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### The Death of the City? Reports of San Francisco's demise have been greatly exaggerated

Rachel Brahinsky

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RACHEL BRAHINSKY

## The Death of the City?

Reports of San Francisco's demise have been greatly exaggerated

**Y**ou may have heard that the wave of gentrification that's crashing through San Francisco these days has brought "the end of San Francisco." You may have heard that the cool city of fog and freaks is over and done with, run over by Google buses filled with techies who have no sense of community or history. At the risk of being very unpopular, I'm going to tell you this isn't quite true. The "Google bus," which is what people in the Bay Area call the mass of private, tech commuter buses that fill the rush-hour streets, is not essentially the problem. In fact, it may be the seed of the solution.<sup>1</sup>

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*BOOM: The Journal of California*, Vol. 4, Number 2, pps 43–54, ISSN 2153-8018, electronic ISSN 2153-764X. © 2014 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintInfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/boom.2014.4.2.43.

The San Francisco Bay Area is undergoing a period of rapid transformation. In many ways, we've seen this boom before. Yet the unsettled atmosphere of the current moment—in which the middle class fears eviction alongside the most vulnerable—has refueled another familiar Bay Area process in the fight against displacement. The San Francisco you love exists because, as capitalism's "creative destruction" tears through the urban landscape, community advocates fighting for what I call an "ethical city" try to reshape that destruction<sup>2</sup>—and sometimes they win.

This latest wave of advocacy has been centered around tech wealth and motivated by the great, white shuttle buses. Defended as a way to keep the tech industry "green," even as it blocks public transit and weighs heavily on city streets, the Google bus has become a metaphor for life in an age of seemingly warp-speed urban change. Neither gentrification nor real estate flipping—in which investors buy and resell property for quick profit—were invented in San Francisco, and neither of them are new. See New York's SoHo and Lower East Side in the 1980s and 1990s, and see cities around the globe, which have produced enough variants on the theme that academics have created an advanced taxonomy of gentrification.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the rumble of urban change has been deeply jarring on many levels, threatening to transform what's left of San Francisco's beloved quirks into what Rebecca Solnit has aptly termed an urban "monoculture."<sup>4</sup>

It's true that, amid rising inequality, the regional culture has become more predictable, more formula retail. Even its offbeat places have aligned with similar districts in other cities, the chain-store hipsterisms of Brooklyn's Williamsburg and many others. The monoculture matters not just for the loss of the unexpected or the creative, but because it rises alongside the forced displacement of people.

Bound with the homogenization of culture, tech wealth has flushed through the real estate market, with harsh impacts on small businesses and longtime renters. Though the relative numbers of evictees are small in terms of the greater population, the steep rise in residential evictions has caused thousands of personal tragedies, and storefronts have seemed to flip at an ever-faster pace. San Francisco's no-fault evictions, in which tenants have not broken rules or laws, are rising, with Ellis Act evictions rising 175 percent in the last year, according to the city's rent board.<sup>5</sup> (The state Ellis Act allows evictions in cases where owners take

properties off the rental market.<sup>6</sup>) Meanwhile, the fallout from the foreclosure crisis continues in the East Bay, drawing capital investments that spill over the edges of the San Francisco market.<sup>7</sup>

The effects are so widespread that, in a city where 65 percent are renters and where landlords are aggressively using all measures to flip houses to take advantage of the flow of tech wealth before the bubble bursts, it's safe to say that more than half the city feels insecure in its tenancy.<sup>8</sup> In many ways it feels like a moment of "one-percent" power; *Wall Street's* Gordon Gekko might be very happy in today's San Francisco. Each week, it seems, we hear about the impending closure of yet another fixture on the urban landscape that will soon lose its place in the city, another hard-fought mural that will soon be losing its face. Meanwhile, the reports flow about realtors knocking on doors in places like the Mission and Bayview Hunter's Point, offering cash buyouts for homes that are not for sale.

Even so, another quintessentially San Franciscan story is emerging in the activist challenge to the Gekko-inspired "greed is good" mentality that is gripping The Valley.<sup>9</sup> In early December 2013, the first tech-shuttle protests burst into the news. At the time, critics challenged whether protesters had chosen the right target by blocking buses of workers who were simply trying to get to work. Yet by the end of February, the issues that the protesters wanted to push into the mainstream had traveled the globe through dozens of high profile media reports. Locally, the concerns from the streets morphed into a clear set of policy prescriptions, from the resurrection of slain supervisor Harvey Milk's proposed antispeculation tax and other disincentives to slow displacement, to the proposed creation of a new city office that would be charged with aggressively protecting tenants.

Suddenly, the once-sacrosanct Ellis Act, which is often used to flip properties for profit, was on the table for reform in Sacramento. Silicon Valley's prominent financiers and the politicians who are close to them are publicly supporting this shift.<sup>10</sup> Suddenly, after negotiating a "handshake agreement" to use public bus stops for its private shuttle program, Google Inc. was offering \$6.8 million to support a free public bus program for kids.<sup>11</sup> Of course, for Google this is a cheap externality. Still, by the time you read this, there may be more stories like this, as the appeal against Google's use of public stops moves forward.



**EVICTED**

A FAMILY IS  
BEING EVICTED  
FROM THIS HOUSE!!

UNA FAMILIA  
ESTA SIENDO  
DESALOJADA DE ESTA  
CASA!!

**DESALOJADOS**

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**DESALOJADOS**

It has been hard to see that real positive change is afoot amidst the hyperventilation in the media and the cacophony in blogs and comment sections about this war for San Francisco. Real lives are at stake as the private pain of evictees has revealed the timidity of public policy when it comes to addressing the needs of vulnerable communities. Rents and home prices have peaked and then peaked again, each rise bringing news of displacements. First, it was seniors on fixed incomes and people dying of HIV/AIDS, and then it was middle-class families, then teachers, and then came reports of shuttered art galleries, evicted musicians, and so on.<sup>12</sup>

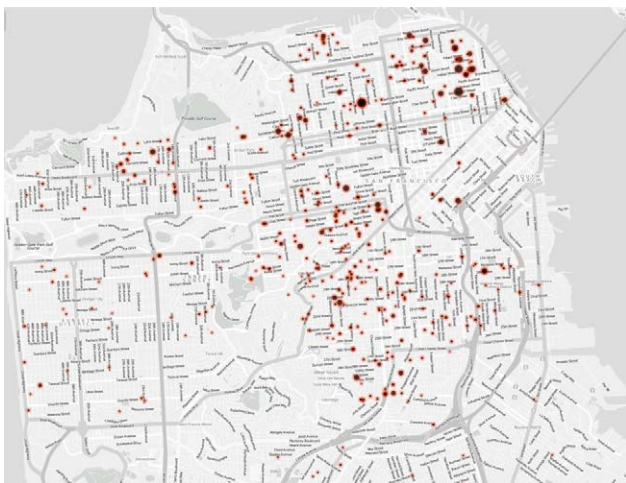
Sometimes it feels as if the tech-capital influence is a force of nature barreling through the region in ways we couldn't have imagined. It can be easy to forget that we didn't have to imagine it. Many of us lived through this story in the late 1990s and stories like it in the 1980s, and in the years before.<sup>13</sup> As chroniclers of the Bay Area's ebb and flow often point out, this is a region born of booms, so we have lots of experience. If we were paying attention, we also saw the counterpoint in, for example, the housing activists who convinced Dianne Feinstein to install emergency rent control in 1978. Then, as now, a key ingredient helped fuel significant policy changes: the middle and upper classes now feel housing stress too.<sup>14</sup>

Although there is much to be mourned in the loss of places and people that this boom has wrought, we cannot

miss that the response to it that has come over the recent winter is also shaping the cultural-political-geographic landscape of the region. The rise of multipronged organizing, where we're seeing street protests bolstered by deep data gathering and policy advocacy, has shifted the debate at a moment when many people who love San Francisco for its quirks and queerness—particularly those who cherish its remaining anticorporate zeitgeist—thought it might be time to give up.

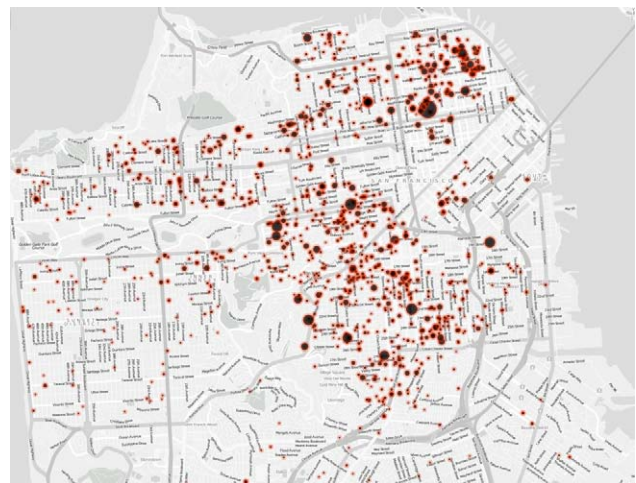
One sign of this shift comes at the wonkish policy level, among organizations like SPUR (formerly the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association), which has classically insisted that simply opening the gates to all development will solve our housing dilemmas. Most recently SPUR began advocating for affordable housing policies that sound increasingly like the proposals coming from street-level tenant advocacy groups. It's hard to imagine this new vision emerging without the activist pressures that have arisen in the recent crisis; it's also hard to imagine that vision becoming long-term policy without continued pressure from below.<sup>15</sup>

I can understand the urge to give up on San Francisco. I lived in the city for fifteen years, spending more than a decade in a tiny Twenty-sixth Street Mission District apartment, covered in beautifully unruly fuchsia bougainvillea. I loved the diversity, creativity, and engaged community



Ellis Act evictions (when a landlord can legally evict all tenants in a building to get out of the rental business) first took off during the dot-com boom of the late nineties. Between 1997 and the burst bubble in 2000 there were more than 900 such evictions.

COURTESY OF THE ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT.



Through the years of the housing bubble, large numbers of Ellis Act evictions continued. By the end of 2007, there had been 2,905 of these evictions in San Francisco—more than 300 in 2007 alone.

COURTESY OF THE ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT.

politics of the Mission. But when my landlady asked me to move out in the summer of 2012, I was oddly comfortable with the idea of leaving. “I want you to give the apartment back to me,” she told me one day, hoping to avoid legalisms.

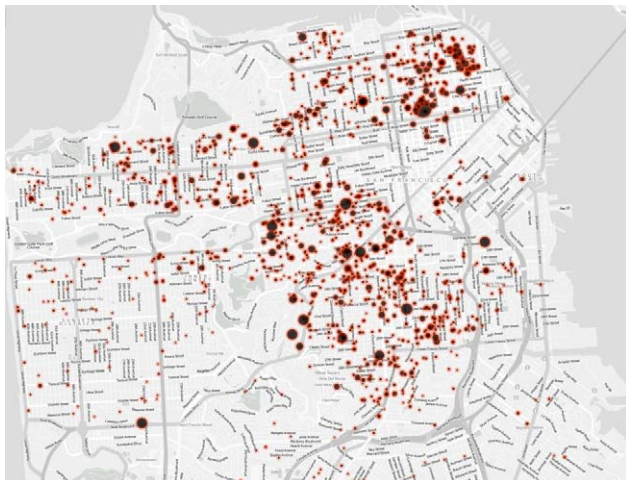
Eventually, I landed in Oakland, where, one by one, old neighbors of mine from the Mission have been emerging, living just down the street or one neighborhood away. They too were pressed out by housing prices; some fought evictions, others simply found it too difficult to stay in the city. What urban pattern have we entered into, in our new neighborhood? Of course, we did not “escape” gentrification or the influence of the tech boom. Here in the Bushrod neighborhood of north Oakland, we are once again in the middle of it.

The Bushrod story is not the same as that of the Mission District, and yet the two are intimately connected. Both places were historically home to the working class, in ethnic waves that reflected the shifting patterns of the region—loosely, from Irish to Latino, in the case of the Mission, and from white-ethnic working class to African American in the case of north Oakland. The two neighborhoods have fates that intertwine through racialized struggles with development projects that tore holes through each of them in different ways. (Mission Street was gutted and then remade by the presence of BART underneath it; residents of the Bushrod were divided from their West Oakland neighbors by the installation of BART over what later became Martin Luther

King Jr. Boulevard).<sup>16</sup> Most recently, over the last decade while the multiethnic working class of the Mission District faced dot-com fueled evictions, North Oakland faced a gut-churning round of foreclosures that have hollowed out the long-struggling neighborhood that once was a central place for the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. Those that remain negotiate a landscape increasingly dominated by corporate property owners who leave a trail in the neighborhood of fresh paint and newly coiffed front yards.<sup>17</sup>

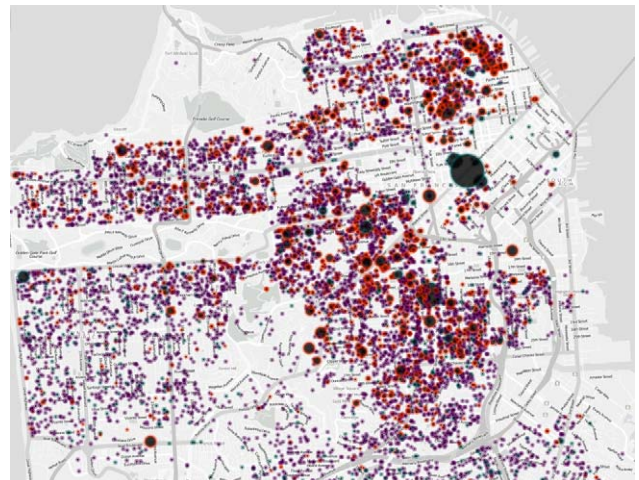
Living in Oakland through bubble 2.0 brings an interesting perspective. I am reminded daily that San Francisco is not the center of the region that it dominates. It is perhaps the crown jewel, but not the crown. The foundation of the Bay Area—its workers, in fields as diverse as healthcare and education and government and, yes, tech—spreads far beyond the borders of St. Francis’s city. The regional connections, through trans-bay transit, economics, culture, and geography, are core to the identity of the Bay Area. To understand the unsettling of San Francisco, we have to widen our lens to include the experience of places like the Bushrod and far beyond. In that light, it’s easier to see that the trauma of displacement in San Francisco is emblematic of the larger pattern of rising inequality, which has finally become a more common part of our daily national conversation.<sup>18</sup>

As urban displacement has risen, Silicon Valley’s heroes have taken a beating in the media. Essential reporting in the



Evictions slowed down during the housing crisis, and in 2010 only 89 families lost their homes due to the Ellis Act. By the end of that year total number of evictions going back to 1997 was 3,336.

COURTESY OF THE ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT.



But the Ellis Act doesn’t tell the whole story. From 1997 to October 2013, there were 11,766 no-fault evictions in San Francisco; 3,693 due to the Ellis Act, 6,952 due to owner move-in, and 1,121 due to demolition.

COURTESY OF THE ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT.



PHOTOGRAPH BY REBECCA ROBINSON.

last year has uncovered the raced and gendered exclusions of the valley, and the value in outing its prominent citizens' crass elitisms; such stories have ignited the anti-tech sentiment.<sup>19</sup> But there is another story about Bay Area technology that is also important to emphasize. It can be hard to see in the ocean of information, but it's there in our history.

In February a woman wearing a pair of Google Glass glasses was attacked (poetically, in a bar called Molotov's) by people who reportedly hurled insults linking the woman to the larger cultural shift underway: techies, they suggested, are ruining the city. But what's a techie? When I moved to San Francisco in the late 1990s, I met a lot of people who had been involved in tech for some time. Sure, many young people flocked toward quick-money start-up dreams and participated in an elaborate party culture that viewed the city as its playground—and the aforementioned real estate boom accompanied those dreams, hurling others from their homes.<sup>20</sup>

But there were, and still are, programmers and web developers who were part of the countercultural tendencies of the region, and who saw technology as a force to harness for the public. Many open-source and otherwise free technologies originated and continue to develop in the Bay Area, bolstered by the cross-fertilization of Stanford and UC Berkeley.<sup>21</sup> Hacker spaces dot the unofficial landscapes of San Francisco and Oakland, nurturing support for WikiLeaks and other countercultural (and counter-capital) uses of high tech. The Bay Area is home to open-data advocates at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the Wikimedia Foundation, Creative Commons, and the Internet Archive, which are working to preserve rights and open access to information in powerful ways.

Tech-hungry people in the region devote a tremendous amount of time to running unpaid workshops on how to play with code, make maps, and build new things at "meet-ups." Sure, many of those people are calculating that they'll

create a partnership that will lead to Twitter-level success, counting on ideas they gleaned from books such as *The Lean Startup*. But like it or not, many of them will simply learn from each other, for free.

It's a history that links back to the days of the *Whole Earth Catalog* and the high-tech lifestyle of the back-to-the-land movement (which was key in the development of off-grid solar and other technologies), with strong ties to Northern California.<sup>22</sup> In the San Francisco region, perhaps even more than some other places, the term "techie" might equally describe someone who uses open-source cartography to document the impact of the tech boom on the housing stock, as it could describe a tech developer whose sole interest is profit. There has long been an uneasy techno-marriage between the free-wheeling punk-burner-anticapitalist-queer-positive milieu with the worlds of app-loving, angel-investor-seeking Internet builders.

Yes, there are prominent tech managers spewing hatred about the poor, there are tech firms dominated by "square" corporate culture, and there is a gathering wealth of evidence showing how corporate tech culture is toxified by *Mad Men*-style sexism, racism, and a new brand of ageism (watch your back after age 30).<sup>23</sup> Even so, there are a lot of everyday people who identify with the Internet economy, and who would work to halt the eviction crisis, if they only knew how. Already the Internet Archive's Brewster Kahle has begun experimenting with financing new forms of affordable housing for nonprofit workers, in conversation with advocates for community land trusts, among others.<sup>24</sup> The problem isn't tech, *but corporate tech*.

This isn't simply a semantic challenge; this is an important distinction that could build alliances for anti-displacement sympathizers. Just as in the 1980s when *Processed World* encouraged an anticorporate ethos of workers confined to cubicles, there are tech workers who hate corporate tech culture and its ends. Seeing this as a point of potential connection, some anti-eviction advocates have started to shift their language to refer to "big tech," while others have been organizing collaborative events in the region to create relationships across apparent boundaries.<sup>25</sup> The idea is to use new connections to help pull newcomers away from the urban frontier mentality that some realtors encourage—willing new migrants to stop thinking of themselves as forging new life out of dead places.<sup>26</sup> Such

connections might support systemic policy efforts to change the course of the current wave.<sup>27</sup>

It is of course important to make a distinction between a genuine anticorporate ethos and the corporations that have co-opted that vibe for profit. Silicon Valley's titans have long claimed garage-culture success well into their middle-aged global dominance.<sup>28</sup> What I'm talking about is a real reckoning of tech that sees tech workers, and small-tech, and alternative tech as potential allies in a conversation about real estate reform. Tech workers are, after all, workers; they produce tremendous value for their employers. Many of them are part of what has been rightfully dubbed "generation debt," and doubtless spend a hefty chunk of their tech checks paying off a slice of the nation's trillion dollars' worth of college loans.<sup>29</sup> Sure, many are riding their financial luck with the exuberance of youth gone wild. These are the ones that make for great magazine pieces, but the focus on them hypes up the real divides between communities and amplifies the worst of the us-or-them corporate tech culture.<sup>30</sup>

The bigger challenge for the region, though, isn't about a particular industry at all. Of course, we know about tech firms' search for global domination and the privacy questions that have emerged with news of their collaborations with surveillance agencies. Tech is not innocent or entirely neutral. The challenge is both larger and smaller than tech. It is about the fallout, during each successive boom, of a property system that prioritizes ownership over community. What we're seeing is a problem of property markets and the consolidation of wealth through one rapidly expanding industry; the problem is not simply "techies." Taking the long view, it is clear that today it's tech capital, tomorrow it may be something else—but the real estate challenge never dies. The struggle to be a part of the San Francisco region begins and ends with property and housing.

Gentrification unfolds unevenly in different epochs and locales. There are layers and varying qualities of change. Some use the term *hyper-gentrification* to describe the mode of displacement and transformation we're seeing in San Francisco and New York these days; it appears to move at historically rapid speeds.<sup>31</sup> I call the San Francisco experience *über-gentrification*: it is gentrification marked by privatization and loosening regulations, often disguised via the "the sharing economy," in which unregulated services such as the Über taxis connect people to willing drivers, filling





gaps in our public transit services. *Über-gentrification* beckons a conversion of the public realm away from the public. That's part of why the Google bus meme is so potent. Whatever your opinion may be of the corporate tech shuttles, they reveal and exploit the flaws of our public systems, such as transit, with a clarity that decades of urban politics have not.

There are benefits to systems like Airbnb, which can offer much more affordable means for traveling and visiting places. But there are major problems as well: in the Bay Area news reports have linked Ellis Act evictions to newly spawned Airbnb sites, and no city has adequately addressed the taxing structure of this semiformal hotel arrangement. The upshot is that cities lose residential units from the general housing stock and lose revenues that would come with more formal hotel arrangements. What's more, the commodification of everyday life—and now even the commodification of sharing—comes at the cost of something both material and spiritual: the idea and the functioning of the public realm. It is in the public realm that we can assert a politics of care for the city and for each other, a politics and an ethics of genuine sharing.

At some of the anti-eviction demonstrations in San Francisco, you'll see a sign that reads "eviction = death," echoing the 1980s cry of ACT UP and others who painted "silence = death" on city sidewalks to force public recognition of HIV/AIDS. As with the AIDS crisis, the anti-eviction protesters' sentiment is not hyperbole. For seniors who depend on local networks for food, medicine, and emotional support, and

for the terminally ill, eviction is a blunt-force instrument that shortens lives and eviscerates communities.<sup>32</sup>

For those who don't have a friend or a neighbor facing eviction, however, the buses remain the most potent symbol of the new era. When I ride the very humble AC Transit buses in Oakland, the large, white tech-shuttle buses loom over us, nearly twice as tall as many of the other vehicles on the road. This is why—even though riders are probably working or sleeping—it feels like they are supervising the city from above. This sensation only feeds the rising anger against the pervasiveness of corporate tech.

What is to be done? There is no lone policy shift that will salve these corporate tech wounds. There are many good solutions under debate now; with continued pressure they may become law in the same way that rent control moved from impossible to mainstream in 1978. What I offer here is a partial prescription, a manifesto for an *ethical urbanism* that could shift power away from corporate tech and real estate capital and into the hands of everyday people.

1. We need a guiding principle of an *ethical urbanism* that values community engagement. Sick and old people should not be evicted but should be cared for; property ownership comes with responsibility. We all love the hilltop views and the beautiful bridges, but it is the collective kindnesses of the past that have made the region great: people who fought to let others love freely, others who risked their lives for livable wages, still others who cared enough to join together in causes from preserving parkland to marriage equality—and people who challenged forced displacement.
2. We need to stop talking about San Francisco and start talking about the *San Francisco Bay Region*. This means that Oakland is not just a place to flee to when you give up on San Francisco. At the same time, the region needs to be respected. Oakland is not a playground, a new frontier, or a place of last resort; it is a place with a history and a present. People in Oakland want economic investment and cleaner, safer streets, but they want to be included in positive changes that come. Regional policies toward *community development without displacement* will be paramount in undoing the geographic and racialized inequalities of the past. Among many possibilities,

I'd like to see the institution of a real estate metric for *eviction-free housing*. Although it's not the ultimate solution, a consumer-side metric like this would highlight when the path to the American dream is paved with the dislocation of other people's lives.

3. We need a *common language* about gentrification that doesn't blame techies for the demographic and landscape changes that make some of us heartsick and others homeless. This is not to say that we should let people off the hook for their impact on the region. But we need to widen the lens and stop conflating style and happenstance with root causes. Evictions are carried out by landlords, and increasingly by corporate landlords. There are structural avenues for dealing with this: We can further regulate property ownership, starting with the Ellis Act reform conversations that have been opened up at the state and local level. We can insist on all available emergency measures—right now. We can push forward conversations about ideas like a tax on property speculation, which came out of the well-attended San Francisco tenants' conventions this winter.<sup>33</sup>
4. What about density? Last summer the pro-growth regime in the Bay Area called on the city to build its way out of the housing crisis, demanding a high-density quick-build solution.<sup>34</sup> Density in some parts of the region will be key. This has been long negotiated in many public forums, but it matters hugely, and entirely, how it is done. The biggest need is for a range of types of affordable housing (from the lowest strata to middle-income), with a focus on family housing rather than studio living. This has been documented year after year in city planning reports.<sup>35</sup> Simply increasing the stock of market-rate housing may well continue the push upward in prices, until an economic crash (or an earthquake) shakes things apart. Even then, this region doesn't tend to "lose value" the way other places do. An ethical urbanism calls for *development and density without displacement*, as a bottom line, or the San Francisco Bay Area that you love will be long gone. This may be an expensive and challenging proposition, but it can be done, with very clear political will that insists that Silicon Valley investors respond to the clamor of rising dissent by supporting community-based development.<sup>36</sup>



5. We need a *reckoning with racism* in the Bay Area, a problem that is deeply embedded, through capital investment, in patterns on the land. As much as the current boom can often look like a clash between class interests, it is also a force that re-creates racial and geographic inequalities in places like the Mission and north Oakland.<sup>37</sup> Facing and challenging the intertwining of racism and real estate markets in the region must be a central part of any ethical urban project.<sup>38</sup>
6. Oh, and *we need more "open-source," and we need more maps*. That is, we need to keep using the deep tech knowledge of the region for knowledge-sharing and public cartography, to continue to reveal the extent and impact of corporate tech, evictions, foreclosures, and the like. Two of the most powerful tools in the eviction-transit struggle have been maps that brought clarity to the chaos. First, a private firm sent people to street corners all around San Francisco to document the previously secret shuttle bus routes. The 2012 Stamen Design map opened up the conversation about the tech buses and enabled dozens of other analyses, about the links between the buses and housing costs, and the overlap between private and public bus routes, among other things.<sup>39</sup> Later, the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project stepped in where local news reporters had not yet gone. The maps and visualizations coming out of that project have gone a long way toward building a common language and understanding of the material conditions of the city.



This is essential for any social movement or meaningful policy discussion.

7. Finally, if you care about the region, and you mourn its rapid transformation, you need to fight like hell for the kind of city you want. Activism is historically a part of the region, but it does not emerge automatically. The people who have been out front challenging displacement—dealing with the day-to-day pain of evictees pushed out of their homes—are tired and need help.

Gentrification is capitalism playing out in the landscape. It is essentially our economy's urban form. Like the economy, gentrification will accelerate with competition, and it can be moderated with regulation. Corporate tech, too, can be shaped. The last few months have proven that possibility.

In these moments of economic boom we can most clearly see the ways in which housing is treated as a commodity. You may think of your home as yours, but it largely belongs to the bank. When the boom times come and we are

able to witness “serial evictions,” in which investors openly seek to quickly buy and sell—“flip”—homes without concern for the lives of tenants, then the crassness of urban property markets is most clearly on display. It is even more harsh in appearance when the victims of displacement are old or sick. The message we send to them, when we allow these evictions to move forward, is that their lives and our community matter less to us than our faith in the power of private property. Until we are willing to challenge this—through a range of options, from raising support of community land trusts among other things—we will witness these typhoons of displacement with each successive boom.

The San Francisco region's most potent dreams are made of the kinds of struggles that refuse the sweeping change brought by the economic forces of urbanism. What we witnessed in the winter of 2014 was a reawakening of this side of “San Francisco,” a part of the city as mythic and real as the Gold Rush. The ongoing cacophony of

protests, corporate tech-activist happy hours, housing lectures and forums, and the ballast of anti-eviction committees brought together by two months of tenant conventions are all signs of this legacy regathering steam. What happens next? **B**

## Notes

All photographs courtesy of Rachel Brahinsky unless otherwise noted.

- <sup>1</sup> My deep thanks goes to those who read and commented on this essay, including Bruce Rinehart, Joshua Brahinsky, Corey Cook, participants in the “Planning, Revitalization, and Displacement” session of the 2014 Urban Affairs Association meetings, and the generous editors and anonymous reviewers at *Boom*.
- <sup>2</sup> “Creative destruction” originates with Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1975). Others have explored its role in the urban context. See Max Page, *The Creative Destruction of Manhattan, 1900–1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Richard A. Walker, “An Appetite for the City,” *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*, James Brook, Nancy J. Peters, and Chris Carlsson, eds. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998).
- <sup>3</sup> Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin K Wyly, *Gentrification* (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2008); Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996). The blog *Vanishing New York* published this excellent analysis that fleshes out “hyper-gentrification” in more detail than I’ve seen elsewhere. Moss is a pseudonym: Jeremiah Moss, “On Spike Lee & Hyper-Gentrification, the Monster That Ate New York,” *Jeremiah’s Vanishing New York*, 3 March 2014.
- <sup>4</sup> Rebecca Solnit, “Resisting Monoculture,” *Guernica / A Magazine of Art & Politics*, 12 March 2014. Solnit has become the prime chronicler of the disappearance of old San Francisco, documenting the clash of cultures in fine detail in a series of essays including this one.
- <sup>5</sup> See Delene Wolf, *Rent Board Annual Report on Eviction Notices* (Residential Rent Stabilization and Arbitration Board, 2014).
- <sup>6</sup> The city doesn’t track the number of people evicted in each incidence, but the activist Anti-Eviction Mapping Project estimates that the number of evictees could be between 716 and 3,580, assuming one to five evictees per eviction. See [antievictionmappingproject.net](http://antievictionmappingproject.net). This advocacy-project’s data sleuthing has been bolstered by city reports like the one noted in note 5 (Wolf, 2014).

- <sup>7</sup> On the economic fallout in the East Bay, see Darwin Bond-Graham, “The Rise of the New Land Lords,” *East Bay Express*, 12 February 2014.
- <sup>8</sup> Housing stability has been a key concern in a series of surveys, including this one: Cook, Corey, and David Latterman, *University of San Francisco Affordability and Tech Poll*, December 2013. This is notable across incomes in San Francisco, where the most recent census showed about 65 percent of residents are renters, about twice the national average.
- <sup>9</sup> This push back by civil society against pressures of market economics is what Polanyi described as a “double movement.” Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001).
- <sup>10</sup> Tim Redmond, “Everyone in Town (except a Few Landlords) Is Supporting Leno’s Ellis Act Bill,” *48 Hills*, 24 February 2014; Norimitsu Onishi, “Ron Conway, Tech Investor, Turns Focus to Hometown,” *The New York Times*, 18 April 2013.
- <sup>11</sup> Cote, John, and Marisa Lagos, “Google Says \$6.8 Million for Youth Muni Passes Just a Start,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 February 2014.
- <sup>12</sup> One of too many to include here: Baker, Kenneth, “Art Galleries Swallowed Up by S.F. Real Estate Boom,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 February 2014.
- <sup>13</sup> On the rise of street-level urban planning during Dot-com I, see Rachel Brahinsky, Miriam Chion, and Lisa Feldstein, “Reflections on Community Planning in San Francisco,” *Spatial Justice/Justice Spatiale* 5 (2013). Then head back to the 1980s—no techies, lots of yuppies: Dan Morain, “Gentrification’s Price: S. F. Moves: Yuppies In, the Poor Out,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 1985.
- <sup>14</sup> Last fall, after a member of the politically connected Alioto clan found himself facing eviction from his well-appointed Art Deco Nob Hill apartment, tensions rose further with the realization that almost anyone could be evicted, even a politically connected person paying high rent. See Carolyn Said, “Park Lane Tenants Protest Conversion Plans,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 September 2013.
- <sup>15</sup> See Gabriel Metcalf, “The San Francisco Exodus,” *The Atlantic Cities*, 14 October 2013, compared with SPUR report, *SPUR’s Agenda for Change*, 12 March 2014.
- <sup>16</sup> See Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Tomás F. Summers Sandoval, *Latinos at the Golden Gate: Creating Community & Identity in San Francisco* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).
- <sup>17</sup> Urban Strategies Council, *Who Owns Your Neighborhood? The Role of Investors in Post-Foreclosure Oakland*, 2012; Alex Schafran, “Origins of an Urban Crisis: The Restructuring of the San Francisco Bay Area and the Geography of Foreclosure: The

- Geography of Foreclosure in San Francisco,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.2 (2013): 663–688.
- <sup>18</sup> Alan Berube, “All Cities Are Not Created Unequal,” The Brookings Institution, 2014.
- <sup>19</sup> Sharmin Kent, “Dudebros Are Ruining the Tech Industry,” *Salon*, 13 March 2014.
- <sup>20</sup> *Boom: The Sound of Eviction*, directed by Francine Cavanaugh, A. Mark Liiv, and Adams Wood (2002; Whispered Media, film).
- <sup>21</sup> David Bretthauer, “Open Source Software: A History,” (UConn Libraries Published Works, 2001). Also see AnnaLee Saxenian, *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- <sup>22</sup> Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- <sup>23</sup> Yiren See Lu, “Silicon Valley’s Youth Problem,” *New York Times*, 12 March 2014; and Noam Scheiber, “The Brutal Ageism of Tech,” *The New Republic*, 23 March 2014.
- <sup>24</sup> Brewster Kahle, “Community Land Trusts Maybe a Way Towards Debt-Free Foundation Housing,” *Brewster Kahle’s Blog*, 3 February 2013.
- <sup>25</sup> For one example, see [engagesf.org](http://engagesf.org).
- <sup>26</sup> Across the Bay Area, we’re seeing repetitions (in realtor publications and websites) of the same explicitly frontierist attitude that Smith (1996) documented in the Lower East Side in New York City.
- <sup>27</sup> The class-action lawsuit announced recently against Google and Apple for colluding to keep engineers from job-hopping may bring out a few of those voices. The charge is that engineers were essentially prisoners in their jobs. These were high-paid positions. But the handshake pact that kept the companies from hiring each other’s people was crippling.
- <sup>28</sup> For example: Curtis White and Rew Cooper, “Apple and Amazon’s Big Lie: The Rebel Hacker and Hipster Nerd Is a Capitalist Stooge,” *Salon*.
- <sup>29</sup> Anya Kamenetz, *Generation Debt: How Our Future Was Sold Out for Student Loans, Credit Cards, Bad Jobs, No Benefits, and Tax Cuts for Rich Geezers—and How to Fight Back* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007); Chris Denhart, “How The \$1.2 Trillion College Debt Crisis Is Crippling Students, Parents and the Economy,” *Forbes*, 7 August 2013.
- <sup>30</sup> Yiren Lu, “Silicon Valley’s Youth Problem,” *New York Times*, 12 March 2014; Sam Biddle, “Startup Stud Hates Homeless People, Ugly Girls, and Public Transit,” *Valleywag*, 15 August 2013.
- <sup>31</sup> See Lees et al (2008) and Moss (2014).
- <sup>32</sup> This is an underexplored problem; researchers are currently interviewing Bay Area evictees to track the effects of displacement on community and health. Fullilove looks at the psychological impact of displacement: M.T. Fullilove, “Psychiatric Implications of Displacement: Contributions from the Psychology of Place,” *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 153.12 (1996): 1516–1523; and M.T. Fullilove, “Root Shock: The Consequences of African American Dispossession,” *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 78.1 (2001): 72–80.
- <sup>33</sup> Wolf, Josh. “Activists Call for Revival of Harvey Milk’s Anti-Speculation Proposal,” *The Public Press*, 10 Feb. 2014.
- <sup>34</sup> Clarence Stone’s term “urban regime” helps explain the power dynamics in cities that emerge around development projects. See Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946–1988*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989). In the Bay Area, SPUR and the Bay Area Council have been central players in that regime. SPUR, as noted previously, has begun to shift its rhetoric in favor of affordability.
- <sup>35</sup> San Francisco Planning Department, *Housing Element, San Francisco General Plan*, 2011.
- <sup>36</sup> A series of proposals have emerged in recent months from all sides of the political spectrum. The Council of Community Housing Organizations has a set of affordable housing solutions. See [sfcho.org/cchos-housing-plan-for-2014/](http://sfcho.org/cchos-housing-plan-for-2014/).
- <sup>37</sup> These connections in other California cities are explored by George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); and Laura Pulido, “Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90.1 (2000): 12.
- <sup>38</sup> Rachel Brahinsky, “The Making and Unmaking of Southeast San Francisco” (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012); Rachel Brahinsky, “Race and the Making of Southeast San Francisco: Towards a Theory of Race-Class,” *Antipode* (2013).
- <sup>39</sup> Eric Rodenbeck, “Mapping Silicon Valley’s Gentrification Problem Through Corporate Shuttle Routes,” *Wired*, 6 September 2013.