

REBECCA SOLNIT

The *Boom* Interview

My imperiled city

Rebecca Solnit is an impassioned voice for San Francisco—around the world. And she comes by it honestly. She grew up in the Bay Area and has lived and worked in the city her entire adult life. She has made it her city, while becoming one of the city's—and, indeed, the world's—most gifted, insightful, consistently relevant, and provocative writers, independent scholars, and public intellectuals. Many of her books have taken a hard look at San Francisco and at the same

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time celebrated the city, from *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism* to *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, and many others. In the last couple of years, her columns on the perils the city faces—most notably symbolized by the great white Google buses—in the *London Review of Books* and elsewhere have made her an international voice for what's at risk in San Francisco and other cities in our new Gilded Age. And that has made her a lightning rod, too. Here at *Boom*, we wanted to step back from the byte-sized debates and flame-wars that have raged online around Solnit's views and take the time to listen to her concerns in full and in the context of the diverse voices in this issue exploring what's the matter with San Francisco. We spoke with her across the kitchen table in her home in the Mission District.

Boom: What's the matter with San Francisco?

Solnit: You can imagine San Francisco as full of dynamic struggle that's been pretty evenly matched between the opposing sides since the Gold Rush. There have always been idealists and populists and people who believe in mutual aid in the City of San Francisco. And there have also been ruthless businessmen and greedy people: the “come in and get everything and be accountable to nobody and hoard your pile of glittering stuff” mentality has been here since the city was founded. But it has not been so powerful that it has rubbed out the other side.

Now, however, it feels like Silicon Valley is turning San Francisco into its bedroom community. There's so much money and so much power and so little ability to resist that it is pushing out huge numbers of people directly, but it is also re-creating San Francisco as a place that is so damn expensive that nobody but people who make huge amounts of money will be able to live here. Of course, San Francisco has been a really expensive city since the 1980s. It has been

steadily getting more and more so. Or not steadily. It has really been more like “punctuated equilibrium,” to use a Clarence King geological term. Whatever equilibrium we had after the last inflationary spiral of both the housing boom and the dot-com boom is over. And now we’re in the midst of a huge boom. And with each boom, we’ve lost a little more of the affordability and economic, ethnic, cultural, and maybe professional diversity of the city. It has become more like a resort community: the rich live here, and the people who service them and perform the vital functions are going to have to live somewhere else.

There are ways in which Silicon Valley now is absolutely unprecedented in human history. It is this bizarre, new, corporate, global power center with no accountability. It’s also just a new phase of San Francisco’s increasing gentrification and unaffordability, its housing crisis. That’s an old story. Or you can tell the story yet another way as a more intensified clash in the global conflict between the haves and have-nots as the economic middle gets hollowed out, and we have rising economic inequality. And it’s a clash of values. In a way, it’s all those stories and more than you can tell. I don’t think one framework explains the whole phenomenon.

So what’s the matter with San Francisco? It’s becoming a bedroom community for Silicon Valley, while Silicon Valley becomes a global power center for information control run by a bunch of crazy libertarian megalomaniacs. And a lot of what’s made San Francisco really generative for the environmental movement and a lot of other movements gets squeezed out. And it feels like the place is being killed in some way.

Boom: Is this different from the situation you wrote about in *Hollow City*?

Solnit: This feels different for a number of reasons. We lost so much in the dot-com boom. A lot of cultural organizations and nonprofits, ways of life got pushed out. And the city became much more exclusionary. We have already lost so much. We can’t afford to lose anymore. It’s like, okay, you

lost one limb, but you can still walk with a prosthetic. How many more cuts can this death of a hundred cuts, a thousand cuts sustain?

There is a lack of meaningful conversation about what’s happening in the Bay Area. You don’t hear newcomers say, “Well, maybe we shouldn’t be the engine of mass displacement. Maybe we don’t want to be completely hated in this city. Maybe we don’t want to run so many tech buses that they’re displacing public transit from its public bus stops,”

I’m just somebody who sees the Google bus go barreling by every day and sees my city changing. How can I not look at it? I think it’s everyone’s business.

Boom: It’s a horrible metaphor, but it seems like this bus kind of ran over you and you had to respond. As you said, it’s in your face. It’s in your life.

Solnit: It’s kind of amazing to me that my most recent very San Francisco book, *Infinite City*, my atlas from late 2010, has so little to do with Silicon Valley. I would be mapping a very different Bay Area if I were doing that atlas four years later. And it’s interesting, because we had really kind of stopped watching Silicon Valley nervously, the way that we had at other times, and then it just exploded again. I’m a San Francisco watcher, and now that Silicon Valley has decided to annex San Francisco, I’ve got to watch Silicon Valley. If the crazy billionaire who wants to divide the state into six new states has his way, the whole Bay area will even be called Silicon Valley, which is a kind of ugly, weird name on top of everything else.

Boom: In a sense, Silicon Valley is becoming the synecdoche for the Bay Area and even California. You travel around the world and you say you’re from San Francisco, and people’s eyes light up.

Solnit: Yeah.

Boom: Do they do that for Silicon Valley?

We lost so much in the dot-com boom, the city became much more exclusionary. We can’t afford to lose anymore.

Solnit: Hell, no. It's interesting, because I used to always say that I was a San Franciscan and a Californian rather than American. Schwarzenegger kind of ruined your standing as a Californian in Europe.

I was in Reykjavik last summer. And everyone has got iPhones and MacBooks and is using Google and Yahoo! and Gmail and stuff. And you realize this is not just some local thing. This is what the world looks like. This is where the new world is, and a very sinister new world. I keep using the word "unaccountability." We are not in an era of antimopoly. Google has left a whole host of antitrust lawsuits in its wake. They are the dominant search engine and they skew results in very weird ways. They are the dominant mapping entity and have attempted to buy up and rub out other mapping entities. They buy up robotic corporations like crazy. And it feels like they have a drive towards monopoly with everything they do. And that's really scary.

Boom: So what happened? What was it you didn't see in *Infinite City*? And then in the last couple years and even in the last few months, what happened that made this explode?

Solnit: Silicon Valley keeps getting bigger and bigger and creating new billionaires and becoming more powerful. Twitter moved to San Francisco. Google keeps enlarging and buying up more corporations and expanding its clutches. And more and more crazy things keep coming out of the mouths of billionaires. And they keep messing with politics in more and more weird ways. The fact that Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, and some of the others all belong to ALEC, the deeply antidemocratic, pro-petroleum industry American Legislative Exchange Council, is really creepy.

There is good journalism. But the picture is so big, it feels like the blind man and the elephant. You'll get a great report on the leg or the trunk or the tusk, but do we even have an overview of what it all adds up to?

Boom: One of the reasons that this kind of relationship in part became visible, I think was because of the map that Stamen did. So then this relationship became visible, and it was like a very old mapping technique. It's like the Minard map of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

Solnit: I don't think it was that influential. San Francisco just kept seeing the damn Google bus every day. When Stamen's map came out, somewhere in the middle of it all—and I would circulate it on Facebook and stuff—I did not see

it widely circulated on Facebook or referenced a lot elsewhere. Actually, MUNI, the San Francisco Municipal Transit Authority, put out for public comment maps showing where the 200 bus stops are that the buses are now stopping at. It's so much more scary than Stamen's map, which kind of makes it look like they've got a few big arteries and a few stops. They've got 200 stops now, and they are really running a major transportation system inside the infrastructure for public transit.

I think it's about the experience for us of literally seeing the Google bus. I'll be sitting at a window in a café or a bar or in a restaurant anywhere in central San Francisco, and they will roll by every few minutes for hours. And part of what makes them sinister is they're unlabeled. The double-deckers are usually Google buses, but how do you tell an Apple bus from a Yahoo! bus—you know, there's just tons of them out there.

They couldn't have chosen a better vehicle to be kind of scary and sinister, these things that look like, as I put it in another interview, a cross between armored personnel carriers and limousines, except that they're much bigger than either of those. They are bigger than—they're so fucking huge. So I think that we just responded to what's actually out there on the street.

One of the big mysteries for me is I got really interested in this because I live here, but Europeans and people all over the world seem really interested in this. Is this because they are all being governed by Google and Facebook and Twitter? Or is this because San Francisco seems like a bellwether for the new economic divide or the new hipster Stasi or what?

Boom: So how did the Google bus become a kind of meme or a synecdoche for what's the matter with San Francisco?

Solnit: Google is the biggest, and it runs the most buses, and so Google became the shorthand for all the tech buses. And I think Google is also the biggest corporation of them all, in terms of power and financial and political and a personal kind of presence. You may not use Facebook, but you probably use the Google search engine. There's a good chance you also use Gmail and Google Groups and Google Maps, and that it's on your phone and your computer and iPad. Google has become so pervasive so quickly.



I don't know if I played a role in the emblematicness of the Google bus. My piece in the *London Review of Books* in February 2013 was entitled "Google Invades."

Boom: What happened then and how did it feel to all of a sudden be in the middle of this?

Solnit: Well, the piece circulated like wildfire. And I think a lot of people had been observing it and feeling nervous. It was the first really widely seen and circulated piece to articulate what was happening and why it was creepy and scary and upsetting, though David Talbot did a really great piece the fall before. So it circulated really widely from the outset and got discussed really widely outside of San Francisco.

The buses gave us this very visible kind of symbol, and as my friend, the poet Aaron Shurin has said, you couldn't have stumbled onto a better symbol, this big, scary, bland, blank, and intrusive behemoth cruising the city streets with its tinted windows. And these people who are just so not there getting in and out.

There isn't a meaningful conversation about what's happening to San Francisco. There are just these attacks on people who don't think it's wonderful.

And Tom Perkins referring to it as *Kristallnacht* is about as articulate—I feel like now I'm defaming middle school students—as junior high. It's this really lame discourse. And maybe I shouldn't say lame. That insults the disabled. Let's choose a better word than "lame." Let's just call it "wanker discourse," if that doesn't insult penises everywhere.

I'm not seeing people say, "Well, actually, this is why it's good and productive." You just get these billionaires calling everyone who doesn't love them a *Nazi*, as though you should not only be able to buy everything in sight, but everyone should worship you like the king or something. It really does feel like a dictatorship or a monarchy where they are shocked and upset that the peasants have a right to their own opinion. So the discourse is just really—well, it's not a discourse. It's like hostile tweets and libels and slurs. And there's an irony within: that the

new technologies have created these debased discourses within which we have to try to articulate what's debased about the discourse.

Then there are also these mountains of magic mantras that don't have anything to do with anything. For example, Silicon Valley is very libertarian. There's this idea, unfettered housing development would solve the housing problem, except that we need about 100,000 new units. Do we even have room to build 100,000 new units of housing in San Francisco? How long would it take? Would it really solve the housing crisis before anyone was evicted?

In my most recent LRB piece, I quote a Silicon Valley kid who said we should just deregulate development and raise the minimum wage and we'd have no problem. I did the math on that. Housing prices would have to fall to a fifth of what they are now for a \$10 an hour minimum wage to make housing affordable at market rate, because market rate housing now, you'd have to make \$50 an hour to be able to get in the gate. And I don't see us raising the minimum wage to \$50 an hour. That's a world I might like to see. But that's not actually the world you think you're advocating for, because you haven't actually done your research, and you don't actually know what you're talking about. We're not getting really insightful counterarguments.

Boom: What would such a conversation look like?

Solnit: It would look like democracy, but you can't really have a democratic conversation when you have the very opposite of democracy economically—so it's not the conversation that matters; it's the economy. Silicon Valley is this dark star that's come along with an enormous gravitational pull that's kind of pulling everything out of its orbit. And there's no accountability. I've seen other people use the phrase, too, but I've been calling it the "military tech industrial complex," because it feels like it's a quasi-governmental body now. And there are a lot of overlaps with government

and military; Silicon Valley arose from military contracting and was never the bohemian entity it likes to portray itself as, Think Different Land.

Boom: Do you think this is a product of the libertarian ideology that dominates Silicon Valley, or is it a product of the constraints and tendencies of the media, the 140 characters of a tweet, the toxic culture of commenting online, or is it a toxic stew of those two things?

Solnit: It's a perfect storm. When Harry met Sally, when libertarian megalomania met semi-anonymous name-calling. It's a kind of discourse that doesn't deserve the name of "discourse."

There has been good research from the SPUR *Urbanist* and others since I started to write. Somebody at UC Berkeley mounted a major study of the Google bus and its impact and confirmed that it's actually not green carpooling. It's displacing a lot of people. A lot of tech people wouldn't live in San Francisco if they didn't have free shuttles that count their long commute as work time. A lot of them would actually take existing public transit, et cetera. But you get these memes. New technology is good at creating these things people think are true, because they've been floating around, and they haven't really checked them.

Boom: What did San Francisco mean to you as you were growing up? And what did it come to mean to you as you fell in love with it as a young writer?

Solnit: Well, the funny thing about growing up here is that this is normal. It's like our weather is normal. You have to go someplace else to understand what's particular to here. You know, San Francisco has been a wide-open town. It was really a city of refuge. It's named after St. Francis, the man who was kind to animals and the poor, who was really an inclusive, empathic figure of mutual aid. And I think that

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there are some real resonances there, despite the brutalities of the Gold Rush. It was an unusually diverse city from the Gold Rush on. We had Chinese and Chileans and European refugees from the collapse of the revolutions of 1848 and free thinkers and people like Henry George the socialist, great union movements. It was a place where women were able to have a public presence, and Jews were able to have a public presence and participation that they weren't able to have in the East. There was a real sense of freedom for people and inclusion. It was a place where people came for refuge as pacifists during World War II, and for long before as openly gay and lesbian and transgendered and cross-dressing people. And it was a port town, so it had the same wildness other port cities like New Orleans have. And it has been a great city of literature and the arts.

The f/64 photographic movement is often described as though it was really based in Carmel and Monterey. Edward Weston was there. But Ansel Adams and Imogen Cunningham went back and forth. And it was as much San Francisco as anywhere.

Maybe “San Francisco Renaissance” is a better term for the incredible explosion of poetry here in the forties and fifties that never really ended but may be ending now. There are probably not so many young poets in San Francisco, though there are still a lot of old ones.

But it was also a place that created new institutions. And I think the Sierra Club in 1892 was really paradigmatic. It was a bunch of businessmen and lawyers who thought you could do well while doing good—and John Muir. They really were turning the idea of the private mountaineering club, which had been a very elite entity in Europe and the East, into something more populist and radical and engaged. And I think the global environmental movement, if it starts anywhere, it starts here.

And all these experiments in lifestyle and the expansion of rights for women and people of color and gays and lesbians and farmworkers and disabled people, that comes out of the greater Bay Area. It has been a place that has produced a lot of new ways of living and doing things, with liberatory and egalitarian and inclusive ideas for the whole

planet. It has been a kind of a beacon and a laboratory. And that's what's at stake. That's why San Francisco matters.

You think of so many individual people who have been absolutely amazing and done wonderful things. And I don't see that in the new San Francisco, where it just costs so damn much to live here, you either have to have a trust fund or be working really hard at making money. You can't be doing what people have been doing in my tenure in San Francisco, which is to do something part time for a living, but do for free with no expectation of return what you're passionate about, whether it's human rights or environmentalism or painting or poetry or scholarship. That scope to be poor and idealistic no longer exists, and it was those poor idealistic people that made the great culture of San Francisco. They are portrayed as slackers in the mainstream conversation, and there have always been slackers, but also people working on AIDS issues, on environmental justice, on human rights, on after-school programs for at-risk kids, and not getting rich at it.

One of the great misunderstandings in our society is that wealth is culture. That's ridiculous. The Fillmore District, a poor African American district, was the Harlem of the West. It was tremendously culturally generative. It was a place that was rich in culture. And the Batman Gallery, which was a great gallery for artists like Bruce Conner and Joan Brown, a kind of avant-garde gallery, had tremendous empathy and connection to the Fillmore. It was at 2222 Fillmore Street. When I started working on my book on it, in the late 1980s, it had become a classical music store. And, okay, a classical music store is just selling culture made elsewhere, but it's a pretty nice cultural entity. Since the nineties, it's been a Starbucks. Now I think it's a Lululemon yoga clothing store. And you can see from an art gallery giving really radical, outspoken, experimental artists a place to show and strengthening a community, to a place selling classical music, to a Starbucks, which is still a café where

people can hang out and read and write, to a yoga clothing corporate chain with \$90 pants, is a trajectory of gentrification in a nutshell, all at 2222 Fillmore Street. While the space that the Six Gallery was in—where the great “Howl” reading happened in 1955, one of the great landmarks in American literature and the rebirth of poetry as a spoken participatory live thing rather than just something you read—that place became a kind of wonderful Middle Eastern rug store that felt like it kept that spirit alive in some way through the nineties. And now it's a boring, upscale restaurant, wine bar. So wealth is not where culture comes from.

Megan Wilson, who is one of the Clarion Alley Mural Project artists, got harassed under the sit/lie law that was forced through by people like Gavin Newsom and the more gentrifying supervisors, the law that criminalizes sitting and lying in public. She's a muralist who has made that alley—which was a kind of drug alley, full of piss and shit—into this beautiful place, full of brilliant, evolving murals. It's not a static museum of the murals that were there in the 1990s. She was painting a new mural, and the police came and hassled her. Here's one of the people who has given the most to the community. And the police are serving a version of community that doesn't tolerate people like that.

René Yañez—who Guillermo Gómez-Peña calls the “capo,” the godfather of the Mission—has been evicted while his wife is being treated for cancer. Who does those things? And who moves into their homes when they're vacated? The brutality and the indifference to the culture, with so much money sloshing around like a tsunami! Why has nobody bailed out Adobe Books, which was evicted, and is now sort of limping along as a nonprofit? Why has nobody bailed out Modern Times, the great bookstore that was also evicted, and is now deeper in the Mission on Twenty-Fourth Street and possibly going to go under? Why has nobody bailed out Marcus Books, the oldest black

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bookstore west of the Mississippi that's also got housing troubles?

That is one of the big questions of Silicon Valley: with that much money, where is our golden age? You think you're the Medicis. Where is your patronage? We're not seeing great cultural patronage. Not that I like the word "patronage," but that's what the Medicis did. We're not seeing giveback. We're not seeing engagement. We're not seeing people saying, "We're the great innovators. Here's how we're going to solve the housing problem." They're just like, "Oh, you just need to deregulate, and things will magically become beautiful and inclusive." And it's like, "Yeah. We've heard that story before with free trade and corporate globalization and stuff." It was incoherent then, and it's incoherent now.

The San Francisco that we all cared about always had bankers and corporations in it. The San Francisco I moved to had Bechtel and Chevron and Bank of America headquartered here. Chevron has moved to the suburbs. Bank of America has moved to Delaware. Bechtel is still here, a great war profiteer in the war on Iraq, deeply involved, like Chevron, in the global oil economy and other kinds of scary

developments. So there have always been many faces to San Francisco. It's always had businesses and corporations and conservatives and massively affluent people and ruthless people and things like that. I don't know what the future looks like, but the present magnified is a homogenized, de-cultured, denatured San Francisco.

And I also feel very strongly that one of the things that make a place meaningful is cultural memory and continuity. It's something I've learned very deeply from New Orleans, which was the least mobile population in the United States before Katrina—that when you have cultural memory and continuity, you really build community. You can start to build practices and conversations and institutions that require long-term involvement. No matter how lovely people are, if they're transient, if they all got there last week, there's no cultural memory. You cannot truly understand change if you don't even know that things were different.

Boom: You have written that in addition to being a refuge, San Francisco has been an anomaly. Is it no longer an anomaly?

Solnit: I don't know. It's weird, because it's now becoming a bedroom community for Silicon Valley, and more and more being assimilated into Silicon Valley. Silicon Valley is an anomaly. But it's also not an antithesis to the status quo—despite their sentimental fantasies about themselves. It is creating and enforcing and marketing and profiting from the status quo, which is the new world of digital technology, communications, media, et cetera.

Boom: In that sense maybe it's the capital of the twenty-first century?

Solnit: Yep. I'll take that. It's funny because it feels like the way Europe has the city of culture that rotates, America has the city of crisis that rotates. LA after the riots was the dystopian vision of the future. And then Detroit has had its moments being the vision of a post-industrial, post-capitalist future. New Orleans has had its moment being the poster child of the city of the future with climate change and catastrophe and a city of government failure.

In that sense, I don't think that every city will be like San Francisco. I think every city may end up getting controlled from San Francisco in a way. Twitter and Wikipedia are here. Facebook, Yahoo!, and Google, which owns YouTube, are down the Peninsula, and that's five of the six biggest websites in the world.

San Francisco used to be this very left-wing city that is an anomaly within the United States. That seems to be ending, or it seems to be becoming another kind of anomaly, the global capital of technology, the fraternity house of the junior members of the new technocracy.

And then the other way it ceases to be an anomaly is that cities all over the world are becoming increasingly divided between the haves and the have-nots as we polarize economies and the middle class gets eliminated. Then you have the masses of poor and precarious and struggling and debt-burdened and desperate people and the new overlords, and that's happened to London in a very intense way.

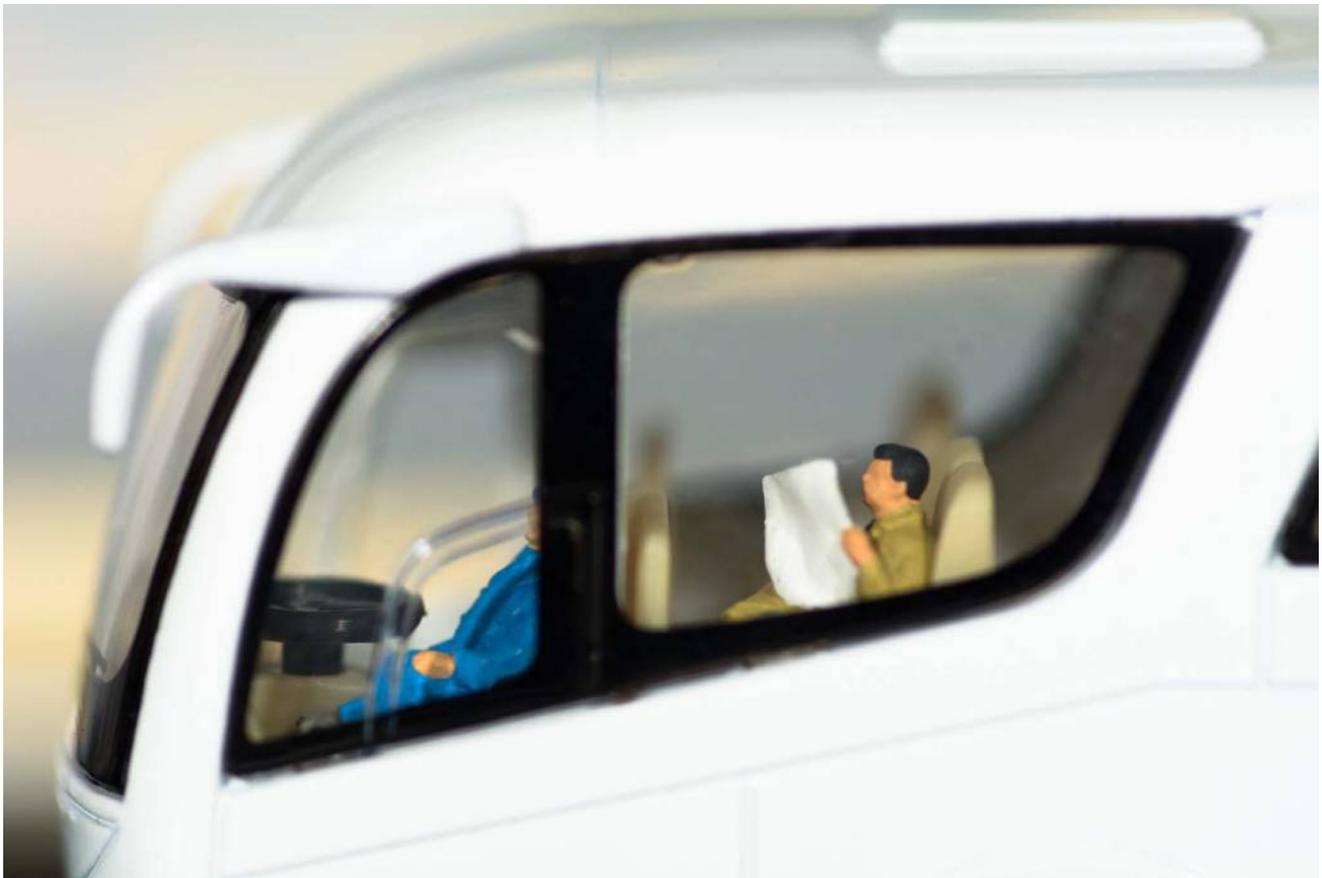
Boom: A lot of your work is filled with a love of place. Are you falling out of love with San Francisco?

Solnit: My wonderful friend, Stephanie Syjuco, has been writing as though she's having flings with places and they're betraying her. She actually wrote a breakup letter to San Francisco that's just tremendous. I joke that I'm not leaving San Francisco; San Francisco is leaving me. Rupa Marya—the band leader of the band Rupa and the April Fishes—used to live in the Mission. So did a lot of her band members. So did a lot of the musicians they played with. They got their start at Red Poppy Arthouse on Twenty-Third and Folsom. And she comes here now and says it feels like a ghost town. All the musicians are gone. They're all in Oakland, which doesn't have the same kind of density that allows for the same kind of easy mingling. You have to get in your car and drive someplace. There are a lot of wonderful things about Oakland, but I know Oaklanders feel like they're being invaded.

I love the same things I love. They're just thinning out and relocating. And I love the physical geography of San Francisco and the Victorian houses and the weather and the farmer's markets and things, and there are still a lot of wonderful people and institutions here. I had drinks with Paul Yamazaki at City Lights Books last week. City Lights is here for the long haul. The Sierra Club is still on Second Street, and it will be for the foreseeable future, although a lot of environmental groups are also moving to the East Bay.

There have always been things here that I didn't love, including ruthless greed. And there's a lot of that now. And I don't love Silicon Valley's culture as it's manifesting. There are programmers in my family. And I don't think that people who are in technology are inherently evil or anything like it. I know well that there are software people and website managers and things at institutions like the Sierra Club. And somebody is running the website for San Francisco Zen Center. But we have an overwhelming number of newcomers coming from a homogenous culture with fairly weird beliefs,

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Silicon Valley to hating and despising it in a year.
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libertarian philosophies, a gaping lack of philanthropy in ways that matter, an apparent wholesale willingness to destroy its host community. And that's not pretty.

Boom: You once wrote about Walter Benjamin's angel of history and imagined an angel of alternative history. Could you imagine an alternative history for the possibilities that didn't play out as we have had this technological revolution and it has gone down this path?

Solnit: The utopian narrative is that we realize that the rise of digital communications is the rise of a new sphere that we declare as a public commons and that will be regulated for the public good by publicly accountable people, for the benefit of the public. Your privacy is protected. We come up with a great pay-per-view model for newspapers and keep newspapers in business, where you pay a penny or something for each article. If I made a penny for everyone who looked at my pieces on TomDispatch, I'd be making thousands on some of those pieces instead of \$100 while

Arianna Huffington is making a fortune off reposting my content and everyone else's on the *Huffington Post*. We'd have models where content providers get paid for investigative journalism and good journalistic sites get support.

Search engines would also have to be a public commons, run for the public good. So how searches are ranked would have to be decided by law, because it's such a tremendously influential thing. And the fact that it can be determined by money, and you can be made to disappear by a search engine that doesn't happen to like you, is really totalitarian. They disappeared human beings in Argentina. Now they can just disappear information or ideas. I think we regard it—as we once regarded the airwaves before Reagan—as a global public commons that has to be regulated for the public good. And “regulated” isn't a very charming word, but governed by democratic means. I think that would make a tremendous difference.

I think we would also have a tremendous conversation about whether we want to spend all our lives being wired.

Consciousness is changing. We haven't made a meaningful decision that, yes, that's the road we want to go down; yes, that's what the good life looks like. Iceland had a massive conversation about what its constitution should look like. What if we had a massive conversation about what communication and entertainment should look like and what we want and who controls it? And not even getting into the misogyny of so much online communication and online gaming and things like that. There are so many arenas.

Boom: Is there hope in the dark, to quote one of your book titles?

Solnit: Absolutely. I don't know what the future holds, and I don't think there is a simple, obvious, near-term change coming, but I don't believe any of those adjectives are impossible to apply. I don't know what's going to happen.

One of the things that's really interesting is the new way that Silicon Valley is being described. Apparently lots of young banker and MBA types are coming here because this is the new money machine. And people are starting to think about Silicon Valley with all the passion and enthusiasm and respect they have for Wall Street and bankers. Occupy Wall Street was a movement against Wall Street. That's why it was called "Occupy Wall Street." We may see some form of Occupy Silicon Valley.

When you want to understand how the world works look at what your enemies are frightened of. If they are frightened of you, maybe they know better than you do that you have real power. And those billionaires are really nervous. And I think people around the world know at some level that when you return to the nineteenth century, a world where the great majority is desperate and a few are insanely wealthy robber barons, you return to a world of revolution and revolt and class war and class conflict and resentment and rage. A lot of what the twentieth century was about was creating social democracy in Europe and the New Deal and Great Society in the United States and similar solutions in other countries to quell class war. Because they have no memory, they have forgotten that that's what their stake was in our having a nice life. I don't think they have any

stake in us having a nice life. But they take away our nice life, and we all go back to the nineteenth century and go back to class war.

The fact that people have gone from having a crush on Silicon Valley to hating and despising it in a year, I think is kind of auspicious. Who knows where that will go?

And I think there are very positive things about the new social media. My major political outlet is TomDispatch.com, which is a little electronic wire service run through The Nation Institute, and that has tremendous power. And I think the fact that we have counter-media is the best part of the new tech landscape. It is creating room for the Glenn Greenwalds and Snowdens and Chelsea Mannings and WikiLeaks and TomDispatches and a host of radical voices that are actually quite powerful. So that's what's hopeful for me in this landscape. And I do feel like there's a global critique of capitalism and neoliberalism, corporate globalization and Wall Street bankers, et cetera, that's very different than it was before the collapse of 2008. A lot more needs to happen to act on it, but it's really interesting.

And who knows what's going to happen? Hope for me has never been optimism, which like pessimism thinks it knows what's going to happen. It's been uncertainty, and I think the very volatility of Silicon Valley could implode, backfire, give rise to revolutions and counter-revolutions and backlashes, be used against the overlords, et cetera, et cetera. The fact that the United States through all the new technological abilities to spy on everybody is pissing off everyone right and left, and may weaken American power, which might be a good thing for the world and might be a good thing for getting other countries to say that, actually, we want to close these privacy loopholes. It's like all these dominoes are falling. And we can't see into the mist, or, since we're in San Francisco, the fog, to see what's going to get knocked over. It's a period of tremendous upheaval. **B**

Note

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