Imageability and Justice in Contemporary New Orleans

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"Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others...in a just society the liberties of equal citizenship are taken as settled; the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests. ...Being first virtues of human activities, truth and justice are uncompromising."
- Rawls (1999) A Theory of Justice: 3-4.

This paper considers how representations of space are involved with the acquisition of social justice. It is argued that space is not solely a contextual tool for defining the limits of injustice. Furthermore, the concept of 'imageability' is a productive consideration for the process of providing just spaces in our urban communities.[1] Such preoccupations derive from the politics of space in New Orleans during the post-Katrina reconstruction period.

After the 2005 hurricanes, neighborhoods insufficiently protected from hazard entered into the public sphere to assert their rights to remain and rebuild. The strategies of identity politics, civic politics, and economics – which formed with certain aesthetic concerns and ideological rationales – competitively constructed notions of cultural and historical authenticity, territorial viability and technological efficacy to solicit funding and support for regional reconstruction. Within this context, the research focuses on the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood of New Orleans; a historic African American community east of the Industrial Canal that was one of the most devastated areas in the flooded city. Early on the neighborhood was deemed an unviable space by planners and in public discourse.[2] The challenges of rebuilding the Lower Ninth Ward in this post-Katrina socio-political environment encouraged a necessary rethink-

ing of the historical nexus between imageability and justice (or also: aesthetics and ethics).

Central to the research is the question: for a marginalized community largely excluded from the limits of justice in centralized plans for rebuilding the city, how might the community convince the larger public of its viability and proceed toward its own definition of justice? Discussion of these speculations follows in the subsequent sections. The proximate section delaminates the somewhat ambiguous concept of justice, and its relations to space and image in the Lower Ninth Ward. The paper then draws from Kevin Lynch's notion of 'imageability' to consider the role of representation in seeking alternatives to failed ideals of justice. Finally, analyses of empirical observations in the Lower Ninth Ward locate three hypothetical arenas for acquiring justice for marginalized communities. These arenas are formed through tactics that engage with the recurrent problem of architectural representation, which has necessarily converged with issues of community representation in the politics of this city.

JUSTICE, AND ITS MULTIPLE IMAGES

In the course of this research period,[3] representations of the Lower Ninth Ward have been dominated by images of hurricane devastation, and distinguished as an extreme case in this widespread travesty. Through televised, internet and print media distribution, the inequities in the New Orleans urban landscape were made nationally visible post-Katrina, introducing a recognizable cartography of devastation. The consensus of the recent writings on the subject has been that while the disaster was prompted by natural causes, the extent and location of destruction can be traced

Images typical of the predominant media depiction of the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood. These photographs were taken 10 months after hurricane landfall and inactivity has conveniently reinforced the characterization of this neighborhood as a space of futility. Source: author.

to the social construction of value in space, and the level of intervention (technological protections and social services) within the city. In the two years since, the unequal pace and distribution of recovery resources have crystallized in enclaves like the Lower Ninth Ward, which have become representative either of municipal governmental incompetence (extended by John Edwards' recent presidential candidacy announcement in the Lower Ninth Ward to a condemnation of Bush administration and Republican capabilities), or of profound social injustice. Anxious absent landscapes, created from the disappearances of buildings and technologies that constituted the minimum standard of residence in New Orleans, locate trace evidence of historical disinvestment and discrimination across the city. The significant media attention given to the Lower Ninth Ward post-Katrina raised the neighborhood to iconic status not only as a space of injustice, but additionally with the ensuing months of inactivity, as a space of futility.

Currently in this neighborhood, the anticipated

actions are those that demonstrate the reversal of injustices through the production of 'just' spaces and the restoration of citizen capabilities. There is indeed an urgent list of actionable ameliorations for the Lower Ninth Ward, including: effective flood protection and drainage systems, running water and sanitary conditions, electricity, affordable and desirable public housing, economic opportunities, public transportation, supportive public schools with academic programs tailored to resident needs, and health care services. More broadly, such a list of deliverables ascribes to the John Rawls' model of "primary social goods", which he asserts lies at the core of any society's expectations regarding justice. Rawls writes:

> "Regardless of what an individual's rational plans are in detail, it is assumed that there are various things which he would prefer more of rather than less. With more of these goods men can generally be assured of greater success in carrying out their intentions and in advancing their ends, whatever these ends may be. The primary social goods, to give them in broad categories, are rights, liberties, and opportunities, and income and wealth (A very important primary good is a sense of one's own worth; but for simplicity I leave this aside until much later...)" [4]

In New Orleans, a central complication to the enaction of Rawls' primary goods and distributive justice model is the need for considerable governmental aid and financial resources across the entire city; a context in which neighborhoods must compete for their limited distribution.[5] Clearly, the production of 'just' spaces is not simply the consensus-driven gathering of neighborhoods' needs and the return of governmental services. While Rawls puts forward a compelling ideal scenario, a more relevant descriptive model for New Orleans draws from Iris Marion Young's 'politics of difference'.[6] Young's counter-formulation of justice is based on a celebration of difference at the scale of individuals in society. This shifts the characterization of justice away from the notion that social benefits can be equitably distributed to various groups unified in an essentialist society.

Instead, Young's model sees justice as the elimination of oppression and domination in its various identity-dependent forms (e.g. individuals, like young–African American–females, might incur multiple discriminations from their multiple identity-associations). The most salient association of Young's model to the contemporary New Orleans

case is that based on the existence of difference, the forms of justice are necessarily variable and dependent not only on its changes through time, but also on the requirements and levels of oppression experienced by different constituencies in society. Along these lines, the Association for Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) in the Lower Ninth Ward has particular notions of what minimum opportunities and liberties should be distributed and what a 'just' space is.[7] These continue to conflict with other neighborhoods' notions of which areas should be rebuilt (and when) and what distributions of finite funds should be provided.

Within the space of this city justice has taken on multiple and different images, and neighborhoods work largely independently of each other to secure their notions of justice. Multiple ideological justifications for the right to rebuild and the right to funding have proved integral to the physical reconstruction of neighborhoods. Before reconstruction can occur, the recuperation of community identity in public discourse - especially for the Lower Ninth Ward, which is portrayed as criminal and destitute rather than culturally valuable and physically viable - has become necessary to justify the community's right to investment. The contemporary model of justice in this city is beholden first to this ideological contestation of the right to rebuild, and subsequently to the release of services and funding in order to construct 'just' spaces. The cacophony of ideological justifications in the public sphere is reliant on 'imageable' representations of neighborhood identity, which have emerged everywhere from competitions for architectural visions for the city, grassroots organizations, religious groups, tourism campaigns, documentary and activist films, municipal task forces, and privately funded cultural archivist projects.

Such a situation has parallels to Hannah Arendt's conception of the public sphere, the 'space of appearances', which is a metaphoric concept built on the *agora* and the *polis* models and only made visible by the appearance of individual speech and action. The 'space of appearances' describes individuals that are existentially and politically mobilized. Arendt locates this space as follows:

> "it is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space

lies between people living for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be." [8]

In particular to the New Orleans case, Arendt's notions of 'public' find the sense of sight critical to a public 'space of appearances' where individuals "*are* only to the extent that they *appear*".[9] In her historical analysis of politics, Arendt considered plural civic society a fundamental condition for Aristotelian and Platonic concepts of rulership, and a precondition for the emancipation of individuals. Through the combination of plurality and 'imageability', Arendt's 'space of appearances' traces an existential blueprint for participative democracy, and presciently describes contemporary New Orleans in its pre-justice state.

This paper builds from these extrapolations to consider how to acquire justice for the marginalized spaces of New Orleans. Although Rawls' utilitarian, rational and even 'modern' verisimilitude between the ideal of justice and its distribution in reality is far more palatable and comforting, it seems that the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans are embroiled in a more problematized relation. The acquisition of justice in this contemporary context is mediated by plural metaphoric figurations of justice: images attached to place that appear in the public sphere to persuade and support particular concepts of justice. Such a process holds space and image as primary tools for the acquisition of justice. These images of justice are not literally referential to a universal ethical ideal. They are rather imageable for rhetorical purposes, and are directly referential to regional manifestations of justice.

IMAGEABLE JUSTICE

In connecting the image of marginalized communities to their right to just spaces, imageability emerges as a potent framework. Centralized reconstruction plans for the city extend justice to nineteen 'target recovery areas' through provision of hazards prevention technologies, social services, residential reconstruction and community facilities.[10] However, a substantial downgrade in financial support for the plan in recent months has again reinforced a hierarchical cartography of sociospatial value across the city, where funding is first distributed to areas thought 'necessary' to the municipal image. The connection between imageability and justice engages with the recurrent

'problem of representation', that is: the problem of connecting an idea (justice) with its referent (spaces in the city). The problem of representation for the Lower Ninth Ward is a problem of recognizing the neighborhood as socially valued, urbanistically viable and culturally attached to the municipal image, so as to argue for the extension of justice to this space, and soon. In these ways, the aesthetic and the spatial are considered intimately connected to the process of imagining and acquiring justice.

'Imageability' is a notion that urban theorist Kevin Lynch developed to analyze the intelligibility of American cities, and was foundational to his work on 'cognitive mapping'. In *The Image of the City* he writes:

> "imageability: that quality in a physical object that gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment. It might also be called legibility, or perhaps visibility in a heightened sense, where objects are not only able to be seen, but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses." [11]

The use of 'imageability' in Lynch's initial definition assumes that images must be easily apprehensible and that a close relation between an image and its signification should exist for an individual to organize her reality. This paper is more concerned with Lynch's later mediated definition that distinguishes between high (previously just 'imageability') and low imageability.[12] He suggests that low imageability is co-evolutionary with new urban forms such as suburban sprawl and that "…we must learn to see the hidden forms in the vast sprawl of our cities...[since] We are not accustomed to organizing and imaging an artificial environment on such a large scale."[13] Low imageability is therefore descriptive of representations that provoke a low-grade liminal or cognitive response because we are not used to recognizing them, or because the motif lies outside of iconic conventions. In addition to re-training perception for the less legible images of the then-novel landscape, Lynch was exclusively interested in the roles that architectural form had in reinforcing meaning and orienting individuals to the urban environment. In *A Theory of Good City Form*, Lynch more specifically implores us to connect the idea of "the city as a symbolic communication device, which

can be manipulated to express one set of cultural values and not another" with the appearance of justice, "since justice lies in the mind."[14]

In the introductory section, the high imageability of injustice was exemplified in the everyday 'lived' spaces[15] of the Lower Ninth Ward, which has reached iconic status as a nationally recognized spatial representation of injustice. Dilapidated public housing, unkempt streets with uncollected garbage, the absence of street lighting, and neighborhoods inundated with flooded waters are examples of 'imageable' injustices here. The high imageability of injustice in the Lower Ninth Ward has a history. In November 1955, the Ninth Ward Civic and Improvement League petitioned New Orleans City Council for the following improvements "necessary for human habitation":

> "we refer to poor housing and overcrowded conditions of our schools; the disease-breeding septic tanks, cesspools, outdoor toilets, stagnant water in the gutters; the flooded and muddy streets; the uncollected trash and garbage and the foul odors in the air." [16]

Ninth Ward social 'benevolent societies' have long regarded civic activism as necessary to address deficiencies in physical and social infrastructure.[17] In 2003, Lower Ninth Ward residents held a rally to protest the deterioration of their neighborhood that they said contributed to the high rates of crime in the area. Organized by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), the residents spoke against a backdrop of burned-out cars and mounds of garbage, requesting that the city "step up police patrols, increase street lighting, and replace fences along the railroad tracks".[18] The recognizable signifiers that indicate the failure of government to extend its services to all of its citizens and spaces are also the images that tend to override consideration of the neighborhood as anything but unviable.

By contrast, the high imageability of justice correlates to conventional representations that rely on a certain distance from normative applications for their effectiveness. Historical examples of highly imageable justice include monumental courthouses and courtrooms, the public square particularly when judicial sentencing was a spectator activity (e.g. public execution), and allegory paintings (e.g. Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment,* among others). Monumentality, formality and stylization

are some of the common attributes of representations of justice in modern Western contexts. Furthermore, modern governed societies reinforce the requirement that representations and principles of justice should be legitimized and enacted by an authority. The aesthetic and spatial distanciation of justice images from everyday life ensures that ordinary people may not easily acquire justice and the ideal is always strived for. As an elemental example of this consider the quasi-religious figure Justitia, a blindfolded goddess holding scales who has appeared as an iconographic reminder of judicial virtue and power for the last 2000 years.[19] Justitia wears the blindfold in self-constraint to avoid fear and favor, and the restriction of sight is thought necessary to preserve an objective and rational justice. When the sense of sight is allowed to the justice icon (e.g. parodies illustrating Justitia peeking from under the blindfold), justice is more closely connected to partial and ordinary individuals whose possession of rational judgment is conditional rather than constant. An essentialist understanding of the virtue considers the dislocation of justice from government a downgrade, but we are now accustomed to ask whether the originary form and principles of justice were in fact perfectly objective.

The high imageability of justice is easily recognizable in historic symbology, but has also found recent publication in architectural and urban ideas competitions for the city. The last two years have produced a plethora of architectural corrections and inventions for residence and public space in New Orleans.[20] These visions required distance from the messiness of the rebuilding process to produce new solutions. Governmental bureaucracy, the social stigma associated with particular communities, contentious cultural histories, and the difficulty of attracting reconstruction financing were seldom addressed within these schemes. Instead, highly imageable and radical architectural forms and urban reorganizations connected with universal principles of justice (e.g. Rawls' primary goods, distributed in space), and failed to address the obstacles to achieving this universal ideal that affects reconstruction in spaces like the Lower Ninth Ward. For these residents, the distance that is essential to the creation of highly imageable visions of justice is problematic, particularly as the faith in centralized authority to provide for justice in marginalized spaces has waned.

THE LOW IMAGEABILITY OF JUSTICE

A transition has occurred in New Orleans in which the low imageability of justice has become more culturally important as a harbinger of social change than the highly imageable representations of justice in ideal form. Looking for low imageability in New Orleans has foundation in the following. First, since it has become apparent that justice does not reside at City Hall or in the New Orleans courts system, and because there is a profound distrust in authority (although this distrust has been a signature quality of New Orleans life it is now exacerbated) government's historic possession of iconic images and ideals of justice is dislodged. Second, because injustices have been historically experienced in this city by marginalized peoples such as the residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, justice can be said to have been largely out of their control. We must look for it elsewhere and in its less iconic forms in order to calibrate the principles of justice for those presently excluded, and also to understand how New Orleans and its underserved residents imagine justice in the city. This section provides three hypothetical arenas in which low imageability becomes a tactic for imagining and acquiring the extension of justice to this space.[21]

The first example of low imageability challenges the popular representation of the Lower Ninth Ward as a futile space, through an alternate project of cultural archivism. This counter-project is deceptively simple: it is merely the reconstruction of Chandra McCormick's and Keith Calhoun's photography studio, exhibition space and residence in the Lower Ninth Ward. To describe its importance as a lowly imageable tactic for justice, it is helpful to contrast the project with the highly imageable cultural archivism of jazz that occurs at the municipal scale. Ray Manning, a local architect and co-chair of Mayor Ray Nagin's Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOBC) stated the following on a US radio show in January 2006:

> "Let's not forget the cultural base of this nation: jazz…it came out of the cultural milieu of New Orleans and we export it to other places…We live in the richest, most technologically advanced country in the world, and to suggest on any level that we cannot find a solution, that we not rebuild this city is just unacceptable".[22]

The purpose of this statement was to convince the nation that jazz was a salient justification of the

Signs of return in the Lower Ninth Ward, from top: 'I'm Coming Home!' sign scrawled on house window; Fats Domino's renovated studio on Caffin Avenue; One of the few instances of new construction in the neighborhood; House newly elevated on temporary wood pilings and awaiting insertion of new concrete pile foundations. Source: Author, June 2006.

city's cultural importance. Relocated to the touristic French Quarter and with little reference to the "rise of postwar music in New Orleans amid the transformation of a long-segregated society",[23] this highly imageable project of cultural representation has little reference to the space of the Lower Ninth Ward, where the formative years of many of these nationally recognized musicians were spent.[24] Chandra McCormick's and Keith Calhoun's photographic work serves as a challenge to this abandonment through 30 years' documentation of the neighborhood's musicians, dockworkers and churchgoers, social aid and pleasure clubs, community gatherings, bars and music venues. These photographers have compiled an atomic understanding of the social networks and cultural foundations of the neighborhood.[25] Nationally recognized, their realist body of work substantially contrasts negative generalizations of the Lower Ninth Ward, and provides visual evidence of the community's engagement in the city's complex cultural processes over several decades. Continuing their work post-Katrina, the photographers were awarded a fellowship through the United States Justice Fund to produce 40 post-flood portraits and 20 oral histories of fellow displaced residents. In March 2007, volunteer student labor from the Minnesota College of Design under direction of Shelter Architecture helped to complete reconstruction of their exhibition space in the Lower Ninth Ward. While this is only part of a larger project planned to help resituate the McCormick-Calhoun family in this neighborhood, the architecture materializes the assertion that the Lower Ninth Ward is culturally valuable, and that not rebuilding the neighborhood "is just unacceptable". Through both the visual media of photography and the physical presence of a place for exhibition, this first strategy of low imageability attempts to restore the memories of a space past to the consciousness of a present public.

"Out of the little clubs and honky-tonks came the lingering strains of a blues tradition. Unlike the raw, plaintive sounds of Mississippi guitars and harmonicas, Ninth Ward blues built off of pianos and horns. Many an old upright piano found home in the small clubs dotting the Lower Ninth; people came to play them and proprietors often encouraged youngsters to try their hand."[26]

The second example of a lowly imageable tactic for justice in the Lower Ninth Ward is found in the neoliberal management of area needs. In reaction to inadequate disaster response and the absence

of centralized rebuilding efforts in the neighbor-hood, church-based groups, neighborhood asso-ciations and activist organizations have been act-ing (and rebuilding) independently of government. They draw from a network of extralocal volunteers (including university students, career activists, and church affiliates) and residents to perform as advocacy and action groups. For example, vari-ous church groups located the recipients of their volunteerism (demolition, reconstruction) through a network of denominational affiliation. Based on this criterion, they produced a geographically scat-tered rehabilitation of residences and churches. Most of the church buildings have been remade as they were remembered to have stood, and within a largely barren landscape they become intention-ally representative of a sacred humility. In June 2006, the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Asso-ciation commissioned an architectural firm to pro-vide a transforming image of the neighborhood, which included a makeover of two commercial cor-ridors in the neighborhood as a dense compila-tion of tree-lined pedestrian walks, ground level retail boutiques and *piano nobil*e residential apart-ments. This made a significant departure from the previous panorama of single-story, non-franchised commercial establishments and shotgun style res-idences, but its architectural similarity to wealthy Magazine Street was representative of the asso-ciation's desired affiliation. During a time when municipal and insurance regulations were being determined for buildings' locations in relation to the ground, a handful of neighborhood residents raised entire structures a full story on new pile foundations. These exaggerated responses to the perceived hazard were representative of distrust in government to reestablish flood prevention and drainage infrastructure. In the previous case, cultural curation was undertaken by Architecture for Humanity, House by House, and Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, who collectively funded and made the McCormck- Calhoun recon-struction project visible as a cultural keystone. Finally, Common Ground Collective prioritized homes of single-mother families, disabled, elderly, and families that were familiar to the organizers when providing demolition and reconstruction ser-vices. They also coordinated the only tool lending library, free kitchen, and free clinic available for returning residents in the 18 months that followed the hurricanes, which produced nodal points in the landscape. The bioremediation they performed on the neighborhood's toxic soils surreally locat-ed large sunflower patches on various empty lots throughout.

Within a disproportionately settled landscape in which lowly imageable tactics are made visible, re-construction proceeds along select calibrations of justice. The various groups are autonomous, op-erating in polynucleic fashion under differing ideo-logical rubrics. While it seems these groups are responsible first to neighborhood residents, they derive their aesthetic intervention from self-refer-ential interpretations of the neighborhood's future image and cultural relevance. In the mapping and making of many just spaces, the groups do not require publicity to sustain their practice; only the membership of a certain constituency is necessary to communicate and reinforce their visions for the neighborhood. Collectively these self-referential representations of the Lower Ninth Ward offer ver-sions for how the neighborhood could be consid-ered socially valued, urbanistically viable and cul-turally attached to the municipal image.

In the third and final example of low imageabil-ity as a tactic for justice, a reinvented iconicity is proposed for the Lower Ninth Ward. These tactics are organized in Global Green USA's efforts to re-build the Holy Cross neighborhood as a "beacon for sustainable development for New Orleans and the world."[27] The project is the result of an inter-national ideas competition that was sponsored by Brad Pitt in April 2006. Over the next year, Global Green and its celebrity organizer, which has part-nered with a development company and Home Depot, will build twenty single-family homes as part of a pilot project. The location of the 'green'

Sunflower fields on property lots indicate a Com-mon Ground soils bioremediation project in progress. Source: Author.

label in the Lower Ninth Ward – which is globally approaching the popularity of 'organic' – is certainly a political catalyst for this work. The reinvention of territorial identity through deployment of 'green building' allows the neighborhood to be aligned with a national concern. Low imageability is here an iconic cloak that allows justice to be extended via association with celebrity and a popular attitude toward the built environment. This case complicates the pure representation of justice through a conflation of intention and attention, and introduces the centrality of publicity and celebrity in contemporary experience. Rhetorical devices of popular culture, such as Brad Pitt's public support, have produced the only significant building in the Lower Ninth Ward to date and cannot be stripped of celebrity. However, and in an important departure from the previously mentioned highly imageable architectural competitions, this strategy for a reinvented iconicity relies on the involvement of the residents and the nine community groups organizing occupation of the model homes.[28] Consider the following blog entry from Holy Cross Neighborhood Association president Charles Allen:

> "The Holy Cross Project symbolizes renewal and rebirth of the Holy Cross/Lower 9th ward community. Given the fact that this community housing/multi-use project is very modern and state of the art in its appearance and technological design/features, it sends a strong message to the world that the people of this community have fully embraced sustainable redevelopment and wish to serve as a model community in this regard. We in this community wish to no longer be seen as being relegated to substandard conditions for living and working in this community. We want nothing but the best. And, we wish to proclaim commitment to helping preserve the global environment." [29]

While the community publicizes itself as a model of sustainable practices at the national level, 'green' living aligns easily with the community's historic skepticism of municipal management of hazards prevention and infrastructure technologies. Rain-water collection, biologically treated waste systems, elevated ground floors, attention to the permeability and drainage of ground cover, and solar panels for energy collection are obviously displayed as signatures of the designs. These are also the facilities for secession from municipal networks. Even at the small scale of this model home development, 'green' building can enable residents to reestablish ideas of cultural worth in relation to the efficacy of the systems that sup-

port their residence, by ensuring that their maintenance is locally calibrated. As such, a popular iconicity is connected subtly to an existing oppositional politics.

The hypothetical arenas in which low imageability has become strategic in the Lower Ninth Ward have similarity in that they are separate from centralized plans for rebuilding and from popular ascriptions of this neighborhood as a space of futility. This separation has caused these arenas to remain outside iconic convention, and therefore hard to see. The first arena uses the rhetorical politics of cultural archivism to challenge the city's 'grand narrative' of social value. The second aspires to a polynucleic management of area needs to provide multiple self-referential and locally derived visions of the neighborhood's future. The last relies on reinvented iconicity to connect the politics of secession with the advancements of a national movement toward 'green design'. The lowly imageable tactics described work in direct confrontation with the challenges to rebuilding the neighborhood, rather than from a centralized distribution of ideal benefits to these spaces. They are also necessarily intertwined with counter-representations of territorial identity, and recognize that the neighborhood is in a position of communicative crisis. The three case studies offer possibilities for reconnecting representations with ideas of justice, and promote revitalized citizenship and urban transformation for those marginalized in centralized plans for rebuilding New Orleans.

Brad Pitt's 'Pink Project' installation in the Lower Ninth Ward inaugurated Global Green USA's housing development. The solar panels erected throughout light the 'Pink Project' at night and symbolize a reinvented iconicity for the neighborhood. Pitt intends to mark the Lower Ninth Ward as a 'beacon for sustainable development for New Orleans and the world.' Source: Author.

IMPLICATIONS.

As the discussion has demonstrated, representations of space are integral to the process of acquiring justice. The three hypothetical arenas present low imageability as a tactic for imagining and acquiring justice in the Lower Ninth Ward. Significantly, low imageability provides the modes and frames of perception for the cultural assets and spatial possibilities not communicated when the Lower Ninth Ward's viability is discussed. With parallels to Hannah Arendt's 'space of appearances', these arenas of possibility will not seem to exist unless they appear in the public sphere. They will not appear until we learn to see more obscure and stochastic relations between the representation and its signified ethic.

Even when justice has had high imageability its meaning was often not specific, but related to an ideal or principle of justice rather than its actual materialization within society. It therefore becomes so far abstracted from normative practice that it could have little real relevance other than as a reminder. If we could operate on universal ideals of justice and make them deliverable, each neighborhood would be granted requests for their consensus-driven list of needs to ensure the production of 'just' space in New Orleans. Reforms in the political arena, fair distribution of social services and technologies, equal opportunities for opinion, and the protection of the disadvantaged are all projects deserving attention in several areas of the city. Such a context would allow for a greater verisimilitude between the ideal and its symbology.

Unfortunately, justice and the tools for rebuilding are not equally distributed across the city. The approach for considering low imageability a proleptic device for imagining justice derives from a need to remake space using rhetorical tools. In contemporary experience this has become necessary to: reinvigorate an abstract ethics with popular and normative manifestations, to operate effectively within a political environment reliant on rhetoric, and to follow the opportunities available outside the failures of government to create new combinations of funding reliant on local galvanizations. This is obviously not the only tool available for acquiring justice. But it is a strategic option for areas such as the Lower Ninth Ward struggling to counter the images and rhetoric that misrepresent as futility injustices sustained by the neighborhood.

ENDNOTES

1. Lynch, *The Image of the City,* 9-13.

2. In October 2005, Mayor Ray Nagin contracted with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to propose recommendations to the city post-Katrina (Carr, 25 Nov 2005: 1; Levitt, 17 Dec 2005: 6). The Institute suggested that the city shrink its footprint as it would be "safer and cheaper to rebuild a smaller, denser city for all returning residents in the higher neighborhoods" (John McIlwain of ULI paraphrased in *The Economist*, 22 April 2006). It suggested that five neighborhoods, representative of a range of socioeconomic characteristics, be considered questionable for rebuilding (including New Orleans East, Gentilly, Upper Ninth Ward, Lower Ninth Ward, and Lakeview), and that portions be converted to wetlands and green spaces using forced buyouts if necessary (Cobb, 23 Jan 2006: A1; Calmes, 15 Sept 2005: A1). This early rebuilding plan relegated the Lower Ninth Ward neighborhood to an 'off-the-grid' political, economic, physical and cultural position, especially as its vulnerability can be traced to the imposition of the man-made Industrial Canal at its eastern edge and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet on its northern border.

Geologist Roy Dokka of Louisiana State University disputed the ULI claim that all of the neighborhoods for which wetlands were planned occupied topographic nadirs in the city, noting that the Lower Ninth Ward lays at a comparable elevation to predominantly white, middle-class neighborhoods like Metairie and Kenner that were not listed (Filosa, 1 May 2006: M-1). Dr. Mashriqui, a state engineer investigating the levee breaches stated, "They will blame the locality for the destruction, instead of flawed engineering…If you think the cost is too high, see how much it has cost to get where we are today" (Schwartz, 25 Apr 2006: A-24). John M. Barry – a historian of the 1927 Mississippi River flood – has written: "…to say you can't re-inhabit the Ninth Ward because of safety is a bit of a phony argument…If you build a good flood-control system, the entire city is safe. If we don't get a good flood-control system, the entire city is dangerous" (1998: 222). Finally, in December 2006 the following newspaper excerpt helps to describe the neighborhood's current predicament. Gwen Filosa wrote: "Mayor Ray Nagin, still vowing that the depopulated city will be rebuilt in its entirety, acknowledges that recovery will come in phases and that the market forces, in which his plan places great faith, will first favor the unflooded parts of town and then move to the areas west of the Industrial Canal. "The Lower 9th Ward will probably be the last area," Nagin said at a forum held at Loyola University a few weeks ago. "That's just the way citizen investment has gone." (Filosa, 18 Dec 2006, 'The Lonely Lower 9').

3. Involvement with the Lower Ninth Ward began with volunteering efforts and field research during June-July 2006. During this period I lived in a Ninth Ward school retrofitted for volunteer living, provided structural as-

sessments and demolition work for a local grassroots organization, and documented rebuilding efforts in the Lower Ninth Ward.   I returned to the area in December 2007, volunteering for rebuild efforts with a different grassroots organization and living for a short time in the Lower Ninth Ward.

4. Rawls, 1999: 79.

5. At its most basic, a distributive justice model relies on the rational actions of man to come to a community consensus regarding particular 'primary social goods', which are then to be allocated via a government responsive to this public expression of needs. Justice is thereby characterized by the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens to individuals in a society.

6. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 1990.

7. In January 2007, the local New Orleans ACORN chapter, which has been active in civic activism for the neighborhood even before the 2005 hurricanes, issued a 200 page document to describe desired ameliorations for the Lower Ninth Ward (ACORN, 6 Jan 2007). This includes a Five-Year Action Plan, in which both threats and opportunities for rebuilding were discussed.

8. Arendt, 1958: 198.

9. Kristeva, 2001: 62.

10. See the New Orleans official plan for 'target recovery areas': www.cityofno.com/portal.aspx?tabid=95, accessed online 30 Nov 2007.

11. Lynch, 1960: 9-10.

12. *ibid*: 12-13, 46-90.

13. *ibid*: 12.

14. Lynch, 1982: 227-228.

15. A characterization best described by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*. In a poignant and parallel observation Lefebvre writes: "representations of space are shot through with a knowledge (*savoir*) – i.e. a mixture of understanding (*connaissance*) and ideology – which is always relative and in the process of change.' (Lefebvre, 1974: 41).

16. *Times-Picayune*, 9 Nov 1955 cited in Landphair, 1999: 35.

17. The 1950s saw a renewed alignment of Ninth Ward 'environmental' activism with the civil rights movement. In addition to lobbying for the desegregation of public space and schools, civic activists campaigned for better pavements, street lighting, garbage pick-up, sewerage, water quality and conveyance, and transportation in the Ninth Ward. (Colten, 2005: 100; Landphair, 1999; *Times-Picayune*, 9 Nov 1955: 5).

18. McFarley, 15 June 2003: M-1.

19. Curtis & Resnik, 1987: 1727-8.

20. These 'visions' of the future New Orleans include: The Netherlands Architecture Institute's invited competition for a 'New New Orleans,' Architectural Record's competitions for 'High Density on the High Ground' and related student competition for single family residenc-

es, and Global Green USA's competition for sustainable housing in the Lower Ninth Ward, among others.

21. This analysis is drawn from interviews, media reviews and field research in the Lower Ninth Ward, during June 2006 and December 2007.

22. On Point Radio, 12 Jan 2006.

23. Berry et. al., 1986: xi.

24. The Lower Ninth Ward was home to the Lastie Family, highly regarded musicians who brought early jazz into neighborhood church services; Kermit Ruffins, an internationally reknown vocalist and trumpeter; and Fats Domino, credited with helping to break color lines with his nationally broadcast rhythm and blues sound in the 1940s and 1950s, and who reemerged in the media spotlight when he was rescued from his Lower Ninth Ward home in August 2005 (Berry et. al., 1986; Coleman, 2006; Tisserand, May 1994: 132-34; Williams, 22 May 1992: B1).

25. Interview with Keith Calhoun, 12 July 2006.

26. Berry, et. al., 1986: 30.

27. Global Green USA mission statement for the Holy Cross project. Retrieved from their website 30 Oct 2007, http://holycrossproject.globalgreen.org.

28. Krupa, 29 Sept 2007: online.

29. Charles Allen, 28 November 2007. Blog entry accessed online 3 Dec 2007: http://holycrossproject. globalgreen.org/

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