

Thought on Tap November 2019 Transcript

Future Visions of the City

Bretton Rodriguez: [00:00](#) You're listening to Thought on Tap, the monthly podcast about the role of the humanities in the world today, brought to you by the College of Liberal Arts and the Core Humanities program at the University of Nevada, Reno. I'm Carlos Mariscal. I'm Bretton Rodriguez and I am Caitlin Earley and every month we convene a panel of local experts to discuss the issues of the day and have a moderated discussion. This month we're talking about future visions of the city. And now here's Caitlin Earley.

Caitlin Earley: [00:28](#) Hello everyone. Can you guys hear me okay? Okay, great. Guys, thank you so much for coming. I'm so excited to be starting this month's Thought on Tap. Before we get started, I want to thank our sponsors, so thank you to the College of Liberal Arts, to Core Humanities and to the Laughing Planet for having us here every month for these great conversations. Yeah, so the way this works for those that haven't been here before is I'm going to give a short introduction. I'll introduce our panelists and then we have a series of questions that we've come up with to think about the future of the city, which is our topic tonight. We'll probably talk about that for 30 to 40 minutes and then we'll open it up for questions and we found that a lot of the feedback coming from you guys really enlivens this conversation, so that's one of my favorite parts of the event. With that in mind, let me introduce our panelists. So right here to my right is Casey Lynch. Casey is an urban political and digital geographer interested in the ways that entangled processes of urban and technological change are differentially experienced and potentially contested by diverse communities. His research aims to understand the relationships of power through which particular visions of urban tech new features come to monopolize popular imagination and guide policy and action, and to explore the multiplicity of political possibilities emergent from the coevolution of humanity and technics. He's very smart. Yes. I'm going to stop there. Okay. Okay, well we'll stop there. Our next panel, this is Nasia Anam and who is an Assistant Professor of English literature and Global Anglophone literature at the University of Nevada, Reno. Her research examines representations of migration between Europe, South Asia, North Africa, and the United States in the colonial post-colonial and contemporary era's, her current book manuscript, other cities, Muslims migration and space in the global novel centers on the figure of the urban Muslim migrant from the postwar to the post 9/11

era is in global Anglophone and Francophone fiction. Let me stop there. Is that okay? All right, welcome. And our third panelist is Angenette Damon Angenette is a government watchdog reporter for the Reno Gazette journal, a Reno native. Angenette has reported on issues from government detention facilities to the courting of tech companies to the recent misspelling of Virginia street on signs in Midtown. For the last year and a half, Angenette has worked with the critically acclaimed USA today investigative podcast to the city, examining the fight over downtown strip clubs in Reno. And what that fight reveals about change power and the future of Reno throughout her work. She is committed to shining a light on problems that need to be solved and connecting those who can help solve them. So I'm super excited about our panelists today. I think their work interacts in all kinds of fascinating ways. So can we just give them another round of applause to get started? [Applause.] Okay. So our topic today is the city. Already, A majority of Americans live in cities and some estimates show that by 2050, 87% of Americans will live in urban environments. This is true globally as well. According to the McKinsey Global Institute, the global urban population is growing by 65 million people annually equivalent to adding seven new Chicago's every year. What those cities will look like is a huge topic of conversation in today's media, and it intersects with issues that feel very close to home. As a city, Reno is also grappling with change. Job opportunities have increased in the Reno sparks metropolitan area with 48,000 new jobs in the last five years leading the area to be named number one nationwide, and job growth by the Milken Institute in 2018. With those jobs, however comes growing populations and growing expenses. The average home price in Reno topped \$420,000 in May, 2019 and rents have increased by 50% in four years. The program for Thought on Tap this year, it focuses on the future and so this month we're thinking about the future of cities both globally and here in Reno. How will cities adapt to shifting populations, new technologies and structural change? Each of our panelists this evening engages with the topic of the city from a different perspective. Nasia studies, people in the movement of people and literature, Casey studies the role of technology and urban change and Angenette looks at the interaction between local government residents and businesses. Putting them on the same panel, it presents a unique opportunity to examine this topic of changing cities from a variety of viewpoints. I see a lot of overlap between the issues our panelists research and write about from people to technology, to government, but I'd like to call attention here at the start to something I think each one is touching on and that's power. Who has the power to make and resist change? How can

we locate power in people, in technology or in government?
Who gets to say where we're headed and how do we navigate the changes required to get there? So thanks again to our panelists for being here. And with that, I want to start with our first question for the evening. And that's related to this challenge of growth. And I'd like to start with Nasia on this. So what do you think is the biggest challenge for cities as they grow and change?

Nasia Anam:

[06:33](#)

Thank you. Can you hear me? Yes. Caitlin, thank you so much for inviting us to be on this panel and thank you to my fellow panelists. I wrote down an answer because I'm a nerd and speaking extemporaneously gives me anxiety. So here, here's my written answer. In 2006- Oh, also like 50% of my six person undergraduate seminar on the global city is here. So this is our class. Thank you for coming. You get extra credit. In 2006 Mike Davis wrote in his book, *Planet of Slums* that for the first time the urban population of the earth will outnumber the rural. We are fully in that reality. Now. What distinguishes this moment from that of the rapid urbanization of the United States in Europe in the 19th century is what Davis calls quote unquote urbanization without industrialization. That is what we are seeing in cities across the world in what was once called the third world or the developing world or now the global South is a massive influx of rural migrants from within those nations and from elsewhere into urban areas, without the infrastructure or economic means to house and sustain these new populations. Agricultural lifeways are disappearing from for various reasons because of climate change, war and structural adjustment policies of the world bank and IMF that put local farmers at a distinct disadvantage when their crops must compete against commodities from the world's richest nations on a global free market. And what this looks like is something we increasingly see in US cities like Reno vast ways of disenfranchised people living in informal housing situations, tent cities, migrant encampments, what in previous eras would have been called Hoovervilles or shantytowns be don't view and now go by names like favela and bussy. This is what the future vision of the city looks like. Very different from the glass and steel utopias with skyways dotted by flying cars that we imagined before. Instead to turn back to Davis, the cities of the future quote are largely constructed of crude brick straw, recycled plastic cement blocks and scrap wood unquote. Instead of cities of light soaring, Oh no, this is still him. Instead he studies of of light soaring toward heaven. Much of the 21st century urban worlds, squats in squalor, surrounded by pollution, excrement and decay unquote. This is a grim portrait to say the least, but not at all wrong. However, I would like to propose an alternate view.

The list of materials that Davis gives us are all recycled, repurposed, and given new use value instead of creating interminable, interminable mounds, mounds of waste. The dark underbelly of the shining city is that it has always been built on the backs of exploited laborers and has shipped its trash out to the peripheries of the world along with seemingly undesirable inhabitants. I reminded of the imaginary civilization in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* that covets its own pristine cleanliness and constant innovation, but finds itself surrounded by a greater and greater mountain of its own jettison waste, which grows to be larger and sizes than the city itself. This trash city has always been the attendant space of the shining city. Perhaps the city of the future that is sustainable is one that can contend and learn to make use of its own filth. After all, as Milan Kununurra said, "Kitsch is the absolute denial of shit."

Casey Lynch:

[10:48](#)

So thinking about this, I think I have some similar thoughts. I'm actually, so what, you know, the question was, you know, what are the biggest challenges? What are the biggest challenges that cities face as they grow and change? And they're a lot of the same challenges that cities have faced up until this point throughout the entire history of, of urbanization, right? We have at no point actually successfully provided dignified housing, clean water sanitation and overall dignified life for entire urban populations. And so that is a challenge that cities have faced and neglected or, you know, focused on, in different points and in different places, in different contexts throughout the entire history of urbanization. And that's something that we have not gotten past now and something that we that in some cases, right, we are backsliding on that cities are doing a worse job now than they were in the past. There's a great pooped map of San Francisco showing the explosion or the amount of, of human waste reported on the streets of San Francisco because of housing- housing poverty and plumbing poverty in San Francisco. We can look at Flint, Michigan, right? Urban populations that do not have access to clean water. You can look at populations throughout California during the drought that did not have access to any water in their homes. Right. We can look at the, the, the homeless population here in Reno and other cities in the U S and around the world. And so a lot of the challenges that we face are the same challenges of, of, of creating habitable equitable human habitat. So I think that's one. And the other one that I wanted to make a comment on is I get asked a lot, you know, what is the biggest challenge? How do we adapt to the changing technology that cities increasingly run on our govern through right from transportation systems to consuming goods and food. And I, I always try to reverse that a little bit and say that I don't think the question is actually how

do we adapt to the technology, but how do we think about shaping what kinds of urban tech new features we want to live in? Right? What is if we let the technology sort of guide the conversation, guide what the future vision of the city looks like. It's really just letting Silicon Valley guide with the future of the city looks like. And so I think we actually need to have a much broader based public dialogue about what the future of the city should look like and what role technologies may or may not play in creating that, those cities. And so,

Angenette Damon: [13:24](#)

Yeah, that's fine. So the, the question again was what is the greatest challenge that cities face moving into the future? And I obviously I'm not an academic, so I don't have a really broad view on this, but I can talk about Reno and Nevada for sure. I've been covering local, state and national politics and government here for 20 years. And I would say one, one of the challenges is we have, and this might be a little specific, but we have a tax code that brings people here in droves. Like everybody's kid. There's no, there's no income tax, you know, property taxes, pretty low. And then we have a legislature else who likes to give these giant tax abatements to great big corporations to come and bring lots and lots of people too. So we don't really have necessarily the resources, the government resources to address a lot of that growth. Thinking about the city of Reno in particular during the recession, all levels of government lost revenue at a, like just a devastating rate. And the city of Reno in particular I don't think has rebuilt back up yet from that recessionary kind of distraction almost. They lack the, the institutional knowledge, they lack a lot of the and this isn't a bad, there's a lot of good people that work for the city of Reno, like I'm not trying to bag on, but the government structure really been undermined, I think one by the tax structure, the recession and the tax structure that doesn't allow the government to recoup what was lost during that time. So that, that's kind of a specific answer that was, came to mind as listening to these very smart people talk.

Catilin Earley: [15:07](#)

So thank you for that answer. And I wonder if we can actually start with you for the next question because one of the other things that I wanted to ask our panelists is how their research informs their perspective on what cities need. So what does your study, or what do your studies indicate about what might be necessary or unnecessary in developing the city of the future and that might be global and that might be here in Reno. And Angenette, I'd love to start with you. As someone who has talked to people in really diverse segments of Reno and has probably a better understanding than we do sitting in our, you

know, ivory tower about what's going on in Reno and, and what kinds of things people need here.

Angenette Damon: [15:50](#)

I mean, people need basically what we all need. I think one of the questions that you asked earlier was like, who has power? And that's something that we really tried to explore in the podcast is as a city is reinventing itself and changing who has the power to effect that change? Who has access to the powerful and, and who I, I stay away from this word, the powerless. I mean it's an easy thing to say in a headline that is the powerful versus the powerless. But everybody has agency. Everybody that I talk to from, you know, the strippers in the clubs to the people living in the Ponderosa hotel, they all have agency and used it in different ways. It's just a matter of whether the decision makers, how much credence, how much weight they give those voices, those experiences. When you know a pack of people who live in the Ponderosa come into the, into the city council and argue that, you know, this guy's going to double my rent. If you kick out the strip clubs, the city council members kind of see them as pawns and not like living, breathing real people that have made a community at this really rather horrid place. I mean, I'm not gonna, I'm not going to try and spin it that this is any good place to live at all, but they have built, they've built like a really tremendous community. They rely on each other, they take care of each other. And that home was under threat. And I didn't see any connection when everybody sitting on the city council's so busy in this political fight against these rich strip club owners and these developers and these, you know, PR mavens, they just see the people at the Ponderosa's is this pond and these kind of victims. And I didn't see any real connection with the decision makers and the people whose lives are being affected by their decisions. So that might be one thing that we could work on as a community. One, just the civic engagement and participation here could really be improved two, to, to put pressure on officials and to tell the story better of what people are experiencing here so they can make those better decisions, I think.

Casey Lynch: [18:00](#)

So I guess there's a couple of different projects that I've done that really shaped the way that I think about this. And one I'll, I'll talk about really quickly is research that I did in Honduras a number of years ago, over probably a two or three year span around a sort of techno utopian city building project. So this was a very rural area in the Southern coast of the Pacific coast of Honduras. Just one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere, one of the most violent countries right now in the, in the Western hemisphere. And there was this plan to build right by Silicon Valley, billionaires basically to build this little

Dubai or Singapore kind of construct a city from scratch with its own. Autonomous government led by a committee of a committee for the adoption of best practices who were all sort of business people, international business people. The idea was that you would create this special zone, you would treat this techno-utopian city of the future, a smart city, a developed city, and that that would be a sort of model to change the rest of Honduras and Central America. So it's this really crazy, crazy, crazy project. And I worked with actual peasant activists, Latin rights activists and Southern Honduras who were fighting this vision. And so something that, that research really taught me and continues to inform how I think about urban change today is, is the sort of power of this imaginary of the techno, urban, you know, techno-utopian, urban future. This idea that we can live in these flying cars and, and jet from place to place that imaginary is actually very, very powerful and, and is able to, that imaginary is able to get a lot of capital behind it and a lot of cases to pursue some projects envisions that are not necessarily in anybody's best interest and don't really have any kind of logical basis behind them. To be quite honest. And then just really quickly working with activists who are in Barcelona, I'm researching activists in Barcelona who are using open source technologies to experiment with different sort of post capitalist economies in the city in Barcelona. Has made me look at this sort of multiplicity of, of, of other alternative visions of-of urban futures, of future cities, of future technologies beyond that sort of you know, paradigmatic flying cars and the, you know, the skyscrapers and glass buildings. So I think understanding the power of that vision and then looking for alternative visions and, and giving voice to alternative visions of urban futures is, is what my research has given me.

Nasia Anam:

[20:41](#)

Let's see how to start this question. I guess my research has- my training as opposed to colonialist has allowed me to consider the kind of the way we idealize the 19th century formation of the modern city, say London and Paris and like sort of, you know, thinking about how much we think about literary London or literary Paris. But those, those cities were built in their forms as we know them because of the wealth that was afforded to those nations from colonization. So not only in terms of like manpower and just sheer wealth, but also in terms of natural resources. So I say, I say this a lot. This is like my favorite little Chestnut, but the exact same iron ore that was used to build the railways in England was the iron ore that was extracted from India and was used to build the railways in India at the same time. So you do not have the like the famous ideas about like Greenwich mean time and the way that we like think about industrialization without, without India. So that's- that's number

one. And number two is to think about like what happens after decolonization to these cities that used to be satellites of the Imperial Center where their main function was extractive or sort of like, you know, there was like one industry say like sugar or textiles or cotton or what have you. Then to have not a non-diversified kind of like economy and suddenly to be on their own as like capital cities or major metropolises of new nations without the infrastructure, because the entire infrastructure that was built in those cities during colonization was built in the service of the European empire. So just thinking about, sort of like what it means now to sort of like wag fingers from the first world and say like, why can't you just like bootstrap as a nation and like figure out every, you know, figure out how to be modern. It's because the entire sort of like form of that city was built in the service of another larger city, which continues to be you know, the center of wealth in the world. And that also leads me to understand why there's mass migration into cities that used to be Imperial centers. So I mean a, there's like linguistic reasons why and cultural reasons why people are moving from formerly colonized spaces into England and France and Italy, in Germany, in the, in the U S but there's also just sort of like, well, the cities are not functioning and there are more economic and just sort of like co ways, like more ways of life that are more livable, available to people who- who find reason to migrate to those. So the, that's a three-pronged I guess answer to that question but, but it does sort of inform, inform the way that I think about what's happening in cities now and, and also sort of like the, the informal ways that people are starting to build housing. So if you think about like migrant encampments and so, so the, the next extension of mass migration is migrant encampments and why-why migrant encampments get shut down and when they get shut down is basically the moment when those encampments start to look like cities like functioning cities like when they have like restaurants in them or they have, they have like, like jerry-rigged electricity or they start to look like, like places where people can actually live in an in a permanent way. When they start to look like cities, that's when they become a threat. So just sort of like the formation of cities and how they had been flow I guess is, is very much informed by my research on colonization.

Caitlin Earley:

[24:43](#)

Thanks for that. Nasia. I think one of the things that jumps out to me about those responses is this idea that as we think about cities, we're so tied to these ideas that we have about cities both in the past and in the future, right? So we're operating under this maybe romantic notion of these 19th century cities while also trying to envision the Jetsons. Right? And, and they're in some ways very stereotypical and super problematic myths,

right? That we've built up at least in this particular Western culture. I want to go back to this idea of technology cause I think that's one of the things people talk about a lot when they, when they think about the future of cities. And Casey, I was really struck by your idea of thinking about developing technology to serve us rather than adapting to the technology. And you said, you said something like technology, which we may or may not use and I don't know about you guys, but the idea that we might choose not to use technology is something that I don't hear very often. So I was wondering if you could maybe speak a little bit on that and maybe the role you see for technology and I think well we can, we can build a bridge after two, but I think this is really pertinent to Reno as we court tech companies and as we become potentially an extension of what's happening in Silicon Valley.

Casey Lynch:

[26:09](#)

Yeah. So when technology that we might not use, so my, my work in Barcelona with these activists that were experimenting with other kinds of technologies and open source technologies and creating local, you know, semi post capitalists are posting, you know, experimented with the ideas of post-capitalism, digital post-capitalism locally. I came to that research really through the idea of the smart city, right. Looking at cities, including Barcelona around the world that were trying to use, you know, new sensor data sort of range of, of, of big data to make decisions about urban planning, about urban governance. And what I found initially was that a lot of the ways that that cities tried to use big data was just, or you know, sensors or you know, smart city technology was just stupid and completely useless. I mean, my favorite example is in Barcelona, they spend a ton of money, I think it was an IBM or a Cisco contract to implant sensors in all the city streets to be able to have an app where you can see where there's open parking, like on street parking. They quickly found out after spending, you know, millions and millions of dollars that the average parking spot is vacant for like 13 seconds. And so by the time you get out an app and figure out where you're going to go, it's completely useless. And so there's been this rush, especially in the past 10 years or so for cities around the world to use all different kinds of, you know, big data analytics and use sensing networks to make decisions. And- and there's just, it's, it's been ridiculous actually. And in a lot of cases it's been completely unnecessary and been a waste of money and waste of time. And in some other cases have had some really negative effects on cities. And so just being more deliberate about when technology and you know, used in a particular way might be useful is something that cities have not done. City governments have not done very well and something that at the very minimum as city governments

try to figure out what to do with new technologies. I think just sometimes pausing for a minute is a better option than just rushing to, to adopt the, you know, the latest thing.

Nasia Anam:

[28:30](#)

I'm not sure how to answer this question, but as you were talking about it, I had this memory the sudden like flash of remembering when I was in new Delhi in 2008 and my dad needed to buy like a, like a, what are those called? SIM SIM. Some Kirk, I dunno. And so we went into this like mall that had like, it was all just like plate glass and track lighting and like everything was really shiny and there were all these stores and you might as well have been in, you know, New York or LA or, you know, Naperville, Illinois where I grew up. This is just like a normal mom. But then I was sort of in one of these cyber cafes looking out the plate glass window. And I saw this like very Wyzant old man walking barefoot pulling a donkey cart full of like apples, like bruised apples. And to look at that, I mean that looked like it could, it's like time and Memorial, you know, it looked like something from the 19th or 18th or like third century, you know, like it could be, it could be any time in history. And I just felt this profound kind of like cognitive dissonance of, of the both of the realities that were, that were sort of mashed up against each other almost violently in that moment. And I, I felt like very, very alienated. So I think the kind of influx of technology also, I mean what I, what I, what it can glean from that moment or that, that memory that continuously sticks with me is that it exacerbates class difference. That it's about access. It's like just, you know, it's not like better living through microchips or whatever. Silicon Valley wants us to believe it's not a democratizing process. It is about exclusion. And I think that that gets more and more pronounced as

Angenette Damon:

[30:31](#)

As the modes of, of life that Silicon Valley kind of carves out, flyers get, get globalized. So I guess that's what I'll say about that. So it's timely to talk about sensors because I just got a press release that they're putting wrong way driver sensors in on some freeway on ramp. So those good, bad, stupid. I know, I'm like, what happens if it triggers? Does the cop come and get him real fast? Like where's the cop going? How is this going to save anybody? So that was just funny. Anyway. So, you know, I don't write a lot about actual technology, but one of the themes of the city and something that we're all experiencing here is, is Reno becoming this like offshoot of Silicon Valley. Some people will even go so far as to say the new Silicon Valley, which is just like so ridiculous. It can't even handle people saying that. And actually if you Google it, you see that there's like mid sized cities across America that are all of them. There's 326 new Silicon valleys. And the other thing is that the perception versus reality,

you hear a lot of that, you know. Yeah, we're at tech hub and we have Apple and Amazon and Tesla and Google and I mean we have Apple and yeah, we have Apple and Amazon and they're just big warehouses. They're, Amazon is a distribution center that, you know, like the work in there is terrible. Apple is just, you know, and switched ginormous buildings filled with computer equipment and a couple of employees to oversee that computer equipment. So I think that's why in some sense there was a lot of excitement when Tesla pick the state to build an actual factory. So now we actually have tech manufacturing and they've had an undeniable effect on the community. But some of the episode four of the city just came out this week and it's, we focused on what it's like to work in Tesla what its arrival has meant to the broader community. And we found that, you know, these, these clean tech manufacturing jobs aren't necessarily like the image in your head that it's this safe and antiseptic or, or maybe even this thought economy kind of job. And it's not necessarily it's a factory and, and people get hurt in the factory or been like many finger amputations when the building was under construction and being put into use as a factory. Everybody was just trying to figure out what was what. And you know, you had an electrocution, you had people falling through holes in the floor, you had like a windstorm, the blow stuff off the roof and smack people coming out of the Sani hut. You know, I don't mean to like laugh too much about that, but a little bit. He was generally okay. And there's a lot of confusion too. Well, tests also got this like tremendous tax abatement package, right? So for 10 years they're really not paying any taxes. And for another 10 years they're paying very little taxes and the strain that they put on government services at all level, I mean, OSHA has been out there, I think it was like over 90 times. It's a huge manufacturing facility. Of course OSHA is going to be there a lot. There's like 10,000 people that work there. It's like a city. So someone every on average, once a day is calling nine one one for any kind of problem that any other kind of city would have. So, you know, the fire is always out there and the Sheriff's office is always out there. And then you put the stress on the road. So it's just, there was very little foresight I think on the decision makers as their Reno was in such a dire Strait. I mean like a former governor loves to quote the Reno Gazette Journal's headline on the paper Reno, is it going to be the next Detroit of the West? The unemployment rate was higher than anywhere else for closure rate was like killing people. So there was just this sense of desperation and then also the sense of excitement. Like we're in the hunt, we're in a competition, we might get this giant factory that all these other States want. And so everybody could just got caught up in that and there was very little like, let's slow down, let's do some

analytical thinking. Let's see what kind of affects this is going to have on the community. And now we're having to play catch up from that.

Caitlin Earley:

[34:58](#)

Yeah. I'm, I'm struck by your comments, all three of you about how technology is something that we think of as this panacea really and this sort of road to the future. But it does affect people incredibly unevenly. And often the introduction of technology reflects real differences in power that are then exacerbated by that technology. I think I have other questions that I sent you guys beforehand, but one of the things that, that I started to wonder about when hearing this kind of conversation is what's our role in that? So what, what can we as humans do as we move towards a future Reno or a future global city?

Angenette Damon:

[35:38](#)

Cause you know, sometimes I listen this and I'm like, Oh, and the government did this and then this factory came in and it's really easy to feel helpless and like we don't have agency. So I guess that's my, that's my question for you guys. Do what's, what's our potential role in navigating that change? I'll just say something real, real quick. Couple of things. One, subscribe to your local newspaper, the Reno Gazette journal, or we have like a statewide nonprofit Nevada, the Nevada independent engage that way. Like we have a room full of journalists that are telling you what your government's doing, what businesses are doing and can help you become informed so as to try and engage in that system. I mean, everybody can go to a city council meeting, everybody can read, write to their council members, you can join commissions, you can join neighborhood board advisory boards. There are lots of opportunities to engage in the actual government structure and not a ton of people do. So that would be my very small suggestion.

Casey Lynch:

[36:36](#)

So I would say you know, technology writ large sort of gets invoked as a way to shut down democratic debate all the time. You know, we have our data analysis, so we don't need to actually debate this because we already know what's going on or or just the sort of complex nature of, of technology, of modern technology is used. As, you know, people say, Oh, I, I don't really know about that. I don't, I don't really understand what an algorithm is or I don't understand how big data works. And so I can't really have a, a part in those conversations. And and that is something that I, I spend a lot of time and trying to push back on. And something that I understand, right. I don't have a tech training. I studied philosophy and development studies, critical development studies as a, as an undergrad. And I only came to think about these questions of psychology much

much more recently. And, and it was hard for me for a long time to feel like I could say anything. Because, you know, it's, it's technology. It's, I don't know how, how can I possibly say something meaningful about that? I don't have a training in this. I don't have the technical training in this. I'm not a coder, you know? And so I think pushing back against those narratives that tell us that we can't have a voice in the direction of technological development is really important. I think there's, you know, some space for, for people as well that, you know, try to figure out certain Ella, you know, aspects of, you know, what an algorithm is. And that kind of thing. It can be very helpful. But I think regardless the broader public does have a role to play, an important role to play that has not been, that has been very much shut down. By the way technology gets invoked in, in common discourses.

Nasia Anam:

[38:31](#)

This is a hard question for an academic to answer because we don't do much except person with our books. But that's not true. I, I mean, I guess I want to echo a little bit of what you're saying because, because I'm teaching this classic global city, I've been reading a lot about like what, what the idea of the global city is and Saskia Sawsan is one of the first people who sort of theorize this and what she said, you know, and then in the late eighties, early nineties, is that part of what makes the city global as it connects more to other global cities rather than the national government or sort of like have, it has less to do with like the local population then sort of circulation between these nodes in a large global network. And I mean I think there is, I mean there is a need to turn back to the local, the municipal have a, have more of a sense of like what's going on on the ground, particularly because like our streets in American cities but all across the world are now becoming like, like violent sites of class conflict, you know, in many ways. And so it is important not to just sort of think about a national conversation or not to think about a global conversation, but also think about how that sort of ramifies and affects our day to day lives here in our city on our streets. So yeah, act local I guess.

Caitlin Earley:

[40:00](#)

Thank you guys. And I'll, I'll throw this out there too. As a scholar of the humanities and someone who studies the past I have been doing a lot of thinking on cities as I prepare for this. And I hadn't yet thought about how I was an English major. Don't tell anybody. But how my study of 19th century British literature forms so much of my understanding of what a city is and, and what cities do. And so I think, you know, we, we sit around with our books a lot, but also being aware of where these cities come from and how we think about those cities and the labor that built those cities and the colonial structures and

under which many of those cities were built is so, so foundational to constructing cities moving forward. So I'll, I'll throw that out there for, for academics. I have a million other questions, but what I want to do is open it up to the audience to see what you guys are thinking. Any questions out there?

Audience Member 1: [41:06](#)

Hi, I wanted to thank you all for coming tonight. I wanted to ask if any of you have any ideas on how we can increase the access to higher standards of living for communities of people here in Reno who currently do not have access to things such as running water or permanent shelter?

Casey Lynch: [41:33](#)

We give them housing. It's, it's a, it's a remarkably, remarkably simple answer. And it's remarkably frustrating in the current political climate or in any political climate really. But you know, there's a lot of studies about how to deal with things like homelessness and you know, millions of dollars in Silicon Valley, a bunch of Silicon Valley. I, the CEO of Salesforce and a bunch of other people just announced, you know, I don't know how many million dollars to go towards research on how to, you know, solve the homelessness issue. And it's like housing is the answer. You can give people housing and, and programs that have just given people housing have been remarkably successful at getting people into housing. So it's a really, really simple thing. And there's a whole weird, you know, political discourse about, you know, the whole American experience of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and we can't, you know, handouts and whatever. But yeah, it's just giving people housing.

Angenette Damon: [42:35](#)

I'll just a comment on some of the difficulties that I've seen. You know, and I don't have the answer, I wish I did, but the answer is housing. And there are other cities that have like literally given, like paid for housing, given them an apartment or a little house. Here, you know, the, the city council is trying a variety of, of solutions, but you know, like they, they had this city owned land right between like the dump and the railroad tracks and this old industrial, the ground is completely like saturated with oil and who knows what else from the decades and decades of industrial use. It had like, oh, let's build some dormitories here and let's build some tiny houses here and you know, this is going to get people off the streets. And it's, I mean, I was nowhere near a grocery store. It's nowhere near even a gas station is nowhere near walkable anything. And then the political will always seems to disappear on things like not even just rent control but renter's protections so that they can't just kick kicked out. When the new developer, the new landlord comes in and buys up an apartment building or a motel. I mean,

this city leaders often celebrate when bulldozers come for the motels and some of these motels are like truly, again, horror places to live, but not healthy for anybody. But instead of, you know, fixing that situation, they're bulldozed and the units go away. There's like inclusionary zoning that you can do where if a developer was to come in and build a housing development or apartment complex that they include a certain number of units for affordable housing or workforce housing. And there's always pushback. Developers don't want to do it. I had one tell me to my face, I know, you know, I'll donate some money to a trust fund so they can build affordable housing somewhere else because of its in my development. Then, you know, I lose those units and then a stigma and all the units around that don't want to live next to the affordable housing. So it really just cuts like 30% of my profits and I can't have that. So it's a, it's a complex, very complex problem and I think it takes the political will, it takes, takes the will honestly to have developers and business owners and people with money and access to decision makers to you know, just come to that decision that everybody needs to play a part in it. I think not to sound like a socialist or [inaudible].

Nasia Anam:

[45:08](#)

I, yeah, I don't have an answer to that question other than to say like it's very clear that the housing crisis is completely manufactured obviously, because I mean, just, just having lived here for a couple of years, I'm astonished at how many luxury condos are filled with empty units owned by people who live elsewhere, who don't live here and are driving up housing costs and not contributing to the quality of life of the city. And meanwhile, there are people increasingly more and more people who are without housing. And it's like, it's not as though there isn't housing for people, it's just that there is this kind of manufactured divide between those who can afford it and those who can't. And I mean, our last crisis, our last major financial crisis was a real estate crisis. So I don't, I mean, I, yeah, I don't have an answer, but other than to say that these, these bubbles are fictions. And I think the sooner we understand that, the quicker we can get to solving these issues.

Casey Lynch:

[46:03](#)

I'll just say really quickly. I mean, yeah, it's much more complicated obviously than I let on, except right. There are some things right that are very easy, well not easy to do, but in theory easy to do. And in terms of, you know, his political will and the money is absolutely correct. But you know, there has either been experiments in housing first policy for a long time, which is this idea that you just before you require people to get a job or go to treatment for whatever, right. You just give them housing first. And, and if you are somebody who's concerned

about, you know, public expenses and stuff like that, that's actually a much cheaper option than dealing with the other, you know, all the other services that cities provide to to, you know, sort of triage the emergency of, of the housing issue, a housing crisis. So actually giving people housing vouchers for housing, building public housing is often much cheaper than dealing with the other services that that city's in you know, providing. So it's, it's one of those things that's frustrating cause I think it should be much more simple. Just housing.

Caitlin Earley: [47:13](#)

Other questions? One over here.

Audience Member 2: [47:19](#)

Hi. thank you for coming tonight. I had a quick question about... so it seems pretty clear to me that in a capitalistic society that we at a local level, it's very hard to generate the kind of medical coverage that we need specifically with specialist doctors. So for example, in the city of Reno, there is exactly one medical doctor that will cover orthopedics under Medicaid. I was just wondering how you thought we could incentivize practitioners to engage with their community in a more effective manner?

Caitlin Earley: [48:09](#)

That's a great question. I think they're just, they're processing,

Angenette Damon: [48:14](#)

I do not have the solution for this at all, but this is, you know, it's something that comes up the legislature all the time and you'll hear the providers say they just need to be reimbursed at it at a higher rate. I don't know. But that, that's one way to look at our entire healthcare system. Obviously needs to be like, well, not being redundant does nothing, is, nothing is working in our healthcare system. And that's all I can really say about that.

Nasia Anam: [48:45](#)

I don't have anything informed to say, but I can tell you that my, my mother was a doctor. She was a general practitioner. She worked on the West side of Chicago. The majority of her patients were on Medicaid, were living below the poverty line, were sex workers, are gang members, and she often didn't get paid for her services. And she was a very good person. And I think that that's maybe one of the, one of the answers to this question is compassion, which sounds very, very useless I guess to as an answer. But but yeah, I mean, I think that that's the first step.

Casey Lynch: [49:06](#)

I don't really have anything too much to say. I mean, I this is a hard one for me. I'm, I grew up in the US mostly, but most of my adult life I've been in either Spain or Canada. A couple of other countries where from Costa Rica, right where universal health care and access to healthcare is pretty good and it's, I've always struggled to understand why we just cannot get our shit

together. Because it's not that complicated. It's like another one of those things that just like shouldn't be as complicated as it is. Like basic needs in, you know, wealthy, wealthy, wealthy societies, basic needs like healthcare and housing shouldn't be as complicated to provide as they are in the, you know, in the end the issue is corruption and greed in the sort of structure of capitalist accumulation.

Nasia Anam: [50:03](#)

But I do want to know, I think we have not solved this problem between the three of us, but I am first of all, thank you for that question 'cause I think thinking about healthcare and medical care is a really important part of thinking about cities. And that's not something that we've touched on tonight. I also just noted this little moment of overlap where I'm not, say you talked about compassion and engineer earlier. You talked about connections between in specifically the residents of the Ponderosa hotel and city council. But that's an emerging as, as a potential way forward. That might not be that graspable really, but it's, it's, you know, kind of something ethereal. But that is something that is maybe an important building block for cities of the future. Other questions?

Audience Member 3: [51:12](#)

Hello. Good evening and thank you very much for this conversation. A very, very important conversation at that. My question is a fairly simple question to pose but not as simple question to ask answer I think. But the basic question is what are we getting wrong? Like what are we doing that is not allowing us to create or what are we not doing that is not allowing us to create sustainable, inclusive cities that are vibrant and thriving for all people? And I'm wondering if you can draw on either your your research and even thinking about, I've been thinking about ancient civilizations, perhaps even Caitlin might have some examples from her research that did thrive for hundreds, sometimes thousands of years and perhaps some of the practices that they included or some current cities that are doing things that are working. I'm thinking about cities like maybe could [inaudible] and Brazil and other cities that are developing sustainable and sustainable ways and also addressing some of the issues that you raised this evening. Thank you.

Casey Lynch: [52:20](#)

I mean, one of the things that we're not doing, or I guess one of the things that we are doing that makes it incredibly difficult is that we're just in this drive to commoditize everything and every aspect of urban life and, and technology is used to, to ramp that up often, right? How can we produce data about X so that we can monetize that data and we can sell it so we can better you know, advertise to you. How can we take the, you

know, the excess capacity of your personal vehicle or your home and commoditize that through Airbnb or Uber. So we're in a constant rush to commoditize every aspect and monetize every aspect of urban life and, and, and intensify it as much as we possibly can. And that is exactly what I think we need to find ways to push back against and to, you know, demonstrate alternatives to, because just commoditizing every aspect of urban life just further drives us into these States of inequality and we will never you know, achieve housing justice by further commoditizing the housing market.

Nasia Anam:

[53:38](#)

I think that one of the markers of the modern city is segregating populations. I think in the ancient city, the pre-modern city, people were living cheek to jowl amongst each other, different classes, different kinds of people. And you know, the first, you know, technically modern city was 19th century Paris and the entire project of hospitalization which is the first like urban planning project, that that was a model for how we have built a lot of our American cities and also rebuilt European cities and other cities in the, in the rest of the world has to do with sort of like excising undesirable populations to the outskirts such that like regularized kinds of housing and people live together amongst each other. And I think that that's one of the major plights of the American city is segregation. Certainly in the cities that I've lived in are deeply, deeply segregated, not only in terms of race, but in terms of class, in terms of like just culture. People coordinate, coordinate themselves off, people build enclaves. And I think that that is what's wrong. I think that people need to live amongst each other, cheek to jowl, as uncomfortable as that is in order for anything to change.

Angenette Damon:

[54:56](#)

I guess I would get back on my soap box on civic engagement. I don't know if any of you have read the book *Bowling Alone*. I, it's old now. I think it was 2004 so it was like maybe 15 years old. But just really marking the decline in civic participation. I mean the fact that all of you are sitting in this room right now, listening to us talk is like a huge step forward. Like you've already done your work today of engaging in your, in your community. But again, like keeping yourself informed on what's happening, knowing what your local government officials are doing being a part of that conversation, knowing who your neighbors are, like go have a conversation or a beer or whatever with your neighbors, know the people on your street, have community barbecues, talk to people. Don't be like *Bowling Alone* is just like they talk about like the television and said, now we all have our own televisions in our pockets all the time. So just I think engaging when you think about what happened to allow Tesla to come here with, with little forethought. In many

ways you have, you know, these developers that went and bought a whole bunch of land in an area that didn't have a community. There's no residents out there. There's no people to like affect the local government decisions out there. And they made a whole bunch of decisions that really like created a really lucrative project for them 'cause there was no one really to push back. So the more that you're like engaged and informed a part of the conversation, a part of your community, I think more of that can only help you. But if it doesn't solve everything.

Nasia Anam: [11:54](#)

I would add just to that. I think that's a really good point about Tesla and I think in all places, but especially in Nevada. Where we have large swaths of land that might look uninhabited. It's also really important and I think this falls under the community engagement thing, but to be aware of the first inhabitants of that land and the way in which that land is important to and signifies for indigenous populations.

Caitlin Earley: [57:15](#)

We have time for one more question.

Audience Member 4: [57:22](#)

Hi. earlier there was a comment made that by you that technology writ large is being used to replace democratic discussion. And I wanted to know how you think that, how you guys think that that is technology and the advances that are kind of emphasizing class difference are affecting our democracy.

Nasia Anam: [57:54](#)

Thanks Delaney. You get extra, extra credit. This is a complicated question because again, I think it's a question about access. Who has access to technology? And obviously it's usually people who have money. But also there is the argument that could be made. The technology is what is affording us the kinds of democratic revolutions that we're seeing across the globe now. I mean, the Arab spring has everything to do with social media. What's happening in Hong Kong has everything to do with social media. So I think it's it's changing the form of democracy or how democracy operates or what it means to democratize at the same time exacerbating class difference. So yet that's not, that's not an answer, but, but, but, but, but, but I think it is palpably changing how democracy works for sure and obviously hampering it in terms of what's happening in social media and our, our, our elections now. But- but we're in the Wild West. We're dumb. Democracy was complicated too.

Casey Lynch: [59:09](#)

Yeah. I think it's a very complicated question. How exactly technology affects our democracy. I think there's a number of, of answers to that. I would suggest there's a great book or an intro thought provoking book by a [inaudible] called *Twitter and*

tear gas about sort of both sides of, of you know, exactly. Some of, you know, the social media led revolutions and I was just teaching a class today talking about the way Twitter data can be used to, for sentiment analytics, to be able to create mood maps of cities so that police and other officials can use Twitter and dissect a data from Twitter to decide where in a city unrest is most likely and, and deploy surveillance technology and police to those areas. It was developed during 2011 in the UK amidst the sort of urban revolutions around the world. And so in some sort of racially motivated unrest in, in the UK at the time. So it's really, really complicated because at the same time that technology can create new ways to connect with people in new ways, to organize people new- new ways to get out, sort of minority voices and, and, and you know, have a diversity of representation and in sort of public discourse. Those same technologies are also tools for surveillance and for control and for policing. And- and to shut down and debate to securitize a futures. This is, I was talking about today. And so I think it changes the way that our democracy happens. It changes the way it changes the tools on both sides. I don't think it necessarily has a sort of unidirectional you know, one sort of kind of causal relationship there. What I was talking about before is this idea that because of, you know, this idea of sentiment analytics and, and dissecting Twitter data seems very sort of high tech. It's something that most people would say, well, I can't really, I don't understand that. So I can't really comment on that. And that's something that, again, I'll reiterate, we should be pushing back on and, and making sure that people are engaged, politically engaged and willing to step in and ask critical questions about the kinds of technologies that are being used, the kinds of technological capabilities that our local governments have or that our police departments have. Just in kind of you know, some things to think about. You know, there's some great municipal regulations that can be passed to ensure that there's transparency in what kinds of surveillance technologies police departments use. The ASLU has a program, the cops community control over police surveillance program as a sample legislation to try to make it clear that you know, there's democratic oversight over the way. Technology is used by some aspects of, of the city bands on facial recognition technology, which have terrible sort of racial buyer biases and other major issues attached to them. I could go on and on and on, but becoming publicly engaged about these about how technology is used, not just about the sort of effects of technology one way, but how technology is used by whom is a really important aspect of this final word.

Caitlin Earley:

[1:02:01](#)

Thank you guys so much for your great questions and thank you to our panelists for your thoughts on this.

End.