

URBANIZING THE MOJAVE DESERT:  
DIE URBANISIERUNG DER MOJAVE-WÜSTE:

# LAS VEGAS

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The images presented above do not project ideals of urban development or solve social and environmental problems. Rather, the images offer a “third sight” that makes visible the complex interstitial spaces of everyday production and consumption tied to physical and virtual place making as well as local and global investment. Locals have responded to these images with comments such as “I see these things everyday, but have never really ‘seen’ them before”. It is a classic architectural trope to “learn to see” and, heartened by such responses, we have learned to see a desert city beyond the blinding lights of the Las Vegas Strip.

*Urbanizing the Mojave Desert: Las Vegas* presents a profoundly complex environment, a hybrid landscape shaped and reshaped by practices of everyday urbanization. Such practices include the fragmented topographies of in- and exclusion (*rears & edges*) where confined sites of natural resources (p. 74) and segregated environments (p. 75) are mirrored by “exclusive” casinos (pp. 90, 92). In turn, such spectacular exclusivity conceals the peripheral role assigned various economic and social groups. These practices also include the de- and reterritorialization (*signs & traces*) associated with blending physical and virtual spaces that connect the desert landscape to imaginary realms of the spectacular (pp. 96, 106, 107), desire (pp. 97, 105), power (pp. 99, 103), the exceptional (pp. 100–102), and the promised

(pp. 108, 109). They illuminate conversions between land use and economics (*mobility & stability*), linking a transitory work force (pp. 113–15, 120, 121) with the consumption of resources and commodities (pp. 112, 116–19, 122–27). They also network local and regional scales (*providing & disposing*) through infrastructures of energy production (pp. 130, 131, 133–35) and the topographies of waste- (pp. 137, 145) and water-management (pp. 132, 138–40, 142–44). These practices fuse industrial and postindustrial activities (*abstraction & extraction*) with their leveled geographies (pp. 150–61) and inscribed geometries (pp. 162, 163). Finally, these are the practices of imbrication (*scraping & sprawling*), overlapping landscapes of industrialized desire, exotic decorum, and environmental damage; exposing the proximity of topographies of extraction and construction (pp. 167, 184), the artificiality of water diversions and catchments (pp. 178, 185, 186), imported landscapes (pp. 170–75, 185, 187–89), and constructions ranging from Italian villas to “cosmopolitan” blocks.

As such, *Urbanizing the Mojave Desert: Las Vegas* reframes the seamless surfaces of draped neon lights, curtain walls, and landscape features layered onto the Mojave’s stark topography, uncovering distinct strata that respatialize the social, cultural, and environmental implications of urbanizing a fierce yet fragile desert.