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Antipublic Urbanism: Las Vegas and the Downtown Project

In the summer of 2013, I did what many would not attempt in the heat of July: I went to Las Vegas. I had a handful of overlapping reasons to be there, and among those was seeing the work and progress of Tony Hsieh's Downtown Project (DTP). [1] [2] Like so many urbanists, I had heard of the plans, the intentions, the investment budget, the vision and its visionary, the ambition. I saw the container park under construction. [3] I walked the perimeter of 9th Bridge—a private early education and elementary school “now enrolling entrepreneurs and creators”—and thought about the building's restoration and DTP's investment in both private and public education. [4] I walked the length of Fremont Street, comparing and contrasting it to the Strip, to the acres of sprawl surrounding Vegas, and to every mixed-use, walkable, “vibrant” downtown revitalization plan I had seen before. When night came, I had a couple of drinks at a couple of bars. I left Vegas uneasy, unsettled, and uncertain.

I am rarely unsure about a place so seemingly defined and self-assured in its image. I am just as much the project's target demographic as I am sensitive to urban marketing schemes. My visit should have held interest as a critical exercise and maybe even a little fun. Instead, I found a downtown almost impossible to engage for the uninitiated outsider. [5] My clearest read of downtown Las Vegas was that it *seems sure* about how it *seems*. To be clear, skepticism was not my reaction. I was nervous.

Three years into the endeavor, the project's unfolding story has recently prompted a line of questions and interrogations into how DTP seems and into the nature of both its assurances and surety. [6] [7] As a result, what follows is not a review of the architectural projects now freckling downtown Las Vegas nor of the plans for additional density, housing, retail, or even technology-related start-up activity. Instead, I'll meander and machete a way through the project as an enacted proposal and prototype for a general form of urbanism in search of the kind of city-making now active along Hsieh's Fremont and its immediate environs. [8] It's a haphazard and necessarily belligerent path. There can be no clarity, elegance, or subtlety in mapping a funhouse—tracing processes that are more “Vegas” than “downtown,” more signifier than substance, more affect than effect, more wizard than Oz. Along the way, I'll infer an urban-planning approach about which I cannot be sure by its own strategic design. Hacking through crafted public statements and a short catalog of awestruck dispatches from the desert, I arrive at in-

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[1] The Downtown Project was initiated in early 2012, under the name DTP Comm Dev, LLC. Its activities include real estate development ranging from office and retail to restaurants and bars to housing; business investment, incubation, and joint ventures. The project's stated “goal and purpose is to help make downtown Vegas a place of Inspiration, Entrepreneurial Energy, Creativity, Innovation, Upward Mobility, and Discovery, through the 3 C's of Collisions, Co-learning, and Connectedness in a long-term, sustainable way [sic].”

[2] The overall project includes several related business entities and a \$350-million personal investment from Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh into the redevelopment of downtown Las Vegas. Max Chafkin, “Tony Hsieh's Excellent Las Vegas Adventure,” *Inc. com*, (January 24, 2012), <http://www.inc.com/magazine/201202/tony-hsieh-zappos-excellent-las-vegas-adventure.html>. Downtown Project, “Our Mission,” accessed October 20, 2014. <http://downtownproject.com/>.

[3] The Downtown Container Park is a shopping-dining-entertainment facility on Fremont Street, open to all during the day and to adults during the evening. The Downtown Project is the owner and operator of the container park and an investor or co-owner in several of the businesses located within the park. See <http://www.downtowncontainerpark.com>.

[4] The school is located in a restored and renovated historic building in downtown Las Vegas and is affiliated with the Downtown Project, which sponsors a discounted tuition rate for the first fifty families to enroll in the school. 9th Bridge School, “9th Bridge School,” accessed October 20, 2014, <http://9thbridgeschool.com>. 9th Bridge School, “2014–2015 Tuition Schedule,” accessed October 20, 2014, <http://9thbridgeschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/9th-Bridge-Tuition-Rates-2014-2015.pdf>.

[5] (Along with the corollary discomfort of knowing that initiation is not usually a prerequisite for thoughtfully engaging a city).

dictments, more nervous than before. This breed of urbanism is an anti-public version of social space requiring only the semblance of city-ness for its sustaining. The image of the Downtown Project, as it is and as it seems, is the logical end of privatized planning *ad absurdum* drawn as a diagram of hubris over a fading erasure of civic responsibility.

The Project That Is and Isn't

The Downtown Project both is and is not many things. It can be simultaneously analyzed through several separate and often contradictory urban reinvestment models and frameworks, each describing a considerably different set of circumstances within which downtown Las Vegas is currently developing.

For starters DTP is generally described as a tech-oriented utopia “where every aspect of life is geared toward entrepreneurship and innovation.” [9] Beyond a mere “tech hub,” Hsieh and DTP are “building an entirely new community—even, in a sense, a new city.” [10] But while it may be “the most ambitious experiment in building a twenty-first century utopian city in the U.S.,” it is noticeably and surprisingly devoid of technological infrastructure investment. [11] [12] [13] Its inhabitants are twenty-first-century entrepreneurs and certainly many of the startups and young businesses receiving investment are tech-focused, but the project’s dominant planning approaches (manipulations of land use and density, strategic investment in the existing built environment for economic development, and so on) are decidedly twentieth-century techniques. [14] The envisioned “new city” is not designed around the deployment of urban apps, sensors, or similarly “connected” technologies. It seems that the “Great American Techtopia” is a city without significant additional technological facilitation.

Perhaps the project may be more appropriately described as a “utopia for techies” and thus operate in terms of creative-class-oriented planning. Within this framework, the members of the creative class act as a local economic generator, and urban development and investment strategies are designed to attract members of this “class.” If you build it, they will come; they will come, and the city will prosper. The Vegas Tech Fund describes its methodology in terms of “increas[ing] the creative class of

[6] In late September, DTP “eliminated 30 positions from [its] corporate staff.” The layoffs and a series of misreportings (many sources claimed that the project was eliminating 30 percent of its staff) led to a level of scrutiny new to the public discussion on the project to date. The layoffs were preceded by an open letter by David Gould to Tony Hsieh in which he tendered his resignation with charges of “decadence, greed, and missing leadership.” In response to much of the misreporting, Tony Hsieh released a clarifying statement (with unabashed defensive sarcasm, its title begins “tl;dr”—Internet shorthand for “too long; didn’t read”) via the DTP website.

[7] That statement includes a link to an Evernote document outlining the DTP activities in which Hsieh is directly involved and those for which he claims no decision-making capacity or responsibility. While Hsieh serves as the project’s instigator, champion, figurehead, and underwriter, the list of his “priorities” and the voice in which it is written unquestionably support Gould’s accusation of “missing leadership.” David L. Gould, “September 29, 2014. An Open Letter to Tony Hsieh.” *Las Vegas Weekly* (September 30, 2014), <http://www.lasvegasweekly.com/as-we-see-it/2014/sep/30/david-gould-letter-resignation-tony-hsieh-DTP/>. Tony Hsieh, “Statement: tl;dr—there are a lot of misleading headlines flying around out there...” September 30, 2014, <http://downtownproject.com/statement/>. Tony Hsieh, “Tony’s DTP Priorities,” October 14, 2014, <https://www.evernote.com/shard/s16/sh/95ba4292-a2b1-4032-8104-0673f2fa2f8a/e724cb9bbe62c61a>). Perhaps coincidentally, the experience that inspired Gould to change his life and join DTP in Las Vegas is recounted in the Part 1 of a multipart series on the project published by *Re/code* on the day Gould penned his letter. See Nellie Bowles, “Downtown Las Vegas Is the Great American Techtopia,” *Re/code* (September 29, 2014), <http://recode.net/2014/09/29/downtown-las-vegas-is-the-great-american-techtopia/>.

[8] Here, “urbanism” is understood as the set of social, political, and spatial practices and processes unique to cities.

[9] Bowles, “Downtown Las Vegas Is the Great American Techtopia.”

[10] Mark Joseph Stern, “Sin No More: Can Tony Hsieh turn downtown Las Vegas into a family-friendly startup utopia?” *Slate.com* (December 5, 2013), http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/the_next_silicon_valley/2013/12/tony_hsieh_las_vegas_can_the_zappos_billionaire_turn_vegas_into_a_tech_utopia.html.

[11] Full disclosure: I understand the logic and act of experimentation in urbanism as fundamentally problematic. See Leah Meisterlin, “The City Is Not a Lab,” *ARPA Journal 1: Test Subjects* (May 15, 2014) <http://arpajournal.gsapp.org/the-city-is-not-a-lab/>.

[12] Bowles, “Downtown Las Vegas Is the Great American Techtopia.”

[13] This is the first of many references to large-scale planning initiatives usually, but not always, undertaken by the public sector. The distinction between governmental and private investment and agenda-setting is an important and underlying theme here, but a full discussion is sadly beyond the scope of this essay. For our purposes, it is necessary to note that DTP’s stated interest in addressing city-wide systemic issues was ambitiously high in 2012 and has since fluctuated. (cf, Notes 21 and 23.)

A rendering of the container park in downtown Las Vegas.



downtown Las Vegas,” and unsurprisingly DTP has suffered many of the same criticisms weathered by creative class theorist Richard Florida. [15] Primary among them is the argument that development marginalizes less advantaged, less “creative” populations. [16] But DTP’s interventions are not designed linearly to create the urban conditions that attract creative professionals. Rather, the project is an inversion of the creative class model’s causal relationships placing chosen creative professionals within the landscape to help create those certain urban conditions.

The project can just as easily be discussed in New Urbanist terms—instigated by reverse-engineered density goals given the requirements of an urban typology. [17] Further, it is predicated on a walkable, mixed-use streetscape (the Main Street model) as well as an aesthetic approach calibrating historical reference to cultural association, capitalizing on local architectural allusion balanced with a romanticized lifestyle expectation. Yet the New Urbanist characterization also holds only so far. The project is effectively hermetic—certainly not conceived relative to its place along a settlement transect. The plans do not connect to or transition from the suburbs, the Strip, or the desert. Nor does it follow a particularly prescriptive or principled approach to the formal matters of urban design.

The same binary exercise can be executed for a number of other urbanistic methods. Briefly, a few more: DTP both is and is not producing a company town with Zappos at its core. Or, perhaps less anachronistically, it is a distributed corporate campus whose very distribution requires description as something other than a campus. The project is and is not an updated Urban Renewal brainchild of a Robert Moses-like power broker. Beyond strictly built-environment models, it both is and is not a city-scaled business incubator. It is and is not a venture capital (VC) firm, a community development corporation (CDC), and/or a VC-CDC mutant hybrid, a simultaneous business plan and urban plan. [18] [19] While the CDC interpretation of the project could help make sense of Hsieh’s previous rhetorical replacement of ROI (return on investment) with ROC (return on community), the sheer notion of the more likely hybrid warrants additional attention below as its image seems nothing short of a terrifying griffin haunting the daydreams of every social justice advocate in America. [20] [21] From the outside, the project is puzzlingly contrary to the binaries of our popular urban thinking. Call it Schrödinger Urbanism: Fremont is simultaneously Wall Street and Main Street.

In truth, the Downtown Project is not generating an urbanism relegated to an analytical “either/or—both/neither” limbo, because it should not be analyzed by the status of the cat, but by the establishment of the thought experiment’s fundamental premise: the box. It is defined by the barrier that prevents one from witnessing the process by which the outcome is determined, and the practices by which the space of the city is constructed and transformed. Each of the urban tactics described above is defined by its methodologies regardless of the success or failure of the result. Urbanism is not defined by its ends, but by its means. [22] Las Vegas’ downtown brand of urbanism is not public. [23] As such, it engages none of the distinctly urban issues resulting from the city’s essential publicness, from the negotiations of difference and competing needs, and from a spatial realpolitik. The Down-

[14] The vast majority of tech-related investment is conducted through the Vegas Tech Fund, a separate but affiliated entity. Including Tony Hsieh, the Vegas Tech Fund’s four partners all hail from Zappos.

[15] Vegas Tech Fund, “We Are Investing in Community,” accessed October 20, 2014, <http://vegastechfund.com/>.

[16] See, for example: Ed Komenda, “Is Tony Hsieh downtown Las Vegas’ Savior or Conqueror?” *Las Vegas Sun* (February 23, 2014), <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2014/feb/23/tony-hsieh-downtown-las-vegas-savior-or-conqueror/>. Joe Schoenmann, “Joe Downtown: Gentrification or Positive Progress?” *Las Vegas Sun* (June 20, 2013), <http://www.lasvegassun.com/news/2013/jun/20/joe-downtown-not-everyone-embracing-downtown-proje/>.

[17] (Although, the project’s density metrics are derived from Edward Glaeser’s research rather than from specifically New Urbanist literature.)

[18] DTP and the Vegas Tech Fund invest in young businesses, many of which are established beyond the stages of incubation. One of the requirements of investment is relocating the business, and thus its owners and employees, to downtown Las Vegas.

[19] Admittedly, the concept of a “for-profit CDC” is perhaps more oxymoronic than that of a “distributed campus.” (cf. Note 20.)

[20] “ROC” has also abbreviated “Return on Collisions” referencing the design efforts aimed at maximizing the sorts of serendipitous encounters that lead to innovative insights.

[21] DTP no longer officially uses the “return on community” language. Still, its emphasis in the early (2012) goal-setting of the project is profound. With the goal of reaping ROC, the concept of community is functionally equated with investment, and thus community development is understood as an input rather than a result. The organization has since abandoned the phrasing, offering an adolescent explanation for the decision: “In the past, we used the word ‘Community’ a lot more, but we learned that a lot of people misinterpreted or misunderstood our goals.” What is clear from the elaboration is that those who misunderstood were the individuals and organizations who engage in community development activity as its own end rather than a means toward profit.

[22] The ends-versus-means question is slightly inappropriate in a discussion of urbanism. There are no real ends.

town Project as conceived will never, for example, encounter the tragedy of the commons—it lacks meaningfully shared space with shared responsibility. It is not open and has no need for the messiness of democratic decision-making. It has replaced the public with massified social self-similarity, hindered effective diversity on a crusade for a singular like-minded community, and substituted experiential richness for “happiness” without conflict. [24] Cities are pluralistic, comprised of multiple publics and multiple communities. The Downtown Project’s utopia is not a city; it’s an enclave.

The Urban Pioneer

The early vision for downtown Vegas was not only utopian in its description. It was universal and lofty. Back then, Hsieh described the global challenges of urbanization and posited that “if you fix cities, you kind of fix the world.” [25] His proposals for downtown Vegas were presented as strategic with each intervention contributing to the holistic and integrated revitalization of a city. With this vision of the city he could create, Hsieh headed into the frontier and settled, beginning with the (literal and figurative) Zappos relocation into what was once City Hall.

The image of the pioneer—fearlessly heading into the untamed and unknown, armed with decision if not experience—is a significant component of the DTP ethos. After all, these are entrepreneurial techie types. They may not know what they are doing, but they are sure they can figure it out. This group of “novice urban planners cheerfully concede they have no experience doing what they’re doing. They’re simply mapping what they do know—how to build technology companies—onto urban development.” [26] [27] Zach Ware, for example, has described their methods as “kind of hacky.” [28] It is a point of pride: It is the pioneers who take the greatest risks, do the work to learn as they go, and reap the greatest reward. “It’s the trailblazers who move West.” [29]

The image of the trailblazing pioneer is revealing and allows for a brief resituating of a few key points often mentioned about the project: gentrification, risk, leadership, zeal, and dissent. First, the DTP decision makers, from Tony Hsieh downward, almost perfectly exemplify the gentrifying pioneers posited by Neil Smith three decades ago, from the frontiersman attitude of the early settlers to the prerequisite debasement of the existing territory and its inhabitants as wild, uncivilized, and in need of outsiders’ culture. [30] [31] Smith was writing on inner-city gentrification practices observed from the 1960s into the ‘80s, and while the imposed culture is different, the arrogance and condescension suggest that these “novice urban planners” could have benefitted greatly from examining those who have previously attempted similar “fixes.” This history is too recent to have been forgotten so quickly.

Smith’s analysis goes on to describe the redifferentiation of urban space by capital through this gentrifying practice. When viewed through this lens, the pioneering adventure fantasy rhetoric falls apart, and DTP’s projected image seems nothing more than the result of a well-financed Peter Pan Syndrome, a crafted delusion of innocence, and a childish game of “Cowboys and Indians” played out in public with real experiences of con-

[23] The scope of this essay does not allow for a full discussion of the relationship between the public sector’s planning capabilities and the work of the DTP. Suffice it to say that municipal decision makers have cooperatively relinquished what power they have to shape the development’s goals toward the priorities set by zoning, and the leverage usually offered by public financing mechanisms is mooted by Hsieh’s private fortune. Earlier this year, Las Vegas planning director Flinn Fagg was quoted as saying “The Downtown Project does things that are a little unusual sometimes, so we have to try to fit our code around that” to the city’s mayor Carolyn Goodman. From Goodman: “Whenever [Hsieh] needs anything, I’m here” (Komenda, “Is Tony Hsieh downtown Las Vegas’ Savior or Conqueror?”). Further, public participation in decision making is regulated at DTP’s private discretion. To date, I have found no discussions of formal community benefits agreements—only the “community benefits” envisioned and espoused by DTP.

[24] In 2010, Tony Hsieh published *Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose*, which spurred a corporate-culture movement and subsequent business. In many ways, *Delivering Happiness* is built upon the Zappos focus on customer service as its basis. When broadened beyond the scope of the sale and delivery of goods, this model maintains a fundamentally transactional definition of that which constitutes “happy,” whether a happy person, a happy people, or a happy city. See Tony Hsieh, *Delivering Happiness: A Path to Profits, Passion, and Purpose* (New York: Business Plus, 2010). And *Delivering Happiness*, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.deliveringhappiness.com>.

[25] Quoted in Timothy Pratt, “What Happens in Brooklyn Moves to Vegas,” *New York Times Magazine* (October 19, 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/21/magazine/what-happens-in-brooklyn-moves-to-vegas.html>.

[26] Brad Stone, “Las Vegas: Startup City,” *Bloomberg Business Week* (February 2, 2012), <http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/las-vegas-startup-city-02022012.html>.

[27] There is likely nothing “simple” about this mapping, and it carries extreme consequences for cities and their inhabitants. Beyond existing models of the relationship between urbanism and labor and beyond the establishment of our consumer society, consider the newfound tendency for architects to refer to people as “users,” a term generally applied to those who unwittingly produce data such that their consumption activities may be targeted. The conflation of urban planning and technology-business design suggests a city choreographed by the logic of the push notification.

[28] Quoted in Sara Corbett, “How Zappos CEO Turned Las Vegas into a Startup Fantasyland,” *Wired* (January 21, 2014), : <http://www.wired.com/2014/01/zappos-tony-hsieh-las-vegas/>.

[29] Will Young quoted in Bowles, “Downtown Las Vegas Is the Great American Techtopia.”

[30] Neil Smith, “Gentrification, the Frontier, and the Restructuring of Urban Space” in Susan S. Fainstein and Scott Cambell (Eds.) *Readings in Urban Theory Third Edition* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 229–246.



Simultaneously Wall Street and Main Street, the downtown project is a New Urbanist-corporate campus-urban enclave.

quest and casualty. DTP is not an organization of pioneers, and Hsieh is no cowboy. At best, they are the analogy's railroad magnates facilitating the expansion of the edge into the frontier from the less risky comfort of their offices. More appropriately, however, they are the banks and insurance companies underwriting the endeavor. The monetary investment is great but their gamble pales in comparison to that of the pioneers wagering material and human bets on the outcome. His risk-to-reward ratio is solidly calculated, and Tony Hsieh's investment strategy is neither particularly visionary nor utopian. It is only the latest incarnation of a longer history in urbanism: the financialization of space and of others' risk within that space.

Third, whether DTP is simplified as *pioneer* or *banker*, this gentrification-settlement model only succeeds if others follow. Fiercely loyal and devoted, Hsieh's band of followers—comprised of friends, colleagues, employees, supporters, and collaborators—are repeatedly and unfailingly described as a cult. [32] [33] Yet Tony Hsieh is not only reluctant to lead, he seems to outright refuse the responsibility when publicly pressed. Instead, Hsieh and the DTP leadership have authorized themselves to make decisions with influence over the whole of a city while declining the accountability concomitant with such authority. [34] In the context of an urban strategy dependent on the many who have migrated to Vegas, this lacking leadership points to a sinister application of holacracy onto the city. [35] Holacratic structures are designed to maximize the rate of innovation by maximizing experimentation unencumbered by the fear of failure or its consequences. In an urban setting, this amounts to an irresponsible disregard for the public effects of possible failures as well as the inevitable negative externalities generated even by possible successes.

The existence of a cult following should not suggest that there are no voices of dissent in downtown Las Vegas. Until very recently, most of these dissenting voices have come from locals rather than those who moved to Las Vegas to be part of the downtown revitalization, whether receiving direct investment or not. Some are weary of the leadership's inexperience. Many feel pushed aside or out, discarded by gentrification. Several fear the repercussions of criticizing the project openly, and very few have exercised their voice along with their name. Others are uncomfortable with the city's reliance on one man's decision to continue his investment. Upon hearing,

[31] It has been suggested that the project seems "a lot like moral gentrification," suggesting yet another self-contradictory form the initiative takes (Stern 2013). Sadly, however, this suggestion tells more of our romanticized and idealist image of young tech entrepreneurs and our faith that those with the ambition to change the world might make it better by default. The Downtown Project's recent stance has been to claim that morality as a basic circumstantial given rather than a goal so as to ensure that not achieving "moral" outcomes cannot be confused with failing to achieve a stated goal. For example, DTP's website now describes the project as "a startup entrepreneurial venture that happens to also have good intentions" (Downtown Project, "ROC: What Is ROC?")

[32] (Not to mention the throngs of admirers throughout the reaches of the Internet.)

[33] At the time of writing, a Google search for the terms "tony hsieh" and "cult" yielded a little more than 80,000 results. Under the present circumstances, I am far more troubled knowing that the combination of "tony hsieh" and "kool-aid" is just as frequent.

[34] Cf. Notes 6 and 23.

[35] The jury is still out on whether Hsieh's holacratic Zappos re-org will prove any more effective than any other management structure, but there is no question it requires a deeply ingrained institutional hierarchy for any chance of success, one that is felt if not seen. The unilateral restructuring of a billion-dollar enterprise toward something that minimizes the appearance of its hierarchy and thus the clarity of accountability requires on one hand the existence of a unilateral decision maker and, on the other, a clear understanding of the pathways for incentivizing credit if not blame. For more, see Gregory Ferenstein, "Zappos just abolished bosses. Inside tech's latest management craze," Vox (July 11, 2014), <http://www.vox.com/2014/7/11/5876235/silicon-valleys-latest-management-craze-holacracy-explained>. For a definition and description of "holacracy" see HolacracyOne LLC. Holacracy: Purposeful Organization through Social Technology, accessed October 20, 2014. <http://holacracy.org/>.

secondhand, that Hsieh is committed to Las Vegas for the long term, one developer commented, “That’s nice to know. But maybe you’re the only one who knows that. We don’t know a thing about what’s going on.” [36] This is the palpable and precarious uncertainty produced by Schrödinger’s box, of urbanism by private dictate. Walking along Fremont, I felt no active excitement, spontaneity, or curiosity, but rather the growth of a scripted narrative and a correspondingly enforced restraint. [37] Even superficially, the developing streetscape’s lively mixture of land use and style—call it, maybe, the “Millennial Serendipitous Aesthetic”—betrays a defiantly unmixed agenda for a similarly unmixed audience of users. Unable to inspire confidence in investors outside his circle or empower voices that are not his own, Hsieh’s project cannot lead to a self-sustaining city.

For now, however, the project is not threatened by its relatively quiet dissent, and despite recent public setbacks and tragedies, DTP’s work is moving along at a rate far faster than most cities might want to see change. This pace, like the rest of the process, is a product of its visionary’s developing culture. [38] Consider Nellie Bowles’ description: “The startup movement is isolationist and idealistic, with a sense that entrepreneurs can build their own, better communities; that founders need to be in a conducive, unfettered environment to innovate; and, most of all, that progress is achievable only by dramatic disruption rather than incremental change. Taken to its logical conclusion, this means building entirely new cities.” [39]

We know this story. We know the story of an isolationist, individualist, and entrepreneurial movement with a persuasive, and somewhat reluctant, leader attracting talent from various places to an unregulated environment somewhere out West. We have all read it or heard it: The fictional story hypothesizing massively disruptive and intentional change and the building of one new city before a new society, so as to “fix the world.” That novel’s pioneer settlement is a prototype, enclave, and refuge, until the day its community members decide they can return to the world. But Las Vegas is not fictional, and the complications of public urbanism are both real and undefiable. Soon, I think, the Downtown Project will need to consider openness, integration, and perhaps even a nondigital relationship with the meaningfully public world. Until then and for the first time, I have an answer to “Who is John Galt?” His name is Tony Hsieh.

[36] Quoted in Schoenmann, “Joe Downtown: Gentrification or Positive Progress?”

[37] There are a growing handful of descriptions like this. One of the best: “It’s like a scene in *Aliens* where they try to imagine how humans act.” (a visitor quoted in Bowles, “Downtown Las Vegas Is the Great American Techtopia.”).

[38] See Alison Griswold, “The Dark Side of Techtopia,” *Slate.com* (October 2, 2014), http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2014/10/02/tony_hsieh_and_the_downtown_project_the_dark_side_of_a_las_vegas_techtopia.html. And Nellie Bowles, “The Downtown Project Suicides: Can the Pursuit of Happiness Kill You?” *Re/code* (September 29, 2014) <http://recode.net/2014/10/01/the-downtown-project-suicides-can-the-pursuit-of-happiness-kill-you/>.

[39] Bowles, “Downtown Las Vegas Is the Great American Techtopia.”