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The Mardi Gras Institute

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THE MARDI GRAS INSTITUTE

by

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The Mardi Gras Institute

by

Craig Pharis

Mardi Gras has over time produced an abundance of material culture which holds in it and through it a history of New Orleans, for Mardi Gras is one representation of New Orleans' culture. To understand the culture of Mardi Gras one must have some knowledge of its history and development, the theories behind the ideas of Carnival and the carnivalesque, and the environment in which the event takes place. The material culture is presently housed in various archives and exhibits throughout the city. The need has therefore arisen for an institute to house this material culture for public exhibition, preservation, and scholarly analysis. It is the taking of a popular cultural event and interpreting it into the built form.
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An Introduction to Mardi Gras

A Mardi Gras Tableau

"Mardi Gras is a city-wide indulgence in pure fantasy that has no parallel on the entire North American continent. What is Mardi Gras all about? Beneath the superficial vulgarity it is a poetic festival steeped in the exquisite high art of allegory."

S. Frederick Starr
New Orleans Unmasqued

The crowd is already in the thousands by eight a.m. They are awaiting the arrival of the first of the days monarchs. Entertainment has, however, already been provided by the passing of several walking clubs who promenade down the street in some semblance of order. Amusement is also provided by members of the crowd itself which resembles a fantasy scene from some science fiction movie with animals walking on two, men who resemble women, dukes and barons with their ladies, grotesques, birds in full plumage, and Pink Panthers. There is a constant procession of maskers promenading up and down the street, laughing and partaking of intoxicating drink, nodding and conversing with others. It is a huge cotillion where the ball room is the street and the courtesans are the populace.

The crowd begins to stir. Congo drums can be heard in the distance. "Zulu is coming," is heard everywhere. The sound of music increases. Above the horizon of the crowd one can see an array of white feathers shuffling under palm trees. Then through the crowd there appears on a throne, King Zulu.
The crowd goes wild, the noise increases, and peoples arms raise to the air. The grand float passes by with papier-mache' leopards at the foot of the throne with a huge torso of a African warrior behind. This is just the first of many such wonders to pass down St. Charles Avenue this day, which is of course mardi gras.

Mardi gras is the climax of the Carnival season which begins on January 6 (the Epiphany, Kings Day, or the Twelfth Day of Christmas) and ends at midnight of mardi gras or Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. The beginning of the season is fixed, but the end of it is variable relying on the date of Easter which sets the date of Ash Wednesday. The Carnival season thus varies in length: it can be as short as 29 days or as long as 63 days.

Sixty parades will be presented during the Carnival season in the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area. Parades are given by Carnival clubs called "krewes", though some go by knights or corps. Twenty-two other clubs do not parade but instead hold elegant "bal masques" at the Municipal Auditorium. Eleven of the parading krewes also hold traditional balls. A krewe is headed by a captain who is the all powerful leader of the club. Once a person is elected captain he, or she, remains captain until death or resignation. Krewes also have royalty which is selected on a yearly basis. The highest honor is to be selected king, or in the case of female krewes queen. The queen of many krewes are debutante daughters of wealthy New Orleans families. The royal court also consists of dukes and princes.
The bal masque consists of several segments. The beginning of the ball is marked by a procession of krewe members in their costumes around the dance floor, followed by the introduction of the ball theme and the presentation of several tableaux which are short dramatic scenes elucidating the theme. The tableau are followed by call-out dances where royalty of the krewe ask selected debutantes to dance. This is then followed by open dancing. Many krewes, especially the larger ones, have begun to hold instead of the traditional bal masque massive supper dances with celebrity entertainment. Many balls are held throughout the metropolitan area of New Orleans. The krewes exist for one thing: to enjoy themselves.

The parades are elaborate productions that begin to be planned just a few weeks after the previous mardi gras. Each year the krewe decides on a new theme for their procession and begin to work on float themes and costumes. Parade themes have ranged from literature to motion pictures, from allegory to proverbs, from mythology to history. The most important thing about the theme is that they are understandable and enjoyable by the viewers.

The floats are elaborate fantasies created of papier-mâché. Most are loaded with krewe members costumed to complement the theme of the float. All are masked. The night parades use elaborate lighting that heightens the dramatic effect of the float. The most important aspect of a Mardi Gras parade and that which sets it apart from all other parades is the participation in the parade by the crowd which is achieved through the use of throws. Beads,
doubloons, emblems, and cups come flying off the floats tossed by krewe members into the crowd. The most sought after throw is the Zulu coconut.

The life of New Orleans revolves around this celebration, and there is more to Mardi Gras than krewes and parades. The Mardi Gras Indians are black social clubs which parade in black neighborhoods on mardi gras. The Mardi Gras Indians combine traditional African celebrations with an empathy to the American Indian. These clubs differ from the larger krewes in that they are strongly neighborhood oriented, strictly a familial affair, and away from the public eye.

There is still another Mardi Gras that exists, the Mardi Gras of the French Quarter. The Quarter’s Mardi Gras revels in the fleshly aspects of Carnival. This Mardi Gras exists beyond the rule of Rex and the krewes. Even in 1979, when the New Orleans Police were on strike and the krewes were unable to parade, Mardi Gras still occurred in the Quarter. It is in the Quarter that "you can just be yourself for the day", or more likely "put on a mask and be someone else." Sensuality pervades here, creatures of the imagination promenade, indulging in their appetites. The exaltation of sexuality is royalty in the Quarter.

For a city that prides itself on its ability to give exceptional parties, Mardi Gras is the climax of the year. Private parties by the hundreds take place for weeks before Fat Tuesday. Carnival season is the time when New Orleans
residents contemplate their heritage and exult in their civilization. Many will tell you that New Orleans without Mardi Gras wouldn't be New Orleans.

Mardi Gras is also the single largest economic boost to the city. Economist Dr. James J. McLain of the University of New Orleans believes that direct spending by locals and visitors combined totals more than $157 million over the eleven day parading period in New Orleans. The combination of the whole suburban area, and the circulation of that money through the economy, adds up to more than $340 million in economic impact.

If New Orleans is an important American city both historically and culturally and if Mardi Gras is entwined with the city, then the relevance of Mardi Gras to American culture is also important. To understand New Orleans, both the student and the pilgrim must have some cognizance and insight to Mardi Gras.

Carnival and Mardi Gras

A History of Carnival

Carnival has been called a survival of paganism, but just as many pagan rites, events and words have been refined by Christianity (Young, Carnival, 2), all that remains of the pagan Saturnalia and Lupercalia in Carnival is the myth. The etymology of the word "carnival" is always being debated. The Catholic Dictionary says,"It is undoubtedly to be derived from the 'taking away the flesh', carnum levare, which marked the beginning of Lent"; but the Latin could also mean the elevation of the flesh, its relief, alleviation. It is only by coincidence that the present term resembles the farewell salutation "vale", giving rise to the interpretation, "farewell to meat". Etymological opinion finds "carnival" first as Carnelevamen, the consolation of the flesh. Mardi gras refers to the particular day and to the carnal privileges which accompany it. Gras does mean fat, but the translation of "Fat Tuesday" denies the essence of the word which carries with it concepts for which there is no English word. Verbatim "mardi gras" means "Tuesday on which meat may be eaten". (Young, Carnival, 5-6)

The date of Easter was set in 325 A.D. by the Council of Nicea. It was established as the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. Ash Wednesday, the first of forty fasting days before Easter, was thereby determined thus setting the date of mardi gras. (Laborde, 34) Little is known about the early days of Carnival, but by the middle ages it had found
great favor in France. The French introduced the *Boeuf Gras*\(^1\) with each province differentiating the festival with its own mark: Provence invented the Tarasque, a fantastic animal moved by men hidden in the cloth and paper belly, and Burgundy held processions called the *mère folle*. Paris outdid the provinces by originating the *mascarade des fous* and the *pape des fous*. These early carnival processions often became unmanageable with orgies, church desecrations, and obscenities, and the Church eventually banned the festival. (Young, *The Mistick Krewe*, 3)

The Roman Carnival of the fifteenth and sixteenth century was marked by violence: the pelting of street maskers with sand filled eggs, and the execution of the condemned. The Roman Carnival was suppressed, but under popular pressure it arose anew as debauchery was abandoned and gave way to artistic and joyous revelry. Theaters gave spectacular performances of masked dancers, singers, and musicians. In Venice the beauty of the celebration was taken to new heights as artists spent half the year assembling fantastic masks and the other half wearing them. (Young, *Krewe*, 5)

Carnival became the symbolic prince of holidays under the Bourbon French kings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Even under Napoleon the celebration survived with the continuation of the *Promenade du boeuf gras*. Themes for other processions, often of drunken revelers, were exhumed from

\(^1\) Prior to the Roman possession of France, the Druids celebrated the *Feête du Soleil* with the sacrifice of a young bull which had been led through the streets covered with garlands of leaves and flowers.
the dominion of mythology or famous French writers. (Young, *Krewe*, 5-6)

However by 1870, the celebration had begun to decline in France, as it had throughout most of Europe. (Laborde, 34)

Mardi Gras in Louisiana

It was from France that Carnival was introduced to North America. (Young, *Krewe*, 5) In 1699, Pierre le Moyne christened the creek on which he was camped "Bayou du Mardi Gras", and that evening a group of Frenchmen celebrated the first mardi gras on Louisiana soil. In 1718 when the French capital was moved from Mobile to New Orleans Carnival celebrations also came with the move. Elegance was added to the celebration in 1743 when the Canadian nobleman Marquis de Vaudreuil was appointed governor of Louisiana. He initiated balls, hosted dinners served on plates of gold, and was patron to the arts. (Laborde, 41)

The growth of a carnival celebration in Louisiana can however only be attributed to the French in the most superficial sense. Prior to 1781, we have no sense of the particular customs, their repetition, and their evolution, all of which are needed in conjunction before there is a festive tradition. (Kinser, *Carnival*, 21) Samuel Kinser believes that the origin of mardi gras, as it is celebrated today, has its origins in the collision, coordination, and precipitation of five diverse elements: white plantation society's winter festivities, black
society's need to adapt African customs in order to preserve them, the Gulf Coast's proximity to and influence by Caribbean festivities, its similar influence by the festive practices of Anglo-Americans migrating westward, and cutting across all these factors, the Spanish and then American commercialization of leisure time. (Kinser, Carnival, 21)

The social season became synonymous with the carnival season because of climatic conditions, agricultural planting requirements, and religious beliefs. Balls became the main activity of season and three types existed by 1810: the private balls, given by the members of the upper class for each other; the "society balls", organized by young men of the upper or middle class on a subscription basis; and the public balls, licensed by the city either for whites only, or for free blacks only, or for white males and free black females--the famous quadroon balls, all to which admission was charged on an individual basis. (Kinser, Carnival, 25) Masking at these balls seems to have been popular from the earliest times, adapting European customs of masking at Carnival time.

The black celebration also centered around dancing as well as singing. The singing appeared to follow the African call-and-response pattern with circles of people dancing around a central figure. The most famous gathering place of assembly was a place known as Congo Square or Place Congo at the northwest side of the French Quarter. (Kinser, Carnival, 32) Many of the black customs were actually modified African customs by way of the Caribbean. The "bamboula", for instance, was a Haitian dance that obtained its name from short
drum made of thick bamboo cane. (Kinser, Carnival, 38-40) The Caribbean influence could also be seen in the organization of black tribes which adopted kings and queens resembling European stereotypes more than African. (Kinser, Carnival, 42-44) The black tribes paraded in some form with masks and music following customs in Jamaica. (Kinser, Carnival, 50)

The commercialization of leisure grew out of the changes that Spanish rule brought to the Louisiana colony. The merchant investor perceived the appetite for distraction of New Orleans which was ethnically too diverse and socio-economically too transient to invest in culture as manifested in libraries, universities, academies and institutes. This commercialization led to the growth of public theaters and ball rooms. The commercialization of leisure received a quickening thrust from the transfer of Louisiana to the United States. The Americans allowed the system of ballroom attendance to take its commercial way, (Kinser, Carnival, 28) and thus it grew to an even larger social arena.  

Though masking was outlawed several times during Spanish rule and banned through American rule it was seldom enforced at the higher society balls. There is, however, evidence that street masking did occur as early as 1835, or even earlier. (Kinser, Carnival, 64) By 1838 street masking had not only become popular, it also had become highly organized (Young, Krewe, 42) with the emergence of parading societies--the Bedouins, the Cirque Ame'ricain,

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2 The importance of the masquerade balls should not be overlooked. Perry Young in The Mistick Krewe goes into great detail about the balls held between 1823 to 1828 and even on to 1837.
and the Mardi-Gras Rangers, all secret societies. (Young, *Carnival*, 19) The bridge between masking in the streets and masking in the ballroom was in place by 1840 when it became the fashion for the maskers from the street to join the performers on stage at the French Opera during the finale, and then for all of them to retire to a chosen ballroom to dance the night away.

A depression in 1842 repressed the celebration, and for thirteen years Carnival was a controversial thing, dispirited by weather, misfortune, and catastrophe. Pranks overtook parading; the throwing flour and quick-lime discouraged masquerading. (Young, *Carnival*, 20)

On Tuesday night before Ash Wednesday of 1857 the Mistick Krewe of Comus made its appearance with the first torchlight procession in Mardi Gras history with the theme *The Demon Actors of Milton's Paradise Lost*. The procession moved from Uptown to the Gaiety Theatre where the Krewe presented four tableaux to a full house of invited guests composed of the elite of Louisiana. After the tableaux the Mistick Krewe marched several times around the great floor and then proceeded to asked the ladies to dance. (Young, *Krewe*, 60-62) The Krewe's entertainment was "designed for the amusement of themselves and their immediate friends." (Young, *Krewe*, 98) "Mystick krewe" is a half literary, half archaically English (from "crew", a working force of men) way of saying "secret society". "Comus" was an ambivalently seductive and devilish character in courtly masques written by Ben Jonson
(1573-1637) and John Milton (1608-74). Comus was the son of Bacchus and of Circe, thus he was made from both revelry and sorcery. The connection between Mardi Gras and mythology was in place.

Comus brought what it called a celebration that was "orderly, educational and cultural" to a decaying Mardi Gras. In *One Hundred Years of Comus* the Krewe itself states, "Comus brought to the Carnival of New Orleans the refinement which it lacked before, lending tone and dignity to the festivities." (Kinser, *Carnival*, 90) But as Kinser points out, Comus did not bring order and refinement to Mardi Gras, but its happy combination of order with disorder, of pretentious gaiety with organizational pragmatism. This duality can be seen in the local papers comments which described the parade as "grotesque" and "motley" and at the same time "magnificent" and "brilliant". (Kinser, *Carnival*, 90)

In 1870 another Carnival society emerged, The Twelfth Night Revelers, who celebrated the beginning of the Carnival season on January 6 with the traditional King Cake. In 1872 the Rex Organization held its first procession in honor of a visiting Russian duke, and gave Mardi Gras its theme song "If ever I cease to love." Rex also organized the street maskers into an orderly procession and gave its first ball "pro bono publico", for Rex was not a secret

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3 The courtly mask was a dramatic form that depended chiefly on its effects of music, dancing, and spectacle, growing out of the Italian Renaissance mask. The mask was not written for publication or posterity sake but for performance. The name "Comus" is said to come from the Greek 'komos', meaning a comic and uncouth spirit, the spirit of revelry or comedy. (Fletcher, 82-84).
organization as was Comus and Twelfth Night Revelers. Other secret
organizations arose: Momus in 1872 and Proteus in 1881, both which
presented parades and balls, but the Atlanteans, formed in 1891, gave only an
exclusive ball.

Mardi Gras grew steadily until World War I when the parades and balls
were cancelled. Following both world wars there was growth. In 1937 the
Krewe of Hermes and in 1939 the Knights of Babylon made their debuts. The
first all women’s parade was presented by the Krewe of Venus in 1941, but the
first all women krewe was organized over twenty years earlier in 1917 under the
name Krewe of Iris which presented only a bal masque until 1959 when it began
to parade.

The traditions of Mardi Gras were thus well established by the turn of the
century. The five old-line krewes of Comus, Rex, Momus, Proteus, and The
Atlanteans provided the foundation on which all carnival clubs are based,
though more modern krewes have taken tradition and molded it for
contemporary needs. One important aspect of the culture of Mardi Gras is
manifested through the krewes: the ritual through parades and balls, the
mystery through secrecy, and the masquerade which uses classic mythology.
Recent Developments in Mardi Gras

"As Carnival has grown, so has the variety of its participants." (Laborde, 89)

The elite societies still exist, but the number of people wanting to take part in Carnival could not have been handled by secret, blue-blood krewes, nor would they have been. The whole point of secret, elite societies is that it establishes who is in and who is out. Membership gives identity to the individual. There are still twenty krewes which carry with them the air of the old aristocracy, but the number of "commercial krewes" has grown to outnumber the society krewes.

A commercial krewe does not mean advertising, which is illegal in Carnival parades, but business which is the common bond among its members rather than bloodlines. The commercial organizations are also more middle-class than their social counterparts. They provide a place for ethnic and newcomers to the scene. (Laborde, 93) There has also been the development of krewes outside the downtown area, the first being Alla in 1933 which paraded on the West Bank.

Categorization of krewes can be complex, many are rated according to seniority as well as heritage. The main divisions are blue-blood old-line (the old social clubs, i.e. Comus and the like), old-line (clubs that began before the Second World War), and the newer clubs (everything else). (Laborde, 94)
Then there are krewes which fit none of these descriptions. A prime example of this would be the truck krewes which parade on mardi gras. The first of these being the Elks Orleanians founded in 1935 now with 140 trucks and 5,600 riders. The truck parades organize the increasing number of individual floats which carry maskers on mardi gras, in a way carrying on the tradition established by Rex in 1872.

Mardi Gras after the Second World War was to say the least stagnant. The old-line krewes restored the parades and continued to hold balls after the hiatus of the war, but the novelty had worn off. The Sixties were characterized by turbulence and change. The Tourist Commission was trying to convince hippies that the title "Greatest Free Show on Earth" was not to be taken literally while still striving to attract tourist who were anxious about rumors that the Hell's Angels were going to roll into town and crash Carnival. (Hardy, 1991, 12)

Racial pressure also had its effects in the Sixties. Segments of the black community put pressure on Zulu, thinking that the group's antics were undignified. The King resigned and the 1961 parade was almost cancelled. Zulu had paraded a parody of Rex on mardi gras since 1909. The first Zulu King ruled with a banana stalk scepter and a lard can crown. While Rex entered the city via the Mississippi River steamboat, Zulu used an oyster lugger to plow up the New Basin Canal. The parade stopped at local bars for salutes lampooning Rex's toast at City Hall. (Hardy, 1991, 10, 12) The Zulu aim was always the satire of both blacks and whites. (Kinser, Carnival, 232) Zulu has
become one of the best examples of ambivalence in New Orleans' Mardi Gras. First, as it cuts against black's internalized image of themselves as too low but also too high, too savage and too noble, and second, as it plays with the white's aristocratic image of themselves as royal and with their idea of blacks as primitive. (Kinser, *Carnival*, 236) Nationwide attention was focused on Zulu in 1949 when native son Louis Armstrong returned to New Orleans to reign as King Zulu XXXV.

The Sixties ended however with a bang. The historic introduction of the doubloon by Rex as a parade throw was overshadowed by the emergence of a new god. Like in 1857 when Comus exploded onto the scene, in 1969 Bacchus did the same. It shook the establishment by presenting the largest floats in Carnival history, by having a Hollywood celebrity ride as its God, and by presenting, in place of the traditional ball, a supper dance to which tickets could be purchased by both visitors and locals. (Hardy, 1991, 12) If Comus had represented the city's elite and wealthy in 1857 emphasizing social ritual, then Bacchus represented the new bourgeois emphasizing prosperity over pedigrees.

Bacchus's success brought imitations. Endymion presented its first parade in 1966, but in 1974 it too became a "super krewe" and presented a spectacular to rival Bacchus. Endymion has grown into the largest krewe with over 1000 members. The krewe's costumes, its headpieces in particular, are now the best of any parade.
The growth of Mardi Gras continued throughout the Seventies with the birth of 18 new parading krewes and ironically, the death of 18 others. The most significant development was the rapid growth of suburban Mardi Gras. The first krewes in Metairie, Zeus, had appeared in 1958, but it was 1974 before there was a parade on mardi gras with the Krewe of Argus. The New Orleans police strike of 1979 also boosted suburban Mardi Gras as many downtown parades rescheduled in Metairie. Metairie now hosts fifteen parades, Gretna five, and St. Tammany eleven. (Hardy, 1991, 13)

The Eighties saw a stabilization of Mardi Gras, with the parade calender settling in with about 65 parades in the four parish area, and a normalization of parade routes (ending Zulu's haphazard, yet entertaining ride). The popularity of parade throws increased experimentation with new ideas, now not only are beads and doubloons thrown but emblemed cups, squeeze bottles, frisbees, dolls, and even krewe crested panties, bras, and shorts.

The greatest change in Mardi Gras in the 1980's was the tremendous increase in tourism. Conventions, which used to avoid New Orleans at Mardi Gras, used the celebration as a reason to visit. One reason for this was the vast increase in hotel rooms brought about by several large hotels being built near Canal Street. (Hardy, 1991, 13)

The future of Mardi Gras appears to be bright. National and international attention has increased, luring more to the city for the celebration. Scholarly inquiry has also increased with the growth of cultural anthropology, but a wide
number of academic writing on the celebration is still sparse. Krewes will come and go, but there will be krewes for many years to come as they adapt to changing needs while preserving tradition.

Evaluation of Mardi Gras

Mardi Gras is New Orleans’ civil act. It is how the city represents its spirit. Social order is established by the civil act, it gives the individual an identity and a place in society. Mardi Gras fulfills a basic human need, that of order and disorder, of rite and ritual. If ritual is "the use of action to express meaning," (Burke, 180) then Mardi Gras is full of meaning beyond the obvious displays. Mardi Gras presents many paradoxes, the most apparent being the coexistence of order and disorder.

While it is said and generally accepted that New Orleans’ elite is preoccupied with social rituals, (Hirsch, 118) the commoner is just as preoccupied. While the old-line krewes represent the elite and the commercial krewes the bourgeois, the truck parades sustain the masses and the Mardi Gras Indians the poor. And if the commoners were not interested in social rituals, why would they show up by the thousands year after year to watch the elite pass by above them granting them gifts. It establishes social identity.

The social identity even occurs in the most prestigious of krewes. Look for instance at Laborde’s list of elite krewes and their descriptions. For example,
The Twelfth Night Revelers, Laborde says, "It is said (though not proved) that a person who is invited to TNR's ball is qualified to be invited to any ball." or the Atlanteans, "It is said that if this organization gave a party, it wouldn't care if nobody came." (Laborde, 90) So either one is "in" or one is "out", thus establishing social identity. The krewes represent both the public and private aspect of Mardi Gras. They parade outdoors before the public, yet are masked, and therefore private by doing so. They conduct their balls indoors in the utmost privacy, yet it is important that the program be published the morning after in The Times-Picayune, making the ball public. The ambivalence of Mardi Gras and its rituals again is seen.

The great paradox of Mardi Gras however occurs between Canal Street and the French Quarter. Canal Street is the Mardi Gras of the krewes and their parades with floats, bands, color, fantasy. It is the family event, picnics are held on the parade routes as children anxiously await the arrival of the next parade. The Quarter is the decadent event. Here is where the individual masks, to throw off the real world and to exercise carnal indulgences. "The Quarter's exoticism flourishes because of Canal Street's conventionality. One supports the other, borrows from, satirizes, needs the other." (Kinser, Carnival, 303) Canal Street represents order, the Quarter disorder.

Why does Carnival endure in New Orleans? Is it the city's dual Creole-Catholic and American-Protestant heritage which renders slightly suspect every pleasure? Or the connections between escapism and profit, and between the
maintenance of respectability and the necessity of corruption to make things run smoothly? (Kinser, Carnival, 131) It is all these things.

The culture of Mardi Gras has become more complex, it has gone beyond that of the krewes. The ritual, the mystery, and the masquerade are still there, but they are now rivaled by chaos, conflict, excessiveness, and sensuality.
Carnival, Culture, and Architecture

Carnival Theories

It has been suggested that the order and rituals which are presented during Carnival have meaning. There then must be theories of Carnival and theories about things which are carnivalesque. Theories of Carnival deal with events that takes place in the season which extends from January 6th through mardi gras. Theories of the carnivalesque deal with the removal and escape from social calculations through a variety of behavioral modes. The carnivalesque is all that is blatantly irreverent, excessive, and inversive.(Kinser, Carnival, 47, 312) Thus the carnivalesque may be seen in a variety of popular cultural events outside of the time of Carnival.⁴

The standard theories of Carnival and the carnivalesque are modified from the work of anthropologists such as Max Gluckman and Edmund Leach.(Kinser, Carnival, xiv) Gluckman's work dealt with African tribes and their 'license in ritual' in which taboos and social restraints are elevated serving to emphasize them. These rituals which apparently express protest against the social order are interpreted as contributions to that order.(Burke, 201) Leach's theory deals with the inversion that occurs during festival rituals, turning the everyday world upside down.(Kinser, Carnival, 325)

⁴ For a detail of festivals which demonstrated the idea of the carnivalesque see Peter Burke's Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe, p.191 to 199.
Burke adapts these ideas and puts them in the category of the carnivalesque, explaining Carnival as "a time of institutionalized disorder, a set of rituals of reversal." (Burke, 190) At Carnival men become animals, women dress like men, humans costume themselves as giants, and Christians behave like pagans. But inversion is only the mask of Carnival.

Carnival does reverse the surface of everyday life in playful fantasy, but it plays not only with the surface but with what the surface hides. Inversion logic is not the key to the carnivalesque according to Kinser, it is rather the ambivalence that inversion logic creates. (Kinser, Rabelais, 84) Surface/depth, past/present, reality/fantasy are all uncertain during Carnival, and more importantly it is a both-and rather than an either-or game. (Kinser, Carnival, xv.) Thus the man who dresses as a women is participating in inversion. But how certain are we that it is a man, and if it is a man is he dressed as a women just for Mardi Gras or because he is a transvestite? Do we like men dressing as women, or does it strike us as strange? Are we attracted to the women, or to the man dressed as a women? Is it true that "men masking as elegant women is a lurking fantasy for the male who, denying all androgyny, prides himself on his machismo."? Ambivalence predominates, and we have participated in the carnivalesque.

Carnival can also be seen as an opposition to Lent and to the everyday. Lent is traditionally a time of abstinence, not only from meat but from eggs, sex, and amusements; what is lacking in Lent is emphasized in Carnival. (Burke, 188)
Carnival also "deals with the barriers omnipresent in daily life, not by tearing
them down or turning them topsy-turvy, but by stepping over them and back
again in an exemplary although impractical enlargement of the
everyday." (Kinser, Carnival, xvii)

The three major themes in Carnival have been food, sex, and
violence. (Burke, 186) The correlation between Carnival and food is obvious, for
Lent was a period of fasting, thus Carnival became a period for feasting. The
"carne" in Carnival not only means food but flesh, and just as fasting from food
was exercised in Lent so was fasting from all sensual desires. Carnival has
always been a time of particularly intense sexual activity. "Sex was, as usual,
more interesting symbolically than food because of the ways in which it was
disguised, transparent as these evils may have been." (Burke, 186), and Carnival
symbols are often sexual symbols--the sausage, the cock, the pig. Carnival
also is a festival of desecration often leading to violence. This violence has
been frequently sublimated into ritual. (Burke, 187) During the Renaissance,
ritual killings of bears, bulls and cocks, cockfights, and executions were
common Carnival activities, as was the pelting of pedestrians with eggs. (Kinser,
Carnival, 151) The Mardi Gras Indians in New Orleans best represent this
mock violence, where today the battle has become a dance.

Carnival symbols all share a common trait of being grandiose, referring to
two qualities of the word--ambivalence and semantic inflation. "Carnival
symbols are nearly always both silly and serious. The Carnival king is a
crowned fool; he provokes admiration and laughter. The Carnival king is not merely grand, but grandiose; the line between self-glory and satire is crossed back and forth all along a parade's route, and indeed all through the long process of selecting costumes and constructing floats. Modern technology has encouraged the development of the second aspect of Mardi Gras's grandioseness, the inflation of symbols through better advertising, bigger floats, larger grandstands, longer parade routes."(Kinser, Carnival, 251-252)

Mardi Gras has always functioned on the popular culture code. Anything that exists in this code has two characteristics. First, it must be already known and immediately recognizable so that its interests lies not in its innate quality but in its unexpected adjacency to other things already known. Second, it is perceptually magnified; it must be big or it must glitter, favorably both.(Kinser, Carnival, 292) The favorite way of expressing popular-culture values in Carnival is parading. Another part of the popular-culture code for Carnival is to get soused.(Kinser, Carnival, 293-294)

Carnival produces ardor because it nourishes people's fantasies. The essence of Carnival is the masquerade, because masking encourages expression of the self's multiplicity, but only part this multiplicity is the "inverse" side of the self which is restrained by everyday social arrangements.(Kinser, Carnival, 275) Or more simply, masquerading brings freedom from inhibition, it's another life for at least a few hours.(Laborde, 16)
Carnival could be called an exercise in surrealism for it is an unnatural juxtaposition and combination of things. The contradictions of Carnival, the ceremonious and the carnivalesque, pushed to extremes can be surreal. (Kinser, *Rabelais*, 87) Carnival, like surrealism, is "the unreality of reality". (Starr, 89-97) Carnival and surrealism both aim to disturb, and pursue this aim by breaking through the conventional, the seemingly ordered, using the instrument of surprise that forces us to take notice. The ideas of surrealism where stated by Andre Breton as the "Imagination, folly, dream surrender to dark forces of the unconscious and the recourse to the marvelous are here opposed, and preferred, to all that arises from necessity, from logical tides, from the unreasonable." (Waldberg, 16) The similarities between Carnival and surrealism become even clearer if surrealism is seen as the proclamation of unresponsibility, asserting that man must escape from the control of reason as well as from the obligations of a moral order. Both surrealism and Carnival rehabilitates superstition and magic and turn to the Hermetic tradition. (Waldberg, 17)

The works produced by artists that followed the idea of surrealism can give images of the idea of Carnival. The two tendencies of surrealist painters were those for whom calligraphy, animation and movement are the essentials, where the idea is suggested without concern for the exact representation, and the painters who used descriptives where the scene is unreal, but the setting, the objects, and the figures are painted with fidelity. (Waldberg, 7) In Joan Miro's
painting Harlequin's Carnival there is the abandonment of reality for illusion, where sexuality and gaiety replace struggle, violence, and frustration. (Bonnefoy, 19-20) Our interest lies in the ambivalence created by the image.

"The more ceremonious a Carnival is, the more it will have a simply inversionary relation to everyday reality. The more Carnivalesque it is, the more it will be complexly transgressive... The two extremes of ceremony and the Carnivalesque are antagonistic; they are also complementary." (Kinser, Carnival, 317) The order and rituals of Carnival are the parades, the masking, the balls, the ceremonies. The carnivalesque is why they take place--the exaltation of taboos, the escape from the everyday. There is in the celebration of Carnival a strong cultural identity, and in New Orleans Mardi Gras culture is manifested in its krewes, parades, balls, and French Quarter masquerades.

Culture and Architecture

It has long been held that there is a relationship between architecture and culture. This relationship is seen by many as existing primarily with vernacular architecture, for it is widely believed that the vernacular has grown out of the practical needs of the inhabitants of a place and the constraints of site and climate. This idea of the vernacular landscape suggests that the architectural forms that are used are consolidated to the particular place. (Hough, 34-35) This implies that culture is reduced down to nothing more than the effect that
practical needs, site, and climate have on a particular people. It does not however explain why there are great differences between cultures of different peoples that live in similar sites and climate and have similar needs, nor does it explain the difference in architectural forms that are used by these different peoples.

Amos Rapoport contends that the explanation of the relationship between architecture and culture cannot be seen in terms of only need, climate, and site, but it involves many other things including materials and technology, economics, defense, and religion. He says that attempts at explaining this relationship have suffered from two faults: they have tended to be largely physical determinists in nature, and they have inclined toward an excessively simplistic attempt to attribute form to a single cause. They have thus failed at realizing the complex interaction of many factors. (Rapoport, 18) He suggests that these factors may often change. For example, the early settlers of the United States were constrained in their building form by climate, limited technology, and materials, whereas today we are constrained by building codes, regulations, zoning, and mortgage authorities.

The conclusion of his argument is that there is a wide range of freedom and choice of architectural forms even under the most severe conditions; thus, because physical criticality is low, socio-cultural factors can operate, and because they can operate, purely physical forces cannot determine from. (Rapoport, 59) Socio-cultural factors are such things as the accepted way
of doing things and the implicit ideals of a people, but maybe most importantly they are often what a culture makes impossible by prohibition, either explicitly or implicitly. (Rapoport, 47) He uses Mumford’s argument that man was a symbol-making animal before he was a tool-making animal to support these ideas. (Rapoport, 42)

The importance of socio-cultural factors on architecture should not be seen as decreasing in the Twentieth Century. As physical forces continue to decrease with advanced technology socio-cultural factors increase. The physical restraints of today, zoning regulations, mortgage authorities, could even been seen as being influenced by more socio-cultural factors than environmental.

The importance of socio-cultural factors in architecture implies that if a culture is understood then architectural form could be derived from it. We have an understanding of the culture of Mardi Gras through its history, its theories, and its environment; thus, it would seem that an architectural form could be derived that would begin to reflect the culture of Mardi Gras.

One of the theories of the carnivalesque which begins to influence and foster an architectural idea is that of the elevation of taboo elements which cause an inversion of the familiar. This leads to the idea of playing not only with the surface of the familiar but with what the surface hides; thus, creating a position of ambivalence. Ambivalence could also be generated in architecture by the use of the grandiose. Another theory which begins to foster architectural
ideas is the use of unexpected adjacency of elements that are immediately recognizable to other elements already known, and the perceptual magnification of these elements.

An architecture which conveyed the culture of Carnival would be a surreal architecture which would aim to disturb, and pursue this aim by breaking through the conventional, the seemingly ordered, using the instrument of surprise and forcing one to take notice. It would be an architecture of imagination, folly, and dream opposed to all that arises from necessity and logic. A surreal architecture would be unreal, but the particular elements used would be very familiar. But, an architecture of Carnival would also be an architecture of procession, ritual, and ceremony.

The analogy between Carnival and architecture has already been alluded to in works by Da Matta which deal with Brazilian Carnaval. Da Matta explains Carnival in terms of the house and the street. The "house" relates to a controlled universe, where things are in their proper places. The "street" displays the world with its unpredictable events, its actions and passions. (MacAlloon, 209) "Whether it be in the street, alley, plaza, avenue, club, school, or home, Carnival requires its own place." (MacAlloon, 221)

Canal Street, the center of Mardi Gras festivities, can itself be seen as an interpretation of the ideas of Carnival in the built form. Venturi uses the image of Canal street in the final argument of his book Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture calling it a "seemingly chaotic juxtaposition" of elements that
express a vitality and validity that produces an unity unto itself. (Venturi, 
Complexity, 104) It is this juxtaposition of elements which links the physical 
form of Canal Street to the carnivalesque.

One manifestation of the ideas of the carnivalesque can be seen in the 
Palazzo del Te' by Giulio Rómano in which accepted architectural practices are 
treated playfully and excessively creating an unreal architecture, just as 
"Carnival symbols are nearly always both silly and serious." The palazzo is 
masquerading before us, for all four elevations are different, and through its 
masquerade it satirizes architecture. The palazzo is carnivalesque because 
"surface/depth, past/present, reality/fantasy are all uncertain and more 
importantly it is a both-and rather than an either-or game." The conflict between 
what we know to be and what we actually see and its unfamiliar juxtaposition 
and combination inclines the palazzo to the surreal and the ambivalent.

Another building which displays ideas of the carnivalesque is Frank 
Furness' Clearing House, now demolished. Venturi describes this building's 
elevation as the "violent adjacencies of rectangles, squares, lunettes, and 
diagonals of contrasting sizes... an almost insane short story of a castle on a 
city street", (Venturi, Complexity, 57) which relates to the statement that "Carnival 
is also a festival of desecration often leading to violence." Ambivalence is 
created because we do not know if we should like this violence and 
excessiveness.
Though these two buildings may have not meant to be reflections of ideas of Carnival, they still exhibit ideas which are carnavalesque. They give us clues as to how these ideas are manifested in the built form through the use of inversion, conflict, excessiveness, violence, unreality, masquerade, and ambivalence.
Rex, King of Carnival, Mardi Gras 1990.
New Orleans
An Urban History

Looking at a map of the southern United States the location of New Orleans is obvious—there had to be a city at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Looking at a map of southern Louisiana and Mississippi the location of any city along the river appears futile. It is nothing but swamps and marsh. The Mississippi Delta is a dreadful place. The river is constantly pushing its way through trying to change course, and the proximity to the sea and the low elevation, never above 15 feet, makes it atrocious if a hurricane hits.

Yet New Orleans is still there.

The apparent paradox between excellent location and miserable location merely illuminates the distinction between two terms—“site” and “situation”—which urban geographers use to describe the location of cities. Site is the actual real estate which the city occupies, and New Orleans’ site is wretched. Situation is what we commonly mean when we speak of a place with respect to neighboring places. New Orleans’ situation is her location near the mouth of the Mississippi, and the fact that a million people work and make a living on this evil site only emphasizes the excellence of the situation. (Lewis, 17)

New Orleans site insured the city would be plagued by incessant trouble and that the form of the city’s physical growth would be shaped by local environment to a far greater degree than in most other American cities. (Lewis, 17)

The location of New Orleans was not however arbitrary. The brothers Bienville and Iberville were looking for a site for a French city along the
Mississippi to control France's claim to the Valley. They were looking for high ground but that meant going to the site of Baton Rouge, the last and southernmost point along the river where the banks are free of flooding. But Baton Rouge was an inconvenient distance upstream for ocean-going ships, and the trip through Lake Ponchartrain, Lake Maurepas, and then up the Amite River used for portage was difficult and out of the way. The Choctaw Indians showed them a shorter way to the river. From Lake Ponchartrain there was a short stream called Bayou St. John which from its "headwaters" it was only two miles to the Mississippi. It was by far the easiest way to get into the river from either the Gulf of Mexico or the sheltered waters of the Gulf coast. Thus it was decided that the capital of New France would be at that location on the river. (Lewis, 30)

The site is suited to the original small city planned by Le Blonde de la Tour. The natural levee of the river provides satisfactory drainage and soil for building. Therefore, urban development and roads were possible only on the levees until the advances of modern engineering. The will of the Mississippi River has made the building of man-made levees necessary, for the river has many times changed its course which can be seen in the geography of the Louisiana coast.

"New Orleans did not grow to become a city; it was decreed a city from the moment of its founding--rather as Venus sprang full-born from the sea." (Lewis, 32) The city's plan was laid out in 1723 by the French engineer Adrien de Pauger, assistant to Le Blond de la Tour, in a gridiron pattern--symmetrical, with
a central square facing the river. (Janssen, 82) The plan represented a perfected, purified Europe, ready to be stamped into the soil of the New World wherever Europeans willed it. The street plan was a declaration of intention, but was not filled until after 1800. (Lewis, 32)

Pauger based the street widths on the then French foot, which was slightly greater than the English foot. Most of the streets in the Vieux Carre, or the original city as it is known, were established at 36 French feet or 38 feet 4 3/8 inches (English) between property lines. Orleans street with its central location running northward from the cathedral was 42 French feet or 44 feet 9 1/8 inches. The bordering streets were made even wider--Rampart 100 French feet (106'6-7/8") and Canal 160 French feet (170'6-1/4")--allowing them in modern times to be divided. The narrowness of the French Quarter thoroughfares caused them to be made into one-way streets when motor vehicles appeared. (Janssen, 5)

The central square was given the name "Place d'Armes," with the church and government buildings facing it. The influence of the Roman Church on the city was thus firmly established from the beginning.

The general pattern of growth of the city was upriver, a tendency that would never be reversed. The Creole residents, or the descendants of French and Spanish settlers, generally stayed in the Vieux Carre' while Anglo immigrants built and moved into the Uptown areas. (Lewis, 34)
Transportation into and out of New Orleans was still mainly restricted to waterways at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The best way to get in or out of the city was still by way of Bayou St. John, and the route had been improved after Governor Carondelet ordered a canal built to connect the bayou with the backside of the natural levee. Carondelet's plans were ambitious, but the canal was nothing more than a ditch plagued by roots and trees until after 1803 when an increase in shipping resulted from the purchase by the U.S. The canal was then widened and deepened and heavily used until the building of the New Basin Canal in 1838 leading to the American sector. (Janssen, 65-66) At the end of the Carondelet Canal, just north of the Vieux Carre' in the land between backswamp and natural levee, a turning basin was built, giving its name to Basin Street and determining the location of a thriving commercial waterfront area and of accompanying bawdy houses. (Lewis, 35) known mythically as Storyville.

"Architecture in the old French city is naturally assumed by tourists to be French, but most of it is not. New Orleans was Spanish for the last thirty years of the eighteenth century, and during that time two great fires burned up most of the city, so the rebuilding was naturally in the Spanish mode." (Lewis, 36) The general system of building resulted from the annual floods of the Mississippi. Houses were built up off the ground on piers, and ditches were dug around the city blocks giving them the name "islets." (Janssen, 21) The wood construction did not last long on the sodden soil of south Louisiana. With
the complete absence of stone, brick came into its own as a foundation and wall material. By 1749 there was at least one brick yard just outside the city. It was not good brick, but it fared better than timber when in contact with the wet ground. The brick had to be protected from rain by a facing of stuccoed plaster or thin boards. (Janssen, 67)

The rapid growth of the city after the American purchase led to new problems. The French Creoles felt alienated and withdrew into their own caste. The Vieux Carre' was getting crowded and would not hold the increasing number of immigrants even if the natives had not made them welcome. With the population spreading outward a permanent etching was left on the urban geography of New Orleans because growth was limited to defined areas—the natural levee. (Lewis, 38) The city therefore pushed into sugar plantations which had lined the river's banks both upstream and downstream from New Orleans. These additions to the city were called "faubourgs", roughly translated as "suburbs". Most of the Americans preferred to settle upstream from the Vieux Carre'. The boundary line between the established Creoles and newly arrived Americans was what John Chase calls a "nameless no-man's land." (Lewis, 38) This would later become known as Canal Street, and though it has never been close to a canal, one was planned there and the street so named. The street became an enormously wide boulevard, and the median was called "the neutral ground," a geographical recognition of the conflict between Creoles and Americans. (Lewis, 38)
The downstream settlement was slower in the Faubourg of Joseph Marigny which was dominated by Creoles who had spilled out from the overcrowded Vieux Carre’ and by new immigrants, mainly Irish and German. Creole growth also occurred on the Esplanade Ridge, a naturally high saddle of land from the river to the natural levee of Bayou Gentilly. The main axis of the ridge is barely above sea level, but it was enough. The Esplanade in time became the great nineteenth century artery of suburban Creole New Orleans.(Lewis, 39)

Because of antagonisms between the different groups of the city it was divided into three self-governing municipalities in 1836: the first being the Vieux Carre’, the second the American Uptown section in the Faubourg St. Mary, and the third the Faubourg Marigny. The ramifications of this division are still evident today though the divisions were soon abandoned. For example, streets change names as they cross Canal Street—Royal becomes St. Charles, Chartres becomes Camp.(Lewis, 40) The Creole city and the American city were in essence two cities. The Americans built their own Place d’Armes and called it Lafayette Square. Churches and burial grounds were sharply segregated.(Lewis, 40)

The street pattern of New Orleans goes back to the time when the land was sugar plantations. French and Spanish land grants extended perpendicular from the river providing each land owner with river frontage and access to the road along the levee. These grants were often narrow strips known as "long lots". But, since the river was not straight, the strips were not parallel. Behind
convex curves of the river the boundaries fanned out; on concave curves, they were squeezed. (Lewis, 42) The street planners did not always use the systematic planning of Pauger, resulting in uncoordinated streets running at various angles and failing to meet. Many were of inadequate widths or of varying widths. (Janssen, 7)

The lot lines were the obvious place to dig canals and became the place for main roads. Later the canals were lined and covered with concrete and gave way to wide boulevards. Cross streets simply followed the river in a series of straight tangents, each tangent jogging slightly when it crossed one of the radial boulevards. Because many of these streets were narrow and New Orleanians being use to large boulevards at periodic intervals, the need for a great boulevard which ran parallel to the river arose. The place for such a boulevard was along the rear boundary line of the narrow riverfront land grants. This line ran forty French arpents from the Mississippi, or 7,200 feet, one arpent equaling 180 feet. Thus St. Charles Avenue was born, running about halfway between the docks of the river and the stench of the backswamp. (Lewis, 42) The avenue became the primary artery of the American city and became the route of the New Orleans and Carrollton Railroad, opened in September of 1835, which carried suburbanites to the city. (Janssen, 107)

New Orleans was running out of space by the turn of the century. The natural levee was almost totally built upon and there was no place to go. Uptown development on the levee stopped at the Orleans-Jefferson parish
boundary because there were no man-made levees in Jefferson parish, opening it up to seasonal flooding. Likewise on the Downtown side of the Vieux Carre' there was little levee protection because the officers of the Orleans Levee District had been less than energetic in providing flood protection in an area whose income and political influence were small. (Lewis, 57)

The response was to pack more and more people into the same space. As land costs rose, land owners were persuaded to subdivide their land into narrow slices. New Orleanians' suspicion of multistory residential quarters gave rise to a unique architectural response--the "shotgun". This popular low cost house was allegedly called a shotgun because one could fire a shotgun in the front door and have all the pellets emerge from the rear. (Lewis, 59) It simply consisted of a string of rooms lined up one behind other, usually with doors "enfilade" instead of a hallway. An evolution of the shotgun resulted in the "bungalow," or "double tenement," which was the attaching of two shot guns under one roof with a central gable. To avoid possible flood danger many bungalows were elevated on pilings five to ten feet high, resulting in a substantial two story double house. (Lewis, 59) The shotguns and bungalows were often embellished to the most popular styles of the day with finials, brackets, spindles, tiled gables, and louvered French doors.

In 1910 the most important development in the urban history of New Orleans occurred: A. Baldwin Wood designed a heavy duty pump that made it possible to drain the backswamps of New Orleans and open up areas of
settlement which were thought forever closed.\textsuperscript{5} Growth did occur towards Lake Ponchartrain, though it was slowed down by the high cost of pumping which was carried over to land prices.\textsuperscript{(Lewis, 62)} The most significant developments were along Lake Ponchartrain where a levee was built and dotted with a yacht club and harbor, a city park with an amusement park, the campuses of a university, and prime residential areas.\textsuperscript{(Janssen, 41)}

The urban development of post-war New Orleans occurred mainly in the form of suburban growth, mainly into Jefferson Parish, St. Tammany Parish, and St. Bernard Parish. Because the new additions have been so sudden and so different in population New Orleans has become two cities in the last forty years. Within is the compact old prewar city; around it in all directions is the sprawl of Houston.\textsuperscript{(Lewis, 75)}

New Orleans seems to be partly immune to a nationwide disease of decaying downtowns because of the late suburbanization and the compactness and residential quality of the inner city.\textsuperscript{(Lewis, 86)} The Vieux Carre' is also a reason for the vitality of downtown. The "Quarter," as Orleanians call it, serves as the insignia of the entire city and attracts large number of tourists. The importance of the Vieux Carre' led to the development of the Vieux Carre' Commission which regulates architecture through the restriction of building permits thus controlling the onslaught of development from Canal Street. The

\textsuperscript{5} Woods pump also revolutionized the geography of the world. Dutch engineers came to New Orleans to learn how the pump worked, and fifty years later the Zuyder Zee had been drained.
commission did not attempt to freeze the area in the manner of Colonial Williamsburg, but it recognized the vitality of the Quarter and for it to survive must continue to function on a contemporary basis. The commission also realized that the Quarter's value was a result of the quality of the total environment, and with that belief requires all changes to be in the spirit of the place. (Lewis, 88) The Vieux Carre's defenders won their greatest success in the early 1960's when they beat back federal plans to build an elevated interstate highway along the Mississippi.

The Quarter has experienced great success since the commissions inauguration. The Quarter might actually be suffering from too much success as hotels, restaurants, and night clubs compete for less and less space, pushing out the residents and smaller businesses. The residents have fled to the Faubourg Marigny purchasing once considered slum areas and gentrifying them. (Lewis, 90)

New Orleans is a city which has defied nature. Its continual struggle with the river and subsidence (Janssen, 17) has made it a strong city, if not openly defiant and independent. Its growth was for its first two hundred years limited by nature to the natural levees, and has been able to grow beyond them in only the last eighty years. The rapid growth of suburbia is of concern, but the continuing importance of the downtown gives encouragement. The future of New Orleans then most likely lies in this downtown area, making it of the greatest concern for future growth and development.
New Orleans is often characterized by its difference from other American cities. "New Orleans never fits in. New Orleans has always gone its own way, at its own inimitable pace, with seemingly little regard for the way things are done elsewhere." (Hirsch, 100) This difference has made it one of the most popular of American cities. It is celebrated for its carefree yet intemperate spirit which is best seen during Carnival season. New Orleans is however the oldest city in the South and is also more staid and conservative when compared to newer cities in the Sunbelt which are youthful, flexible, and exuberant. (Hirsch, 100) An obvious paradox therefore exists between the conservative city of the Old South and the profligate city of Mardi Gras. Yet Mardi Gras is the way the city celebrates its past, with the same enthusiasm newer cities devote to building the future. (Hirsch, 100)

Peirce Lewis sees New Orleans as an island city. First, it is an urban island among the rural cajuns who share Orleanians French and Catholic ancestry but live outside its cosmopolitan practices. It is secondly an island among Louisiana’s cultural split of Protestant north and Catholic south, often seen as the seat of papacy and corruption in the state. It is also an urban island in a rural South whose only real city is Atlanta which has only grown significantly since the second world war. Finally, it is an economic island whose hinterland
does not surround it in the traditional city model, but is instead the Midwest of America. (Lewis, 11-16)

New Orleans was a foreign city to the Anglos who visited and settled there from the beginning, and it has never completely lost its foreign flavor. French was spoken by many Orleanians until well into the twentieth century, and when Louisiana seceded from the Union in 1861 the articles of secession were published both in French and English--as were all of Louisiana's laws. (Lewis, 3) The New Orleans Creole considered his Franco-Spanish civilization superior to that of England, and worlds apart from the ill-bred, gauche Anglos who came from the East coast and the Appalachians. As H.W. Gilmore put it, "[it was] the only case of its kind in American history...[when the] spreading American frontier ran into a culture which, on the basis of manners and fine appearances at least, was superior to its own." (Lewis, 3)

New Orleans has always been different from other cities, it was so from early times. The urban historians Glaab and Brown remark that "by the 1840's travelers found monotonous similarity in the appearance of American cities, particularly those that had been newly built in the West," but they immediately hasten to note that New Orleans was different--a foreign-looking city which visitors found fascinating. (Lewis, 5)

Americans have always found New Orleans to be a romantic place. Since the early 1900's New Orleans has been pushing this romantic image, a place of ironwork balconies, trailing wisteria, and vivacious mulatto street vendors,
mostly to promote tourism. The leisurely way of life of New Orleans did not live up to the late nineteenth-century exuberant capitalism, and New Orleans society retreated into its own world. (Kinser, Carnival, 137) The city’s myth furthered by its own society which was quite content to remain outside the mainstream of American urban society. (Lewis, 5)

Part of New Orleans difference in appearance is a result of its climate. New Orleans is theoretically a tropical city (by strict standards it is a subtropical city). The image of a tropical city is of the romantic and the faintly corrupt. (Lewis, 5) The climate also encourages the growth of exotic plants, adding to New Orleans’ remote character.

New Orleans buildings are foreign and eccentric too. The combination of the architecture brought by the French and the Spanish together with imports from the Caribbean (where an early connection of Indian and European ideas had created picturesque houses that afforded maximum ventilation and shade) with the tastes of Americans, which was constantly changing depending on the newest European propensity, gave rise to the most eclectic architecture found in North America. New Orleans was foreign not just in small areas but for miles. As Peirce Lewis says, "if the mixture did not resemble any particular foreign city very much, it resembled the ordinary North American city not at all." (Lewis, 7)

The interesting thing about New Orleans is that one is never directionally orientated in the city. North, south, east, and west are ambiguous ideas. If
across the river is the West Bank, why is that where the sun rises? And if the
sun does rise in the west in New Orleans, why does it appear to set in the
north?

The difference of New Orleans extends to the very plan of the city creating
an almost surreal urban experience. As Frederick Starr explains it,

Superficially it appears to have been built on a rational Cartesian grid.
But because of the bend in the river, the entire grid is skewed. Hence,
in a bizarre tribute to non-Euclidean geometry, parallel lines meet in
New Orleans. Which accounts for the fact that it is easy to become
completely disoriented in the Crescent City, both literally and
figuratively.
Look with your own eyes. Is it not true that Canal Street and St.
Charles Avenue meet at right angles? It is equally self evident that
both thoroughfares head out from their point of junction in straight
lines. Then how is it that Carrollton Avenue (which clearly joins St.
Charles Avenue at a ninety-degree turn and runs straight thereafter)
connects eventually with Canal Street, and at another right angle?
Stated formally, 90 degrees + 90 degrees = 270 degrees, in New
Orleans at least. (Starr, 89)

Is it significant that Desire Street and Piety Street in New Orleans run
parallel to each other, and are only yards apart? That Desire is a two-way
thoroughfare while Piety can be traversed in only one direction? Or that
Desire gets most of the traffic, leaving Piety a peaceful byway? (Starr, 121)

The flavor of New Orleans also depends heavily on its location to water, for
it is basically surrounded by it. The fact that New Orleans is a port city adds to
the image of its worldliness and its iniquity. The romantic image of the city is
symbolized with the steamboat, alluding to a day gone by.

The location of New Orleans at the entrance to the Mississippi made it an
important city. This spot controlled the access and egress of the Mississippi
Valley, and thus controlled the whole interior of North America from the Appalachians to the Rockies. Thomas Jefferson once said, "There is on the globe one spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans." (Lewis, 10) The importance of New Orleans was factual, but the factual gave way to the mythical.

New Orleans is engaging, where else could one ride on a streetcar down a wide boulevard lined with Second Empire mansions. The fascination with the city must however go beyond the romantic. It probably comes from the comic or absurdity of the city, i.e., illogical, contrary to all reason or common sense, dissonant. (Starr, 19) Where else would the West Bank actually be to the east of the city? Where else would parallel streets meet, or more importantly, would it even matter? New Orleans then is full of paradoxes, or is it itself a paradox? The very fact the city exists is inconceivable, for it should be under water. It is these absurdities that make the city so interesting. It is these absurdities that link the physical city with the carnivalesque and make it the perfect Mardi Gras town.
The Mardi Gras Institute
The Site

The site for the Mardi Gras Institute is what is known as the Cultural Center which is immediately to the northwest of the French Quarter. The area is bounded by Rampart Street to the southeast, St. Philip Street to the northeast, North Villere Street to the northwest, and Orleans Street to the southwest. The site includes a series of parks and structures: Congo Square, Louis Armstrong Park, the Municipal Auditorium (where Mardi Gras balls are held), the New Orleans Theatre for the Performing Arts, the old pumping station, and the defunct jazz museum.

When Pauger plotted the city much of the site was known as Fort St. Ferdinand and home to the wood and earth ramparts which protected the city. In 1804 the fort was demolished and land was immediately incorporated into the City Commons, except for a parcel of land original to the Morand Estate and owned at the time by Claude Treme’, by whose name the area is known todayy. Treme’ had plotted his land in correspondence to the Quarter and had begun the selling of lots in 1798. The newly vacated square bounded by St. Ann, Rampart, St. Peter, and St. Claude was known as both Circus Place and Congo Square. In 1851, the Place d’Armes (in front of the Cabildo, Cathedral, and Presbytere) was renamed Jackson Square, and Congo Square was redesignated as the new Place d’Armes. In 1893, the square was renamed
Beauregard Square to honor the New Orleans Civil War hero General P.G.T. Beauregard; the square was landscaped, oaks planted and whitewashed, and benches set in place. (Toledano, 65)

Immediately to the west of Beauregard Square was the old Carondelet Canal Basin which has been built by the Spanish governor Baron Luis Hector de Carondelet in 1794. The Carondelet canal led from the headwaters of Bayou St. John to the city, and the basin grew as an important place of commerce. In 1927 the canal was deemed un navigable and was filled.

In 1833 a new parish prison was built on the block bounded by Orleans, St. Ann, Treme’, and Marais. The prison was a major architectural landmark for the city; the interior featured large court yards with arcaded walkways and tiers of galleries. In 1895 it was demolished, and eleven years later on its site the City Pumping Station was built in a Spanish Revival style. (Toledano, 63)

In 1929 the Municipal Auditorium was built behind Beauregard Square after the Italian Renaissance-style designs of Favrot and Livaudais. The building seats 6,000 for balls and concerts and can be divided to house a small performance (2,000) in one side and a large one (4,000) in the other.

"Intermittently, from the time of the completion of the Municipal Auditorium, various city administrations have tried to embark upon a cultural center project on the squares surrounding the auditorium and Beauregard Square." (Toledano, 66) In 1961 the city reacquired the area of the City Commons, bounded by Orleans, St. Philip, Rampart, and North Villere, with the aid of federal urban
renewal funds. This act displaced a whole neighborhood which the city government saw as slum but which sociologists saw as a reflection of the living city. (Toledano, 66) Many historical structures were destroyed. Five major buildings were planned for culture-oriented use, but the funds for the buildings did not exist. The first actual construction within the cleared complex began in 1971 with the Center for the Performing Arts. The rest of the cleared site remained unused. (Toledano, 68)

When the famous New Orleans jazz musician Louis Armstrong died, city officials decided that the cleared area contiguous to the Performing Arts Center and the Municipal Auditorium could be developed as a memorial to the native musician. In 1971, plans were begun on a park based on Victorian pleasure gardens; the plan was controversial and unfunded. In 1974 the city spent $8.2 million for the development and improvement of the entire thirty-one acres of the cultural center. The entire site was enclosed by a concrete and steel fence. A 3 acre lagoon with fountains, extensive planting, paths, lighting, seating, and other amenities were designated. An architectural portion of the scheme included the creation of a jazz museum complex which would preserve four buildings that remained within the compound after the urban renewal clearance.

Today the area is uninhabited and dangerous, an ideal hangout for drug dealers and thieves. The Municipal Auditorium is still heavily used during Mardi Gras and at other times of the year for concerts, and the Performing Arts Center is also used on a regular basis. Extra security is however necessary to
assure safety for patrons attending events at either hall. The jazz museum complex is however a failure. The place is desolate during the day and literally dead at night. Its close proximity to the French Quarter and the multitude of tourists is an asset, but this has not been capitalized on.

It is envisioned that the Mardi Gras Institute will provide activity in the area and make it a more dynamic and appealing place.

The Objectives of the Institute

The Mardi Gras Institute will be an archives for the material culture of Carnival in the New Orleans area. The Institute will both exhibit and preserve the artifacts for public as well as scholarly analysis. The Mardi Gras Institute's goal is to make this material more accessible to the public and the scholar and to put it in the context of the history of the city. This material culture ranges in size from the very large--parade floats to ducal pins--while some of the material requires special storage, such as the elaborate costumes. Some of the many things that would be preserved here are parade throws which includes beads, embeled beads, and doubloons, krewes memorabilia which includes invitations, jewelry, and ball favors, sound recordings of Mardi Gras music, records of social events which includes who was presented to each court, photographs, and writings which includes magazines, newspapers, and books.
The Institute will also be the host to the annual Mardi Gras Symposium, currently hosted by the University of New Orleans. This symposium is a day of short conferences which address different aspects of Mardi Gras, such as the history and the future of Mardi Gras, the costumes of Mardi Gras, the Mardi Gras Indians, the role of women in Mardi Gras, Mardi Gras photography, and the histories of individual krewes.

Through architecture the Mardi Gras Institute will convey to the visitor an idea of Carnival; thus, the Institute will be a manifestation of the ideas of Carnival--ritual, inversion, conflict, excessiveness, sensuality, myth, satire, masquerade, unreality, and ambivalence--in built form.

The Program

The major portion of the program of the Institute will be given to exhibition and preservation space, being the main objective of the Institute. There is the need for a small orientation auditorium for visitors which can double for a meeting room for the Mardi Gras Symposium. Other meeting rooms for the Mardi Gras Symposium which can also serve krewes and other organizations will also be necessary. Research will necessitate a small library and reading room. Administration will require offices. Visitors will want a small gift shop and a restaurant. The Institute will also provide housing for the director and two small apartments for visiting scholars.
The exhibition space will require two large display areas for larger objects such as parade floats and reconstruction of krewe courts. Seven to ten smaller spaces will also be needed. Related to the public display areas will be public facilities including rest rooms, a gift shop, and food and beverage service. The collection storage area will require a special area for costumes.

The auditorium should accommodate at least 200 people. The meeting rooms, approximately four, should hold between 20 to 60 people.

The library will house books, recordings, photographs, newspapers, and magazines. There should also be space provided for Librarian offices and workrooms. The reading room should provide facilities for both short term and long term research.

The administration offices will include a directors office, a curators office, a small conference room, secretarial space, and private rest room facilities. The staff will require a lounge with lockers, etc. Living facilities for the director will include a living area, kitchen, and two bedrooms. Two small apartments for visiting scholars will also be provided, both only one bedroom.

Parking for 100 cars will be required: 21 for staff, 4 handicapped, and 75 visitors.
Louis Armstrong Park with the Municipal Auditorium.
Carnival display in The U.S. Mint, Louisiana State Museum.
Float decorations stored at Blain Kern's Mardi Gras World.
Bibliography


Appendix: The Building
Order of Illustrations

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