

## Lakeviews

### A Bus Tour As a Vehicle for Regrowth in New Orleans

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Since the 2005 Katrina disaster in New Orleans, not many people frequent West End. A bustling row of seafood restaurants once lined the seawall on Lake Pontchartrain's south shore; now all that remains are a few scarred foundations and a clear view of the water. Although West End and its encompassing Lakeview neighborhood are not the only parts of New Orleans still struggling to jumpstart reconstruction, Lakeview's proximity to Lake Pontchartrain rendered it particularly devastated when the levees collapsed.

However, on 1–3 June 2007, West End showed peculiar signs of life. Two idling school buses and dozens of cars filled the weed-choked lot. A few people ordered plastic cups of wine and bottled beer from a makeshift bar. The rubble of a former dining room framed a simple scene: a single table flanked by two chairs, draped with a white tablecloth and topped with two place settings. Since it was wiped out by the aftermath of Katrina, this is all that's left of Bruning's Seafood Restaurant, family owned and operated since 1859. For a weekend its crumbling foundation was the starting point for Lakeviews, A Sunset Bus Tour: Performance, Art, Music, and Food. The tour also concluded here at sunset. For the two hours in between, the audience took part in a set of site-specific performances and installations at four other neighborhood locations, and afterward shared a meal with the artists at the former restaurant.

Lakeview was produced in affiliation with the community-based arts network HOME, New Orleans?—a collective of multidisciplinary artists, students, local residents, universities, colleges, and neighborhood and cultural institutions. Unlike the numerous “disaster tours” that highlight post-Katrina devastation, Lakeview was “intended as a rejuvenation ritual: to infuse the energy of art and audience into this decimated area” (HOME, New Orleans? 2007). Instead of merely mourning the ruin of Lakeview, the project worked to enliven the neighborhood by invoking its pre-Katrina life. While HOME, New Orleans? consists of diverse projects in three other neighborhoods—Central City, the Seventh Ward, and the Ninth Ward<sup>1</sup>—the Lakeview team's bus tour/performance, with its focus on pre-Katrina life, most closely resembles the original Home, New Orleans? idea as devised by Richard Schechner, in dialogue with The VESTIGES Project: Think Tank: to remember and revitalize devastated neighborhoods by performing “the vast range of human experience” that was lived in these spaces (Schechner 2006).<sup>2</sup>

The very concept of a bus tour radically alters the normally sedentary artgoing experience by requiring viewers to be on the move. Spectators become passengers, visitors, pedestrians (dare say tourists?), and more. Not only are people bused between several sites; once in those spaces, they are invited to move

1. These projects include a visual arts project with elementary school students in the Ninth Ward, a mixed-media quilt installation in Central City, youth theatre workshops in the Seventh Ward, and a Bridging Group focused on photographic and video documentation of all projects. See <http://ny2no.net/homeneworleans> for more information.
2. Founded in 1984, The VESTIGES Project is a collective of New Orleans artists and writers. “THINK TANK is an UMBRELLA project—a conceptual BUCKET within which to brainSTORM ways to explore New Orleans’ future and to present multidisciplinary actions and installations in dialogue with the viewing audiences” ([www.thevestigeproject.org](http://www.thevestigeproject.org) 2006).

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