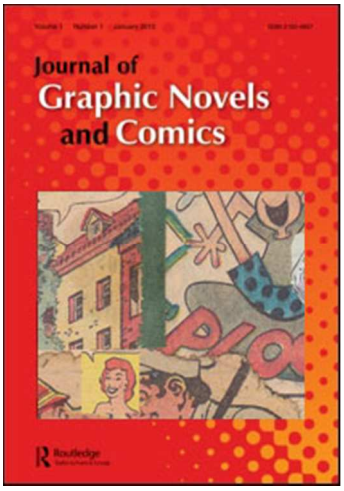
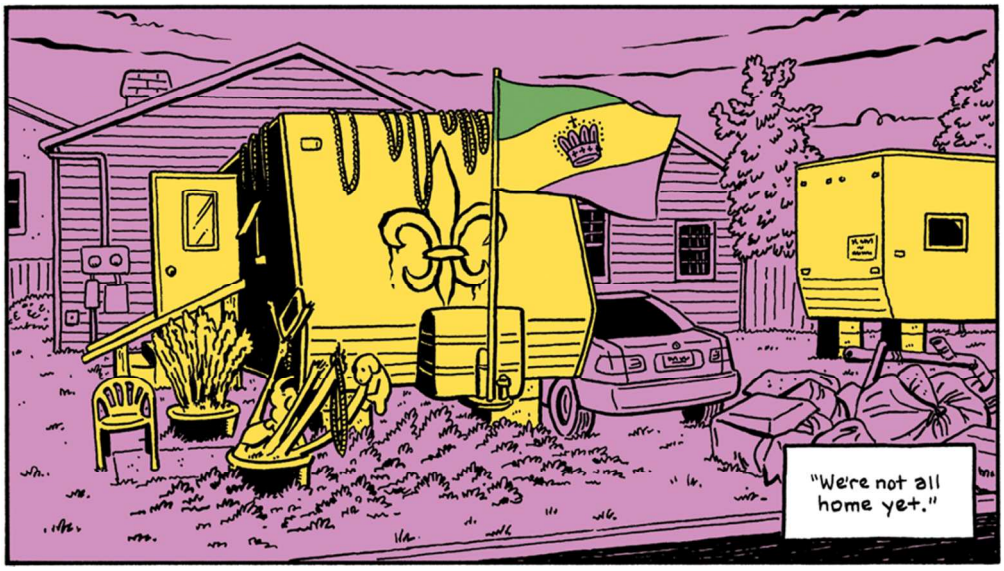


Graphic Katrina: Disaster Capitalism, Tourism Gentrification and the Affect Economy in Josh Neufeld's A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge (2009)

Journal:	*Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*
Manuscript ID	RCOM-2017-0065.R3
Manuscript Type:	Articles
Keywords:	New Orleans, disaster capitalism, comics journalism, tourism gentrification, Josh Neufeld

722x411mm (72 x 72 DPI)

352x206mm (72 x 72 DPI)



358x201mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Graphic Katrina: Disaster Capitalism, Tourism Gentrification and the Affect Economy in Josh Neufeld's ***A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*** (2009)

The Blank Canvas: Disaster Capitalism and Tourism Gentrification

In late August 2005, the levees that cut through and divide New Orleans' unevenly developed and often racially segregated neighbourhoods were breached by the storm surge created by Hurricane Katrina. The result was a catastrophic flooding of the city that destroyed much of its urban infrastructure, from houses and roads down to 'gas lines and underground pipes' (Rivlin, 2015, xiv). This damage was especially brutal in the city's 'lower' precincts, which mostly tended to be demographically poor and black. A patchwork view of post-Katrina New Orleans threw into relief the extent to which, as geographer Stephen Graham has recently argued, though urban inequality 'is almost always imagined to be constituted horizontally rather than vertically', it now increasingly cuts across vertically stratified urban spaces that extend beyond the 'terrestrial surface' of the city (2016, 12-13). As one map published in newspapers just months after Katrina showed, '[t]he area that remained dry and the city boundaries as they existed in 1870 were nearly identical' (Dyson, 2007, 185). To attend to these vertical inequalities, Graham argues that new techniques that allow us to 'shift our perspectives sufficiently to see boundaries and relations between layers and levels within volumes of geographic space' need to be developed (2016, 13). This article argues that the multi-scalar perspectival agility of comics – especially in its 'journalistic' or 'documentary' form – is equipped to document and resist both the horizontal and vertical geographies of discrimination and violence in New Orleans, as well as the ideologies of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification that sustain them.

Six years after Katrina, in 2011, the business group Downtown Development District (DDD) hung a series of banners along the mains streets of New Orleans' by-then reconstructed Central Business District (CBD) that bore phrases such as 'welcome to your blank canvas' and 'get caught in our brain storms'. Punning on a combination of corporate business lingo and references to the flood that had forced the evacuation of around 1.5 million people from the city and surrounding coast, these inexcusably offensive banners described as a 'blank canvas' places that 'at least some people considered home' (Rivlin, 2015, 404).[1] Whilst residents were displaced from the CBD by the flooding in 2005, more recently communities have been priced out of precincts such as Bywater and Tremé and forced to find 'cheaper housing outside the city' (404). In their glossy business brochure, the DDD outline their aims to 'drive the development of Downtown New Orleans' by 'cultivating economic development in such industries as bioscience, the arts, digital media and tourism' (2017, 3). Elsewhere, they describe the city's 'rich colourful past, raw authenticity and highly charged, progressive energy' alongside scenes from a downtown café, its affluence denoted by expensive-looking cocktails, large glass windows, and a suspiciously white-washed racial demographic (5). Finally, these words and images are layered over a map of the city's gridded infrastructure, which include the Superdome in the top lefthand corner and the Mississippi in the bottom right – two of the city's most visually iconic landmarks.

Urban theorist David Harvey, among others, has shown how the '"branding" of cities becomes big business': 'claims to uniqueness, authenticity, particularity, and specialty

[1] By 2011, New Orleans was still only returned to about three-quarters of its pre-Katrina size (Weber & Peek, 2012, 1, 15).

underlie the ability to capture monopoly rents' and attract tourists (2012, 103). As Don Mitchell similarly observes, this branding takes physical shape in 'extravagant convention centres, downtown tourist amusements, up-market, gentrified restaurant and bar districts, [and] baseball and football stadiums'; as he concludes: 'Image becomes everything' (2003, 166). Writing specifically of New Orleans, Kevin Fox Gotham notes the tendency of '[b]rochures and tourist guides' to 'convey a stylised cityscape composed of neighbourhoods with famous and architecturally significant mansions, public landmarks, museums and so on', all of which 'bear little relevance to the realities of social deprivation and poverty concentrated in the city's peripheral neighbourhoods' (2002, 1743). Meanwhile, the proto-corporate language of 'blank canvases' and 'tabula rasas' accords with the violent rhetoric of 'disaster capitalist' policies first experimented with in 1980s Chile, perfected in twenty-first-century Iraq and implemented aggressively in post-Katrina New Orleans (Klein, 2008, 372-7).

The DDD's banners therefore encapsulate a nexus of related conditions that continue to shape the city's ongoing structurally racist and neoliberal urban redevelopment. This nexus connects first the twenty-first century's frenetic visual culture, in which distressing photographs of human suffering are reproduced and decontextualised by 24-hour news channels, the internet and other media outlets (see Gardner, 2015, 22-23), and of which the imagistic documentation of Katrina was a case in point; second, Naomi Klein's concept of 'disaster capitalism', in which 'orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events' lead to 'the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities' (2008, 6); and third, outward-looking urban rebranding strategies that emphasise 'local distinctiveness, local cultures and different local histories that appeal to visitors' tastes for the exotic and unique', a process described by Gotham as 'tourism gentrification' (2005, 1102). The result, remarks Tara McPherson, is a 'lenticular racial logic allows us to celebrate diversity when it adds flavour to tourist attractions while we remain blind to government policies that put those attractions (not to mention the largely poor, black workers that built and sustained them) at risk' (2007, 332).

There have been a number of comics set in New Orleans during Katrina and its aftermath, varying greatly in lengths, format and genre. These range, on the one hand, from Matt Johnson and Simon Gane's spy thriller *Dark Rain: A New Orleans Story* (2010) to Mark Landry's vampire story *Bloodthirsty: One Nation Under Water* (2016), which combine fantasy narratives with critical commentaries on the disaster; and on the other, documentary comics such as Gary Rivlin and Jackie Roche's webcomic 'The Corner Store After Katrina' or Don Brown's short book, *Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans*, both published in 2015 to mark Katrina's ten-year anniversary. In this article I focus on the most famous and widely celebrated of these, Josh Neufeld's *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*, which was published serially as a webcomic online from 2007 to 2008 and then collected in book form in 2009. In particular, I shall refer throughout primarily to the printed book, though critics Anthony Dyer Hoefer and Jim Coby have emphasised elsewhere the merits of the online version that, through the use of hyperlinks to other sources, enhanced the comic's 'immersive' reading experience and its pedagogic elements (Coby 2015, 117; Hoefer, 2011, 255).

All of these comics challenge in different ways the mutually reinforcing nexus of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification, if not directly, then at least by exposing the connections between them. Furthermore, their aim is often not simply to document and critique the failure the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its incompetent response, nor to challenge 'the visual record of [this] highly mediated event',

though this they certainly do (Hoefer, 2011, 255). They are also concerned to document what Rebecca Solnit describes, in her book *Paradise Built in Hell*, as 'the extraordinary communities that arise in disaster', and of which she takes Katrina as a prime example (2009, 1-2). For Solnit, disasters are of course unwelcome, but with the subsequent 'suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems', they produce an environment in which citizens 'are free to live and act another way', one that tends, she argues, to be notably altruistic (7).

Nevertheless, as Solnit herself concedes and as other critics have pointed out, at the time of Katrina the media repeatedly framed 'blacks as outlaws and savages' by looping 'on television the same few frames of stranded blacks "looting" food and other items', thereby spreading 'the notion that black folk were in a state of social anarchy' rather than some kind of utopian paradise (Dyson, 2007, 166). Furthermore, these racist representations were not a departure from, but in fact a continuation of, New Orleans' pre-Katrina 'tourism narrative', which labelled 'historically and predominantly black areas of the city as dangerous, and obscures and distorts the African presence and participation in the development and sustenance of the city' (Thomas, 2008, 256; see also McPherson, 2007, 331).[2] Indicatively, commentator Michael Dyson critiques this process through an emphasis on the way in which such photos were 'framed' by accompanying text that underscored a 'hidden bias and sleeping bigotry' toward African Americans: 'Words help to interpret images' he notes; 'language and pictures in combination reinforce ideas about black identity' (165).

In this analysis, he shares the basic critical vocabulary used by comics critics to describe the formal architecture of the comics form, which involves the co-mixing of text and image, and the contextualisation of single images within longer multi-panel sequences. Indeed, such correlations go some way toward explaining the recent proliferation of comics that document social and human rights abuses, offering what Nina Mickwitz describes as 'graphic truth-telling in a skeptical age' (2016, 2-3). As Hillary Chute writes, 'the word-and-image form of comics expands the reach of documentary, recording facts while also questioning the very project of what it means to document, to archive, to inscribe' (2016, 7). Though comics are of course still used to propagate an array of conservative agendas (see Knowles et al., 2016, 378-380), because of this formal architecture they are especially able to expose and correct the biases of contemporaneous mainstream media coverage. It is this formal distinction that gives comics, as opposed to other popular media such as television and film, its particular relationship with small-scale conflicts and disasters, as well as the minutiae of their everyday, civilian experience (see Prorokova and Tal eds., 2018). In the case of Neufeld's comic, this relationship manifests in his recovery of the resilient post-Katrina 'reconstruction efforts' that, as Klein argues, 'represent the antithesis of the disaster capitalism complex's ethos' (2008, 466).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the remarkably altruistic outpouring from across the US so celebrated by Solnit also set the coordinates for a culture of 'voluntourism', whereby visitors to the city can 'fully immerse themselves in the local culture, indulge in their hobbies, get involved in humanitarian efforts, and have the experience of a lifetime' (Dunham, 2007, 47). Voluntourism has had deleterious effects on

[2] Of course, tourism has for decades (if not centuries) been 'considered a major sector of the New Orleans economy', though as Kevin Fox Gotham notes, since the 1970s 'it has become the dominant sector', a transition that 'has paralleled population decline, white flight to the suburbs, racial segregation, poverty and other a host of other social problems including crime, fiscal austerity, poor schools and decaying infrastructure' (2002, 1742-1743).

the city that are complicit with the wider disaster capitalist enterprise. As Vincanne Adams describes, 'a surfeit of emotion generated by the inefficiencies of profit in recovery capitalism [can] become itself drawn back into the economy as a new resource for profit' (2013, 124). This results in the 'affect economy' included in this article's title, which denotes 'the affective surplus produced by disasters like Katrina [that] have become themselves part of an economy in which affect circulates as source of market opportunity for profit' (10). The claims I make for the radical components of comics such as Neufeld's therefore need to be qualified by their simultaneous contribution to an affect economy 'in which charity, faith, patronage, and for-profit capitalism are knitted together' (174), even if, as this article will show, *A.D.* itself on occasion offers a meta-commentary on such processes. As renters and consumers, voluntourists contribute to the escalation of living costs in New Orleans, whilst with their free labour they provide support previously the responsibility of federal and local governments, thereby facilitating the state's systematic privatisation of public and social services. Their simultaneous indulgence in an 'authentic' New Orleans' culture has lead to a widespread belief among the city's 'black and poor residents' that post-Katrina reconstruction has been designed 'to tear out [the city's] black core but keep its cultural product' (Graham, 2008, 25).

The Downtown Development District's proto-corporate language of 'blank canvases' and 'tabula rasas' reproduces the ideological terminology of disaster capitalism which, 'rooted in biblical fantasies of great floods and great fires' is predicated on 'a logic that leads ineluctably toward violence' (Klein, 2008, 19). Meanwhile, its simultaneous neoliberal emphasis on an 'image' of New Orleans as a global city worthy of external corporate investment and offering an authentic culture saleable to tourists similarly results in the intensified privatisation of once public housing and urban infrastructure to the detriment of locals simply trying to live there. It is into this complex nexus that comics about Katrina and its aftermath, and especially Neufeld's book-length comic *A.D.*, effectively intervene.

A.D.'s Vertical Perspectives: 'Natural' and 'Manmade' Disasters

Neufeld's evocation of biblical parlance in the title of his comic might at first appear to suggest a narrative of Katrina as a 'natural' rather than 'manmade' disaster, one that conceals 'political arrangements that enable violations of human and civil rights and a furthering of political agendas in the name of humanitarian aid' (Adams, 2013, 15). But the comic's brief preface points out that in fact Hurricane Katrina 'struck east of New Orleans', emphasising instead that it was the breach of the 'city's levee systems' – itself a consequence of years of lack of state investment in public infrastructure – and subsequent flooding that wrought the most damage (Neufeld, 2009, viii; see also Dyson, 2007, 80).

Insert Fig.1: The splash page in *A.D.*'s opening sequence focuses readers' attention on the breaching of the levees.

This counter-narrative is then visualised in *A.D.*'s twenty-page opening sequence, which shifts in a series of vertical scalar movements downwards from initial satellite images through to a close-up of the water bursting through the levees. The shift from 'natural' to 'manmade' scales is metered out in the rhythm of the panels, which decrease in size as the comic progresses, thereby speeding up the pace of the narrative. This temporal intensification correlates with the impending moment of the levee's breach, serving to

emphasise the centrality of this manmade infrastructural failure to the subsequent disaster. Reinforcing this focus on the levee, the sequence – the panels of which have been gradually diminishing in size – suddenly concludes with a double-page spread of the moment of the breach, as the water breaks through to crash into nearby houses and cars. This sudden spatial interruption of the comic's temporal rhythm is known as a 'splash' page, a technique used, as comics artist and theorist Will Eisner writes, to set a 'climate' for the rest of the narrative (1985, 62). The synergies between the critical vocabulary used to describe these formal strategies and the content of *A.D.* are far from coincidental here. Rather, Neufeld exploits these overlaps to create not a natural, meteorological 'climate', but rather a political climate of disaster capitalism. This sequence not only foregrounds the extent to which manmade failures were mostly responsible for Katrina's catastrophic effects, but also frames the sociopolitical lens through which the main body of the narrative should be viewed.

A.D.'s titular biblical reference foregrounds the federal government's complicity in the extent of Katrina's devastation through its ideologically-motivated refusal to invest in public infrastructure. Moreover, the use of the term 'deluge' circulates in US-based activist and grassroots circles, especially those operating in New Orleans, to refer not simply to the 'natural' storm and 'manmade' flood, but to the discriminatory privatisation of social services and public infrastructure that the disaster subsequently unleashed. As John Arena writes, 'Hurricane Katrina and the forced displacement of residents provided an opportunity to fast-track the revanchist agenda – to drown public housing in a fully human-made "neoliberal deluge" and finally rid the city of [its] concentrations of poverty' (2012, 147). The comic situates Katrina within longer deep-rooted processes of gentrification in the city that were well underway before the storm, and that exploited the city's mass evacuation in 2005 as an opportunity to expel its unwanted poor, and mostly black, demographics. Through its own dramatic imagery, *A.D.* thereby points to the connections between the cynical disaster capitalist's view of Katrina and the flooding as a moment of urban cleansing, on the one hand, and the post-Katrina image-oriented effort to reconstruct New Orleans as a cleansed and commodified city, a 'blank canvas' awaiting gentrifying urban redevelopment.

The crucial mechanism by which *A.D.* makes these connections is through its scalar perspectival shifts that first evoke, and then jolt readers away from, the familiar overhead views from which the disaster was documented in mainstream media coverage. In so doing, it allows for a 'vertical, indeed fully volumetric view of the politics of cities' (Graham, 2016, 22) – in this case, New Orleans during Katrina. These shifts encourage readers to think of this airborne perspective as evocative of two malicious forces with which they themselves are, as US citizens, complicit. The comic's opening panels implicate viewers in the abstract perspective of the roving eyes of both disaster capitalist and consuming tourist, as the city's iconic landmarks – Bourbon Street, Jackson Square, Canal Street, the Superdome – are introduced. (With the exception of the Superdome, which became a crucial refuge for hopeful evacuees, none of these iconic locations appear again in the comic). Then, as *A.D.* progresses through scenes that shift between ground- and sky-level orientations, readers also come to realise that they are viewing New Orleans from the perspective of the helicopters – Blackhawks, the same used in Iraq, a point to which I shall return in the next section of this article – that flew over the city during the flood. On FEMA's direct orders, rather than 'helping people in need', these helicopters were used 'to transport journalists to the region to film the misery they saw', capturing the 'barrage of images' that frequently misrepresented disaster victims as looters and criminals (Dyson,

2007, 121). Indeed, in a later splash page, a helicopter moves through a dark red sky as Abbas, one of Neufeld's characters who is trapped on a roof with his friend Darnell, comments: 'There goes another one' (2009, 128-129). By materialising disaster capitalist ideologies in the perspective of the helicopter, Neufeld subtly reveals the extent to which the media's racist coverage drew on and perpetuated broader structurally racist policies of urban white-washing – policies that have since informed the city's subsequent racially discriminatory redevelopment.

In his excellent chapter on *A.D.*, 'A Re-Vision of the Record', collected in Brannon Costello and Qiana J. Whitted's similarly brilliant collection, *Comics and the U.S. South* (2011), Hoefer argues that Neufeld's images, which 'approximate either satellite shots of swirling clouds or video and photographs captured from helicopters hovering safely above the city', serve to situate 'the narratives that follow within the context of what much of the audience has already seen' (2011, 259). In so doing, the comic demands that 'readers reconsider the images that may have been presented as documents of facts' (259). By invoking the vertically hierarchical gaze of government and media, *A.D.* first suggests the reader's complicity with these forces, before subverting this violent visual culture by demanding from readers a more critical engagement with Katrina and its history.[3] Crucial to this process, as Hoefer astutely observes, is the comic's balancing of scales: too much generalisation dehumanises disaster victims, whilst 'the pathos of an individual witness's testimony might reduce the magnitude of the event, remove it from its historical context, or diminish the political momentum necessary for action' (254-255).[4] Such scalar shifts are inscribed into Neufeld's visual sequences, which function conceptually to situate the meticulously documented on-the-ground experiences of its five real-life protagonists within the larger structural practices of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification.

Neufeld's characters come from a range of racial and class backgrounds, and though they are all united by their firsthand encounters with Katrina and its aftermath, the hurricane's ramifications are felt with uneven severity by different characters according to their race – a point that I will take up more fully in the next section of this article. This reorientation of visual perspective, which views Katrina from the perspective of the street rather than the air, reinforces the comic's deconstruction of the mainstream media's initial coverage. Indeed, this visual reorientation is crucial to the comic's project: by creating its own imagistic currency that visualises the experience of Katrina's victims, it first undoes the stereotypes that were exacerbated by the limited hierarchical view of the airborne helicopters, whilst also revealing the extent of the simultaneously militarised and privatised state response that so violently put policing and profits before people – and especially black people. It is at this point that I depart from Hoefer, for whom '[i]n the case of Katrina, discussions of race are particularly problematic', and who reads *A.D.* as avoiding any 'such missteps by hardly mentioning issues of race or ethnicity' (273). By displacing the long and violent context of race outside of its narrative content into the hyperlinks included in the original webcomic, Hoefer argues that *A.D.* is able to focus 'squarely on generating the

[3] Interestingly, Neufeld illustrated Brooke Gladstone's book-length comic, *The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone On The Media* (2011), which documents in comics form the mechanisms and power-relations that inform the way in which the media operates. In one brief section, Neufeld actually draws images of the 'problematic' media coverage of Katrina, adding a further layer of self-reflexivity to his own graphic documentation of the disaster (Gladstone & Neufeld, 2011, 41-42).

[4] This combination of general overview and individual testimony is similarly employed in one of the most compelling prose accounts of Katrina, Dan Baum's bestselling *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death, and Life in New Orleans* (2010).

emotions of frustration, despair, isolation, and abandonment felt by these characters, rather than diverging into historical complexities' (274). However, I contend that such a reading risks downplaying the fundamentally racist state and media infrastructure in which viewers themselves are ultimately complicit, perhaps even commodifying the suffering of black New Orleanians into an economised 'affect' that, whilst it might mobilise altruistic action, can in turn encourage the kinds of voluntourism that have been as damaging as they have beneficial in post-Katrina New Orleans.[5]

Instead, by viewing *A.D.* through the overlapping nexus of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification, particularly as these manifest in the increased privatisation of public infrastructure and social services that exacerbated Katrina's effects and have only intensified since, these issues are in fact seen to be loaded into the visual fabric of Neufeld's comic. Rather than reading *A.D.* as making an emotional appeal to the reader, then, Neufeld's comic should in fact be viewed as a deeply political project that clearly identifies the structural conditions that have violently impacted the city's most marginalised inhabitants, and that have equally violent ramifications for poorer populations in other cities in the US and beyond. As Lynell Thomas observes, '[t]he limitations of the responses to Hurricane Katrina uncovered the ways that racial representations within popular culture profoundly impact the way that we live and die' (2008, 265); as a piece of popular culture itself, *A.D.* is both complicit with, but also at times able to reflect on and critique, the fissures and failures of representation that remain undeniably cut along racial lines.

Public Housing and Privatisation: Making a Killing Out of Catastrophe

In one particular sequence that documents FEMA's eventual arrival, Neufeld emphasises the militarisation of the state's response to Katrina through invocations of war zone imagery uncannily reminiscent of scenes of US forces and convoys that had been roaming through Baghdad since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Dyson actually pinpoints the war in Iraq as in part responsible for stymying the 'response of the National Guard to Katrina' and diverting 'critical resources from the Army Corps of Engineers as well' (2007, 80). Meanwhile, as Klein argues, the 'for-profit relief and reconstruction [that has] become the new global paradigm' was '[p]ioneered in Iraq' (2008, 13) – the large 'private-sector businesses like Haliburton, the Shaw Group, and Blackwater [...] called in for rescue-and-relief operations' during Katrina had been working in and profiting from Iraq in preceding years (Adams, 2013, 8). Neufeld thus visualises what Graham calls the 'new military urbanism', which 'feeds on experiments with styles of targeting and technology in colonial war-zones, such as Gaza or Baghdad', using these 'as testing grounds for technology and techniques to be sold on through the world's burgeoning homeland security markets' (2011, xvi-xvii). Such urban militarisation involves 'the deliberate attack of the systems and places that support civilian urban life' so that they might be privatised for further profitable extraction (16), a process that journalist Antony Loewenstein provocatively describes as 'making a killing out of catastrophe' (2015).

Nevertheless, because of its visual agility and vertical perspectival movements, *A.D.* is able to hold these processes to account. The comic documents the arrival of FEMA at the

[5] Hoefer himself concedes that in the comments section that accompanied the original webcomic of *A.D.*, 'instead of discussion of potential action, the comments are most often platitudes for Neufeld's work; the community created by these discussions is fleeting and offers little additional testimony by victims' (2011, 274).

New Orleans Convention Centre in order to explicitly critique, from the ground up, the failure of the federal government, implicitly deconstructing the hysterical media coverage that claimed the centre was the site of 'the rape of women and babies' and 'bodies being shoved into a freezer' – allegations all 'later proved to be baseless rumour' (Dyson, 2007, 170). In this sequence, Denise – significantly one of Neufeld's black characters – first expresses her outrage to other black citizens, whilst intervening panels document not looting marauders but a carefully administered grass roots effort to distribute limited resources to the most vulnerable. However, the comic's critique is especially foregrounded in the final panel of this sequence, when the reader is made conscious of their airborne perspective by Denise's breaking of the fourth wall, as she looks out at the reader to address them – and, given the visual context that the comic has established, the media and governmental institutions with which that perspective is associated – directly. In this moment, she steps out of the spatial and temporal logic of the comic's narrative to mobilise an alternative gaze that implicates readers themselves, as democratic citizens supporting a government committed to disaster capitalist policies, in the violence wrought by Katrina.[6] The comic deploys a visual 'affect', which 'calls for emotional responsiveness and generates an inducement to action' – even if, within the logic of the affect economy, such emotional claims can be co-opted to generate 'new business investments and free labour for a struggling socio-economy' (Adams, 2013, 174).

Insert Fig.2: Denise breaks the fourth wall to address the reader directly.

In this concluding section, I want to follow Denise's story as it plays out in *A.D.* because it raises the issue of public housing, which serves as a microcosmic instance of the wider processes of post-Katrina privatisation that have rebuilt New Orleans to the exclusion of the city's most marginalised pre-Katrina inhabitants. As John Arena writes, 'from the perspective of those working to defend public housing and other public services, [...] the disaster underscored the bankruptcy of neoliberalism and the needs for a massive, direct government employment programme to rebuild New Orleans and the entire Gulf Coast' (2012, 223-224). However, focusing on Denise also foregrounds the extent to which Katrina disproportionately impacted African American residents. In the 'Ten Years On' webcomic produced by Neufeld in 2015, he checks in with his characters to document their recovery, and each offers conflicting opinions on the city's post-Katrina recovery. One white New Orleanian, Leo, surprisingly comments that 'loss of life notwithstanding, I don't think I would trade the way the city was then for the way it was now'; meanwhile Denise, 'after a decade of ups and downs [...] chose not to be interviewed for this [follow up] piece' at all (Neufeld, 2015). Following Denise's story in the original comic allows for a more careful unpacking of the ways in which race continues to inform New Orleans' post-Katrina recovery, as well as addressing the stickier problem of the production of an affect economy in which the comic is undoubtedly itself implicated, but the ramifications of which are also addressed within its concluding pages.

[6] Critic Jim Coby similarly notes a similar moment in a later scene in which Neufeld graphically reinterprets the infamous photograph of Ethel Freeman that 'came to underscore the callousness and unmitigated failures [115] of FEMA and the US Government' (2015, 114). In the dialogue surrounding this image, Coby points out, the questions raised by *A.D.*'s characters are again 'directed at us', thereby placing at least in part 'the burden of failure on the reader' (2015, 114-115).

In *A.D.*'s penultimate section, Denise, who was eventually evacuated from the convention centre to Baton Rouge, is first shown as a 'refugee' – a term contested at the time 'because it seemed to deny that black folk were citizens of the nation' (Dyson, 2007, 176). Here she is in receipt of a house built by the non-governmental organisation, Habitat for Humanity. The intervention of this 'global housing charity', who 'fight poverty worldwide by building safe and decent homes where families and communities can thrive' ('Habitat for Humanity'), offers as a case in point how the intervention of nonprofits has 'helped to legitimate further state retrenchment and abdication of responsibility' (Arena, 2012, 183). Furthermore, as Denise herself comments, this new reconstruction was not located in her home city of New Orleans, but 'on the edge of this godforsaken part of Baton Rouge' (Neufeld, 2009, 175). In an act of resistance to the pacificatory structure of this patchy humanitarian intervention, Denise's mother refuses to buy 'any new furniture for the house' (175). A moment later the reader is directly confronted with Denise's own anger, as she gazes directly, face first out of the page's top panel. 'They say they're rebuilding New Orleans "one beer at a time"', she comments: '"Laissez les bon temps rouler"?! Fuck that shit!' (177).

The double quotation marks included inside the speech bubble here suggest Denise's invocation of the shameless marketing strategies of corporations such as the Downtown Development District, who exploit a 'raw authentic' culture to facilitate processes of tourism gentrification that do not cater to, if not actively exclude, poor and mostly black displaced New Orleanians. The extent to which the physical environment of New Orleans itself constitutes Denise's identity is visualised in this page's final panel, when the comic's frame breaks away and the meticulously drawn urban backgrounds that have recurred throughout Neufeld's comic are replaced by an empty, blank page – or within the terminology of disaster capitalism, a 'blank canvas'. The whiteness of this jarring blank space in the comic might also be read as a subtle comment on the city's demographic shifts, particularly as they relate to the marketisation of its local cultural facets. As journalist Gary Rivlin documents, in 2011, just as the Downtown Development District was hanging its 'blank canvas' posters across the city, '[e]vents that before Katrina attracted a mostly black crowd of maybe a couple of hundred were drawing a mostly white audience of fifteen hundred'; meanwhile, '[r]estaurants were able to charge more for food and drink without any drop-off in business. The future only looked bright for a tourism economy that they declared more profitable than ever' (2015, 404-405).

A.D.'s final section, entitled 'The Return', documents the experience's of the comic's characters who have, by 2008, eventually returned to the city. Denise is among them, having left Baton Rouge 'after more than a year' there, returning to New Orleans to work 'with battered women Katrina survivors' (Neufeld, 2009, 186). In this final section, Neufeld's colour code, which as Hoefer observes has throughout been used to 'evoke particular emotional content' (2011, 256), symbolically takes on the deep purples and golds – and on the comic's final page, the greens – of the city's iconic Mardi Gras festival. Of course, this is in part an expression of a New Orleanian identity and heritage offering aesthetic compensation for the 'blankness' that encompassed Denise in Baton Rouge. After all, New Orleans 'looms large in the collective American imagination as the home of jazz, jambalaya, and Mardi Gras' (Dyson, 2007, 14) – the festival is the city's national, if not global, cultural signature.

However, 'urban leaders and economic élites have attempted to strategically deploy Mardi Gras imagery and advertising to refashion the city into a themed landscape of entertainment and tourism' with increasing intensity 'over the past few decades' (Gotham,

2002, 1753).[7] As Gotham observes, Mardi Gras has played a crucial role in processes of tourism gentrification, promoting 'the growth of low-wage jobs with few benefits' and diverting 'public monies from addressing crucial local problems' (1736), of which public housing is a case in point. Foregrounding the Mardi Gras colours in the final section of *A.D.* might serve simply to emphasise the return to New Orleans in the minds of readers who will, if only subliminally, associate gold, purple and green with the city (itself a testament to the success of corporate marketing campaigns of the festival). But when used to colour the difficult experiences of returning New Orleanians who are struggling to negotiate the simple facts of housing and accommodation, it also inadvertently works, as Gotham has tried to do in his critical work more widely, to focus 'attention on the role of simulations and imagery in urban tourism without missing or downplaying the exploitation and inequality that make possible [such exclusive] spaces of consumption' (1754).

This final section of 'return' also reveals the extent to which Katrina's impact has had different consequences for different racial demographies, consequences measured particularly through property damage and housing circumstances. The other characters documented in this final section, Kwame (a young black teenager and son of a New Orleans' pastor), Leo (a white 'comic book fan, with a collection of more than 15,000 comics') and Abbas ('an Iranian-born longtime New Orleanian') (Neufeld, 2009, ix), all comment on the issue of housing. Kwame's father's religious community 'is helping us rebuild or house' (180); his parent's house is located 'on the West Bank', outside of the flood zone, and he has been able to live there in the meantime. Kwame's experience dramatises the extent to which religious, non-governmental and familial networks stepped in during Katrina's aftermath to fill in the gaps in social services left by the state, a process that, as outlined above, risks complicity with disaster capitalist-oriented governance (Adams, 2013, 10-14).

The issue of housing recurs again a few pages later when Abbas, who owns a local store, comments that he 'didn't realise what the hurricane would do to this city' (2009, 185). These words are placed by Neufeld over a decontextualised image of a decrepit shotgun house marked with the notorious 'X' used by FEMA to indicate which houses had been searched in the aftermath of the storm – an advert for house demolitions also hangs conspicuously in the foreground of this image. The disjunct between verbal and visual descriptors highlight the implicit yet pervasive problem of housing in post-Katrina New Orleans, one that is exacerbated by processes of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification in equal measure. Though Abbas's shop has reopened, he concedes that he 'lost three years' of business because of the flooding.

Meanwhile, Leo's housing situation is resolved without too much difficulty: 'Luckily, our landlord was cool about our apartment. He decided right away to gut the place and rehab it. And he told us we were welcome to move back in once it was ready' (2009, 184). Though the fact that Leo is himself still a renter points to the limited accommodation options for prospective local buyers in the city, Leo's main concern in the aftermath of Katrina is the loss of his material possessions: his 'old journalism notes', his 'Dickies jacket', his 'long leather trench coat', all 'gone, and gone' (182). Most especially, however,

[7] This global marketisation of the Mardi Gras festival conceals the extent to which the festival has long been divided racially and spatially within the city, even prior to Katrina: 'Whites historically have gathered on St Charles Avenue and Canal Street, while blacks historically have gathered at the intersection of Orleans and Clairbourne Avenues, where the Zulu parade ends. Additionally, the Mardi Gras Indians function as a living tribute to the associations between slaves and Native Americans' (Robertson, 2008, 41).

is the loss of his huge comic book collection, pieces of which swirl in amongst these other lost possessions in one of Neufeld's few conceptual rather than documentary visual images.

This abstract image contrasts with the brutal reality of *A.D.*'s final page, which Neufeld chooses to dedicate to Denise. Here Denise, now returned to New Orleans, gazes out one final time directly at the reader, not with an expression of anger or accusation, but fatigue. Her commentary highlights explicitly the central issue of housing, as she comments on 'all the new development' in the city that means 'the place will never be the same'; 'I am home', she continues, 'But it's not over. [...] We're not all home yet' (187). Accentuating Denise's emphasis on the notion of 'home', Neufeld's final panel shows a trailer – temporary housing infrastructures that became a notorious point of contention between returning New Orleanians and FEMA in the aftermath of Katrina – in front of a presumably yet-to-be renovated house. By draping this temporary accommodation in Mardi Gras beads and inking it in the festival's purple, gold and green colouring, the comic undermines the broader tourism gentrification marketing that has seized hold of the city in recent decades, and with especial veracity since Katrina. In this final vertical movement, *A.D.* connects such marketing imagery to the discriminatory effect it has had on the ground, where failure to rehouse the city's pre-Katrina inhabitants has had a disproportionate impact on its poorer and often black demographics.

Insert Fig.3: *A.D.*'s final panel shows a FEMA trailer draped in Mardi Gras beads.

I should emphasise here that by highlighting these discrepancies it is neither the comic's nor my intention to compare directly Leo's suffering with Denise's, nor to suggest that Leo should not mourn the loss of his comic collection or that he is somehow undeserving of the housing to which he has access – clearly, this is in fact the very least a returning New Orleanian should have been able to expect. Rather, by drawing parallels between comics as material objects and perhaps more urgent material needs such as housing, *A.D.* asks readers – who after all, in the case of the printed book, hold a comic in their hands as they read this section – to reflect on the very real ramifications that disaster capitalist-informed governance had on New Orleanians and which are here documented in comics form. The comic measures these ramifications especially through the lack of state provision of a basic public right such as housing. It then equates the materiality of shelter with the comic's own enduring documentation of Katrina (even more notable in book form, but also an attribute of the original webcomic). Finally, in loading these two different perspectival scales, side by side, into its concluding panels, *A.D.* inserts itself as a material object into an ephemeral visual culture in which the narratives of these Katrina victims might, like their houses, otherwise be washed away.

Moreover, and in conclusion, this self-reflexive layering allows *A.D.* to begin to demonstrate an awareness of – and thus asks its readers to reflect on – the 'affect economy' to which it contributes, one that risks complicity with and perpetuation of the ongoing privatisation of basic public infrastructure and social services. 'By being outraged, we appear compassionate. This permits us to continue to ignore the true roots of their condition', writes Dyson (2007, 4). Though undoubtedly designed to generate an 'emotional impact' on its readers (Coby, 2015, 115), this is not *A.D.*'s only strategic intervention. It also offers a radical political commentary that, on the one hand, visually emphasises the deep structural contours of disaster capitalism which have meant '[m]any of the greatest beneficiaries of federal relief efforts have been corporate engineering firms [disinterested] in low-income housing'; and on the other, aesthetically undermines tropes of tourism

gentrification, which seek to market New Orleans 'Vegas-style as a slick-surfaced, sanitised theme park of American nostalgia' (McPherson, 2007, 332).

Responding to Solnit's work on post-disaster community resilience in his book *Disaster Capitalism: Making a Killing Out of Catastrophe*, Loewenstein emphasises the need to document 'the humanity of the people and communities craving a more equitable world. It is too easy to erase personalities and talk instead only about dollars' (2015, 311). For Loewenstein, the documentation of the stories of 'people struggling against overwhelming odds—the invisible, the unpeople, the undesired, the expendable, the broke, and the poor' is crucial in the movement toward a 'more equal economic system and truly representative democracy' better able to challenge the ideologies and policies of disaster capitalists (311-312). *A.D.* participates in this documentary effort, mobilising through its visual-narrative strategies and multi-scalar perspectival agilities a radical critique of the dual forces of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification. Even as it feeds into the affect economy, the relevance of *A.D.*'s commentary will remain continually prescient so long as New Orleans' public infrastructure continues to be systematically privatised, its vibrant culture commodified, and access to its urban spaces violently restricted at the expense of its most marginalised, often African American inhabitants.

Works Cited

Adams, Vincanne. 2013. *Markets of Sorrow, Labours of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Arena, John. 2012. *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatisation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Baum, Dan. 2010. *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death, and Life in New Orleans*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Coby, Jim. 2015. '"—it's pretty easy to forget what it's like to be a have-not": Envisioning and Experiencing Trauma in Josh Neufeld's *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*'. *South Central Review*, Vol.32, No.3: 110-123.

Chute, Hillary L. 2016. *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Downtown Development District, New Orleans. 2017. 'DownTownNola'. Online Source: http://downtownnola.com/uploads/DDD_Brochure_Web_HighRes.pdf Accessed 15 August 2017.

Dunham, Christina. 2007. 'Voluntourism'. *Filipinas: Ethnic NewsWatch*, Vol.16, No.186: 47.

Dyson, Michael Eric. 2007. *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Colour of Disaster*. New York: Basic Civitas.

Eisner, Will. 1985. *Comics and Sequential Art*. Florida: Poorhouse Press.

Gardner, Jared. 2015. 'Time Under Siege.' In Worden, Daniel ed. *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World*, pp.21-38. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi.

Gladstone, Brooke, and Neufeld, Josh. 2011. *The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone On The Media*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Gotham, Kevin Fox. 2002. 'Marketing Mardi Gras: Commodification, Spectacle and the Political Economy of Tourism in New Orleans'. *Urban Studies*, Vol.39, No.10: 1735-1756.

——2005. 'Tourism Gentrification: The Case of New Orleans' Vieux Carre (French Quarter)'. *Urban Studies*, Vol.42, No.7: 1099-1121.

Graham, Darwin Bond. 2008. 'The New Orleans That Race Built: Racism, Disaster, and Urban Spatial Relationships'. In Marable, Manning and Clarke, Kristen eds. *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race, and Public Policy Reader*, pp.17-32. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Graham, Stephen. 2011. *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*. London and New York: Verso.

——2016. *Vertical: The City from Satellites to Bunkers*. London and New York: Verso.

'Habitat for Humanity'. Online Source: https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/ Accessed 17 August 2017.

Hoefer, Anthony Dyer. 2011. 'A Re-Vision of the Record: The Demands of Reading Josh Neufeld's A.D. *New Orleans After the Deluge*'. In Costello, Brannon, and Whitted, Qiana J. eds. *Comics and the U.S. South*, pp.254-279. Louisiana: University Press of Mississippi.

Johnson, Mat, and Gane, Simon. 2010. *Dark Rain: A New Orleans Story*. New York: DC Comics.

Klein, Naomi. 2008. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt & Company.

——2017. 'How Power Profits From Disaster'. *The Guardian*, 6 July. Online Source: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/06/naomi-klein-how-power-profits-from-disaster Accessed 16 August 2017.

Knowles, Sam, Peacock, James and Earle, Harriet. 2016. 'Introduction: Trans/formation and the Graphic Novel'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol.52, No.4: 378-384.

Landry, Mark, Pace, Richard, and Witter, Ashley. 2016. *Bloodthirsty: One Nation Under Water*. London: Titan Comics.

Loewenstein, Antony. 2015. *Disaster Capitalism: Making a Killing Out Of Catastroph*e. London and New York: Verso.

McPherson, Tara. 2007. 'No Natural Disaster: New Orleans, Katrina, and War'. *Modern Language Association*, Vol.122, No.1, *Special Topic: Cities*: 331-335.

Mickwitz, Nina. 2016. *Documentary Comics: Graphic Truth-Telling in a Skeptical Age*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Spac*e. New York and London: The Guilford Press.

Neufeld, Josh. 2009. *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*. New York: Pantheon Books.

——28 August 2015. 'Where are they now? Revisiting Four Katrina Survivors Ten Years Later'. *Splinter*. Online Source: http://splinternews.com/where-are-they-now-revisiting-4-katrina-survivors-10-y-1793850346 Accessed 17 August 2017.

Prorokova, Tatiana, and Tal, Nimrod. 2018. *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma and Memory*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Rivlin, Gary. 2015. *Katrina: After the Flood*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rivlin, Gary, and Roche, Julie. 16 August 2015. 'The Corner Store After Katrina'. *Economic Hardship Reporting Project*. Online Source: http://economichardship.org/archive/the-corner-store-after-katrina Accessed 17 August 2017.

Roberston, D. Osei. 2008. 'Property and Security, Political Chameleons, and Dysfunctional Regime: A New Orleans Story'. In Marable, Manning and Clarke, Kristen eds. *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race, and Public Policy Reader*, pp.39-63. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rose, Andrew. 22 April 2015. 'What's Old is New Again'. *Guernica: A Magazine of Global Arts and Politics*. Online Source: https://www.guernicamag.com/kristina-kay-robinson-whats-old-is-new-again/ 14 August 2017.

Thomas, Lynell. 2008. '"The City I Used To… Visit": Tourist New Orleans and the Racialised Response to Hurricane Katrina'. In Marable, Manning and Clarke, Kristen eds. *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race, and Public Policy Reader*, pp.255-270. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weber, Lynn, and Peek, Lori A. 2012. 'Displacement: An Introduction'. In Weber, Lynn, and Peek, Lori A. eds., *Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora*, pp.1-18. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Graphic Katrina: Disaster Capitalism, Tourism Gentrification and the Affect Economy in Josh Neufeld's *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge* (2009)

The Blank Canvas: Disaster Capitalism and Tourism Gentrification

In late August 2005, the levees that cut through and divide New Orleans' unevenly developed and often racially segregated neighbourhoods were breached by the storm surge created by Hurricane Katrina. The result was a catastrophic flooding of the city that destroyed much of its urban infrastructure, from houses and roads down to 'gas lines and underground pipes' (Rivlin, 2015, xiv). This damage was especially brutal in the city's 'lower' precincts, which mostly tended to be demographically poor and black. A patchwork view of post-Katrina New Orleans threw into relief the extent to which, as geographer Stephen Graham has recently argued, though urban inequality 'is almost always imagined to be constituted horizontally rather than vertically', it now increasingly cuts across vertically stratified urban spaces that extend beyond the 'terrestrial surface' of the city (2016, 12-13). As one map published in newspapers just months after Katrina showed, '[t]he area that remained dry and the city boundaries as they existed in 1870 were nearly identical' (Dyson, 2007, 185). To attend to these vertical inequalities, Graham argues that new techniques that allow us to 'shift our perspectives sufficiently to see boundaries and relations between layers and levels within volumes of geographic space' need to be developed (2016, 13). This article argues that the multi-scalar perspectival agility of comics – especially in its 'journalistic' or 'documentary' form – is equipped to document and resist both the horizontal and vertical geographies of discrimination and violence in New Orleans, as well as the ideologies of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification that sustain them.

Six years after Katrina, in 2011, the business group Downtown Development District (DDD) hung a series of banners along the mains streets of New Orleans' by-then reconstructed Central Business District (CBD) that bore phrases such as 'welcome to your blank canvas' and 'get caught in our brain storms'. Punning on a combination of corporate business lingo and references to the flood that had forced the evacuation of around 1.5 million people from the city and surrounding coast, these inexcusably offensive banners described as a 'blank canvas' places that 'at least some people considered home' (Rivlin, 2015, 404).[1] Whilst residents were displaced from the CBD by the flooding in 2005, more recently communities have been priced out of precincts such as Bywater and Tremé and forced to find 'cheaper housing outside the city' (404). In their glossy business brochure, the DDD outline their aims to 'drive the development of Downtown New Orleans' by 'cultivating economic development in such industries as bioscience, the arts, digital media and tourism' (2017, 3). Elsewhere, they describe the city's 'rich colourful past, raw authenticity and highly charged, progressive energy' alongside scenes from a downtown café, its affluence denoted by expensive-looking cocktails, large glass windows, and a suspiciously white-washed racial demographic (5). Finally, these words and images are layered over a map of the city's gridded infrastructure, which include the Superdome in the top lefthand corner and the Mississippi in the bottom right – two of the city's most visually iconic landmarks.

Urban theorist David Harvey, among others, has shown how the '"branding" of cities becomes big business': 'claims to uniqueness, authenticity, particularity, and specialty

[1] By 2011, New Orleans was still only returned to about three-quarters of its pre-Katrina size (Weber & Peek, 2012, 1, 15).

underlie the ability to capture monopoly rents' and attract tourists (2012, 103). As Don Mitchell similarly observes, this branding takes physical shape in 'extravagant convention centres, downtown tourist amusements, up-market, gentrified restaurant and bar districts, [and] baseball and football stadiums'; as he concludes: 'Image becomes everything' (2003, 166). Writing specifically of New Orleans, Kevin Fox Gotham notes the tendency of '[b]rochures and tourist guides' to 'convey a stylised cityscape composed of neighbourhoods with famous and architecturally significant mansions, public landmarks, museums and so on', all of which 'bear little relevance to the realities of social deprivation and poverty concentrated in the city's peripheral neighbourhoods' (2002, 1743). Meanwhile, the proto-corporate language of 'blank canvases' and 'tabula rasas' accords with the violent rhetoric of 'disaster capitalist' policies first experimented with in 1980s Chile, perfected in twenty-first-century Iraq and implemented aggressively in post-Katrina New Orleans (Klein, 2008, 372-7).

The DDD's banners therefore encapsulate a nexus of related conditions that continue to shape the city's ongoing structurally racist and neoliberal urban redevelopment. This nexus connects first the twenty-first century's frenetic visual culture, in which distressing photographs of human suffering are reproduced and decontextualised by 24-hour news channels, the internet and other media outlets (see Gardner, 2015, 22-23), and of which the imagistic documentation of Katrina was a case in point; second, Naomi Klein's concept of 'disaster capitalism', in which 'orchestrated raids on the public sphere in the wake of catastrophic events' lead to 'the treatment of disasters as exciting market opportunities' (2008, 6); and third, outward-looking urban rebranding strategies that emphasise 'local distinctiveness, local cultures and different local histories that appeal to visitors' tastes for the exotic and unique', a process described by Gotham as 'tourism gentrification' (2005, 1102). The result, remarks Tara McPherson, is a 'lenticular racial logic allows us to celebrate diversity when it adds flavour to tourist attractions while we remain blind to government policies that put those attractions (not to mention the largely poor, black workers that built and sustained them) at risk' (2007, 332).

There have been a number of comics set in New Orleans during Katrina and its aftermath, varying greatly in lengths, format and genre. These range, on the one hand, from Matt Johnson and Simon Gane's spy thriller *Dark Rain: A New Orleans Story* (2010) to Mark Landry's vampire story *Bloodthirsty: One Nation Under Water* (2016), which combine fantasy narratives with critical commentaries on the disaster; and on the other, documentary comics such as Gary Rivlin and Jackie Roche's webcomic 'The Corner Store After Katrina' or Don Brown's short book, *Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans*, both published in 2015 to mark Katrina's ten-year anniversary. In this article I focus on the most famous and widely celebrated of these, Josh Neufeld's *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*, which was published serially as a webcomic online from 2007 to 2008 and then collected in book form in 2009. In particular, I shall refer throughout primarily to the printed book, though critics Anthony Dyer Hoefer and Jim Coby have emphasised elsewhere the merits of the online version that, through the use of hyperlinks to other sources, enhanced the comic's 'immersive' reading experience and its pedagogic elements (Coby 2015, 117; Hoefer, 2011, 255).

All of these comics challenge in different ways the mutually reinforcing nexus of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification, if not directly, then at least by exposing the connections between them. Furthermore, their aim is often not simply to document and critique the failure the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and its incompetent response, nor to challenge 'the visual record of [this] highly mediated event', though this they certainly do (Hoefer, 2011, 255). They are also concerned to document

what Rebecca Solnit describes, in her book *Paradise Built in Hell*, as 'the extraordinary communities that arise in disaster', and of which she takes Katrina as a prime example (2009, 1-2). For Solnit, disasters are of course unwelcome, but with the subsequent 'suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems', they produce an environment in which citizens 'are free to live and act another way', one that tends, she argues, to be notably altruistic (7).

Nevertheless, as Solnit herself concedes and as other critics have pointed out, at the time of Katrina the media repeatedly framed 'blacks as outlaws and savages' by looping 'on television the same few frames of stranded blacks "looting" food and other items', thereby spreading 'the notion that black folk were in a state of social anarchy' rather than some kind of utopian paradise (Dyson, 2007, 166). Furthermore, these racist representations were not a departure from, but in fact a continuation of, New Orleans' pre-Katrina 'tourism narrative', which labelled 'historically and predominantly black areas of the city as dangerous, and obscures and distorts the African presence and participation in the development and sustenance of the city' (Thomas, 2008, 256; see also McPherson, 2007, 331).[2] Indicatively, commentator Michael Dyson critiques this process through an emphasis on the way in which such photos were 'framed' by accompanying text that underscored a 'hidden bias and sleeping bigotry' toward African Americans: 'Words help to interpret images' he notes; 'language and pictures in combination reinforce ideas about black identity' (165).

In this analysis, he shares the basic critical vocabulary used by comics critics to describe the formal architecture of the comics form, which involves the co-mixing of text and image, and the contextualisation of single images within longer multi-panel sequences. Indeed, such correlations go some way toward explaining the recent proliferation of comics that document social and human rights abuses, offering what Nina Mickwitz describes as 'graphic truth-telling in a skeptical age' (2016, 2-3). As Hillary Chute writes, 'the word-and-image form of comics expands the reach of documentary, recording facts while also questioning the very project of what it means to document, to archive, to inscribe' (2016, 7). Though comics are of course still used to propagate an array of conservative agendas (see Knowles et al., 2016, 378-380), because of this formal architecture they are especially able to expose and correct the biases of contemporaneous mainstream media coverage. It is this formal distinction that gives comics, as opposed to other popular media such as television and film, its particular relationship with small-scale conflicts and disasters, as well as the minutiae of their everyday, civilian experience (see Prorokova and Tal eds., 2018). In the case of Neufeld's comic, this relationship manifests in his recovery of the resilient post-Katrina 'reconstruction efforts' that, as Klein argues, 'represent the antithesis of the disaster capitalism complex's ethos' (2008, 466).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the remarkably altruistic outpouring from across the US so celebrated by Solnit also set the coordinates for a culture of 'voluntourism', whereby visitors to the city can 'fully immerse themselves in the local culture, indulge in their hobbies, get involved in humanitarian efforts, and have the experience of a lifetime' (Dunham, 2007, 47). Voluntourism has had deleterious effects on the city that are complicit with the wider disaster capitalist enterprise. As Vincanne Adams describes, 'a surfeit of emotion generated by the inefficiencies of profit in recovery capitalism [can]

[2] Of course, tourism has for decades (if not centuries) been 'considered a major sector of the New Orleans economy', though as Kevin Fox Gotham notes, since the 1970s 'it has become the dominant sector', a transition that 'has paralleled population decline, white flight to the suburbs, racial segregation, poverty and other a host of other social problems including crime, fiscal austerity, poor schools and decaying infrastructure' (2002, 1742-1743).

become itself drawn back into the economy as a new resource for profit' (2013, 124). This results in the 'affect economy' included in this article's title, which denotes 'the affective surplus produced by disasters like Katrina [that] have become themselves part of an economy in which affect circulates as source of market opportunity for profit' (10). The claims I make for the radical components of comics such as Neufeld's therefore need to be qualified by their simultaneous contribution to an affect economy 'in which charity, faith, patronage, and for-profit capitalism are knitted together' (174), even if, as this article will show, *A.D.* itself on occasion offers a meta-commentary on such processes. As renters and consumers, voluntourists contribute to the escalation of living costs in New Orleans, whilst with their free labour they provide support previously the responsibility of federal and local governments, thereby facilitating the state's systematic privatisation of public and social services. Their simultaneous indulgence in an 'authentic' New Orleans' culture has lead to a widespread belief among the city's 'black and poor residents' that post-Katrina reconstruction has been designed 'to tear out [the city's] black core but keep its cultural product' (Graham, 2008, 25).

The Downtown Development District's proto-corporate language of 'blank canvases' and 'tabula rasas' reproduces the ideological terminology of disaster capitalism which, 'rooted in biblical fantasies of great floods and great fires' is predicated on 'a logic that leads ineluctably toward violence' (Klein, 2008, 19). Meanwhile, its simultaneous neoliberal emphasis on an 'image' of New Orleans as a global city worthy of external corporate investment and offering an authentic culture saleable to tourists similarly results in the intensified privatisation of once public housing and urban infrastructure to the detriment of locals simply trying to live there. It is into this complex nexus that comics about Katrina and its aftermath, and especially Neufeld's book-length comic *A.D.*, effectively intervene.

A.D.'s Vertical Perspectives: 'Natural' and 'Manmade' Disasters

Neufeld's evocation of biblical parlance in the title of his comic might at first appear to suggest a narrative of Katrina as a 'natural' rather than 'manmade' disaster, one that conceals 'political arrangements that enable violations of human and civil rights and a furthering of political agendas in the name of humanitarian aid' (Adams, 2013, 15). But the comic's brief preface points out that in fact Hurricane Katrina 'struck east of New Orleans', emphasising instead that it was the breach of the 'city's levee systems' – itself a consequence of years of lack of state investment in public infrastructure – and subsequent flooding that wrought the most damage (Neufeld, 2009, viii; see also Dyson, 2007, 80).

Insert Fig.1: The splash page in *A.D.*'s opening sequence focuses readers' attention on the breaching of the levees.

This counter-narrative is then visualised in *A.D.*'s twenty-page opening sequence, which shifts in a series of vertical scalar movements downwards from initial satellite images through to a close-up of the water bursting through the levees. The shift from 'natural' to 'manmade' scales is metered out in the rhythm of the panels, which decrease in size as the comic progresses, thereby speeding up the pace of the narrative. This temporal intensification correlates with the impending moment of the levee's breach, serving to emphasise the centrality of this manmade infrastructural failure to the subsequent disaster. Reinforcing this focus on the levee, the sequence – the panels of which have been gradually diminishing in size – suddenly concludes with a double-page spread of the moment of the

URL: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rcom Email: RCOM-peerreview@journals.tandf.co.uk

breach, as the water breaks through to crash into nearby houses and cars. This sudden spatial interruption of the comic's temporal rhythm is known as a 'splash' page, a technique used, as comics artist and theorist Will Eisner writes, to set a 'climate' for the rest of the narrative (1985, 62). The synergies between the critical vocabulary used to describe these formal strategies and the content of *A.D.* are far from coincidental here. Rather, Neufeld exploits these overlaps to create not a natural, meteorological 'climate', but rather a political climate of disaster capitalism. This sequence not only foregrounds the extent to which manmade failures were mostly responsible for Katrina's catastrophic effects, but also frames the sociopolitical lens through which the main body of the narrative should be viewed.

A.D.'s titular biblical reference foregrounds the federal government's complicity in the extent of Katrina's devastation through its ideologically-motivated refusal to invest in public infrastructure. Moreover, the use of the term 'deluge' circulates in US-based activist and grassroots circles, especially those operating in New Orleans, to refer not simply to the 'natural' storm and 'manmade' flood, but to the discriminatory privatisation of social services and public infrastructure that the disaster subsequently unleashed. As John Arena writes, 'Hurricane Katrina and the forced displacement of residents provided an opportunity to fast-track the revanchist agenda – to drown public housing in a fully human-made "neoliberal deluge" and finally rid the city of [its] concentrations of poverty' (2012, 147). The comic situates Katrina within longer deep-rooted processes of gentrification in the city that were well underway before the storm, and that exploited the city's mass evacuation in 2005 as an opportunity to expel its unwanted poor, and mostly black, demographics. Through its own dramatic imagery, *A.D.* thereby points to the connections between the cynical disaster capitalist's view of Katrina and the flooding as a moment of urban cleansing, on the one hand, and the post-Katrina image-oriented effort to reconstruct New Orleans as a cleansed and commodified city, a 'blank canvas' awaiting gentrifying urban redevelopment.

The crucial mechanism by which *A.D.* makes these connections is through its scalar perspectival shifts that first evoke, and then jolt readers away from, the familiar overhead views from which the disaster was documented in mainstream media coverage. In so doing, it allows for a 'vertical, indeed fully volumetric view of the politics of cities' (Graham, 2016, 22) – in this case, New Orleans during Katrina. These shifts encourage readers to think of this airborne perspective as evocative of two malicious forces with which they themselves are, as US citizens, complicit. The comic's opening panels implicate viewers in the abstract perspective of the roving eyes of both disaster capitalist and consuming tourist, as the city's iconic landmarks – Bourbon Street, Jackson Square, Canal Street, the Superdome – are introduced. (With the exception of the Superdome, which became a crucial refuge for hopeful evacuees, none of these iconic locations appear again in the comic). Then, as *A.D.* progresses through scenes that shift between ground- and sky-level orientations, readers also come to realise that they are viewing New Orleans from the perspective of the helicopters – Blackhawks, the same used in Iraq, a point to which I shall return in the next section of this article – that flew over the city during the flood. On FEMA's direct orders, rather than 'helping people in need', these helicopters were used 'to transport journalists to the region to film the misery they saw', capturing the 'barrage of images' that frequently misrepresented disaster victims as looters and criminals (Dyson, 2007, 121). Indeed, in a later splash page, a helicopter moves through a dark red sky as Abbas, one of Neufeld's characters who is trapped on a roof with his friend Darnell, comments: 'There goes another one' (2009, 128-129). By materialising disaster capitalist ideologies in the perspective of the helicopter, Neufeld subtly reveals the extent to which the media's racist coverage drew on and

perpetuated broader structurally racist policies of urban white-washing – policies that have since informed the city's subsequent racially discriminatory redevelopment.

In his excellent chapter on *A.D.*, 'A Re-Vision of the Record', collected in Brannon Costello and Qiana J. Whitted's similarly brilliant collection, *Comics and the U.S. South* (2011), Hoefer argues that Neufeld's images, which 'approximate either satellite shots of swirling clouds or video and photographs captured from helicopters hovering safely above the city', serve to situate 'the narratives that follow within the context of what much of the audience has already seen' (2011, 259). In so doing, the comic demands that 'readers reconsider the images that may have been presented as documents of facts' (259). By invoking the vertically hierarchical gaze of government and media, *A.D.* first suggests the reader's complicity with these forces, before subverting this violent visual culture by demanding from readers a more critical engagement with Katrina and its history.[3] Crucial to this process, as Hoefer astutely observes, is the comic's balancing of scales: too much generalisation dehumanises disaster victims, whilst 'the pathos of an individual witness's testimony might reduce the magnitude of the event, remove it from its historical context, or diminish the political momentum necessary for action' (254-255).[4] Such scalar shifts are inscribed into Neufeld's visual sequences, which function conceptually to situate the meticulously documented on-the-ground experiences of its five real-life protagonists within the larger structural practices of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification.

Neufeld's characters come from a range of racial and class backgrounds, and though they are all united by their firsthand encounters with Katrina and its aftermath, the hurricane's ramifications are felt with uneven severity by different characters according to their race – a point that I will take up more fully in the next section of this article. This reorientation of visual perspective, which views Katrina from the perspective of the street rather than the air, reinforces the comic's deconstruction of the mainstream media's initial coverage. Indeed, this visual reorientation is crucial to the comic's project: by creating its own imagistic currency that visualises the experience of Katrina's victims, it first undoes the stereotypes that were exacerbated by the limited hierarchical view of the airborne helicopters, whilst also revealing the extent of the simultaneously militarised and privatised state response that so violently put policing and profits before people – and especially black people. It is at this point that I depart from Hoefer, for whom '[i]n the case of Katrina, discussions of race are particularly problematic', and who reads *A.D.* as avoiding any 'such missteps by hardly mentioning issues of race or ethnicity' (273). By displacing the long and violent context of race outside of its narrative content into the hyperlinks included in the original webcomic, Hoefer argues that *A.D.* is able to focus 'squarely on generating the emotions of frustration, despair, isolation, and abandonment felt by these characters, rather than diverging into historical complexities' (274). However, I contend that such a reading risks downplaying the fundamentally racist state and media infrastructure in which viewers themselves are ultimately complicit, perhaps even commodifying the suffering of black New

[3] Interestingly, Neufeld illustrated Brooke Gladstone's book-length comic, *The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone On The Media* (2011), which documents in comics form the mechanisms and power-relations that inform the way in which the media operates. In one brief section, Neufeld actually draws images of the 'problematic' media coverage of Katrina, adding a further layer of self-reflexivity to his own graphic documentation of the disaster (Gladstone & Neufeld, 2011, 41-42).

[4] This combination of general overview and individual testimony is similarly employed in one of the most compelling prose accounts of Katrina, Dan Baum's bestselling *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death, and Life in New Orleans* (2010).

Orleanians into an economised 'affect' that, whilst it might mobilise altruistic action, can in turn encourage the kinds of voluntourism that have been as damaging as they have beneficial in post-Katrina New Orleans.[5]

Instead, by viewing *A.D.* through the overlapping nexus of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification, particularly as these manifest in the increased privatisation of public infrastructure and social services that exacerbated Katrina's effects and have only intensified since, these issues are in fact seen to be loaded into the visual fabric of Neufeld's comic. Rather than reading *A.D.* as making an emotional appeal to the reader, then, Neufeld's comic should in fact be viewed as a deeply political project that clearly identifies the structural conditions that have violently impacted the city's most marginalised inhabitants, and that have equally violent ramifications for poorer populations in other cities in the US and beyond. As Lynell Thomas observes, '[t]he limitations of the responses to Hurricane Katrina uncovered the ways that racial representations within popular culture profoundly impact the way that we live and die' (2008, 265); as a piece of popular culture itself, *A.D.* is both complicit with, but also at times able to reflect on and critique, the fissures and failures of representation that remain undeniably cut along racial lines.

Public Housing and Privatisation: Making a Killing Out of Catastrophe

In one particular sequence that documents FEMA's eventual arrival, Neufeld emphasises the militarisation of the state's response to Katrina through invocations of war zone imagery uncannily reminiscent of scenes of US forces and convoys that had been roaming through Baghdad since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Dyson actually pinpoints the war in Iraq as in part responsible for stymying the 'response of the National Guard to Katrina' and diverting 'critical resources from the Army Corps of Engineers as well' (2007, 80). Meanwhile, as Klein argues, the 'for-profit relief and reconstruction [that has] become the new global paradigm' was '[p]ioneered in Iraq' (2008, 13) – the large 'private-sector businesses like Haliburton, the Shaw Group, and Blackwater [...] called in for rescue-and-relief operations' during Katrina had been working in and profiting from Iraq in preceding years (Adams, 2013, 8). Neufeld thus visualises what Graham calls the 'new military urbanism', which 'feeds on experiments with styles of targeting and technology in colonial war-zones, such as Gaza or Baghdad', using these 'as testing grounds for technology and techniques to be sold on through the world's burgeoning homeland security markets' (2011, xvi-xvii). Such urban militarisation involves 'the deliberate attack of the systems and places that support civilian urban life' so that they might be privatised for further profitable extraction (16), a process that journalist Antony Loewenstein provocatively describes as 'making a killing out of catastrophe' (2015).

Nevertheless, because of its visual agility and vertical perspectival movements, *A.D.* is able to hold these processes to account. The comic documents the arrival of FEMA at the New Orleans Convention Centre in order to explicitly critique, from the ground up, the failure of the federal government, implicitly deconstructing the hysterical media coverage that claimed the centre was the site of 'the rape of women and babies' and 'bodies being shoved into a freezer' – allegations all 'later proved to be baseless rumour' (Dyson, 2007, 170). In this sequence, Denise – significantly one of Neufeld's black characters – first

[5] Hoefer himself concedes that in the comments section that accompanied the original webcomic of *A.D.*, 'instead of discussion of potential action, the comments are most often platitudes for Neufeld's work; the community created by these discussions is fleeting and offers little additional testimony by victims' (2011, 274).

expresses her outrage to other black citizens, whilst intervening panels document not looting marauders but a carefully administered grass roots effort to distribute limited resources to the most vulnerable. However, the comic's critique is especially foregrounded in the final panel of this sequence, when the reader is made conscious of their airborne perspective by Denise's breaking of the fourth wall, as she looks out at the reader to address them – and, given the visual context that the comic has established, the media and governmental institutions with which that perspective is associated – directly. In this moment, she steps out of the spatial and temporal logic of the comic's narrative to mobilise an alternative gaze that implicates readers themselves, as democratic citizens supporting a government committed to disaster capitalist policies, in the violence wrought by Katrina.[6] The comic deploys a visual 'affect', which 'calls for emotional responsiveness and generates an inducement to action' – even if, within the logic of the affect economy, such emotional claims can be co-opted to generate 'new business investments and free labour for a struggling socio-economy' (Adams, 2013, 174).

Insert Fig.2: Denise breaks the fourth wall to address the reader directly.

In this concluding section, I want to follow Denise's story as it plays out in *A.D.* because it raises the issue of public housing, which serves as a microcosmic instance of the wider processes of post-Katrina privatisation that have rebuilt New Orleans to the exclusion of the city's most marginalised pre-Katrina inhabitants. As John Arena writes, 'from the perspective of those working to defend public housing and other public services, [...] the disaster underscored the bankruptcy of neoliberalism and the needs for a massive, direct government employment programme to rebuild New Orleans and the entire Gulf Coast' (2012, 223-224). However, focusing on Denise also foregrounds the extent to which Katrina disproportionately impacted African American residents. In the 'Ten Years On' webcomic produced by Neufeld in 2015, he checks in with his characters to document their recovery, and each offers conflicting opinions on the city's post-Katrina recovery. One white New Orleanian, Leo, surprisingly comments that 'loss of life notwithstanding, I don't think I would trade the way the city was then for the way it was now'; meanwhile Denise, 'after a decade of ups and downs [...] chose not to be interviewed for this [follow up] piece' at all (Neufeld, 2015). Following Denise's story in the original comic allows for a more careful unpacking of the ways in which race continues to inform New Orleans' post-Katrina recovery, as well as addressing the stickier problem of the production of an affect economy in which the comic is undoubtedly itself implicated, but the ramifications of which are also addressed within its concluding pages.

In *A.D.*'s penultimate section, Denise, who was eventually evacuated from the convention centre to Baton Rouge, is first shown as a 'refugee' – a term contested at the time 'because it seemed to deny that black folk were citizens of the nation' (Dyson, 2007, 176). Here she is in receipt of a house built by the non-governmental organisation, Habitat for Humanity. The intervention of this 'global housing charity', who 'fight poverty worldwide by building safe and decent homes where families and communities can thrive' ('Habitat for Humanity'), offers as a case in point how the intervention of nonprofits has 'helped to

[6] Critic Jim Coby similarly notes a similar moment in a later scene in which Neufeld graphically reinterprets the infamous photograph of Ethel Freeman that 'came to underscore the callousness and unmitigated failures [115] of FEMA and the US Government' (2015, 114). In the dialogue surrounding this image, Coby points out, the questions raised by *A.D.*'s characters are again 'directed at us', thereby placing at least in part 'the burden of failure on the reader' (2015, 114-115).

legitimate further state retrenchment and abdication of responsibility' (Arena, 2012, 183). Furthermore, as Denise herself comments, this new reconstruction was not located in her home city of New Orleans, but 'on the edge of this godforsaken part of Baton Rouge' (Neufeld, 2009, 175). In an act of resistance to the pacificatory structure of this patchy humanitarian intervention, Denise's mother refuses to buy 'any new furniture for the house' (175). A moment later the reader is directly confronted with Denise's own anger, as she gazes directly, face first out of the page's top panel. 'They say they're rebuilding New Orleans "one beer at a time"', she comments: '"Laissez les bon temps rouler"?! Fuck that shit!' (177).

The double quotation marks included inside the speech bubble here suggest Denise's invocation of the shameless marketing strategies of corporations such as the Downtown Development District, who exploit a 'raw authentic' culture to facilitate processes of tourism gentrification that do not cater to, if not actively exclude, poor and mostly black displaced New Orleanians. The extent to which the physical environment of New Orleans itself constitutes Denise's identity is visualised in this page's final panel, when the comic's frame breaks away and the meticulously drawn urban backgrounds that have recurred throughout Neufeld's comic are replaced by an empty, blank page – or within the terminology of disaster capitalism, a 'blank canvas'. The whiteness of this jarring blank space in the comic might also be read as a subtle comment on the city's demographic shifts, particularly as they relate to the marketisation of its local cultural facets. As journalist Gary Rivlin documents, in 2011, just as the Downtown Development District was hanging its 'blank canvas' posters across the city, '[e]vents that before Katrina attracted a mostly black crowd of maybe a couple of hundred were drawing a mostly white audience of fifteen hundred'; meanwhile, '[r]estaurants were able to charge more for food and drink without any drop-off in business. The future only looked bright for a tourism economy that they declared more profitable than ever' (2015, 404-405).

A.D.'s final section, entitled 'The Return', documents the experience's of the comic's characters who have, by 2008, eventually returned to the city. Denise is among them, having left Baton Rouge 'after more than a year' there, returning to New Orleans to work 'with battered women Katrina survivors' (Neufeld, 2009, 186). In this final section, Neufeld's colour code, which as Hoefer observes has throughout been used to 'evoke particular emotional content' (2011, 256), symbolically takes on the deep purples and golds – and on the comic's final page, the greens – of the city's iconic Mardi Gras festival. Of course, this is in part an expression of a New Orleanian identity and heritage offering aesthetic compensation for the 'blankness' that encompassed Denise in Baton Rouge. After all, New Orleans 'looms large in the collective American imagination as the home of jazz, jambalaya, and Mardi Gras' (Dyson, 2007, 14) – the festival is the city's national, if not global, cultural signature.

However, 'urban leaders and economic élites have attempted to strategically deploy Mardi Gras imagery and advertising to refashion the city into a themed landscape of entertainment and tourism' with increasing intensity 'over the past few decades' (Gotham, 2002, 1753).[7] As Gotham observes, Mardi Gras has played a crucial role in processes of tourism gentrification, promoting 'the growth of low-wage jobs with few benefits' and

[7] This global marketisation of the Mardi Gras festival conceals the extent to which the festival has long been divided racially and spatially within the city, even prior to Katrina: 'Whites historically have gathered on St Charles Avenue and Canal Street, while blacks historically have gathered at the intersection of Orleans and Clairbourne Avenues, where the Zulu parade ends. Additionally, the Mardi Gras Indians function as a living tribute to the associations between slaves and Native Americans' (Robertson, 2008, 41).

diverting 'public monies from addressing crucial local problems' (1736), of which public housing is a case in point. Foregrounding the Mardi Gras colours in the final section of *A.D.* might serve simply to emphasise the return to New Orleans in the minds of readers who will, if only subliminally, associate gold, purple and green with the city (itself a testament to the success of corporate marketing campaigns of the festival). But when used to colour the difficult experiences of returning New Orleanians who are struggling to negotiate the simple facts of housing and accommodation, it also inadvertently works, as Gotham has tried to do in his critical work more widely, to focus 'attention on the role of simulations and imagery in urban tourism without missing or downplaying the exploitation and inequality that make possible [such exclusive] spaces of consumption' (1754).

This final section of 'return' also reveals the extent to which Katrina's impact has had different consequences for different racial demographies, consequences measured particularly through property damage and housing circumstances. The other characters documented in this final section, Kwame (a young black teenager and son of a New Orleans' pastor), Leo (a white 'comic book fan, with a collection of more than 15,000 comics') and Abbas ('an Iranian-born longtime New Orleanian') (Neufeld, 2009, ix), all comment on the issue of housing. Kwame's father's religious community 'is helping us rebuild or house' (180); his parent's house is located 'on the West Bank', outside of the flood zone, and he has been able to live there in the meantime. Kwame's experience dramatises the extent to which religious, non-governmental and familial networks stepped in during Katrina's aftermath to fill in the gaps in social services left by the state, a process that, as outlined above, risks complicity with disaster capitalist-oriented governance (Adams, 2013, 10-14).

The issue of housing recurs again a few pages later when Abbas, who owns a local store, comments that he 'didn't realise what the hurricane would do to this city' (2009, 185). These words are placed by Neufeld over a decontextualised image of a decrepit shotgun house marked with the notorious 'X' used by FEMA to indicate which houses had been searched in the aftermath of the storm – an advert for house demolitions also hangs conspicuously in the foreground of this image. The disjunct between verbal and visual descriptors highlight the implicit yet pervasive problem of housing in post-Katrina New Orleans, one that is exacerbated by processes of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification in equal measure. Though Abbas's shop has reopened, he concedes that he 'lost three years' of business because of the flooding.

Meanwhile, Leo's housing situation is resolved without too much difficulty: 'Luckily, our landlord was cool about our apartment. He decided right away to gut the place and rehab it. And he told us we were welcome to move back in once it was ready' (2009, 184). Though the fact that Leo is himself still a renter points to the limited accommodation options for prospective local buyers in the city, Leo's main concern in the aftermath of Katrina is the loss of his material possessions: his 'old journalism notes', his 'Dickies jacket', his 'long leather trench coat', all 'gone, and gone' (182). Most especially, however, is the loss of his huge comic book collection, pieces of which swirl in amongst these other lost possessions in one of Neufeld's few conceptual rather than documentary visual images.

This abstract image contrasts with the brutal reality of *A.D.*'s final page, which Neufeld chooses to dedicate to Denise. Here Denise, now returned to New Orleans, gazes out one final time directly at the reader, not with an expression of anger or accusation, but fatigue. Her commentary highlights explicitly the central issue of housing, as she comments on 'all the new development' in the city that means 'the place will never be the same'; 'I am home', she continues, 'But it's not over. [...] We're not all home yet' (187). Accentuating Denise's

emphasis on the notion of 'home', Neufeld's final panel shows a trailer – temporary housing infrastructures that became a notorious point of contention between returning New Orleanians and FEMA in the aftermath of Katrina – in front of a presumably yet-to-be renovated house. By draping this temporary accommodation in Mardi Gras beads and inking it in the festival's purple, gold and green colouring, the comic undermines the broader tourism gentrification marketing that has seized hold of the city in recent decades, and with especial veracity since Katrina. In this final vertical movement, *A.D.* connects such marketing imagery to the discriminatory effect it has had on the ground, where failure to rehouse the city's pre-Katrina inhabitants has had a disproportionate impact on its poorer and often black demographics.

Insert Fig.3: *A.D.*'s final panel shows a FEMA trailer draped in Mardi Gras beads.

I should emphasise here that by highlighting these discrepancies it is neither the comic's nor my intention to compare directly Leo's suffering with Denise's, nor to suggest that Leo should not mourn the loss of his comic collection or that he is somehow undeserving of the housing to which he has access – clearly, this is in fact the very least a returning New Orleanian should have been able to expect. Rather, by drawing parallels between comics as material objects and perhaps more urgent material needs such as housing, *A.D.* asks readers – who after all, in the case of the printed book, hold a comic in their hands as they read this section – to reflect on the very real ramifications that disaster capitalist-informed governance had on New Orleanians and which are here documented in comics form. The comic measures these ramifications especially through the lack of state provision of a basic public right such as housing. It then equates the materiality of shelter with the comic's own enduring documentation of Katrina (even more notable in book form, but also an attribute of the original webcomic). Finally, in loading these two different perspectival scales, side by side, into its concluding panels, *A.D.* inserts itself as a material object into an ephemeral visual culture in which the narratives of these Katrina victims might, like their houses, otherwise be washed away.

Moreover, and in conclusion, this self-reflexive layering allows *A.D.* to begin to demonstrate an awareness of – and thus asks its readers to reflect on – the 'affect economy' to which it contributes, one that risks complicity with and perpetuation of the ongoing privatisation of basic public infrastructure and social services. 'By being outraged, we appear compassionate. This permits us to continue to ignore the true roots of their condition', writes Dyson (2007, 4). Though undoubtedly designed to generate an 'emotional impact' on its readers (Coby, 2015, 115), this is not *A.D.*'s only strategic intervention. It also offers a radical political commentary that, on the one hand, visually emphasises the deep structural contours of disaster capitalism which have meant '[m]any of the greatest beneficiaries of federal relief efforts have been corporate engineering firms [disinterested] in low-income housing'; and on the other, aesthetically undermines tropes of tourism gentrification, which seek to market New Orleans 'Vegas-style as a slick-surfaced, sanitised theme park of American nostalgia' (McPherson, 2007, 332).

Responding to Solnit's work on post-disaster community resilience in his book *Disaster Capitalism: Making a Killing Out of Catastrophe*, Loewenstein emphasises the need to document 'the humanity of the people and communities craving a more equitable world. It is too easy to erase personalities and talk instead only about dollars' (2015, 311). For Loewenstein, the documentation of the stories of 'people struggling against overwhelming odds—the invisible, the unpeople, the undesired, the expendable, the broke, and the poor' is crucial in

the movement toward a 'more equal economic system and truly representative democracy' better able to challenge the ideologies and policies of disaster capitalists (311-312). *A.D.* participates in this documentary effort, mobilising through its visual-narrative strategies and multi-scalar perspectival agilities a radical critique of the dual forces of disaster capitalism and tourism gentrification. Even as it feeds into the affect economy, the relevance of *A.D.*'s commentary will remain continually prescient so long as New Orleans' public infrastructure continues to be systematically privatised, its vibrant culture commodified, and access to its urban spaces violently restricted at the expense of its most marginalised, often African American inhabitants.

Works Cited

Adams, Vincanne. 2013. *Markets of Sorrow, Labours of Faith: New Orleans in the Wake of Katrina*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Arena, John. 2012. *Driven from New Orleans: How Nonprofits Betray Public Housing and Promote Privatisation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Baum, Dan. 2010. *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death, and Life in New Orleans*. New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Coby, Jim. 2015. '"—it's pretty easy to forget what it's like to be a have-not": Envisioning and Experiencing Trauma in Josh Neufeld's *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*'. *South Central Review*, Vol.32, No.3: 110-123.

Chute, Hillary L. 2016. *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Downtown Development District, New Orleans. 2017. 'DownTownNola'. Online Source: http://downtownnola.com/uploads/DDD_Brochure_Web_HighRes.pdf Accessed 15 August 2017.

Dunham, Christina. 2007. 'Voluntourism'. *Filipinas: Ethnic NewsWatch*, Vol.16, No.186: 47.

Dyson, Michael Eric. 2007. *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Colour of Disaster*. New York: Basic Civitas.

Eisner, Will. 1985. *Comics and Sequential Art*. Florida: Poorhouse Press.

Gardner, Jared. 2015. 'Time Under Siege.' In Worden, Daniel ed. *The Comics of Joe Sacco: Journalism in a Visual World*, pp.21-38. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi.

Gladstone, Brooke, and Neufeld, Josh. 2011. *The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone On The Media*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Gotham, Kevin Fox. 2002. 'Marketing Mardi Gras: Commodification, Spectacle and the Political Economy of Tourism in New Orleans'. *Urban Studies*, Vol.39, No.10: 1735-1756.

——2005. 'Tourism Gentrification: The Case of New Orleans' Vieux Carre (French Quarter)'. *Urban Studies*, Vol.42, No.7: 1099-1121.

Graham, Darwin Bond. 2008. 'The New Orleans That Race Built: Racism, Disaster, and Urban Spatial Relationships'. In Marable, Manning and Clarke, Kristen eds. *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race, and Public Policy Reader*, pp.17-32. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Graham, Stephen. 2011. *Cities Under Siege: The New Military Urbanism*. London and New York: Verso.

——2016. *Vertical: The City from Satellites to Bunkers*. London and New York: Verso.

'Habitat for Humanity'. Online Source: https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/ Accessed 17 August 2017.

Hoefer, Anthony Dyer. 2011. 'A Re-Vision of the Record: The Demands of Reading Josh Neufeld's A.D. *New Orleans After the Deluge*'. In Costello, Brannon, and Whitted, Qiana J. eds. *Comics and the U.S. South*, pp.254-279. Louisiana: University Press of Mississippi.

Johnson, Mat, and Gane, Simon. 2010. *Dark Rain: A New Orleans Story*. New York: DC Comics.

Klein, Naomi. 2008. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt & Company.

——2017. 'How Power Profits From Disaster'. *The Guardian*, 6 July. Online Source: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/06/naomi-klein-how-power-profits-from-disaster Accessed 16 August 2017.

Knowles, Sam, Peacock, James and Earle, Harriet. 2016. 'Introduction: Trans/formation and the Graphic Novel'. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Vol.52, No.4: 378-384.

Landry, Mark, Pace, Richard, and Witter, Ashley. 2016. *Bloodthirsty: One Nation Under Water*. London: Titan Comics.

Loewenstein, Antony. 2015. *Disaster Capitalism: Making a Killing Out Of Catastroph*e. London and New York: Verso.

McPherson, Tara. 2007. 'No Natural Disaster: New Orleans, Katrina, and War'. *Modern Language Association*, Vol.122, No.1, *Special Topic: Cities*: 331-335.

Mickwitz, Nina. 2016. *Documentary Comics: Graphic Truth-Telling in a Skeptical Age*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Spac*e. New York and London: The Guilford Press.

Neufeld, Josh. 2009. *A.D.: New Orleans After the Deluge*. New York: Pantheon Books.

——28 August 2015. 'Where are they now? Revisiting Four Katrina Survivors Ten Years Later'. *Splinter*. Online Source: http://splinternews.com/where-are-they-now-revisiting-4-katrina-survivors-10-y-1793850346 Accessed 17 August 2017.

Prorokova, Tatiana, and Tal, Nimrod. 2018. *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma and Memory*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Rivlin, Gary. 2015. *Katrina: After the Flood*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rivlin, Gary, and Roche, Julie. 16 August 2015. 'The Corner Store After Katrina'. *Economic Hardship Reporting Project*. Online Source: http://economichardship.org/archive/the-corner-store-after-katrina Accessed 17 August 2017.

Roberston, D. Osei. 2008. 'Property and Security, Political Chameleons, and Dysfunctional Regime: A New Orleans Story'. In Marable, Manning and Clarke, Kristen eds. *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race, and Public Policy Reader*, pp.39-63. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rose, Andrew. 22 April 2015. 'What's Old is New Again'. *Guernica: A Magazine of Global Arts and Politics*. Online Source: https://www.guernicamag.com/kristina-kay-robinson-whats-old-is-new-again/ 14 August 2017.

Thomas, Lynell. 2008. '"The City I Used To… Visit": Tourist New Orleans and the Racialised Response to Hurricane Katrina'. In Marable, Manning and Clarke, Kristen eds. *Seeking Higher Ground: The Hurricane Katrina Crisis, Race, and Public Policy Reader*, pp. 255-270. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weber, Lynn, and Peek, Lori A. 2012. 'Displacement: An Introduction'. In Weber, Lynn, and Peek, Lori A. eds., *Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora*, pp.1-18. Austin: University of Texas Press.