

Golden Age Syndrome

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New Orleans is wavering in blind indecision of whether it will be a self-parody as it attempts to maintain its New Orleansness or accept globalization to gradually become a more generic city. The initial trajectory was established nearly 25 years ago by the World's Fair which inadvertently set a course of self-parody so imbedded in the local thought that it was seemingly only uncovered after the waters receded from the city after Hurricane Katrina. The World's Fair, held in 1984 as the steeped in nostalgia centennial celebration to a previous fair in the city, is still the only fair to go bankrupt and subsequently there has never been another fair in the United States. While the Fair may be dismissed as a rather short singular event precedents show its potential importance in shaping history. The Chicago World's Fair in 1893 instigated the City Beautiful Movement and according to Louis Sullivan set the development of architectural ideas behind by forty years through its promotion of neoclassicism. The Olympics in Beijing and the World's Fair in Shanghai have increased design and construction quality expectations on local architects and continued to open China's doors to international offices while legitimizing China globally. For New Orleans it was showcasing the postmodern design of Charles Moore. Since the city of New Orleans bailed out the failed Fair, budgets were slashed in following years covering recreation, infrastructure, and education while having already laid a foundation of supporting postmodernist architecture as the proper and logical response to building new in an historic city. Postmodernism, like all styles, is quickly misunderstood and watered down in its continued implementation creating faux historic projects that lack Venturi's complexity or Moore's playfulness. The decades that followed saw the Modernist buildings of the 60's & 70's fall into disrepair, soaring crime rates, and ignored infrastructural issues as the main economic focus of the city switched to tourism and selling New Orleans as cultural capital. With Hurricane Katrina hitting land twenty years after the Fair, we must ask, "can something so bad, actually be good?" like a survived drug overdose that instigates a go in rehab. Katrina washed away the primordial rug under which all of the city's problems had been swept revealing all of its problems. Since then major changes in education reform, infrastructural investment, and new construction of public buildings are being implemented widely in the city, but for post-World's Fair tourist-centric New Orleans new is a dirty word. New doesn't sell like in other cities. The Bilbao Effect doesn't work here. Gehry designed the World's Fair's prominent auditorium on the riverfront which was stripped of him mid design, watered down, and eventually demolished. Regardless of who wins the battle between the globalization of the new or the self-parody of the fake old, the outcome is that the outsiders always win.

GOLDEN AGE SYNDROME

TWO TALES OF A CITY: A PARADOXICAL IRONY OF EVENTS

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity... we had everything before us, we had nothing before us..."

Charles Dickens
A Tale of Two Cities

New Orleans, considered the last bastion of authenticity and bohemia in the United States, is wavering in blind indecision of whether it will be a self-parody as it attempts to maintain its New Orleansness or accept globalization to gradually become a more generic city. The initial trajectory was established nearly 25 years ago by the World's Fair which inadvertently set a course of self-parody so imbedded in the local thought that it was seemingly only uncovered after the waters receded from the city after Hurricane Katrina. While the collective memory of the Fair is that of pleasure, it is similar to the local cuisine in that often what tastes the best is the worst thing for your figure. The World's Fair, held in 1984 as the steeped in nostalgia centennial celebration to a previous fair in the city, is still the only fair to go bankrupt and subsequently there has never been another fair in the United States. While

the Fair may be dismissed as a rather short singular event precedents show its potential importance in shaping history. The Chicago World's Fair in 1893 instigated the City Beautiful Movement and according to Louis Sullivan set the development of architectural ideas behind by forty years through its promotion of neoclassicism. The Olympics in Beijing and the World's Fair in Shanghai have increased design and construction quality expectations on local architects and continued to open China's doors to international offices while legitimizing China globally. For New Orleans it was showcasing the postmodern design of Charles Moore. Since the city of New Orleans bailed out the failed Fair, budgets were slashed in following years covering recreation, infrastructure, and education while having already laid a foundation of supporting postmodernist architecture as the proper and logical response to building new in an historic city. Postmodernism, like all styles, is quickly misunderstood and watered down in its continued implementation creating faux historic projects that lack Venturi's complexity or Moore's playfulness. The decades that followed saw the Modernist buildings of the 60's & 70's fall into disrepair, soaring crime rates, and ignored infrastructural issues as the main economic focus of the city switched to tourism and selling New Orleans as cultural capital. With Hurricane Katrina hitting land twenty years after the Fair, we must ask, "can something so bad, actually be good?" like a survived drug overdose that instigates a go in rehab. Katrina washed away the primordial rug under which all of the city's problems had been swept revealing all of its problems. Since then major changes in education reform, infrastructural investment, and new construction of public buildings are being implemented widely in the city, but for post-World's Fair tourist-centric New Orleans new is a dirty word. New doesn't sell like in other cities. The Bilbao Effect doesn't work here. Gehry designed the World's Fair's prominent auditorium on the riverfront which was stripped of him mid design, watered down, and eventually demolished. Regardless of who wins the battle between the globalization of the new or the self-parody of the fake old, the outcome is different than the Battle of New Orleans in which Americans beat the British in the War of 1812. In this case the outsiders always win.



PHYLLIS WHEATLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
1954-2011
NEW ORLEANS, LA
CHARLES COLBERT

RIVERGATE EXHIBITION CENTER
1964-1995
NEW ORLEANS, LA
CURTIS AND DAVIS

ST. FRANCIS CABBINI CHURCH
1963-2006
NEW ORLEANS, LA
CURTIS AND DAVIS

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHOREMAN'S ASSOCIATION
1959-2008
NEW ORLEANS, LA
LAURENCE AND SAUNDERS