figures, community activists, and residents to revitalize damaged communities, as well as the practical circumstances, conceptual and methodological shortcomings, and outmoded policies that resulted in “system” failures. As a result, my ethnographic study of preservation in post-Katrina New Orleans contributes to scholarly writing and reflections on urban systems and policy in crisis, historic preservation policy and practice specifically. While the Katrina disaster and the local recovery process have become popular topics among social-science researchers, this project contributes to the small, though growing body of academic ethnographic work on New Orleans, which is grounded in the city pre-Katrina and offers a longer-term perspective on issues facing the city since the storm (see Breunlin & Regis 2006; J. Jackson 2006; Sakakeeny 2008; Breunlin & Regis 2009).

In chapter two, I show how this research is relevant not just to the exceptional circumstances of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, but also to other American cities and towns that face complex issues regarding recovery, redevelopment, preservation, and cultural vitality. In looking at historic preservation specifically, my research work is most concerned with how federal preservation policy has come to conceptualize and operationalize the importance of buildings, because federal policy dictates the nature of architectural significance standards upheld at all three levels of the U.S. preservation system – national, state, and local (Oaks 2002; Shull 2002; Lyon & Brook 2003). I situate these federal preservation policies within the context of New Orleans’ prominent role in the modern preservation movement and the extraordinary circumstances and challenges posed to the New Orleans preservation community post-Katrina. The extensive damage to New Orleans’ built landscape and the city’s post-storm diaspora created a literal and figurative space for residents, as well as preservation officials, professionals, and activists, to reflect on the role of particular buildings in their everyday lives. Historic preservation was a principal arena where these architectural geographies of meaning were articulated and contested, and my research reveals

that the material and the embodied, as two immediate qualities of built spaces and systems of meaning-making, factored prominently in how community users and preservation professionals sensed and understood the importance of buildings.

In chapter three, I carefully draw on the rich legacy of architectural studies in cultural geography to develop both a conceptual and methodological framework to apprehend this unique insight offered by the circumstances of my research, to explore with my research participants the typically taken-for-granted role of buildings, namely their material and embodied elements, in shaping everyday geographies of meaning. The conceptual frame I put forward in chapter three builds upon the work of critical architectural geographers by incorporating a serious consideration of material presence, form, and features in structuring everyday and more heightened uses of buildings. Since the emergence of the “critical turn” in cultural geography, the material and visual emphasis of early geographic scholarship on the built landscape has been dismissed for its lack of engagement with critical theory and the complex social processes the built environment both informs and participates in (Duncan & Duncan 1988; Goss 1988; Schein 1997; Lees 2001; Cresswell 2003). As this dissertation reveals, however, the rigorous and detailed work of traditional architectural geographers in documenting and analyzing the material elements of buildings offers an avenue for apprehending the localized and powerful work of buildings, their physical presence and form, in constituting performative geographies of architecture.

My research also refines the methodological approaches and empirical engagements of critical architectural geographers. Generally speaking, studies employing non-representational theory in cultural geography have been conceptually sophisticated, but lacking in empirical depth (Crouch 2003; Latham 2003; Thrift 2009). Critical architectural geographers have pushed to empirically ground their non-representational studies of buildings, and their writings offer some discussion on

their methods and methodological approaches (see Lees 2001; Llewellyn 2003; Kraftl 2006a, 2006b), but my dissertation went still farther to engage with the conceptual contributions of the sub-field in a work that is both heavily ethnographic and methodologically explicit (see the sub-section Architectural Documentation below). In chapter three, I thus carefully outlined a methodological framework that draws on architectural survey, ethnographic, and archival methods to apprehend the physical and lived elements of buildings and how they intersect to produce resonant and emergent architectural geographies of meaning.

Importantly, this methodological frame permits me to develop a collection of ethnographic case studies that illustrate the intimate, particular, and profound ways buildings not only structure and sustain community practices, performances, and meanings, but are informed by them. In my first ethnographic chapter, chapter four, I look specifically at the Sound Café and the Montana Family house to explore how the material and embodied qualities of buildings are co-constitutive of one another. Chapter four reveals how architectural significance is not only relational, but emergent and, in the case of the Sound Café and the Montana House, we see how these spaces were re-defined as sites of local significance in the post-Katrina landscape. In offering a close look at the physical form of the buildings and their performative details and the routine uses and regular performances that take place in and around them, as well as their productive intersections, the chapter offers architectural geographers and preservationists intimate insight on the everyday and ongoing processes through which buildings become significant to those who use them.

In chapter five, I continue my deliberations on the interrelationships between architecture and embodied practices, by exploring how cultural practices and embedded cultural traditions rely on the physical and social space of buildings to promote and sustain them. My ethnographic research on the Sportsman's Corner Barroom and Preservation Hall considers how these buildings

sustain the cultural practices and performances that define them in fundamental, though notably different ways. Chapter five contributes to recent geographic research on urban environments and cultural and creative production, and it seeks to expand considerations of formal or “official” spaces of cultural production by demonstrating how adaptable, accessible, modest, even run-down buildings promote the sorts of free and emergent interactions that underpin creative production (Bain 2003; Bain 2010; Edensor et al. 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming). This chapter also points to the role architectural spaces play in sustaining performance traditions and offers practical insight into how the conservation of intangible heritage can be linked to the preservation of built resources (King 2003, 2008; Kaufman 2009).

In chapter six I take an in-depth look at the post-Katrina struggles to protect the Lafitte Public Housing Complex and the Deutsches Haus from redevelopment. A consideration of these sites of preservation friction calls attention to preservationists’ aggressive efforts to safeguard these communities, but it also underlines the impasses they faced, how particular concepts, methods, and approaches to community involvement that underpin the field prevented them from effectively engaging and building alliances with the communities they worked so hard to protect. Though some researchers and preservation professionals have identified the disconnect between the field’s progressive concepts and outreach strategies and their outmoded policies (Morgan et al. 2006; Cresswell & Hoskins 2008; Kaufman 2009), there has not been ethnographic research put forward that critically examines the complexities of their more expansive protection efforts in recent years. Chapter six offers important considerations of how preservation’s more inclusive agenda has practically affected and potentially estranged both minority and more privileged communities. Though a number of critiques of the preservation process have been developed both by preservationists (Lee 1992a, 2003; Morgan et al. 2006; Longstreth 2008b; Kaufman 2009) and social scientists (Greenbaum 1990; Duncan & Duncan 2001; Hoskins 2004; Cresswell & Hoskins 2008;

Pendlebury et al. 2009), this dissertation is unique because the findings it presents to inform the work of preservation are grounded in ethnographic research on a diverse collection of both vital and threatened local landmarks.

In this final chapter of my dissertation, I offer some unifying concepts and approaches to better theorize, document, and promote the variety of built spaces that are integral to the social lives of communities. In the next section I consider a selection of themes that embody various ways buildings in post-Katrina New Orleans were used and/or valued by community residents in the wake of the storm. The themes are intended to put forward important ways architecture both physically and socially engenders community vitality, including historical worth in the present day, as well as offering architectural geographers and preservationists ideas for exploring new and fruitful avenues to apprehend architectural significance. In addition to producing insight on the ways in which buildings are used, perceived, and valued by different camps of users and onlookers, the third section of this chapter considers how new methodological approaches to documenting buildings can help researchers and place advocates account for and convey the range of ways buildings are meaningful to those who inhabit, use, or associate with them. This section of the chapter on my development of an “ethno-material” methodology, highlights ways my research was successful in identifying both the material and embodied elements of significance of my study sites, as well as the interrelationships among them. This chapter also considers the predominant documentary tool of the preservationist, the architectural survey, and it points to more recent efforts by preservationists to carry out comprehensive surveys that record all buildings regardless of architectural merit. This push by preservationists to document the full array of built resources that inform community life links their work to the legacy of critical architectural geographers and cultural geographers more generally, who have demonstrated how a variety of built spaces are necessary to structure systems of social meaning. The chapter closes by considering how critical architectural geographers and

progressive preservationists can inform one another in their efforts to understand how meaningful engagements with buildings work on an everyday, localized level and how such experiences can perhaps be made more widely available through, but also independent of formal preservation practices and policies.

## **Architectural Meanings**

My long-term and intimate ethnographic study of prominent cultural landmarks in New Orleans, as well as my broader engagement with historic preservation post-Katrina, has revealed that buildings generate an array of meanings not just for the users of buildings, but also preservationists, developers, political figures, researchers, and others who work in significant ways to protect particular sites or communities. My dissertation has presented different perspectives on how buildings are variously viewed and valued, and it speaks to the productive dynamism between different architectural systems, namely the material and the embodied, which participate in defining architectural significance. Much like Cresswell and Hoskins' critical research on the National Landmarks program, this research submits that buildings are actually defined and sustained by the tension between the "material persistence" and "experiential fluidity" of built spaces (2008: 395), which make them such powerful sites for ongoing acts of remembering, perpetuation, and meaning-making. In the following sub-sections, I consider a selection of architectural characteristics that cross-cut exclusive notions of place significance and offer researchers fruitful avenues to further explore how buildings generate significance and also how social networks and cultural practices rely on built spaces to sustain them.

These significant architectural characteristics emerged through the processes of coding and interpreting my field work data, and the four sets of characteristics I briefly revisit and refine below thread through all of my study sites – intimacy, openness, and sharing; flexibility and improvisation; stability and continuity; and generosity. The first three sets of architectural meanings I consider

combine a physical quality or qualities with a corresponding embodied characteristic in order to speak to the productive tensions between the material and embodied elements of buildings. The physical qualities of intimacy, openness, flexibility, and stability are pointedly intended to put forward new conceptualizations of architectural significance, while the concepts of sharing, improvisation, and continuity are intangible characteristics that should be further explored by geographers, preservationists, and other place researchers for the ways they function in conjunction with built spaces to produce systems of social support and cultural transmission. The final characteristic I highlight, generosity, was the most unexpected defining characteristic of my study sites, but I believe it is the most significant unifying factor in determining their importance, especially during the hard years of recovery after Hurricane Katrina.

### **Intimacy, Openness, and Sharing**

Some of my study sites encouraged the sharing of information or more subtle but significant embodied or bodily exchanges among users because of their lay-out and intimate settings. The Sportsman's Corner's small and heavily-used one-room barroom consistently encouraged close interaction and dialogue during my fieldwork, particularly during weekend night parties when I would often stand shoulder-to-shoulder with my neighbors at the bar or dance side by side with them on the dance floor (field notes 12.8.06). At Preservation Hall, the small concert room where performers are seated at the same level as audience members, allowed concert-goers to engage in direct and visceral ways with the music, feeling the air blowing from a trumpet only inches away or viewing the precise fingering of a saxophone solo (field notes 11.11.07, 4.1.08). The musicians also valued "the proximity...the sharing and the feedback" with audience members and the sense of actively participating in the passing on of New Orleans' jazz (John Longenecker interview, 5.25.08). The one-room design of the Sound Café, though a more expansive space, similarly encouraged conversations or interactions to happen with customers. "A lot of things that are happening with

the city get brought out into the open here,” barista Michelle Glass explained about the communal exchange of information at the coffee shop in the early months after Katrina (Michelle Glass 4.12.08). While each of these study sites had a number of peripheral spaces that constituted the actual building they were housed in, their defining activities happened in open, one-room spaces that simply encouraged uses to happen “in a social way” (Adey 2008: 40).

As a result of their layouts, the sites mediated the social act of sharing, not just of knowledge or information, but also the shared embodied experiences of jazz music, second-line parades, and book readings, among many others. At the Sportsman’s Corner, information about upcoming second lines and Mardi Gras Indian practices were regularly shared in casual conversations or passing encounters (field notes 1.11.07, 9.3.08). At Preservation Hall, the proximity of the performers permitted fledgling musicians to approach them during set breaks and carry on technical conversations or receive demonstrations of particular instrumental techniques (field notes 5.20.08). At the Sound Café, one neighbor’s regular piano practice sessions became casual afternoon concerts for the coffee shop clientele (field notes 10.11.07). These buildings permitted their respective cultural practices to happen in the open, so that users shared everyday embodied practices and more heightened performances and passed on information or knowledge about some of the city’s long-term cultural traditions (Roach 1996; Adey 2008). Importantly, as well, all three spaces encouraged users to carry out activities in close proximity, and in so doing they further promoted bodily encounters and dialogue, which helped to generate a sense of collective identity and break down social barriers. The Sportsman’s Corner, the Sound Café and Preservation Hall draw users from different classes, races, neighborhoods of New Orleans, as well as other countries, but within the space of these sites users were physically and socially held together by their passion for and experiences of the various cultural practices each site housed (Adey 2008; Rantisi & Leslie Forthcoming).



## **Flexibility and Improvisation**

A selection of cultural geographers submit that peripheral, marginal or decaying buildings, as both physically and socially accessible spaces, encourage uncensored, playful, and embodied engagements with other users and the physical sites themselves (Bain 2003; DeSilvey 2005; Edensor 2005, 2007; Bain 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming). My dissertation, in contrast, considers how sites recognized by communities as important or significant, are, in fact, valued by users for the ways they can physically adapt and freely use them. The plain configuration and ambience of the Sportsman's Corner permitted second-line community members to creatively employ the space of the barroom for the range of uses necessary to support their club activities and their parading tradition more broadly, from hosting parade stops to holding raffle fundraisers to housing weekly organizational meetings (field notes 3.4.07, 11.11.07). The "not overwhelming" or subdued interior of the Sound Café (Michelle Glass interview, 4.12.08), in combination with particular physical features and material objects, like the raised upper-level or stage-like setting, adjustable track lighting, and the piano, encouraged local artists to use the café for a variety of events from casual jazz concerts to visual art showings and poetry readings (field notes 6.20.08). Big Chief Tootie Montana continually altered his family house to aesthetically indicate the building's role in the community's architectural and Mardi Gras Indian arts, as well as practically transforming the west half of his shotgun double into a suit storage and assembly space when the family began to safeguard their suits as artistic creations worthy of preservation (Joyce Montana interview, 11.6.07 & 12.4.07). These buildings are valued by their inhabitants and associated local tradition bearers and artists for the ways they have been able to adapt and reconfigure the physical space of the buildings to sustain their cultural practices and traditions (Bain 2003, 2010; Norma & Rantisi 2010, Forthcoming).

Importantly, the flexible physical nature of these spaces also helped to promote free, creative expressions and interactions. At the Sportsman's Corner, I have watched friends spend the entire

afternoon playfully socializing, rearranging the barroom, and experimenting with elaborate decorations to transform the barroom into a dance hall for a second-line club member's birthday party (field notes 4.7.07). With a stage and instruments always at their disposal, I regularly observed musicians at the Sound Café suddenly perform impromptu numbers or hold unannounced, casual concerts to try out new songs and sounds on the small coffee shop audience (field notes 7.10.07, 6.27.08). After Katrina, Joyce responded to demands by friends, neighbors, and researchers seeking to learn more about and document the threatened practices of the city's Mardi Gras Indian tradition, by providing regular tours of her family's Indian suit collection and her informal archive (field notes 9.12.07, 4.21.08). As other cultural geographers have demonstrated, these are the sorts of free, expressive, responsive, or *improvised* interactions that underpin creative experimentation and cultural production (Bain 2003, 2010; Edensor et al. 2010b; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming). Like the work of Bain, Rantisi, and Leslie, my research reveals that "improvisational spaces" are characterized both by a physical and social flexibility that are necessary to facilitate creative appropriation. In the disaster context of post-Katrina New Orleans, the changeable interiors of the Sportsman's Corner, the Sound Café, and the regularly reconfigured Montana House encouraged users to responsively adapt the buildings in order to meet the shifting needs of the communities they serve.

### **Stability and Continuity**

Some of my study sites physically offered stability and continuity, because of their solid, enduring construction. The Lafitte Housing apartments were valued by former residents for their thick brick walls and durable concrete frames that withstood all of New Orleans' major hurricanes and floods since the late 1930s, as well as serving the everyday needs of residents by providing quiet and private living space in inner-city New Orleans (Sharon Woods interview, 6.5.08). The Deutsches Haus organization has been housed in the same towering two-story brick building on South Galvez in Lower Mid-City since the inception of the German benevolent society in 1927.

The stone foundation and brick walls of the Deutsches Haus withstood several feet of Katrina flood water for weeks, and the building currently stands as the most prominent physical testament to the legacy of German immigrants in the Lower Mid-City neighborhood and all of New Orleans (Warner 2007; Jacob Hagan interview, 9.27.07). 726 Saint Peter Street, the converted two-story Creole townhouse that serves today as Preservation Hall, has stood poised in the heart of the French Quarter for over two centuries (Long 1968). The perseverance of these sites was prized by my research participants, especially since many of the city's buildings did not survive Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Importantly, not only did all three sites endure Katrina, but each building has sustained a physical continuity. The Lafitte apartments and Preservation Hall have undergone few notable alterations since they were built, and, up until Hurricane Katrina, the Deutsches Haus was little changed since the occupation and remodeling of the building by the organization's founding members in the 1930s and 40s. Additionally, these buildings are materially distinguished in New Orleans by their brick construction and their commanding presence within their neighborhood contexts; they are notable visceral markers of stability.

The physical stability of my study sites facilitated a social continuity, which, among other things, offered residents a reliable context for gathering, participating in, and perpetuating cultural practices. Lafitte was a centerpiece in New Orleans' black Mardi Gras for decades (Maggi & Reckdahl 2008). The Deutsches Haus incorporated and carries out the cultural activities of some of the city's earliest German social organizations, benevolent societies like *Die deutsche Gesellschaft von New Orleans* (The German Society of New Orleans) and musical groups, like the *New Orleanser Quartett Club* (Adam Racke interview, 9.27.07). Preservation Hall has consistently delivered traditional jazz to music enthusiasts and budding musicians since it opened its doors in 1961. Crucially, all three buildings offered a direct physical link to the history or activities of fellow community members who preceded them, which encouraged users to imaginatively and

meaningfully interpret past realities in the present (DeLyser 1999, 2001, 2003). Preservationist Ned Kaufman (2009) and architectural theorists like Stuart Brand (1994) have reflected in their writings on the ceaseless efforts necessary to stave off architectural decline. In other words, despite seemingly unchanging outwardly appearances, maintaining the material form, look, and feel of a building is consuming, ongoing work. Enduring buildings are thus a product of durable materials and construction, but also the active maintenance of users to physically sustain them and facilitate social continuity. Importantly, the convergence of such qualities generates a sense of perseverance and reliability among users that promotes the iterative, but always emergent acts of cultural transmission (Roach 1996; Taylor 2003; Kaufman 2009).

### **Generosity**

Studies of generosity typically put forward theories of “gift economies,” because they function outside capitalist systems of currency exchange. Marcel Mauss’ 1923 ethnography, *The Gift*, is the foundational text that explores the role of gifts in reinforcing social order by sustaining reciprocal obligations. Recently, geographers who have put forward research on spaces of generosity, however, distinguish conceptually between “gift economies” that uphold “economic logic, exchange, and calculation,” versus “economies of generosity” that are not tied to reciprocal obligation, but, rather, are sustained by “sharing and non-competitive forms of sociality” (Bromberg 2010: 217-218; Edensor & Millington 2010). Using these conceptual parameters for the notion of “generosity,” I found that instances of unreciprocated personal sacrifice and social support run throughout my field data.

Sound Café regulars recognize that Baty regularly forgoes profit for the sake of sponsoring the café’s many community activities and welcoming musicians to use the coffee shop as an informal performance space – “She’s definitely not in it for the money...it’s mostly for the community space” (Michelle Glass interview, 4.12.08). The Montana family has invested countless hours and expense

on elaborate materials to offer neighbors and residents citywide a spectacle of beauty and empowerment on Carnival day and Saint Joseph's night (Joyce Montana interview, 11.6.07 & 12.4.07). Mr. Louis' legacy as "a giving guy" established the Sportsman's Corner barroom as a space where residents from Central City and other marginalized, black working-class communities could seek the help or financial assistance needed to endure a personal hardship (Cheryl Pierre interview, 6.8.08). The Jaffes made a number of counter-intuitive business decisions when establishing Preservation Hall, like not selling food and drinks, to keep concerts courteously focused on the musicians, as well as paying African-American performers union wages in a still legally segregated and discriminatory New Orleans (Sancton 2006; Ben Jaffe interview, 4.3.08). After Katrina, Ben Jaffe founded the New Orleans Musicians' Hurricane Relief Fund (now transformed into Renew Our Music) that was one of the most effective non-profits in providing the city's musicians with instruments, gigs, and financial assistance in the immediate months after the storm (Arnold Gladstone interview, 3.27.08). "In the Lafitte," Sharon Woods explained in our interview (6.5.08), "You could go to your next door neighbor if your parents' hadn't cooked or nobody was home when you got home from school, and sit by their house and they'd feed you 'til your parents come home." The Deutsches Haus has always served as a space of social support and assimilation, but after Katrina members offered countless hours of their time and "sweat equity" to recreate a needed space of camaraderie (Jacob Hennrich interview, 9.27.07).

My study sites, though several are for-profit institutions, are not predicated solely on consumption or economic gain. Instead, they are places that please, nurture, and support their users through the variety of everyday activities, as well as the more heightened performances that they house and support (Edensor & Millington 2010). This dissertation has only pointed to the political corruption and racial marginalization that characterized New Orleans well before Hurricane Katrina brought the city's social disparity into the national spotlight, namely the structural oppression of the

city's black working poor (Breunlin & Regis 2006). It is within this much larger context that the logic and benefits of a generative climate of generosity distinguished the Montana house, the Sportsman's Corner, Preservation Hall, Lafitte, and the Deutsches Haus for decades, but the overriding practices of sacrifice and support housed within these sites (excepting the closed-down Lafitte) critically helped to rebuild communities and piece long-standing cultural traditions back together in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

## **Architectural Documentation**

### **An "Ethno-Material" Approach**

The principal methodological contribution advanced in this dissertation is the explicit combination of architectural documentation techniques with qualitative methods or, what I have termed, an "ethno-material" approach. Through testing a combination of methods in the field, dialoging with preservation professionals, architectural historians, and ethnographers, as well as conceptually reflecting on my research findings, I streamlined my approach to documenting built spaces and developed a six-pronged procedure that strives to apprehend the enduring, yet emergent nature and significance of buildings. The principles of my "ethno-material" approach are the following:

- Tour the physical site and identify prominent features and meanings as noted by the research participant leading the tour.
- Visit the site during a selection of ordinary and heightened times to observe the range of ways the site is used and engage in informal conversations with users to refine understandings of the building's prominent architectural features and embodied significance.
- Conduct a historical records and articles search to gather relevant contextual information on the building and its significance, including historical significance in the present-day.

- Conduct intensive, semi-structured interviews with community members, like owners, inhabitants, regulars/users, or neighbors to identify not only what about the building is significant, but, importantly, why, in their own terms, it is significant.
- Use “placed” formal and informal interview techniques to identify connections between affective experiences, practices, performances, and the physical presence and features of sites.
- Visit the site at a time when photographs or measurements can be taken to generate images, architectural sketches, measured drawings, and/or maps that convey the building’s form, layout, and prominent and valued features of the building and their relationships to the building’s uses.

Not all these survey principles are applicable to all sites and they can be carried out in different temporal order, depending on the research circumstances. In my experience, however, it was important to be given a tour or official introduction to the space by the owner and then to observe and informally converse with users about everyday and more heightened uses, because it helped determine what themes or topics to further explore in the archives and formal interviews, as well as which material characteristics or features of the building to document. Practically speaking, this approach to site-specific architectural documentation can be carried out by an individual researcher, though, as will be explained below, I enlisted the help of Tulane architecture students to develop some of my architectural documentation data.

My efforts to document the lived and embodied elements of my study sites has revealed that qualitative methods can be used to apprehend both the material and embodied, historic and contemporary meanings of buildings, it is a matter of employing a range of responsive, research questions to address these various and interrelated components of built spaces. Appendix C is a list

of the research questions I often employed in my recorded, semi-structured interviews, and they permitted me to gauge how users value both the material and embodied aspects of their community centers and the interrelationships among them. Asking research collaborators, “What is your favorite architectural feature?” helped me to identify distinguishing material characteristics of my study sites. In addition, Shelley Houston’s (interview 5.21.08) view that “upgrades, like [security] cameras” are important architectural features of the Sportsman’s Corner, for example, helped me to further understand how my research collaborators conceptualize and value architecture. The research questions in Appendix C, were also, crucially, the questions I posed to myself as I participated in long-term participant observation, taking careful note of the physical nature of my study sites, drawing the lay-out, determining building materials, having informal conversations with research collaborators about the history of the building, as well as documenting the regular and heightened uses that occurred within and around them through field notes.

As a result of my collaborative work with Tulane’s School of Architecture on the Cornerstones project during my field research, I had the help of several Tulane Architecture students in developing measured drawings and footprints of some prominent New Orleans local landmarks, including several presented in this dissertation (see chapters four, five, & six). Our efforts at combining standard architectural documentation methods with my qualitative research work turned out to be extremely relevant to the “ethno-material” approach I was attempting to develop as part of my dissertation research. Our collaborative documentary efforts revealed that the nature of architectural documentation can be much more flexible than typically mandated in architectural survey methods. Architects and architectural historians have a wide variety of material documentation methods available to them to highlight the varied ways in which the physical presence and elements of buildings are important to users, from measured floor plans that display how spaces are laid out and structure uses, to hand sketches of architectural details that illustrate



integral features, to conceptual drawings that convey how spaces are typically used (Burns 1989a). Importantly, qualitative methods are valuable for determining which architectural features or qualities are important to users and, therefore, which ones to record. When documenting the Montana House, for example, Tulane Architecture student Sarah Cloonan and I determined it would be useful for her to document Tootie's compelling architectural modifications to the façade of the house, which are prized by Joyce and admired by neighbors, in addition to our standard protocol of developing a measured drawing of the house's floor plan, a standard New Orleans double shotgun (see Figure 4.10). These small-scale efforts at integrating qualitative methods and architectural documentation during my fieldwork point to the promising potential of refining a dialogical approach to documenting buildings using both methods (see Appendix B).

Some of my research exchanges also revealed that the built environment itself is a resource not to be overlooked in place documentation, because of the embodied ways it elicits reflections, memories, emotions, and physical responses (Anderson 2004). This was most poignant when I went on a walking tour of the half-demolished and closed Lafitte housing complex with Marcus Stallworth (interview 6.19.08). Despite my initial concern that it would be distracting and hard to record our interview if we were on foot the entire time, it proved extremely telling that Marcus's memories of his community were so vivid they overpowered the dismal bulldozed scene of his apartment, what he called home for close to 35 years. When we stepped through the collection of extant and eerily abandoned apartment buildings waiting to be razed, our surreal environment triggered a number of important reflections for Marcus about the sturdiness of the buildings, the waste involved in destroying them, the trauma of being denied access to his apartment after Katrina, and the political controversies surrounding the citywide public-housing redevelopment initiative. As a result of the richness of this and other "placed" interviews (see Elwood & Martin 2000; Sin 2003), I developed a commitment during my fieldwork to carry out research "conversations in

place,” not only to illicit participants’ immediate experiences of and feelings about their community centers, but also to develop understandings about the links between buildings, their material form, and the embodied practices and performances within and around them (Anderson 2004: 254).

Ned Kaufman has carefully considered the importance of such a step in approaches to place documentation. In his articulation of his “storyscape” methodology, he insists on the need to demonstrate the connection of community stories and meanings to places and, further, to “document the ways in which those places’ form or appearance supports the reliving or retelling” of those stories and meanings (2009: 53). Kaufman is making the subtle push for place documentarians not just to map values but also to encourage community participants to indicate *how* places physically shape and emotionally anchor their social lives. As my findings have indicated throughout my dissertation, the value of particular built resources are often overlooked by those who use them, as are the interrelationships between built and intangible resources. This was perhaps most clearly illustrated in the case of my interview with lifelong Lafitte resident Sharon Woods. On the one hand, Sharon was of the strong opinion that the Lafitte buildings did not define her community, but, on the other, she insisted that the buildings and the relationships within those apartments were enduring, long-term, and therefore “historic” (interview 6.5.08). My dissertation thus points to the value of “placed” research methods, to produce awareness among community members of the ways practices, performances, and community meanings are tied to places, which, ultimately, could cultivate more interest and involvement in place documentation projects, local processes of preservation, and related endeavors.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Though my project did not employ them, I do think the use of mapping techniques to more explicitly identify ties between practices or community values and the built environment would be valuable (see Mason 2002; Anderson 2004; Low et al. 2005).

My “ethno-material” approach offers a comprehensive means to identify and document the situated and ongoing ways communities ascribe meaning to buildings. While this research involved long-term ethnographic engagement with most of my study sites (see below), the principles I have developed for this methodological approach does offer researchers, preservation officials, or community activists working under a limited time frame or funding a streamlined and practical method for developing place portraits that speak more richly and accurately to place significance than traditional architectural documentation methods. For example, it was under limited time and resource parameters that I applied this ethno-material approach to the case studies in chapter six. When I initially began researching the Lafitte Public Housing Complex and the Deutsches Haus, the work was part of my broader ethnographic engagement with preservation issues in post-Katrina New Orleans. Not intending to develop the sites as ethnographic case studies in this dissertation, I nonetheless wanted to employ the method I was developing to produce a sophisticated understanding of how community members valued these sites versus the ways their significance was articulated by preservation professionals in the public debates and meetings concerning their redevelopment. By employing the principals of my “ethno-material” approach, this research produced unique findings on the constructive and conflicting ways Lafitte and the Deutsches Haus were valued by different camps – users, preservationists, public officials, and onlookers.

Notably, however, my look at sites of preservation friction in chapter six lacked the depth of my four more fully ethnographic case studies. I use the term “ethnographic” to describe my qualitative engagement with Lafitte and the Deutsches Haus, but in the case of the four post-Katrina landmarks, I used ethnography as a research technique that required a much longer-term and intimate engagement with those study sites. In the case of the Sound Café, the Montana family house, the Sportsman’s Corner, and Preservation Hall, I regularly spent time at each site for over a year-and-a-half and developed intimate relationships with some of the prominent community

members, collecting extensive data that included architectural histories, embodied experiences of the physical buildings, users' emotional attachments to the buildings, ongoing practices, and field conversations (see Appendix D). Such embedded experiences of these study sites, the buildings themselves, and the activities that took place in and around them, permitted me to develop ethnographic portraits that included, but also pushed beyond tangible qualities and descriptions of the study sites to reveal the affective sensations, practices, and performances that so fundamentally constitute these buildings and their users' understandings of their importance. My involved study of four post-Katrina landmarks produced refined insight on the everyday workings of architectural significance, from buildings important principally to New Orleanians, such as the Sportsman's Corner, to sites known worldwide, like Preservation Hall. While, as noted, this ethno-material approach offers geographers, preservationists, and other researchers or public officials working under practical limitations a means to more comprehensively document architectural significance (similar to efficient methodologies like REAPs outlined in chapter three), this dissertation illustrates the importance of supplementing these modes of more rapid documentation with long-term ethnographic engagements of over a year more in order to more effectively account for the rich and complex nature of buildings and their importance to those who inhabit, use, or associate with them.

### **Architectural Surveys**

This dissertation project not only seeks to refine methodological approaches employed by architectural geographers and preservationists in documenting buildings, it also speaks to the principal documentary tool of the preservation process – the architectural survey. The National Park Service's publication, *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning Bulletin*, defines a survey as the “process of identifying and gathering data on a community's historic resources” (Derry et al. 1985: 2), but an essential component of the survey, according to the NPS, is the evaluation of all inventoried sites according to the register's established criteria of significance. In an effort to

expand the types of buildings and sites the field of preservation documents and promotes, however, some preservationists and preservation organizations are re-orienting the traditional architectural survey to forgo the evaluation component of surveys entirely or to use community-based evaluations in steering the identification of sites of significance. In *Race, Place, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*, Ned Kaufman submits that “in most cases it is simply valuable to identify, document, and publicize sites” (2009: 54), as opposed to also assessing their significance according to traditional standards that often devalue architecturally modest sites or buildings associated with working-class or minority communities.

Such inclusive philosophies have been incorporated in the ongoing survey efforts of projects like Survey LA in Los Angeles<sup>52</sup> and Place Matters in New York City,<sup>53</sup> that are recording structures as part of citywide resource surveys regardless of their architectural merit or physical condition, while also seeking public input to identify the ways documented sites are historically, socially, or culturally significant to their communities. The underlying philosophy of such a comprehensive approach to preservation survey work is that members of the professional community cannot always adequately determine the nature and significance of sites in the same ways as those who use and fundamentally value them. These inclusive survey efforts also speak to my research work, because

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<sup>52</sup> Survey LA is being carried out by the Office of Historic Resources in Los Angeles. It is a survey of every standing structure within Los Angeles’ city limits that is approximately more than 30 years old (the standard minimum age for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources), the most ambitious architectural survey undertaking of any major American city (Office of Historic Resources 2010). The database that will be developed as a result of Survey LA will be used to identify sites to be designated for the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historical Resources, and as part of the City of Los Angeles’ register of Historic-Cultural Monuments or Historic Preservation Overlay Zones, but it is critically intended to provide necessary information to help developers and public officials exercise forethought in avoiding projects that threaten important community landmarks, as well as encourage development where it could be particularly beneficial to communities (Office of Historic Resources 2010; Ken Bernstein radio interview, 9.15.09).

<sup>53</sup> The most significant component of the Place Matters project is a ground-up, narrative survey, the “Census of Places that Matter,” which asks New York residents to identify the places they consider important to their communities and to explain, in their words and terms, why the place is important (Hansen 2004; Place Matters 2010). Place Matters served as a model in the development of my collaborative efforts on the Cornerstones project with Tulane University’s School of Architecture.

of the potential they offer to reveal how overlooked, misunderstood, peripheral, massively altered, architecturally modest, deteriorated, or relatively young buildings can play significant roles in the life of communities.

In a more in-depth way than these comprehensive survey projects, this dissertation has illustrated how different types of buildings work in particular and localized ways to structure meanings and identity. As opposed to the emphasis of the field of preservation and even architectural geography on architect-designed spaces (see Lees 2001; Llewellyn 2004; Jacobs 2006; Kraftl 2006a, 2006b; Adey 2008; Kraftl & Adey 2008; Kraftl 2009), this dissertation (with the exception of the Lafitte) has highlighted vernacular architecture, revealing how builder and owner-designed and altered buildings work as sites of significance of through their adaptability, accessibility, and emergent meanings (Bain 2010; Rantisi & Leslie 2010, Forthcoming). The case studies presented in this dissertation also illustrate how different types of places, such as coffee shops (see also Rantisi & Leslie Forthcoming), corner barrooms, and music venues, serve as significant community gathering or “universalizing spaces” (Adey 2008). This dissertation, as a result, builds on the legacy of architectural geographers and cultural geographers more broadly, who, through an array of empirical explorations and sophisticated deliberations on the nature of built spaces, have explored the work of a wide variety of overlooked, misunderstood, ordinary, and idiosyncratic sites from industrial ruins (Edensor 2005) to backyard gardens (Hitchings 2003) to airplanes/air travel (Adey et al. 2007) to pure absence (DeLyser 2001).

This dissertation and the work of cultural geographers thus speak to the recent push by preservationists to conduct comprehensive surveys of built resources. My engagement with the fundamental nature and meaning of built spaces points to the ways in which all types of buildings and spaces, not just those threatened with demolition or upheld by communities as iconic landmarks, play a necessarily particular role in structuring experiences and engendering community

meanings and practices. As such, a comprehensive approach to the documentation of built structures enables preservationists and other place documentarians to account for the architectural diversity needed to facilitate a wide variety of everyday and more heightened uses (Watson et al. 2009; Rantisi & Leslie Forthcoming), but also how various built spaces, in structuring everyday practices and performances, inform community meanings in localized, distinctive, and resonant ways.

## **Conclusion**

### **“Katrina Showed Us that Nothing Stays the Same”**

In the post-Katrina context of my fieldwork, my research participants were forced to become aware of the often routine, yet embedded significance of their community spaces, as explained earlier in the chapter, but they were also forced to recognize that the built landscape and the social networks it sustains must change and adapt, in this case, to the dramatically shifting circumstances and needs of their communities following a major natural and civic disaster. When I asked Steven Elloie (interview 6.28.08), the manager of the Sportsman’s Corner, “What would have happened if Central City had lost the Sportsman’s Corner in Hurricane Katrina?” he thoughtfully replied, “It would be a total loss to the whole community. But if it was to happen, you know, we would just have to build and move forward, because we all have to look for change someday. Katrina showed us that nothing stays the same.” In the end, these powerful circumstances of destruction and change determined the longevity of any building in post-Katrina New Orleans and they dictated the outcomes of local preservation processes – even sites possessing exceptional architectural merit or anchoring significant histories or traditions could not always be saved. Protecting some of the city’s old and often times blighted buildings proved too costly or impractical, becoming the “wave” of old buildings dying too soon after the storm as described by one local preservation figure in chapter two. Sometimes, moreover, the momentum, money, or political

power behind a major development project cannot be withstood to protect an individual building or community, as the fates of Lafitte and the Deutsches Haus demonstrate.

My research findings point to some of the tensions and practical limitations to protect historic structures in post-Katrina New Orleans, but more directly this work points to the variety of architectural spaces, not just well-preserved landmarks, needed to promote community vitality. This dissertation builds upon the research of other cultural geographers who have revealed that the complex and rich nature of community life is necessarily shaped and expressed in a variety of built forms in a variety of physical states. The work of cultural geographers may help preservationists consider the impacts of their deliberate efforts to protect certain landmarks, or, conversely, to permit demolition of humble, deteriorated, or misunderstood buildings, because, in so doing, they profoundly shape how local meanings are structured and maintained (Riesenweber 2008).

This dissertation has highlighted recent efforts by preservation professionals to shift their field from one based on internal or professional measures of historical and cultural significance to one based on internal, community-based, or “emic” standards of “social relevance and utility” (Low 2002; Low et al. 2005; Longstreth 2008b; Mason 2008; Kaufman 2009: 1). Progressive preservationists have embraced the potential of preservation as a “social practice,” one which incorporates history, culture, and thoughtful community planning as a means to promote or engender vital communities (Kaufman 2009: 1), and one which, further, recognizes that historic or aesthetically distinguished buildings are not always the most important to retain in order to promote a greater social good (Mason 2008). Such a commitment to social well-being is a decided shift from a sound emphasis on the material preservation of buildings at all costs, to one which is committed to the protection of community values and meanings and the range of spaces, new and old, architecturally distinguished and humble, unaltered and massively redone, that best anchor and



perpetuate those community values and meanings. The findings put forward in this dissertation are of relevance to preservationists seeking to shift their internal measures of significance and corresponding policies, because they permit them to further consider and better account for the lived and ongoing ways buildings function as sites of significance. By employing a unique and responsive combination of ethnographic and architectural documentation methods and carefully analyzing my research data, I have put forward new understandings about types of physical and embodied architectural characteristics, such as intimacy, flexibility, continuity, and generosity, which participate in defining the ongoing importance of buildings, but also that facilitate and perpetuate social networks and cultural practices and performances, especially, in light of the context of this research, during times of crisis and recovery.

This dissertation offers possibilities for refining existing practices, policies, and professional language employed by preservationists, but, in carefully documenting and conceptualizing the nature of the built environment, this dissertation also speaks to ways sites of community significance and community meanings are sustained outside of formal preservation practices. Such insights are recognized by some heritage and preservation professionals, like British preservation scholar and practitioner John Schofield (2009: 94), who submits that not all meaningful architectural sites should be protected or restored through “state-led mechanisms” for reasons ranging from the scale of significance to the impractical expense of restoration (see also Mason 2008). In his essay, “Being Autocentric: Towards Symmetry in Heritage Management Practices,” Schofield thus deliberates not how important buildings should be protected, but, rather, why “intimate engagements [with sites] matter and how they can be made more widely available to those who want to share in them” (2009: 94). At the most fundamental level this is what both critical architectural geographers and progressive preservationists are concerned with – the meaningful, ongoing act of place-making and how particular communities are included in or excluded from this process. This dissertation was

intended to give voice to the social actors who create sites of community and vitality, as well as paying heed to the work of overlooked, but also iconic buildings in generating community significance, but, most fundamentally, through in-depth case studies and conceptual reflections, this dissertation puts forward ideas and asks for further research on how intimate and meaningful engagements with buildings can be “made more widely available to those who want to share in them” both through, but also independent of government-led preservation practices and policies (Schofield 2009: 94).

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## Appendix A

### Interview Table

Affiliation	Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Length
<b>Sound Café</b>			
	Venita Andrews	June 27, 2008	20 min
	Michelle Glass	April 12, 2008	32 min
	Shirley Green	May 17, 2008	38 min
	Toby Hudson/Big T	June 18, 2008	25 min
	Baty Landis <sup>1</sup>	January 24, 2008	84 min
	Jennifer Moran	May 28, 2008	34 min
	David Pass	June 20, 2008	58 min
<b>Montana house</b>			
	Charles Andrews <sup>1</sup>	July 3, 2008	61 min
	Joyce Montana 1 <sup>1</sup>	November 6, 2007	68 min
	Joyce Montana 2 <sup>1</sup>	December 4, 2007	71 min
	Tootie Montana 1 <sup>2</sup>	June 18, 1999	
	Tootie Montana 2 <sup>2</sup>	July 26, 2000	
<b>Sportsman's Corner</b>			
	Gerard Albert	April 13, 2006	32 min
	Leslie Albert	May 21, 2008	26 min
	Steven Elloie <sup>1</sup>	June 28, 2008	27 min
	Teresa Elloie <sup>1</sup>	April 14, 2006	61 min
	Jacob Forstall	June 21, 2008	27 min
	Shelley Houston	May 21, 2008	18 min
	Troy McCowan	April 14, 2006	37 min
	Cheryl Pierre	June 8, 2008	18 min
<b>Preservation Hall</b>			
	Marc Charles	April 3, 2008	37 min
	Carlos Dawson	April 10, 2008	61 min
	Troy Doucet	March 19, 2008	28 min
	Arnold Gladstone	March 27, 2008	56 min
	Ben Jaffe <sup>1</sup>	April 3, 2008	75 min
	John Longenecker	February 25, 2008	77 min
	Sonja Nast	April 3, 2008	47 min
	Jenny Perez	May 19, 2008	25 min
	John Tyler	June 2, 2008	55 min
<b>Lafitte Housing</b>			
	Cynthia Brooks	February 23, 2008	35 min
	Marcus Stallworth	June 19, 2008	76 min
	Sharon Woods	June 5, 2008	49 min

<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Length</b>
<b>Deutsches Haus</b>			
	Raymond Hagan	October 10, 2007	15 min
	Jacob Hennrich	September 27, 2007	26 min
	Hannah Kappel	October 10, 2007	21 min
	Adam Racke	September 27, 2007	25 min
	Max Reinhold 1	September 27, 2007	20 min
	Max Reinhold 2	December 13, 2007	43 min
<b>Preservation Professionals</b>			
	Rudy Barthe	June 25, 2008	64 min
	Meredith Campbell	September 27, 2007	70 min
	Shane Lanham	June 25, 2008	64 min
	Sissy Corp	October 20, 2007	42 min
	Richard Vogel	November 12,	80 min
<b>Preservation Activists or</b>			
	Jeff Cooper & Elaine Knight	May 29, 2008	65 min
	Jane Dupre & Susan Westbrook	March 19, 2008	75 min
	Sydney Oxley	June 7, 2008	55 min
	Sarah Wiley	May 24, 2008	67 min

<sup>1</sup> I was given written consent by these participants to use their names because they are the owners and/or inhabitants and their identities are directly tied to these study sites.

<sup>2</sup> These two interview transcripts came from the University of New Orleans Building Arts project archived in the Special Collections at the Earl K. Long Library.


## Appendix B Cornerstones Materials

Online web registry – [www.cornerstonesproject.org](http://www.cornerstonesproject.org)

# CORNERSTONES

## DEUTSCHES HAUS mid city

- home
- about
- registry
  - house of dance and feathers
  - deutsches haus**
  - joytown square
  - liuzza's by the track
  - maple leaf bar
  - mimi's in the marigny
  - rock bottom lounge
  - roman by terry
  - sound cafe
  - sportsman's corner
  - st james AME
  - domino sound
  - montana house
  - mother-in-law lounge
  - lafitte housing complex
  - jefferson variety
  - community book store
  - wheatley elementary
- nominate



The Deutsches Haus represents the center of German-American cultural activities in New Orleans. The forming organizations of the Haus - the *Deutsche Gesellschaft von New Orleans* and several other groups - date back to 1848. In 1928, the Deutsches Haus was founded as a benevolent and social group to serve the German immigrant population in New Orleans. In the same Mid-City building since 1928, the Haus has had a long-term presence in Mid-City New Orleans just two blocks off Canal on Galvez Street, a former working class German community. The Deutsches Haus is an old Cumberland telephone and telegram exchange building that dates to 1910, which includes an upstairs ball room with a pressed tin ceiling and walls and a former bowling alley that was added to the Galvez Street building in the 1940s, making it one of the very first bowling alleys in New Orleans. The Haus has grown into a member-supported organization that promotes the culture, music, language, and history of Germans and German-Americans. Every fall the Haus holds Oktoberfest – a fundraiser and celebration that features German food, beer, wine, and traditional music.

**Address:** 200 South Galvez Street  
**Neighborhood:** Mid-City  
**Historic District:** Mid-City (National)  
**City Council District:** B  
**Status:** Renovated by members following Katrina in time to host Oktoberfest 2006. The current plans for the proposed LSU/VA medical complex could involve razing the Deutsches Haus.

Additional Information:  
[www.deutscheshaus.org](http://www.deutscheshaus.org)

The Deutsches Haus web registry listing with principal photograph and written narrative.



"We're the last of the three main immigrant groups that came into New Orleans during the late 1800s and early 1900s and we're the only group that officially has a designated meeting place, someplace where all can meet other than going to a restaurant or something like that. With the Deutsches Haus and the Germans, we're the last hold out.

I think you can co-exist with a city and still not get rid of all your remembrances of the past. That's not really even the right way to put it, because it's not a remembrance of the past. We're still a vital club. Of all the things and the people in the neighborhood, we were the first ones that came in and said "we can't let it go" and this was after so many of us lost our own homes. The majority of the renovations after the storm, we did in-house. That would be the hardest thing if we had to leave – seeing the Haus destroyed and then rebuilding it only to see it come down again."

*Joseph Stephany, Deutsches Haus Board Member, House Chairman, and Oktoberfest Chair*

"I moved to New Orleans in 1984 and the first six years of being here, I didn't know the Deutsches Haus existed and then I met another young lady from Stuttgart, Germany. I was born and raised in a small country town directly next to the Luxembourg border called Daleiden. She brought me to the Deutsches Haus and that's how I became a member. I've been a member ever since. I would hate to lose my home away from home. That's how I feel about this place."

*Margo Mitchell, Deutsches Haus member and German teacher*

click to enlarge

The Deutsches Haus web registry listing with thumbnail photographs, map, building foot print, measured floor plan, and interview quotes.

Cornerstones of the Month postcard project



Front of February 2009 Cornerstones of the Month postcard, featuring the Sound Café.



tulane city center  
www.tulaneccitycenter.org

Through interviews, written narratives, photographs, maps, and architectural drawings, the Cornerstones Project, in collaboration with the Tulane City Center, is documenting the dynamic intersection of places and people that make New Orleans unique. To learn more about Cornerstones or to nominate a local landmark to include in our project, visit [www.cornerstonesproject.org](http://www.cornerstonesproject.org).



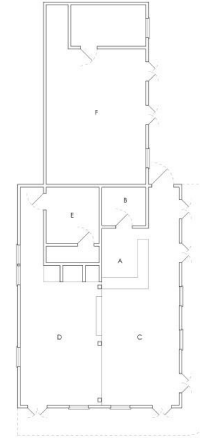
Art Show Reception at Sound Cafe



"Silence is Violence" Youth Music Clinic

In 2003 Baty Landis opened the Sound Café as a coffee shop and performance space for the creative arts magnet high school, NOCCA, a block away on Chartres Street, but the inviting café, with its tall window doors and spacious, understated interior, has grown to play a more integrated role in the everyday life of the Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods and New Orleans more generally. After Katrina, the café was the second high ground coffee shop to re-open downtown and researchers, journalists, planners, politicians, and residents flocked to the café for coffee, wireless internet, company, and information. The Sound Cafe was the hub of a citywide movement to protest the rise in post-Katrina violent crime. Baty formed the non-profit "Silence is Violence" with her neighbors Ken Foster and Helen Gillet and friend Nakita Shavers after the murders of Hot 8 drummer Dinnerral Shavers and local artist and film maker Helen Hill. Staying true to its original commitment to the arts, the coffee shop hosts live music performances, book and poetry readings, and visual art shows. The Sound Café is a "Ya spot," featuring the print, furniture, and fabric art of young adults participating in the Young Aspirations/Young Artists (YaYa) program. A series of free youth music clinics at the café sponsored by Silence is Violence is teaching young New Orleanians how to play music in the city's brass band and jazz traditions.

This project is supported by a grant distributed by Transforma Projects/National Performance Network, thanks to the generous support from the Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts.



A. COFFEE BAR  
B. STOREFRONT  
C. MAIN SEATING AREA  
D. WALKWAY SEATING AREA  
E. RESTROOM  
F. BOOKSTORE

Plan of Sound Cafe



"Silence is Violence would never have been the organization it is, if I didn't have the coffee shop at my disposal. And so I've come to use it in a way that I was trying to make it available for other people to use. And it's made me realize, 'Okay, this is why it's important to the neighborhood to have places like this.'" *Baty Landis, Owner of the Sound Café*

Back of February 2009 Cornerstone of the Month postcard with photos, a written narrative, measured floor plan drawing, and interview quote.

## Appendix C

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Where were your parents from?  
What did they do for a living?

Where were you born?  
In what part of town did you grow up?  
What part of town do you live in now?  
Is it different since Katrina?  
What do you do for a living?

When did you first begin spending time at this place?  
How do you first remember it?  
Why did you first begin spending time here?  
How would you describe your relationship with the place now?

Do you know the history of the building?  
What architectural features do you like? Which ones make the building stand out?

How would you describe the people that live/work around here?  
What is the character of the neighborhood?  
How is this building important to the neighborhood?  
Does the place's location in the neighborhood affect the type of space it is?

What types of people hang out here?  
What would you say attracts people to this place?  
What would you say are some of the special events that happen here?  
What makes it different/makes it stand out from other places?

Is this place used differently since Katrina?  
Are there other differences you notice?

If this place were to disappear, what would be lost? What would people miss? What would people do?

Appendix D

Typical Weekly Schedule of Ethnographic Field Research

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>Morning</b>		Visit the Sound Café during a Monday morning rush and set of work meetings	Visit with Joyce and help archive her collection of photos, articles, and other memorabilia	Attend a Historic District Landmarks Commission meeting	Volunteer with the Preservation Resource Center	Do research at the Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library	
<b>After-noon</b>	Attend second line stop and post-parade party at Sportsman's Corner	Meet Tulane students to develop measured drawings of Montana family house	Read about pressing preservation issues; gather & read sources related to Lafitte and the Deutsches Haus	Go the Sportsman's Corner for the after work and visit with the bar's older crowd of regulars	Interview a preservation official or activist or prominent community member; Schedule interviews	Do more research on sites, flesh out quick notes from my field notebook, or read relevant literature	Type up week's field notes and analytical memos
<b>Evening</b>			Attend a public hearing about the redevelopment of Lower Mid-City as part of the LSU/VA biomedical complex	Attend the weekly Silence is Violence Youth Music Clinic at the Sound Café	Go the Deutsches Haus for an evening of German lessons and socializing in the main barroom	Attend the Friday night Preservation Hall Jazz Masters show	

## Vita

Bethany Rogers earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in anthropology and sociology at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, in 1996. Her post-college travels ultimately brought her to New Orleans, where she earned a Master's in urban and regional planning at the University of New Orleans in 2002, with an emphasis in historic preservation and living heritage conservation. During her years in New Orleans, she also worked at the New Orleans Regional Folklife Office, the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, and for a cultural resource management firm, R Christopher Goodwin and Associates, and those professional experiences deepened her commitment to better understand and promote the city's built and cultural resources. She embarked on her doctoral studies in geography at Louisiana State University to carry out those research commitments, and she also currently oversees a public outreach project that is an effort to put her scholarly research into practice, the Cornerstones Project ([www.cornerstonesproject.org](http://www.cornerstonesproject.org)). Her degree of Doctor of Philosophy will be conferred at the December 2010 commencement.