Re-covery

A Thesis Presented for
the Master of Architecture
Degree
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Dedication

To all those who have found the courage to face the harsh realities of their past and push forward towards personal improvement and recovery of their lives and to the ones who haven't yet.

To my grandmother Anni Kay who's dreams of becoming an Architect were shattered by a war torn Germany.

To my great grandfather Albert Prasch who's indomitable spirit and survival drive as a prisoner of war in the Siberian mines during World War 2 has taught me to never give up.

To my father Walter M. Manis who embodies the terms 'hard work, persistence, and determination.'

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Abstract

This thesis concerns itself with the recovery of the history of Las Vegas, the effects of historic knowledge upon the cities present identity, and how focus on its past can effect individuals in its community and visitors from afar at present. Further it concerns itself with the quality of living, or lack thereof, in the surrounding neighborhoods of the thesis' design site, The Old Mormon Fort, and seeks to make a healthy contribution to its community. The Old Mormon fort is the earliest site of modern day human settlement in Las Vegas, and in many ways has been the foundation for its modern development. It is therefore through the use of its historic Geographic location and Geological condition that attention is brought to the importance of its locality and place in history, but through a re-appropriated use of this historic relic to give it back to the community that surrounds it, and with that validate the importance of its community to the future development of Las Vegas. The underlying motivation in this project has been to test how architecture can affect a community and society as a whole, and where its limitations are.

The design solution is heavily site driven. A program and/or architectural typology were not chosen before the site was thoroughly physically inspected, historically and archeologically investigated. Several historic and archeological documents, all listed in the bibliography, were consulted for the better understanding of the site. Numerous books, museum displays, film documentaries, guided tours were consulted, and interviews with individuals knowledgeable of Las Vegas' and/or its history were conducted.

Over a half docent visits to Las Vegas over the past decade allowed the author a physical connection with the city, and gave ample opportunity to communicate with party seeking visitors, but more importantly also with its local community, including the homeless and many individuals in recovery from various addictions. All these personal impressions, analysis, and information collections were all combined in a very personal document and experience of a wonderfully mystical, uniquely beautiful, but also very troubling place on the map of the United States of America.

Preface

This thesis is about recovery.
For one, the recovery of the architectural and cultural history of Las Vegas, a city that continues to erase built icons of it past in celebrated fashion. This recovery is driven by a physical archeological exploration of Las Vegas' first site of modern human settlement, unearthing and/or uncovering the earliest remains of the cities history found mostly below grade or covered with earthen material above grade. With this action I am seeking to counteract the trend to redefine Las Vegas without consideration of its past, but instead to allow its architectural and cultural history to have an influence in the shaping of its present and future identity.
Secondly, this thesis is very much about human recovery. It concerns itself with the impoverished state of the design sites surrounding neighborhoods and living conditions that locals on the lower social scale inhabit. It is the intent to draw attention to the dark shadow of lacking economic, mental and physical well being that the 'served space' manifest in "The Strip" casts on the 'servant quarters' of the city and its inhabitants.
This human recovery component is to a large degree of metaphoric nature, comparing the archeological exploration of the design site to a therapy session, in which the underlying motivations in unhealthy patterns of living are explored. In a sense: an excavation and re-arrangement of the mental layers of the human psyche.
The metaphoric statements, however, relate back to the physical experience of the tectonic and stereotomic components of the architecture. The visitor is physically engaged with the metaphoric statements manifest in the built environment as his/her body and mind is guided vertically and horizontally through its layers, eventually leading them to participate with its program.
With my design solution I am endeavoring to create an opportunity for a shift in an individual's awareness, perhaps an awakening, by drawing attention to the existence of relevant information present, beyond the immediately obvious. In the individual's health and consciousness I see the building block for a healthy society, for a sustainable Las Vegas.
I am seeking to counteract the attitude of 'The Strips' transient culture, to see Las Vegas as a place to use for their pleasure, and essentially abuse with their careless escapism. Instead I desire to lend it the dignity and respect it deserves as the home and livelihood of its local community and as a beautifully natural desert ecological environment.

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Chapter 1: INITIAL PROBLEMS, QUESTIONS AND DEFINITIONS

Architecture and Societal Change

The interest in the thesis I have been developing lies rooted in the reasons why I decided to become an architect in the first place. I chose the discipline of Architecture as my future profession, seeing a potential to have a positive influence on our struggling natural environment and to design the appropriate individualized human habitats in which people can live healthy, happy, and fulfilled lives. People, however, don't live inside a vacuum. Other individuals or society as a collective whole will sooner or later influence their quality of life. Therefore without a collective larger-scale effort, one of civic action combined with the appropriate architectural manifestation, the architects limits are quickly reached.

This issue is further emphasized by the study of the various histories of human societal development and architecture. The strong message is delivered that architecture does not change society, but on the contrary, that human societal evolution and underlying cultural shifts are what constituted changes in architectural form and its general development. As Bernard Tschumi wrote in his work Architecture and Contradiction: "No doubt. Architecture and its spaces do not change society..." This of course poses a problem for my idealistic and utopian motivations. Concerning this idealism, I pull myself up on the words with which Tschumi continues the above quoted statement "...but through architecture and the understanding of its effect, we can accelerate processes of change under way." To expand upon the power of architecture that Tschumi eluded to, a quick look a Kurt W. Forster's essay Monuments to the City is encouraging. Concerning the panorama from the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France Forster stated that it "not only offered a new view of the city, but also gave rise to a new image of it. To the point where the tower itself became the Image of Paris." In this example, in which the perception of a city and the experience of its surroundings was drastically altered, the 'ability' of Architecture to influence human perception through a single 'monument' is illustrated. It introduces a tool for the architect to shift focus, raise awareness, and alter the view even of a whole city. While apparently there exists a certain limitation to what Architecture can and can't do, recognizing this potential has me exited.

Since the first step in human change, is the awareness that a modification of action is even necessary or desirable, I want to see my architecture as a vehicle in this process. The perception of the experiential qualities of space, site, and build form and its effects of on the human psyche therefore, will enter heavily into my thesis argument. While I am not expecting my design solution to have as profound of an effect on the whole city of Las Vegas as the Eiffel Tower did on Paris, I shall be satisfied with touching society one person at a time.

Las Vegas Defined

Since the discussion of site particulars and its context are addressed later in the thesis, certain terms that will be used before this portion need definition. Since my thesis frequently criticizes 'Las Vegas', I find it necessary so as to respect its 'local' community to explain my understanding. Within the confines of this paper and the discussion of my thesis I distinct between several major components of Las Vegas by their context, overall feel, physical and experiential

qualities and manifestations. These are:

1. Las Vegas the IncorporatedTownship (which does not include "The Strip")
2. Downtown Las Vegas with its Fremont Street Experience (within the Township of Las Vegas)
3. The Strip (located South of the Township of Las Vegas)
4. Las Vegas the People (as formed by its local long term community in various neigh borhoods)
5. Las Vegas the People (as formed by its ever changing newly arriving residents)
6. Las Vegas the Escapist Mentality (the "party like there is no tomorrow" attitude largely manifest but not limited to The Strip and Fremont Street Experience)
7. Las Vegas the Escapists (formed largely, but not limited to, by the almost 40000 million visitors who's majority seek Las Vegas out for its entertainment and surreal qualities)
8. Las Vegas the Homeless, the Addicts, the Broken

I am aware that there is much more to the Las Vegas Valley then described above. It is not my interest to describe the present conditions without any gaps, but inspire a new condition.

It is important to me for the reader to know, that when I speak in the context of this thesis in a criticizing tone of 'Las Vegas' it is not directed toward 'Las Vegas the People' as defined by its long term community, nor the 'Township of Las Vegas' or newly arrived population (unless specifically mentioned), nor the Homeless, Addicts or Suffering individuals. All other components listed above are included into 'one' Las Vegas. This treatment of combining these physical elements with their distinct differences, but also combining mental predispostions with material manifestations was not made without a certain disconcernment. Especially since the major focus of my paper is to filter out and establish an identity. This treatment was done with the focus on what connected these various elements not with focus on what there obvious differences were. One of these strong connections is addressed in the next paragraph.

The Escapist Mentality of Las Vegas

Las Vegas at night is at certain moments in time the physical and experiential manifestation of the hallucinations of an addict's high. A colorful dream come reality in which escapists of all levels, sick and/or 'healthy' amuse themselves on a shared adult playground, where the addict can mix and mingle without detection. It is a place that is named after a deed that does exist there, for "Sin City's" lights blind the attempt even of God to pass judgment. A city of contrast with limitless possibilities and of total loss. An environment built on the loss of others, but at the same time made for the purpose of their escapist gain. A world that through the cognitive engagement with the layers of its fantastic experiential qualities defines a higher level of disassociating from reality, it allows for the short-term experience of a different image of self. It is a storehouse of secrets, a place where societal norms are skewed, and where one's identity can temporarily transform into anything desired.

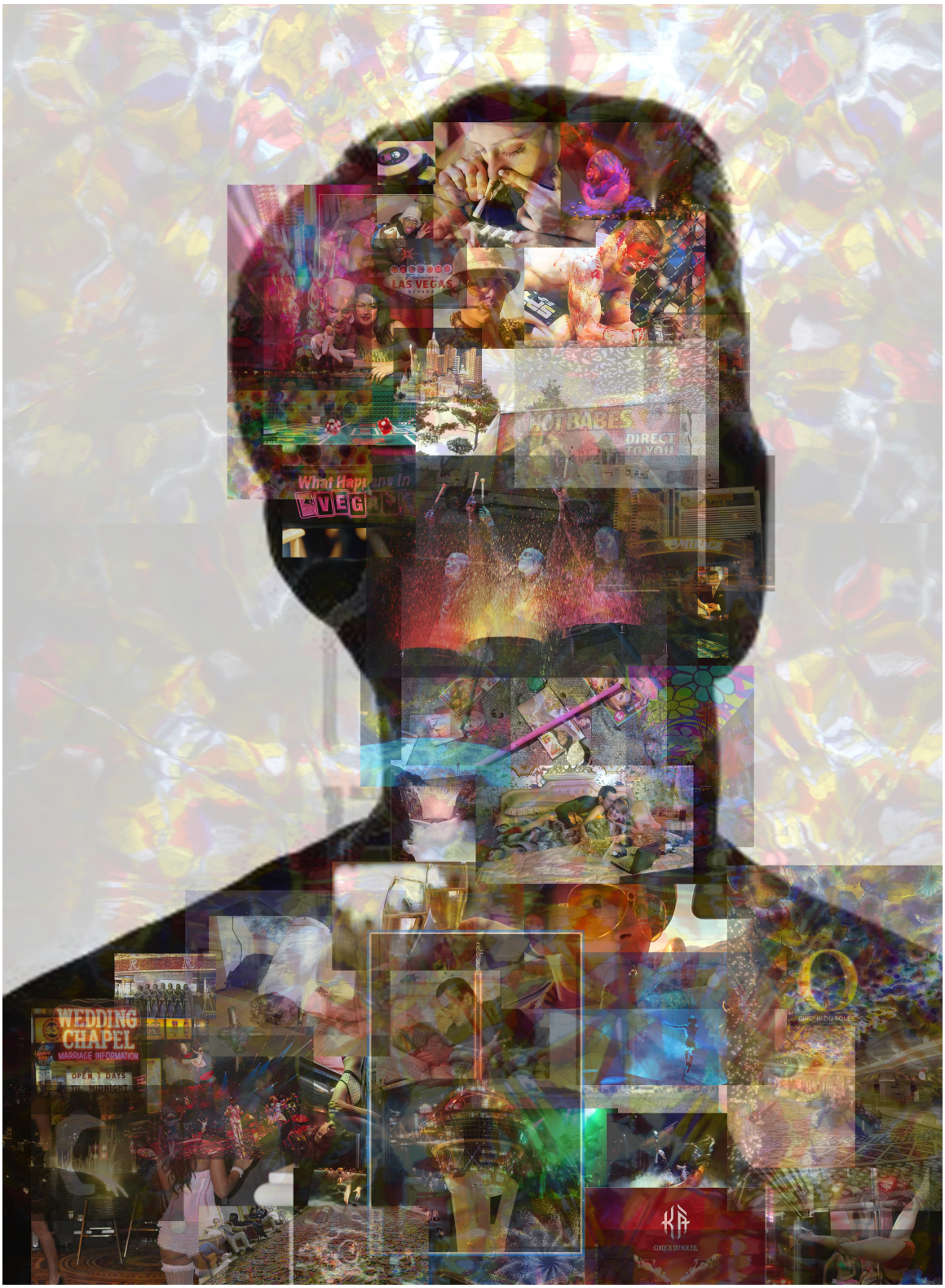

Figure 1.1. Cognitive Layers, photo collage by Mark Christopher Manis, images from Google image search, October 2010

Chapter 2: THE ARGUMENT

Thesis Statement

This Thesis is about the recovery of the architectural and cultural history of Las Vegas, and the use of this physical and intellectual inheritance in the reshaping of its future identity. It is also very much about human recovery manifest in the metaphors of the physical qualities of the proposed Architecture, and connected to the re-appropriated use of an important historic site. In fact this thesis links the physical archeological remnants of the city with the fragments of a recovering individuals past, and re-shaping them into a new shared identity.

Supporting Argument for Thesis Statement

There are four major components that lead to the development of my particular thesis topic: One, simply my interests and fascination with the city of Las Vegas Nevada and its surreal qualities. Second, architectures potential in facilitating and encouraging personal recovery and change, as described above. Third, Las Vegas' implementation of Architecture as a sign with its abilities to raise awareness and to communicate. Fourth, my concern about the city's loss of historically and culturally connected identity and its citizens.

My thesis development has been from the beginning very site driven. My personal experiences on several visits to "Sin City", which varied from time to time in degrees of sinfulness, have taught me the power of the experiential environment that architects and designers have created there. Las Vegas has managed to communicate a very alluring message, attracting almost 40 million visitors per year, its advertising campaigns filled with glamorous depictions of its environment. These fantastic and surreal expressions of form and space accented by carefully chosen lighting strategies, encapsulate the verbal message conveyed in TV, web, and magazine adds, that the same consequences that might arise out of ones actions anywhere else, do not apply here. What results is a prevailing escapist mentality, strongly driven by that permeates Las Vegas and becomes its very essence, its identity. On first look this attitude might appear harmless. Unfortunately, however, we have in this type of environment human casualties, both metaphorically and literally, and a loss of local identity perpetuated by a transient culture dominated Las Vegas.

To what degree Las Vegas, or the mentality communicated, makes people sick or invites sick people is beyond the scope of my thesis. My research shows, however, that a large numbers of people with gambling-, alcohol-, sex-, overeating-, and drug addictions live in Las Vegas, most of them not in recovery but rather encouraged in their path by the Las Vegas spirit. The homeless who have lost everything and are still losing, sleep in cardboard boxes, make shift shelters, tent communities, and under underpasses, just a couple of blocks North of the downtown glitter gulch and anywhere in the streets right off of the strip. Only these two examples already show the need for some kind of shift in perception and action, some sort recovery.

In addition to this mental and physical health component Las Vegas has developed into an unsustainable environment. The springs for example that made 'The Meadows' (Las Vegas translated from Spanish) a natural oasis seemingly destined for human population, have long been exhausted due to their overuse. In Las Vegas we have built environment and mentality

that encourages acting careless, where responsibility and stewardship of the natural environment are so desperately needed. While its geographic location, population growth, and local attitude towards the management of the regions natural resources are a strong factor, the fact that Las Vegas has to satisfy the desires of almost 40 million guests with amenities not naturally quenchable in a desert climate are a significant component in its exhaustion. Once more the locale is altered by mindset of its visitors and causes a loss of identity.

Above-mentioned issues and problems combined with an almost ironically acting glamorous backdrop of neon lights and sparkle make Las Vegas as a truly surreal place, one that influences people beyond its physical location. Whether Las Vegas' transients are bringing a tidbit of Las Vegas style escapism back to their home soil, whether the contents of Las Vegas' advertising campaigns are finding eager replication in other localities, or whether Hollywood film making encourages overindulgent partying with a light and humorous take on peoples escapades in Las Vegas, Las Vegas' mentality finds adaption world wide.

One thing is guaranteed, however, that 40 million visitors and 360000 new resident by next year will have impressed their expectations and preconceived ideas upon a city that for the good of its residence needs to be more than an adult playground for the rest of the world. "What happens here stay's here"? My concern is not so much what is left behind in a metaphoric sense, but much more what is being taken. Resources and identity!

Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Cognitive Research and Identity Crisis

My design investigation has been strongly fueled by personal experiences and observations of others. The concentrated effort and a more systematic approach in research began about 2 years ago for both major topics of my thesis: Las Vegas and Recovery. On a visit to Las Vegas, my sixth at the time, with a revised version of Learning from Las Vegas in hand, I began retracing the steps the authors had taken over 30 years prior. My intent was to experience Las Vegas through the eyes and lens of my predecessors and to determine to what degree Las Vegas still fit the analysis of Robert Venturi, Denise Brown, and Steven Isenhour. In a sense I journeyed back in time to explore to what degree Las Vegas had changed. I took numerous images from the same angles and camera placement as the authors, and compiled a before and after directory, and documented the particular changes. It did not take long to realize that this city had undergone significant changes. In some areas a literal metamorphosis of components that originally defined it as unique had occurred. *Learning from Las Vegas* described the resorts on "The Strip" as having the signage on the street, then the parking between signage and building. In contrast significant signage is now often found on the hotels themselves sitting further back from Las Vegas Blvd, and therefore more legible in the vertically expanding built environment, whereas the parking is now almost exclusively located in parking garages behind the hotels. A change more important to my thesis, however, is a certain loss of quaintness and charm that was replaced by a cold and plastic feel in the architecture and branding, in a sense personal touch was replaced by a corporately infused character.

Further I studied and documented the views one would experience from a car, the way a lot of Las Vegas visitors love to experience the city's nightly glamour, while driving from North Las Vegas to the Southern part of the Strip and back. With this exploration it became clear how 'The Strip' manages to oppose its character on the rest of the community, and with which features it infuses its lure on the rest of the world, while the surrounding areas struggle for attention. While approaching 'The Strip' coming from North on Las Vegas Blvd one experiences intense contrasts. The small aperture of the car window's glazing and the relatively short opportunities one has to get visual impressions while concentrating on traffic and driving, further amplifies this experience. The northern part of Las Vegas Blvd is lined with a large number of vacant sandy lots, buildings in disrepair, unattractive retail and office buildings, low quality housing and several cemeteries. The color is grey, the built environment is low in verticality (especially in contrast to the massive hotels one can see from miles away), the materiality is dull, and the feeling is quite simply of 'death'. 'The Strip' in contrast represents the polar opposite. To no surprise one would rather be recognized for neon lights, double facades, baroque infusion, and a little craziness then with characterless, boring, and simply ugly features. 'The Strip' has won in the popularity contest of a proposed identity.

Above-mentioned focused research approaches allowed me to become analytically in tune with the experiential aspects that the city offers. I registered mentally how Las Vegas was affecting my psyche, senses, and emotions. In a sense I was watching myself experience the city noting consciously (whenever I managed not to be mesmerized) how its entertainment, restaurants, architectural pomp and glamour was affecting me, and how it was seemingly affect-

ing others. The conclusion is quite simple. It is very difficult to be yourself in this city. I desired to be someone a little different, just a better, more intense, more attractive, more successful me, but I also desired to take the opportunity to act wilder and crazier than I normally would. I desired to take on an identity that would not fit my way of life back home.

All along my research certainly combined a more traditional scholastic approach, reading a plethora of written material about Las Vegas (which usually is heavily accompanied by images), but also through the viewing of documentaries and movies with Las Vegas as the backdrop or main subject. With assistance of this research and my own record, I compiled an 'experiential log' (not included in this document), in which I documented the qualities and ideas represented by small thumbnail images and text taken from quotes of the authors I read. This log illustrated how Las Vegas never exhausts the interest of media, filmmakers and writers, who lend Las Vegas an identity often through a sensationalized and exaggerated depiction of it. It is my belief, however, that it is this exaggerated Las Vegas that visitors then become to expect when they arrive, and then essentially create themselves.
As to the research on human recovery I took a strong 'hands-on' approach. I gained insight into the struggles a person in recovery from addictions or trapped in unhealthy behaviors experiences, how they got to that point, and how they were coming back out of it. I have had numerous conversations and attended meetings with members of Alcoholics Anonymous, Sexaholics Anonymous, Sex Addicts Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Overeaters Anonymous. I also investigated the various places where homeless people find shelter and interviewed homeless people who were trapped by addiction and mental illness. In addition I consulted reading material on the subject of human recovery and interviewed treatment center directors, psychologists, sociologists, and social workers. I conclude out of this extensive research that nobody struggles with identity as much as an addict, maybe even more so the recovering addict. Addicts are escapists on an elevated level. Usually unable to cope with an unhealthy past and traumatic experience in the present, they seek a numbing of their emotions and an escape with unhealthy coping mechanisms. Their personality changes through a self-centered obsession and/or altered by the chemicals they consume and/or that their body produces. Their intoxication makes it unable for them to reason, have compassion and love for self and others, and therefore an almost animalistic state is reached. A city like Las Vegas, that deals with a drug and alcohol abuse and behavioral oriented addiction epidemic, will have many of such individuals struggling with their identity, mental, and physical health.
To build healthy communities these issues have to be addressed. It is not only an issue of the creation of more and more varied treatment opportunities for such individuals, but more importantly it is about preventing damaging events in an individuals life that eventually lead to unhealthy coping. This has to be a societal concern and effort. It's about the raising of the quality of mental and physical health on a larger scale. This sort of focus seems more difficult in an environment like Las Vegas that encourages and even encorses escapism and irresponsible behavior. Let's achieve a healthy identity.

Chapter 4: CITY NEIGBORHOOD AND SITE

Distorted Identity

When leaving the car rental annex near the Las Vegas McCarran airport, one is told: "three rights and you are on 'The Strip', assuming it to be the reason the visitor came in the first place. And the fact is that the majority of the over 30000 million visitors that arrive there each year, only ever experience or care about the neon of "The Strips" façades or the lights of the interior of its casinos. The location of the airport at the very south end of "The Strip" makes it literally unnecessary to actually ever venture off of this entertainment-oriented axis. As I have done myself, one can actually be fixated on the unusual Architecture of "The Strip" already through the window of the plain while flying in, focus on its iconic neon signs and built manifestations as one drives directly out of the airport onto "The Strip", engage in a surreal 24 hour experience driven by fantastic shows, entertainment, the pursuit of instant riches, the indulgence in the stimulation of all the senses, just to head right back out mesmerized by the very same things without ever having paid attention to anything to anything else. Even the sun that is prevalent throughout most of the year, becomes merely an amenity to large numbers of visitors basking at the plethora of pools at resorts and hotels, disconnected from the fact that they are in the middle of the Southern Nevada desert, a place that was shaped by nature over millions of years. This fact, introduces a strong concern for the realization of its complete identity, and therefore its true appreciation and the appropriate use of its natural resources that the visitor simply isn't concerned about. If a visitor does not experience the actual 'place' of Las Vegas, including its natural beauty, cultural diversity, rich history, and 'urban' qualities, he can't truly care for a place. In fact therefore this city or lets say its amenities manifest in its built environment could be transplanted anywhere else. This makes its actual geographic location and its history completely unimportant. The visitor seeks out the 'benefits' not the place itself. In fact the vertical expanse of "The Strip's" built environment and scalar variance to its surroundings acts as a wall/a shield to its adjoining context, leaving the neighborhoods often physically but for sure metaphorically in its shadow. Interesting is that the interior of the hotels and casinos operate on the same principle. One is always shielded from various things. The visitor is offered a façade and ambiance, behind which a maze of servant spaces ensures its clean appearance, which is created to evoke a certain detachment from reality, the reality of physical location and time. This captures my first troubling impressions.

Another reason why Las Vegas needs recovery of its identity, is the fact that what is generally known as Las Vegas, really isn't. If you asked most anyone in the world to describe Las Vegas, you would more than likely be overwhelmed with a sea of physical descriptions concerning its 'fantastic' architecture and neon lights, 24/7 amenities offered such as gambling, dining, and entertainment, and hear slogans such as "Sin City" and "what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." And all these descriptions would aptly apply to "The Strip." Yes, "The Strip": an approximately 4.5 mile resort hotel and casino filled portion of Las Vegas Blvd., stretching from just South of Mandalay Bay Resort up to the Stratosphere Tower just passed Sahara Avenue. And yet, the Strip isn't in Las Vegas. Legally it lies in unincorporated parts of the townships of Paradise and Henderson, which are both South of Las Vegas. In fact Las Vegas begins, with a slight overlap from Sahara Avenue to the Stratosphere Tower, where "The Strip" ends.

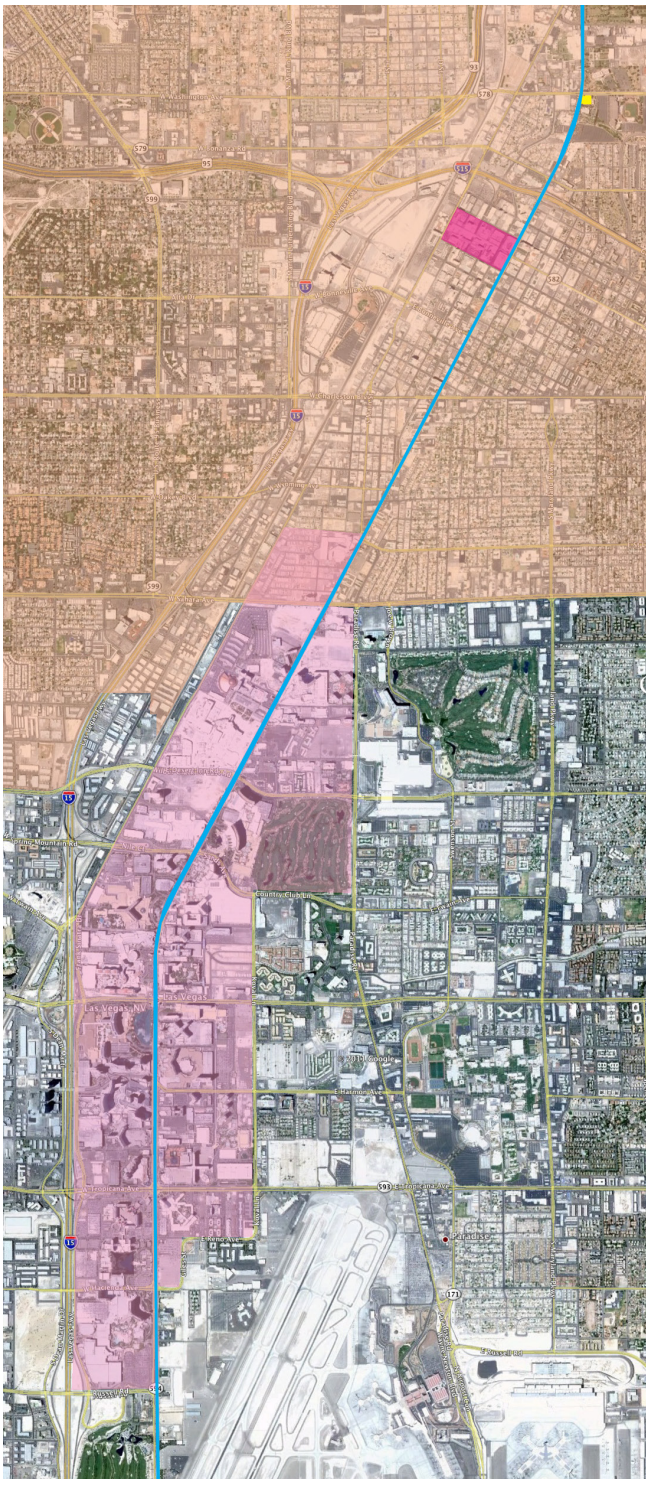

Figure 4.1. Las Vegas and its Context, diagram by author, image taken by Google Earth, April 2010

As a matter of fact the only place in Las Vegas that even resembles "The Strip," is its center of entertainment restricted to a few blocks in Downtown Las Vegas, now called the Fremont Experience. Of course it must be said that this is where the neon facades, casinos, and burlesque entertainment had their beginning in the Valley. Further, the downtown's revamping efforts that included adding a giant overhead dome that is lit with digital shows and music entertainment, has put this portion of Las Vegas back into the mainstream advertising, and show "The Strip" and "Fremont Experience" together in the same campaigns. And yet, what concerns me about Las Vegas is the fact that the rest of the world does not know its true identity. It would be similar to calling Disney World 'Orlando' because of its close proximity to the city. How misleading to the public and how demeaning to its population, who does not live behind 'plastic' facades and amongst roller coaster rides, but instead in a real city! Of course there is financial interest involved, and business owners in the actual 'Las Vegas' don't complain about being seen as one with "The Strip" through their shared name. And yet, this thesis is about the identity and dignity of the city and its inhabitants, not about financial gain. As a matter of fact while the profits made in the casinos and gambling industry have allowed the rapid development of "The Strip" and on a slightly lesser degree of the actual Las Vegas, they are therefore after all places that are built on the losses of other. One may want to accept that as a byproduct of our capitalistic society, but what can't be accepted is the loss of culture, community health, and identity.

One more area of concern is the loss of identity through the rapid growth of the city. Just within 170 years the population of the area has grown from a few Mormon settlers in 1850's to about 1.5 million at present, and daily an average of a 1000 new comers call Las Vegas 'home'.

What results is often the individuals social disconnection as a stranger in a new place that lacks true identity. Or, on the other side, the reinforcement of old communities, often of ethnic nature and related to their cultural background. This separates and divides them from civically active individuals who have already formed existing communities that are essential for the healthy development of the city.

The Old Mormon Fort: Location and Qualities of the Design Site

The site of 'The Old Mormon Fort' is located about 1 mile north of Downtown Las Vegas at Fremont Experience, and approximately 3 miles from the northern end of 'The Strip' in the Incorporated township of Las Vegas (see Figure 4.1.) on the corner of Las Vegas Blvd and Washington Ave. It holds its mark at the north end of what Las Vegas has dubbed the 'Cultural Corridor' of its city. Other components of this cultural corridor is the 'Neon Museum', the 'Reed Whipple Cultural Center', LIED Discovery Museum and Children's Library (including a public library), the Las Vegas Natural History Museum, and a AAA baseball stadium with convention center facilities. This cultural corridor stretches for about 2 city blocks on which it undergoes an approximately 50 ft elevation change (certainly one of the steepest inclines one will see in the city) and is located at a part of Las Vegas Blvd that sees quite heavy automobile traffic and crosses a major intersection. This cultural corridor can be seen as the northern Gateway to the action and excitement of Downtown Las Vegas and 'The Strip', while for itself it struggles for recognition. When entering this area one is distracted by the developing building



Figure 4.2. Attraction Magnets and Barriers, diagram by author, image taken by Google Earth, April 2011

skyline, the variation in topography, and the heavy traffic, leading one to pretty much ignore most of its built environment. The Old Mormon Fort site in particular, while further 'camouflaged' behind several good size trees, vegetation, and a relatively closely spaced black fence certainly is mostly overlooked. This stretch of Las Vegas Blvd is also defined by a large number of homeless people who travel by foot to downtown, the library, the to the North located shelters.

The Old Mormon Fort itself is an approximately 3 acre large site with sparse vegetation in its center and unusually pink sand as its groundcover. To the South (see Figure 4.5.) there are several 30ft plus trees and the Natural History Museum as a major barrier. To the West (see Figure 4.4.) there several slightly smaller trees, but in additon the above mentioned fence and vegetation. The East is bordered by the Visitor's Center and the North (see Figure 4.3) by an unsightly wall and natural grade change. The site slopes about 25 ft from West to East a rather subtle incline.

The Old Mormon Fort: Historic Significance of the Site

Las Vegas or as it is translated into English "The Meadows", is an unlikely description for a place in the Southern Nevada desert. And yet it seems as if millions of years of Geological processes predestined this place for human habitation and cultivation. Aquifer fed springs blessed the Las Vegas Valley with water and allowed it to become a natural oasis. It is hard to say how long these springs had been sought out by local Native Americans, but it has been determined that we are talking around 5000 years of human history in the area. Las Vegas and its springs became an important stopping point on the Old Spanish Trail paving human settlement efforts to the West coast. The site of the Old Mormon Fort did not have its own spring, but was supplied with water via the Las Vegas Creek (see Figure 4.6.). The spring feeding the creek, however, was exhausted with most of the other dozen springs in the 1960's (the remaining springs are now managed and protected by the Las Vegas Spring Preserve) and was covered with road construction and finally with the building that now houses the Natural History Museum to the south of the site (see Figure 4.5). This creek became the lifeblood of the site, and together with its geological features invited the first organized modern settlement in the valley in the 1850's. This shall be the important event
for this thesis, since from then on we count the modern day history of the sites and the regions built environment. And it is the importance of the remnants of this human settlement that will be visited in this discussion and celebrated in the design project.

A small group of or Mormon missionaries arrived in 1855 in Las Vegas for the purpose of preaching the gospel of their church to the Native Americans. A fort (not a military operation but instead a protected mission) was designed and constructed not long after their arrival for the protection of the missionaries, their goods, and food resources. The fort measured 150 ft in square and was constructed with two Bastions. There was a gate to the North centered in the wall that opened toward the corral, and a gate to the South on the same axis that opened toward Las Vegas Creek. The fort was constructed out of Adobe (sun dried mud bricks) with a foundation wall (2-3 foot deep) of naturally occurring rocks and stones of the area. The walls varied in height from the south side to the north side, but were somewhere between 10 -14 ft high with their base being 2ft and gradually thinning towards the top.



Intensity of Barriers

Figure 4.3. Design Site's North Barrier, image and diagram by author, December 2010



Figure 4.4. Design Site's West Barrier, image and diagram by author, December 2010



Figure 4.5. Design Site's South Barrier and Design Potential, image and diagram by author, December 2010

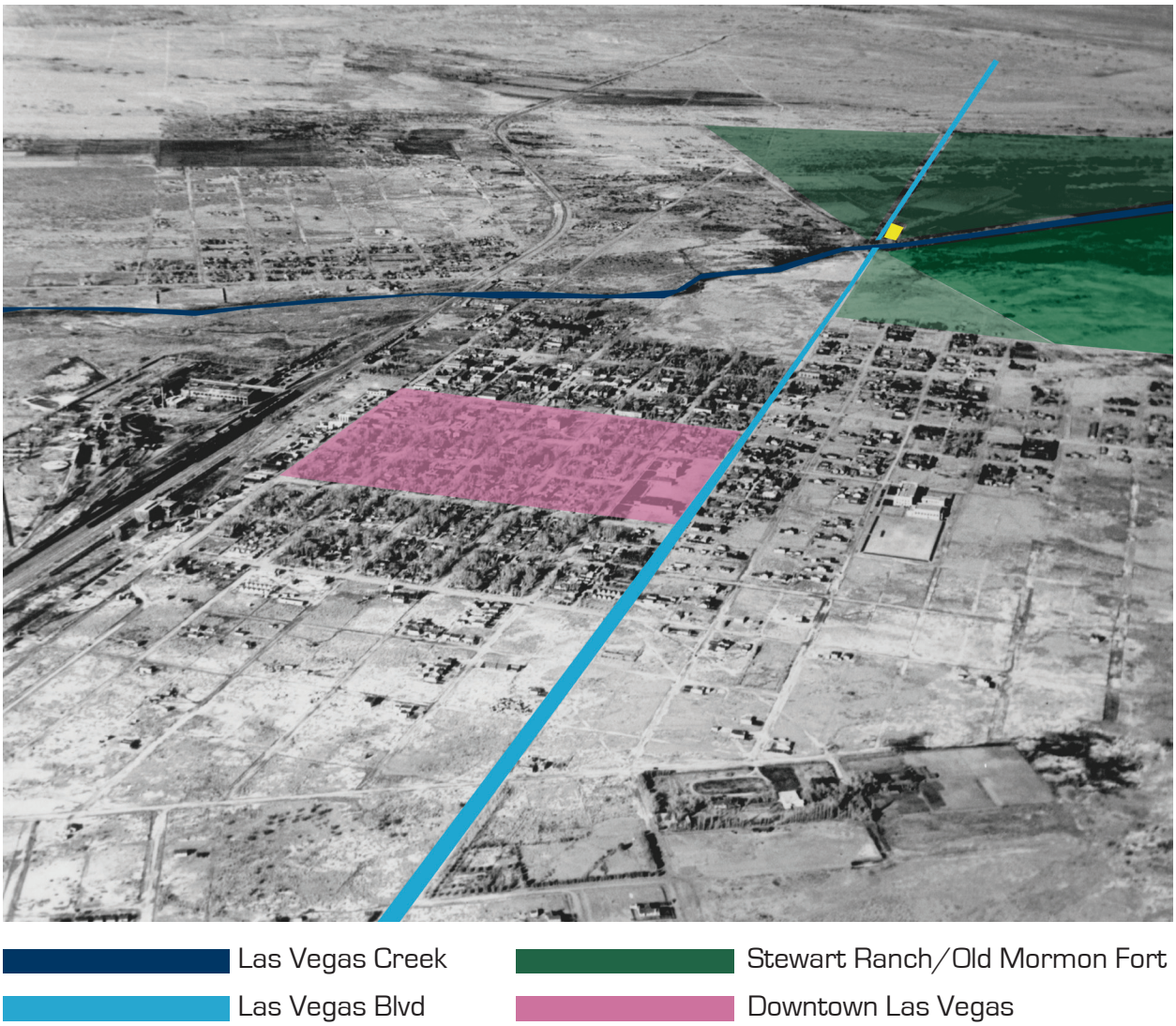

Figure 4.6. Las Vegas Creek and Context around 1900, diagram by author, image scanned from a photocopy at the Old Mormon Fort Archives, with authorization from Scott Egy, December 2007

Initially the mission thrived. Much like individuals arriving in Las Vegas today these missionaries came with particular expectations and goals, but part of their success as the historical record shows, appears to have come from their willingness to interact and learn from the cultures present. There was an exchange of agricultural knowledge between the Indians and the Mormons that apparently benefited both parties. The record shows, however, that some of the problems arose out of cultural differences. For example the different sense of ownership the Natives had in comparison to the settler, led them to 'steal' the crops of the missionaries, leaving them lacking. While these issues were contributors it seemed that desert life, regardless of the existence of water, was just simply taking its toll on the missionaries who eventually abandoned the site. This abandonment would be bad news for the architectural inheritance. The fort fell into disrepair, mud brick began to disintegrate, and the walls literally were melting away. Important to the remaining archeological record is that individuals who took over the site in the years after the Mormons, reused components of the leftover fort wall. For example the building that is now known officially as 'The Old Mormon Fort Building' contains parts of the forts original east wall in its west wall, and pars of the bastions wall in its south wall (see Figures 4.7. and 4.8.). Over time these adobe bricks were manipulated in reconstruction efforts and eventually covered with stucco. Part of Las Vegas' history covered and shielded from human observation.

As recent archeological exploration has uncovered, the dry and sandy composition of the sites earth stratification, was a good preservative for the forts foundation structure. Completely covered by earthen material we find the majority of Las Vegas' architectural history, its very foundation, below grade.

The site of the Old Las Vegas Fort continued to act as a catalyst for the development of the region. When Mrs. Stewart for example inherited the property and large acreage surrounding it, she developed it into a thriving ranch. This meant economic prosperity for Mrs. Stewart but also lots of resulting benefits on the slowly developing local community. Mrs. Steward had a ranch house on the property that partially shared the foundation of the fort walls in the SW corner, but also had its own more recent foundation (Figure 4.7.). It is also Mrs. Stewart that would sell her ranch to the railroad who would divide her property into plots and auction them to the heavily developing community. Therefore the grid of the future development had is foundation in a trade made with individual who occupied and owned the Old Las Vegas Fort.

Another significant catalyst for the development of the region came in form of the 'Hoover Dam' or as locals prefer the 'Bolder City Dam'. The Old Mormon Fort Building is repurposed once more, this time into a concrete testing lab for the materials used in the construction of the Bolder Dam. It is of significant metaphoric meaning, that the building blocks of a structure that enabled Las Vegas to become what it is today have all been tested on the historic site of the Old Las Vegas Fort. The oldest remaining components of its past, sheltering and assisting in the creation of its future.

To the present condition of the Old Las Vegas Fort site it must be mentioned that a peplica of the North wall and short sections of the West and East have been constructed as a historic display. This replication lacks in materiality and tectonics and falls short of an appropriate archeological display.



Figure 4.7. Historic Markers of the Design Site, diagram by author, image taken by Google Earth, April 2010



Figure 4.8. The Old Mormon Fort Building and its Relation to the Fort Wall, image and diagram by author, December 2010



Figure 4.9. Existing Replica of the Old Mormon, image by the author, December 2010

The Neighborhoods and Conditions Surrounding the Site

Ironic, is the appropriate term when comparing the Las Vegas Cultural Corridor with its bordering neighborhoods. What happened to the 'culture' in those seemingly forgotten zones? And yet one might appropriately state that after all a corridor divides two spaces from another, in this case a 'corridor of culture' in contrast to zones with none. Or, at least not what one would like to describe a culture. But subculture is culture too. And the subculture of survival, while disturbing and repulsive to the onlooker, reflects the very foundation of culture, its ability to survive. It is in those zones where escapism isn't for entertainment, but for coping with harsh realities. It is in these neighborhoods that the Las Vegas visitor will not party because the neon lights don't reach there, an area in the shadows of "The Strip." Shady characters roaming, street prostitution and drug dealing are the daily order. Perhaps that is why one of the locals said not to pass a single letter street after dark. And as much as Las Vegas wishes to contain this subculture in these bordering 'ghettos', the effects it will have on society at large can't be prevented. In following figures I will shed light on some of these issues. Dilapedated houses in which people still live, low quality neighborhoods segrated by literal walls, humans sleeping in cardbord boxes, tent communities, make shift shelters, and underpasses. While this condition certainly isn't unique to Las Vegas, it is the contrast to the glitz and glamour just just steps away that amplifies the surreal nature of how these conditions can exist right next to eachother. Yes indeed, recovery is needed!

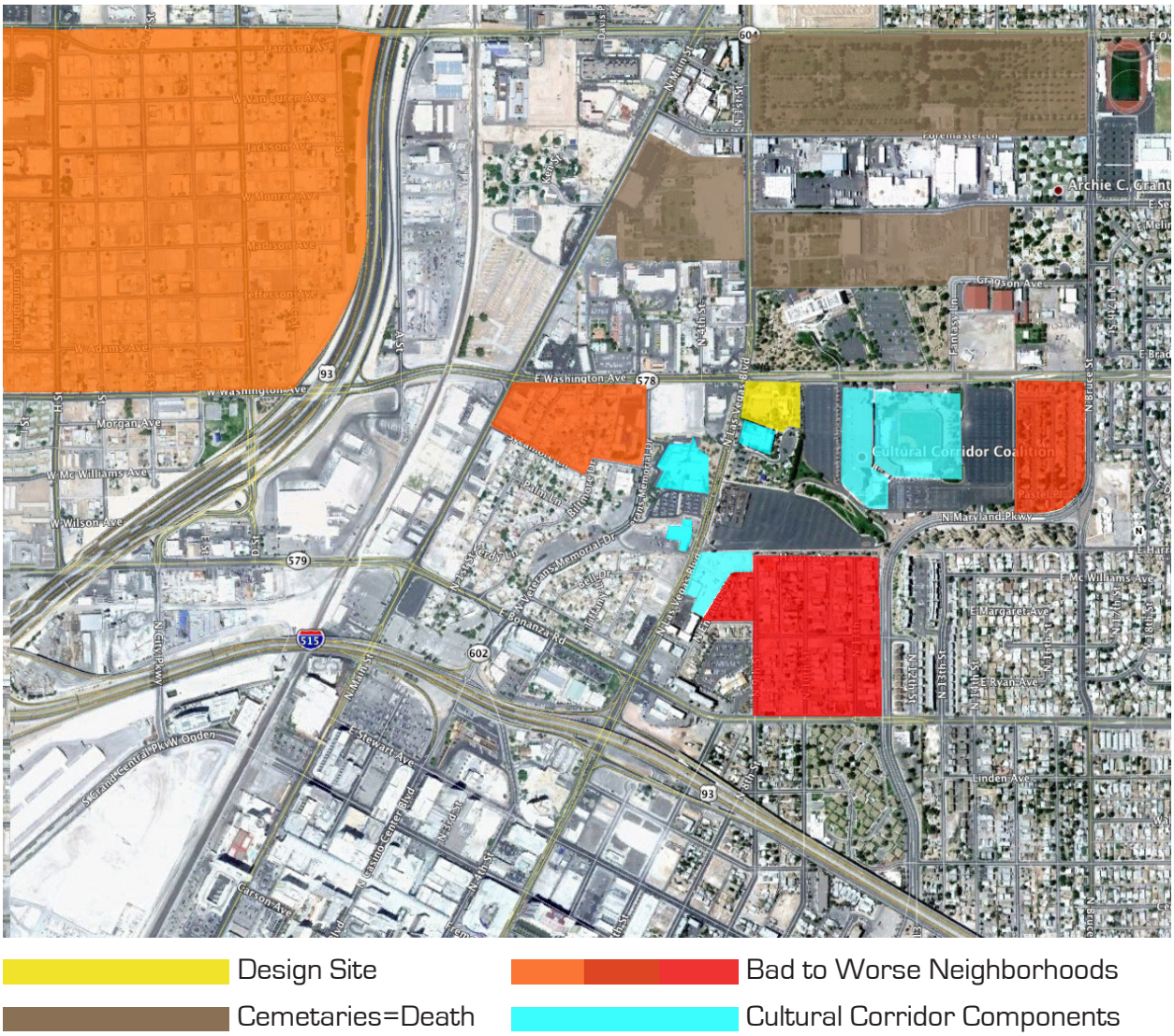

Figure 4.10. Low Quatilty Neighborhood and the Cultural Corridor, diagram by the author, image by Google Earth, April 2011



Figure 4.11. Segregated, image and diagram by author, December 2010

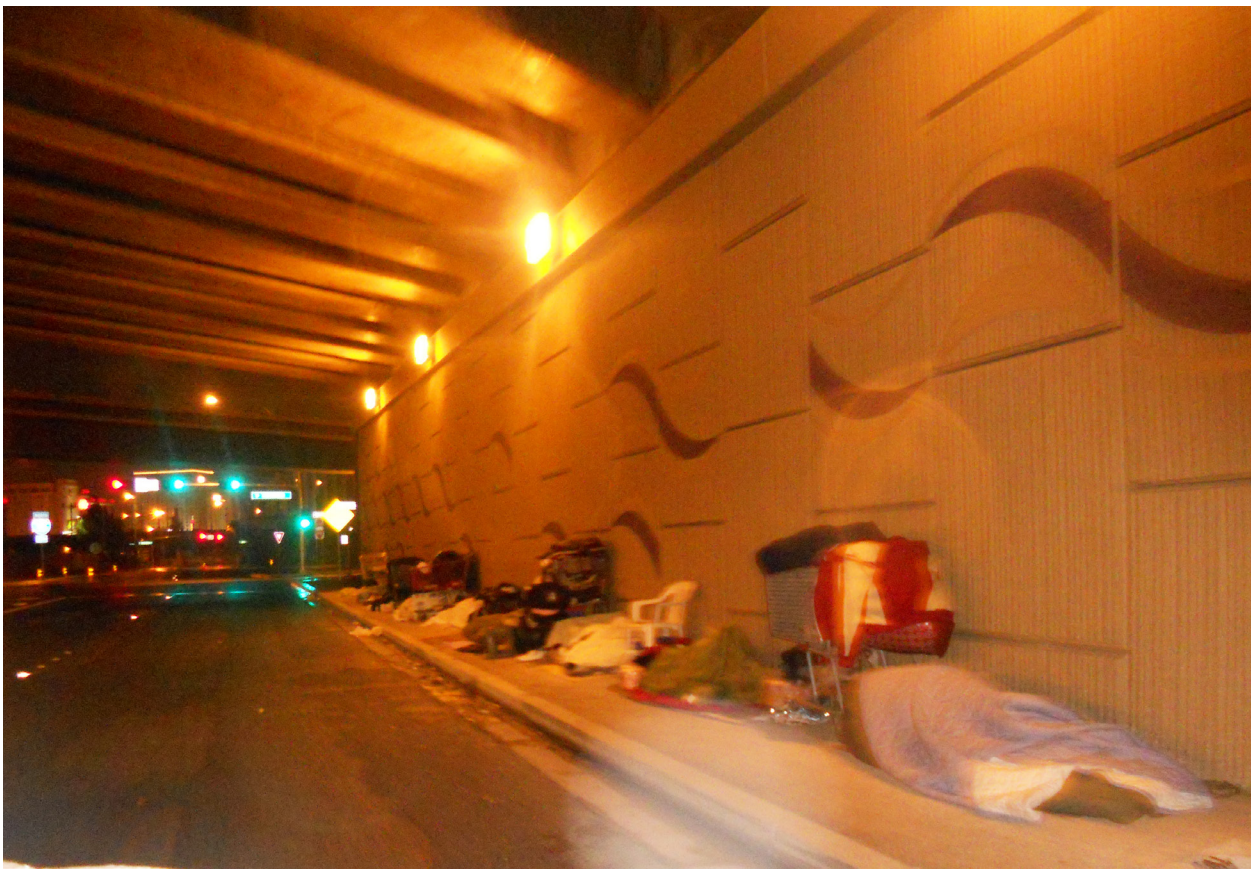

Figure 4.12. So Close and Yet So Far, image by author, December 2010



Figure 4.13. In the Shadow of 'Palms', image by author, December 2010



Figure 4.14. Make Shift, image by the author, December 2010



Figure 4.15. Home Less Luxury, image by the author, December 2010

Chapter 5: THE DESIGN SOLUTION

Design Inspiration and Catalyst

This thesis and design project has been from the start very site driven. A particular typology was contemplated before the site visit, but was not decided upon before the physical location of the site, its context to the neighborhood, its relation to the Las Vegas and its historic inheritance were consulted. Initially fascinated with the physical and experiential qualities of Las Vegas at large, I began to search for clues in its surreal qualities and to seek for contrasting elements to accentuate in my architecture, in a sense I was discovering an antithesis. This fact coupled with my interest in architecture for human recovery, led me to the above-described site of the Old Mormon Fort that on first glance seemed like nothing special. It is from here that human recovery connected with the recovery of the history of this site and to the desire to recover the historically connected identity of Las Vegas, and then further to the concept of recovering people through the recovery of the identity of Las Vegas.

Project Typology

My projects program is that of a 'Healing through the Arts" based community center. It offers places of reflection, action, and observation to lead the 'participant' to a different state of awareness, personal engagement, and community involvement. While human recovery is a desired component of my thesis, it does not take place here as in a traditional rehab facility. Healthful forms of escape are offered in form art programs and inward focused activities such as Yoga and Meditation, even an art therapist is on staff. The core of recovery, however, found here is based on the engagement with the metaphors inherent in the architecture and its connection to history at large.

Design Concept

Realizing that the remnants of Las Vegas' architectural history are largely covered, either by dirt and sand (concerning the foundation of the original fort walls), or covered by stucco above grade (concerning the remnants of the Old Fort's East Wall), an uncovering is necessary to recover the history. This has strong metaphoric value to the recovery of human beings trapped in unhealthy patterns of living and/or addictions. The recovering individual will seek for clues in his/her past to determine the appropriate action in the future. The history of the person's life is researched, in a sense digging through the mental and emotional layers to uncover events of the past. This metaphor finds physical manifestation in my design with an excavation to expose the foundations of the northern fort walls and the foundation of the corral walls.
Since the design uncovers what actually is present and left over from the past, it does not concern itself with copying. This is why I have discarded of the fort wall replication, constructed on site. Only a small portion of the replicated wall on the East remains, for the purpose of documenting this historic effort of Las Vegas to discovering their past. Unfortunately the replication is unsatisfactory as an appropriate historic record due to its lacking materiality and tectonics.

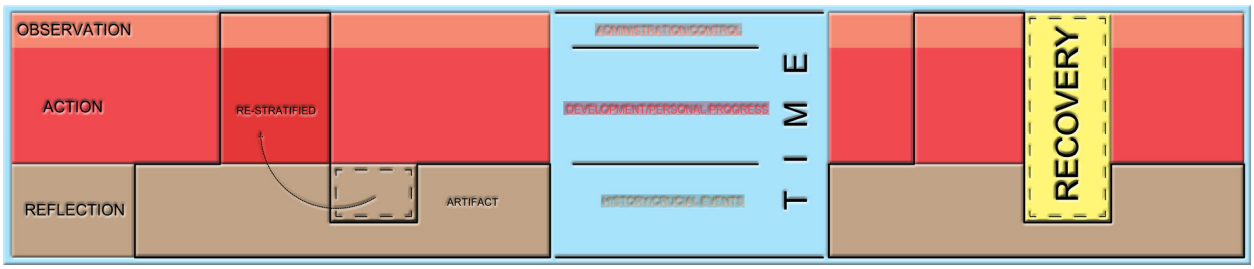

Figure 5.1. Concept Diagram, diagram by the author, July 2011

Table 5.1. Program

Art Gallery	1825	10	18250
Coffee Shop	2850	10	28500
Excavation Display	2880	10	28800
Meditation/Yoga Area	970	10	9700
Material Storage	1194	10	11940
Mechanical	790	10	7900
Bathrooms	1004	10	10040
Healing Garden (outdoors)	4978	30	149340
Circulation	2560	10	25600
subtotal	**19051**		**290070**
First Floor (Action Level)			
Large Assembly Hall	3484	26	90584
Small Meeting Room A	265	12	3180
Small Meeting Room B	265	12	3180
Medium Meeting Room A	545	12	6540
Medium Meeting Room B	850	12	10200
Atrium	7453	39	290667
Bathrooms	999	12	11988
Kitchen	1490	12	17880
Dining Space	1812	12	21744
Art Store	1200	12	14400
Outdoor Patio	1190	12	14280
Circulation	1200	12	14400
subtotal	**20753**		**499043**
Second Floor (Action Level)			
Ceramics Studio	1222	12	14664
Wood and Metals Shop	1358	12	16296
Painting Studio	1732	12	20784
Sculpture Studio	1240	25	31000
Indoor Observation	880	25	22000
Computer Lab	960	12	11520
Bathroom	990	12	11880
Outdoor Patio	960	12	11520
Circulation	1251	12	15012
subtotal	**10593**		**154676**
Third Floor (Observation Level/Adminstration)			
Nutritionist and Art Therapist	1183	12	14196
Administration Office A	214	12	2568
Administration Office B	245	12	2940
Directors Office	411	12	4932
Conference Room/Media Center	940	12	11280
Bathroom	990	12	11880
Assembley Space	520	12	6240
Outdoor Patio	865	12	10380
Outdoor Observation Deck	2368	12	28416

Table 5.1. Program (continued)

Mechanical (outdoors)	865	25	21625
Circulation Circulation	1250	12	15000
subtotal	**9851**		**129457**
Observation Deck (Observation Level)			
Private Party Deck	1155	12	13860
General Observation Area	4475	12	53700
Mechanical	937	12	11244
Bathrooms	990	12	11880
Circulation	1387	12	16644
subtotal	8944		107328
Off Campus Program			
Old Fort Wall Enclosure	762	12	9144
Old Ranch House Excavation	3625	12	43500
subtotal	**4387**		**52644**
Total Program in sqft	**73579**		

Design Concept (continued from page 28)

The project consists of 3 vertical layers. The reflection layer is connected with the physical archeological excavation, and therefore in my architecture located below grade. Here I have located elements of my program that I associate with reflection and contemplation, a very important component in human recovery and of course in the unearthing of historic artifacts. As the colors of the Concept Diagram (Figure 5.1.) and the Design Program Table (Figure 5.2.) correlate, one can see the programmatic elements of the various levels.
Level 2 in my design is related to action. Human recovery can't take place with personal insight alone, but requires positive action. With historic knowledge of the site comes the cultural connectedness with the past. While this in itself can instill a sense of belonging, through a focused community activism based on this connectedness progress and a reshaping of the future may occur. This reshaping is symbolized in my design by the use of a rammed earth wall that becomes a guide vertically and horizontally through the architecture. Significant is also the fact that elements of the past have been used, in form of the excavated earth taken from the reflection level, for the creation of the load bearing and structure supporting massive wall, in a sense building a new future with the remnants of the past. This action level is manifest on floors 1 and 2 in my design. As the table (see Figure 5.2) shows this action component is of civic nature with congregation facilities, and through a 'healing through the arts' concept.
Level 3 is the observation level. The focus here is a reflection upon past deeds in connection with the power of and personal/civic progress or regression. It is about a self-critical look to analyze and determine whether the path one has taken is still desirable or needs adjustment. Human recovery has been described as an upward spiral, unfortunately not a straight line. The manifestation in the design is somewhat simplistic with the creation of various observations decks, and the building administration, which functions as a control mechanism, is located on this level.



Figure 5.2. SW Entrance, digital model and rendering by the author, model created in Google Sketchup, rendered with Vray, August 2010

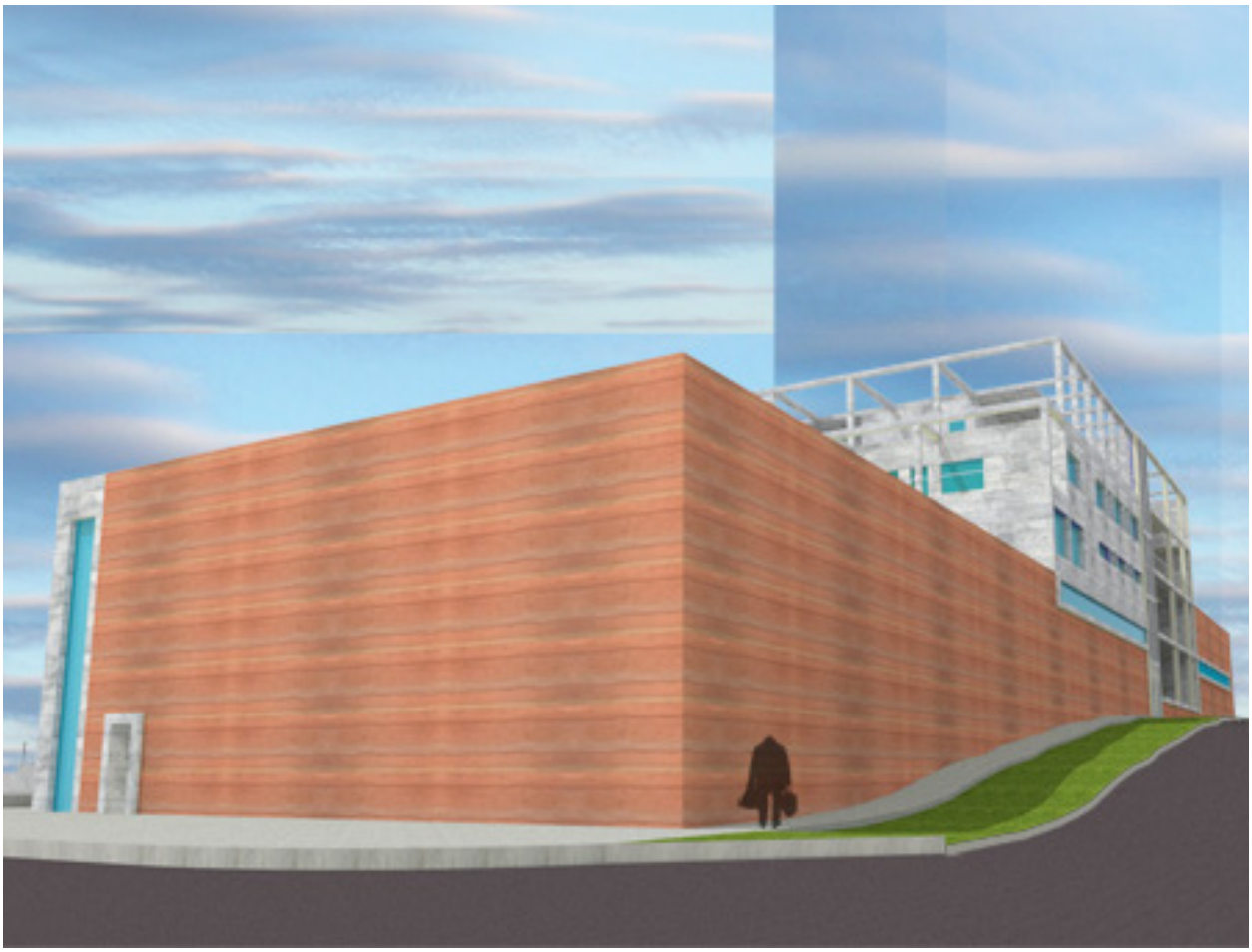

Figure 5.3. NW Corner towards Washington Ave, digital model and rendering by the author, model created in Google Sketchup, rendered with Vray, August 2010



Figure 5.4. North Side on Washington Ave, digital model and rendering by the author, model created in Google Sketchup, rendered with Vray, August 2010



Figure 5.5. SW Corner, digital model and rendering by the author, model created in Google Sketchup, rendered with Vray, August 2010



Figure 5.6. View from West Entrance toward the East, digital model and rendering by the author, model created in Google Sketchup, rendered with Vray, August 2010

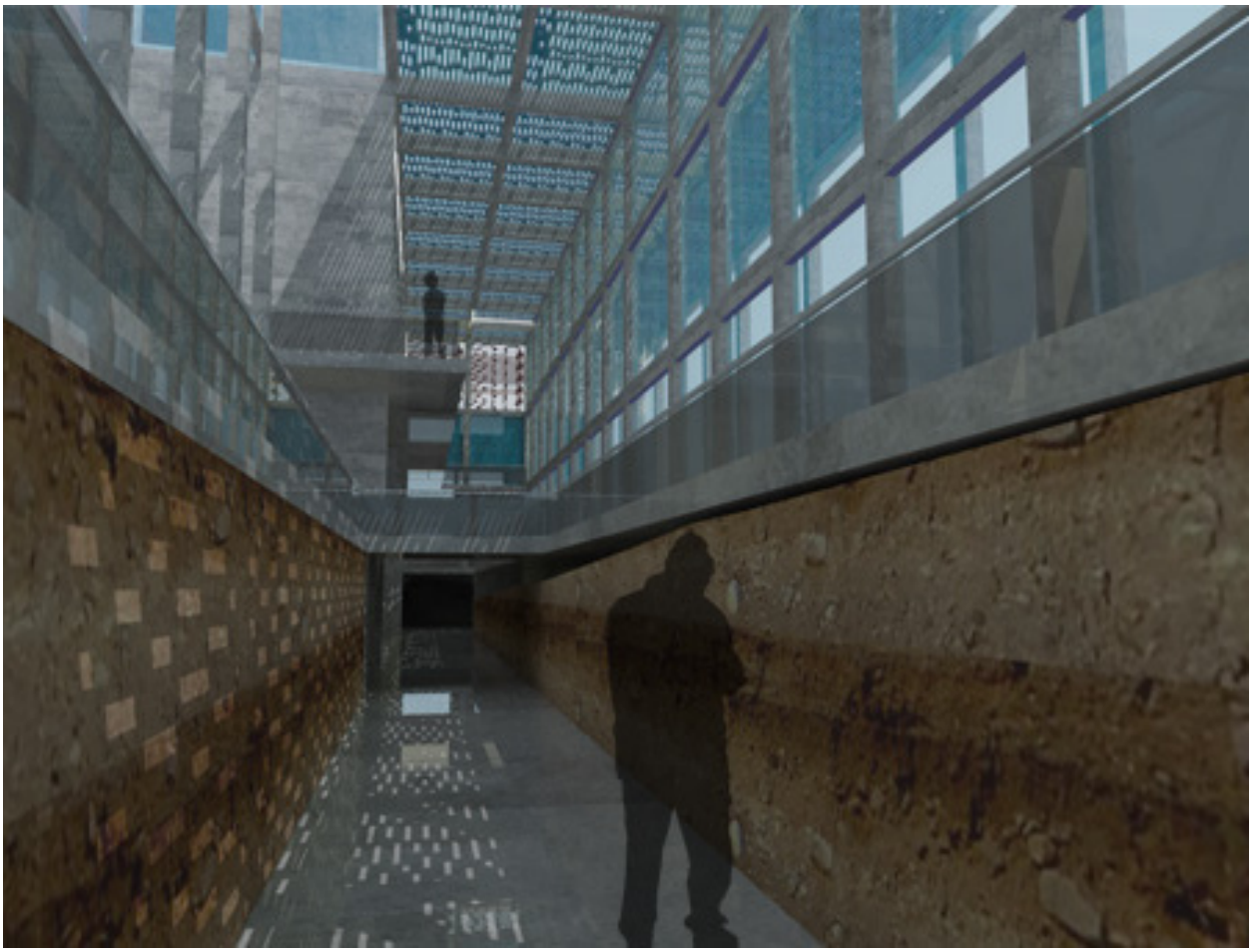

Figure 5.7. Below Grade: The Excavation, digital model and rendering by the author, model created in Google Sketchup, rendered with Vray, August 2010

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Vita

Mark Christopher Manis was born on March 29, 1972 in Kingsport, TN to the parents of Waltraud and Walter Manis. The son of a German post war child and an East Tennessee farm boy he was born into cultural diversity. At age 4 he moved with his parents to his mothers hometown of Bad Orb Germany, a small town 40 miles west of Frankfurt, where he spent all his forming years. At age 8 his German grandmother became his primary care giver. It is at her table and that of his German great grandparents, where he from earliest childhood on, formed his sensitivity toward social issues. His great grandfather was a survivor of imprisonment by the Russians in the 'deadly' coalmines of Siberia. Their stories about the violence, the senselessness of racial hate and discrimination, but also the humanity they experienced in the 2nd World War would implant a strong desire for equality and peace amongst people in him. The strong sense of environmental awareness and activism amongst Germans was another influence that would mark his conscience.

He attended the Grund- und Hauptschule in Bad Orb, then the Berufsfachschule fuer Wirtschaft und Verwaltung (a vocational school for business and administration) in Gelnhausen. Struggling in his young life as a survivor of sexual abuse, parental divorce, his mother's addictions and parental abandonment, he was underachieving in his academic performance, and it seemed as if higher education would elude him. While life's hard knocks education was forming him emotionally, in his professional carrier he settled for the vocational training and certification as a "Kaufmann im Einzelhandel" (certified retail merchant), and worked for local home improvement retailer.

During his late teens and early twenties his social consciousness would be deepened even further. In the mid 90's due to the war in former Yugoslavia, civil unrests all over Africa, and global economic hardships, Germany was overrun with refugees. These were housed in often-pitiful conditions, in former dilapidated US military barracks or other rundown facilities. Conducting bible studies with numerous refugees, and communicating with hundreds of them about their culture and the atrocities they survived, he was touched by their suffering. But it is also here, in the seriously lacking facilities of their temporary new homes, were he realized what kind of demoralizing effect the lacking quality of ones surroundings can have on the human psyche.

In his mid 20's he moved back to the United States where he started several home-improvement oriented businesses. In his early 30's after several personal and economic setbacks he would finally heed the ever-stronger call of higher education. He earned a Double Bachelors degree in Building Science with concentration in Construction Management, and Industrial Technology with concentration in Appropriate Technology, Cum Laude from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC.

It is also here that his life's education and formal University education come together in the desire to have a positive contribution to the survival of the planet and to raising of peoples life quality. He seeks to make that contribution through architecture, and is accepted into the Masters of Architecture Program at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN. During his three-year career at UT it has been said by friends who know him best, that he double majored again, this time in Architecture and Recovery. He decided to face the demons of his past that had been so destructive in his life until that point, and took action toward his own recovery from unhealthy patterns of living, rooted in the abuse he suffered in his childhood. His focus on

spirituality and god connectedness has and is continuing to transform him, speaking strongly the "I CAN" message to other victims of our society, and has led him once more to meet, communicate, and learn from struggling individuals in this world.