

Farewell, Bohemia

On Art, Urbanity, and Rent, by **Rebecca Solnit**

IN A RECENT LETTER to the *San Francisco Bay Guardian's* sex column, "Ask Isadora," a masochist asked whether he had to obey his dominatrix by sexually servicing their ancient landlord. Although the letter was ostensibly about the extent to which a bottom's obedience must go, it was really about what so much is about in this city—rent. Apparently even dominatrices worry about keeping a roof over their heads in San Francisco, and rent, housing, housing prices, and eviction stories fill the collective dirge chanted whenever the San Franciscans I know gather. The city is changing too fast for its bohemian inhabitants to keep pace, many of them don't expect to be living here many more years, and some have already left. (To designate those overlapping groups—artists in all media, grassroots activists, students with leftist leanings, and pursuers of alternative lifestyles—I'll use the catch-all term "bohemian.") Last year's heated mayoral run-off race between incumbent Willie Brown and insurgent candidate Tom Ammiano was a war of sorts, about what kind of a city San Francisco should be, and for whom. Brown spent \$5 million to win the race

and drew support from big business, developers, and out-of-town interests, as well as from the African-American community; Ammiano's sponsors included the San Francisco Tenants Union, the Bicycle Coalition, and an army of volunteers. On my corner, and many others, someone spray-stenciled, "People who make less than \$50,000 don't belong here.—Willie Brown." "Another terrified tenant for Tom," read one popular button. Ammiano's support came from the neighborhoods identified with the bohemianism that has long characterized San Francisco—from the heart of the city, in other words, where its civic image originates and its influential cultures gestate.

In the past few years, Silicon Valley's wealthy workers have discovered San Francisco and begun to transform the former capital of the west into their bedroom community, in the process making an already bad housing market far, far worse. And small computer-related businesses are setting up offices in the city at a frenzied pace. The technology boom is doing more than creating hundreds of new millionaires in the region; it is resituating the status of

those who don't participate in this economy. All the tenants of the Bay View Building in the Mission district—including two Spanish-language newspapers, radio stations, and social services for the local Latino community—got evicted when the building was sold to a dot.com; nearby, the former San Francisco Labor Temple, which now houses dozens of progressive activist and alternative arts organizations, is up for sale.¹ American Indian Contemporary Art lost its downtown lease when the rent nearly doubled, and its director doubts that the nonprofit gallery can relocate.² Evictions have skyrocketed, and so have rents and housing prices. Moderate-income San Franciscans and nonprofits who lose their homes or work spaces often cannot find another that they can afford in the city, and the former refuge of the East Bay—the local equivalent of Brooklyn—has been hit by the same boom. Although the situation is more extreme in the Bay Area than elsewhere, a similar flush of upscale resettlement of cities across the country—Seattle (which is similarly affected by the computer economy),

Gentrification used to be a relatively organic process in which affluence crept up gradually on a neighborhood—forest succession was the naturalizing metaphor often used. But evictions have more than tripled since 1996, to five per day last year, instituting widespread fear among tenants, and housing costs for both renters and buyers are rising so rapidly across the region that moving someplace else in the city or even the Bay Area is becoming an increasingly unfeasible option. And when there's no place left to go, it's not forest succession; it's clearcutting.

Boston, and Denver, to name a few—is displacing those who have long lived there, changing the nature of urbanism and even starting to alter the culture itself. And of course, Manhattan led the way long ago.³ It may be that the whole geography of culture is changing.

What is happening in San Francisco today can be compared in scale to the transformation of mid-19th-century Paris under the direction of

Hausmann. But while Baron Hausmann changed the whole infrastructure and tore down the slums in a frenzy of urban reconstruction, San Francisco is mostly changing who and what occupies the existing structure. Those who mourned the medieval thicket that Hausmann razed in favor of light, logic, and manageability lamented the loss of the intricate relationship between imagination and place, of the mystery and subversive delight of a city that crowded together the rich and poor. Like Second Empire Paris, contemporary San Francisco is being simplified, and the poor are being exiled to the periphery (whose outer reaches haven't yet been charted). But by some measures, of course, the Parisian experience was more benign. The new metropolis created by Hausmann and his emperor brought genuine benefits to all citizens—clean water, sewers, parks. In modern gentrification, the infrastructure often declines as private desire prevails over public interest—as, for example, the number of cars increase and the thoroughfares become

clogged. The boulevards of Hausmann's Paris were rich settings for generations of artists who, in fact, were not displaced directly; Baudelaire had his trust fund, however mismanaged, as did the brothers Goncourt, who deplored the changes, and for generations Paris remained porous enough for less well-funded artists to remain within its bounds. The global city of today, though, with its ubiqui-

tous Starbucks, Rite-Aid, and Banana Republic, and its condos and gridlock, offers no such richness of experience. As the chains and conglomerates are multiplying, diversity of business, culture, and class is disappearing.

Artmaking has, at least since the ideas of bohemia and modernism were developed in mid-19th-century Paris, been a largely urban enterprise: The closer artists were to museums, publishers, audiences, patrons, politicians, other enemies and each other, the better for the artists and also for art. For if cities have been essential to artists, artists have been essential to cities. (The rural artists who come to mind as exceptions to this rule—Georgia O'Keeffe, Gary Snyder—early on made their urban connections so effectively they could thereafter maintain them from a distance.) The complex connection of artists and urbanity gave rise to the definitive modernisms of the Left Bank and Montmartre, of Bloomsbury and Greenwich Village. Being an artist is one way of being a participant in the large cultural debates about meaning and value, and the closer one is to the center of things the more one can participate. This is part of what makes a city vital and stimulating—this braiding together of disparate lives and diverse cultures; but the new gentrification threatens to yank out some of the strands altogether, diminishing urbanism itself. The Left Bank and Bloomsbury no longer beckon artists; bohemia has been all but driven out of Manhattan as the last pockets of poverty get gentrified. Of course, the relationship of bohemia to gentrification is ambiguous, in San Francisco as well as almost everywhere else.

In the contest for the future of San Francisco, the most visible battlefield is the mural-bedecked Mission, a longtime Latino neighborhood which in the 1980s began to harbor both refugees displaced from Central America and bohemians seeking cheap apartments. More and more bookstores and cafés appeared among the

bakeries, thrift shops, and hardware stores; then, in the early 1990s, upscale restaurants began to appear among the cafés and burrito shops, followed by clothing and housewares boutiques. The central stretch of Valencia Street has become an upscale restaurant row. More than 50 percent of the businesses there in 1990 had vanished by 1998, and the street has changed more in 1999 than in any previous year.⁴ Although the process of transformation has never stopped in the Mission, it has lately accelerated with the proliferation of upscale businesses and with the colonization of San Francisco by the well-heeled of Silicon Valley. The southern part of the city—for generations its poorer half—has better access to the valley and has been hardest hit by the wave of evictions and of conversions of buildings into condos, and by the creation of expensive “live-work space” lofts benefitting from zoning rules and from affordable-housing and property-tax loopholes created to support artist housing in SoMa (the area South of Market) in the 1980s. Seventy percent of those evicted leave the city.⁵ Gentrification used to be a relatively organic process in which affluence crept up gradually on a neighborhood—forest succession was the naturalizing metaphor often used. (In fact, few neighborhoods in this country are truly stable in terms of ethnicity or economics.) But evictions have more than tripled since 1996, to five per day last year, instituting widespread fear among tenants, and housing costs for both renters and buyers are rising so rapidly across the region that moving someplace else in the city or even the Bay Area is becoming an increasingly unfeasible option.⁶ And when there’s no place left to go, it’s not forest succession; it’s clearcutting.

One highly visible response is an initiative called the Yuppie Eradication Project, whose Mission district posters and letters to the editor call for class war—including such tactics as the vandalism of luxury cars and fancy restaurants. Like many other responses, this

project clearly regards artists and their ilk as casualties of class warfare. But the role of artists in neighborhoods like the Mission is more ambiguous. Though artists have sometimes settled in partially abandoned industrial districts like Soho and SoMa, they have just as often moved into poor neighborhoods and, however inadvertently, made them attractive to whiter and more middle-class settlers—and indeed, the artists themselves have often been whiter and more middle-class. Though bohemians would like neighborhood flux to stop with their own arrival, they function as catalysts of change, even trailblazers. In *Neighborhoods in Transition: The Making of San Francisco’s Ethnic and Non-conformist Communities*, Brian Godfrey outlines the usual metamorphosis:

In the first stage, a bohemian fringe discovers a neighborhood’s special charms—e.g., social diversity, subcultural identification, architectural heritage. Non-traditional “footloose” elements are favored, such as single people, counter-culturals, homosexuals, artists, feminist households, or college students. These “urban pioneers” make a run-down or even dangerous area livable and attractive to others who would not normally venture there; they constitute the unintentional “shock troops” for gentrification and encourage the beginnings of housing speculation. These social elements are not necessarily wealthy in objective terms, but they do often enjoy a conditional affluence, at least insofar as they have more disposable income to spend on renovation because of smaller households and fewer traditional pursuits.⁷

During almost two decades of living in another metamorphosing part of San Francisco, the Western Addition, I have realized that most of the young people there move too frequently to notice that the neighborhood itself is changing and that they (and I) are a force for change. Skyrocketing rents (the city has rent control but not vacancy control) have finally forced this transient community to move more slowly than the world around

it—the precondition for noticing change. Still, most people tend to notice the changes that they themselves haven’t caused more than those that they have. At Cell Space, a Mission district industrial cavern housing artists and activists and hosting many community events, I attended a meeting about gentrification held in conjunction with an art show on the issue.⁸ Many were astute about the complexities. One young white man described how his artist parents were first gentrified out of Boulder, Colorado; then moved to an African-American neighborhood and a Hispanic neighborhood in Denver; and then, after these were successively gentrified, fled to San Francisco; and he advocated armed struggle against the forces of gentrification—which he himself unwittingly embodied. That the first stage of gentrification in San Francisco—the move of white artists, students, and activists into then non-white neighborhoods such as the Mission—took place with relatively little fanfare says more about who has a voice than what has an impact. It’s the second stage, when the bohemians themselves get replaced, that is causing the stir. The conflict in the Mission is frequently described in terms of Us-versus-Them, but the lines are hard to draw and many cross them.

Carol Lloyd, a writer who now works for the online magazine *Salon* and owns a flat in the Mission, writes that:

As a dyed-in-the-wool progressive, community-volunteering, social-working artist, I was once a member of the endangered species that these activists are so diligently trying to save from extinction. What happened? I got a job—in the scurrilously libertarian Internet sector—that allowed me to buy a home. That alone has transported me across the battle lines. The problem is that in San Francisco downward mobility had become a lifestyle choice every bit as self-indulgent as upward mobility. I know because I was one of the voluntarily low-income: lionizing the working class, despising my

“white-skinned” privilege, camouflaging the capriciousness of my aesthetic tastes, nursing a love-hate relationship with the middle-class identity my parents imbued in me. There is a real pleasure and even, I think, a virtue in that kind of voluntary poverty, but it really doesn’t have much in common with the poverty in my neighborhood.⁹

Lloyd has a point, for often the differences between artists and those they view as gentrifying them out of their homes and communities is less dramatic than the difference between those artists and the neighborhood’s earlier residents. The bohemians and the gentrifiers are two empowered groups, one of whom chose to get MFAs, while the others got MBAs—or nowadays, software skills. Artists often identify with the poor, but the rich identify with artists.

But Lloyd overlooks an important point: The realm she left behind is genuinely imperiled—even if some of its downwardly mobile denizens have safe ways out—and its loss will be a loss to the culture as a whole. From this urban culture come activists, tenant organizers, teachers, muralists, environmentalists, human rights advocates and others directly advocating for diversity and democracy. From the East Village in the 1980s to the Mission now, many of the recent arrivals tend to identify with and wish to support rather than usurp the long-time denizens of their neighborhood. They—we—may be the shock troops for gentrification, but I believe our activities benefit the culture as a whole in ways that, say, day-trading does not. Rather than tell the story in Lloyd’s defensive way—as being about whiny middle-class kids—one could tell it as being about what happens when the price of admission to certain places is too high for those most engaged with questions of justice, meaning, and culture, as well as for the most economically vulnerable. Understood as a morality tale about the deterioration of choice and complexity in urban life, gentrification involves much more

than the victimization of the lower middle class by the upper middle class (or the disappearance of the middle class as everyone in it rises or falls).

Bruce Conner’s black-and-white film *The White Rose* documents the 1964 removal of Jay DeFeo’s monumental one-ton painting *The Rose* from her longterm home by a group of unusually priestly-looking moving men. The seven-minute movie is about many things—the artist’s passionate commitment to this work, the mandala-like spiritual icon the painting had become, the melancholy end of the intricate relationship between artist, home, and art. But the bottom line is rent, and DeFeo and her magnum opus were forced to move. In the mid-1950s, DeFeo and many other artists and poets had moved into the spacious flats at 2322 Fillmore Street in what was then the edge of the Western Addition and is now called Lower Pacific Heights. In 1964 DeFeo’s rent was raised from \$65 to \$300 a month and she was forced to move. My first book was about Conner, DeFeo, and other San Francisco visual artists closely tied to the Beat poets; writing in the already-lousy-for-tenants late-1980s, I came to appreciate how strongly a copious supply of cheap housing contributed to the Beat era’s sense of freedom.¹⁰ The artist-poet David Antin, who harks from this era, once gave a lecture arguing that rent had destroyed the avant-garde, specifying the changes from the 1950s, when a Manhattan artist could work a few days a month and paint the rest of the time, to the late 1980s, when such an artist would have to work two jobs to afford space there.¹¹ This explains why squatting was part of punk culture but not that of earlier insurgencies—and why an accurate history of the countercultural flourishings of the 1950s and 1960s would have to be in part a history of urban real estate. As Bay Area geographer Richard Walker puts it:

Prosperity worked its magic more effectively as long as rents remained low

enough to allow artists, refugees, and those outside the mainstream to survive, if not prosper, in the inner city. The long slump in central-city investment due to depression, war, and suburbanization had left property markets relatively untouched for two decades. The confluence of economic growth without property speculation through the 1950s was ideal for nurturing the countercultures that mushroomed in San Francisco. Conversely, the heating up of real estate in the seventies and eighties drove out many of the marginals; as old commercial space disappeared; the affluent crowded into gentrifying neighborhoods. . . .¹²

I once asked the poet Michael McClure why North Beach has always been associated with the Beats, when the majority of them lived elsewhere—particularly in the Western Addition, on the edges of the city’s main African-American district in the postwar era. (Allen Ginsberg’s 1955 first reading of “Howl” took place in a cooperative gallery further up Fillmore Street, and McClure read that night too.) “North Beach was like a reservation in which there was a free space for bohemians and oddballs of all stripes to meet in-between the Italian and the Chinese districts, in what was still a remarkably inexpensive part of town with lots of [residential] hotels,” McClure told me. “A lot of those very constructive people got out of there in ’56 or ’57, when the beatnik thing started—because the tour buses [started coming too]—and the obvious place to go was the Western Addition.”¹³ McClure and his family, along with the painters Sonia Gechtoff, James Kelly, Craig Kauffman, and James Weeks, and later Joan Brown and Bill Brown, lived at 2322 Fillmore as neighbors and friends of DeFeo and her painter husband, Wally Hedrick. “We were enjoying the black stores, the black ambience, the black music,” recalls McClure. “We had our faces toward them but our butts towards Pacific Heights.” Many artists had already arrived in the neighborhood—the poet Robert Duncan, the painter Jess, and Kenneth Rexroth,

who long hosted a salon at 250 Scott Street (not far from where artist Wallace Berman and his family would live along with the poet Jon Wieners in 1960, as described in Wieners's book *707 Scott Street*, and Bruce Conner lived around the corner on Oak Street). The city's African-American population had jumped from 5,000 to 43,000 during the 1940s, and the Fillmore district had become a thriving community with political force and cultural activity. During the Beats' tenure on the fringe of the Fillmore, the city began the massive urban renewal project bitingly nicknamed "Negro removal." More than a thousand Victorians were destroyed (Conner and his fellow artist George Herms scavenged in the ruins for fragments to incorporate into their assemblages and collages), before, in 1968, Fillmore activists won the first court-ordered stay against urban renewal. Under siege, the African Americans of the Western Addition moved south, to the far more isolated Bayview and Hunter's Points neighborhoods or east to Oakland and Richmond across the bay. Many of the vacant lots created in the heart of the Fillmore grew nothing but weeds until the late 1980s, and its edges have been whittled away by gentrification—by the counterculture in what became known as the Haight-Ashbury, by gay men in what is now Hayes Valley, by the upscale themselves in DeFeo's old haunts. There were not enough artists, nor was there enough interest in artists, to make them a force for gentrification then (though they did become a tourist attraction).

But another cultural force of the era did much to increase the bohemian population across the country. As Richard Candida Smith writes in his history of California artists, *Utopia and Dissent*, "Between 1945 and 1957 two and a quarter million veterans attended college-level schools under the GI Bill (65,000 were women). By 1947 the total college enrollment in the United States had jumped 75 percent over the prewar record. . . . Educators were

surprised by the educational choices veterans made. The assumption that their primary goal would be to learn practical skills was overturned when veterans who attended college-level institutions preferred liberal arts education over professional training."¹⁴ Postwar prosperity made possible a broad middle class as well as a broad culture of people engaged in unremunerative explorations. The few bo-

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hemians who flourished in San Francisco in the '50s became a huge force in the city in the 1960s. And in the 1970s two other groups became a strong presence on the scene: the gay and progressive communities. The reactionary Dan White's 1978 assassination of fellow supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone was part of the conservatives' revolt against these groups, but this murder didn't stop gays and lesbians from becoming major forces. Now, as a recent essay in the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted, those who won the battle of the 1970s—progressives and bohemians—are losing the battle of the 1990s.¹⁵ Culture as a widespread activity, as a *lifestyle*—to use that very '70s phrase—seems to be in decline. Kids graduating from high school nowadays often can't afford to leave home even if they work full-time, and the brutal realities of the new economy focus them more on survival. Although the official version is that the economy is great and inflation at an all-time low, rising housing costs constitute a localized inflation of virtually Brazilian proportions, a situation that is making many citizens feel more economically strapped than ever, and more nervous. A generation ago there

were no twenty-something cybermillionaires; but there were also few homeless people. Although the Internet is incessantly praised for connecting people, the Internet economy is clearly disconnecting people as it creates nouveaux riches and the newly evicted.

And in the future there may be very few artists, at least artists whose origins are middle class, not because the urge

stirred up during the postwar era has died down, but because the circumstances that make it possible to make art—or at least to live modestly with access to the center—are drying up. (Writers and artists who teach are, economically speaking, educators, not artists, and I have left them out of this narrative.) On my most cheerful days, I imagine an outmigration of artists to the small towns they can afford, a sort of unofficial artist-in-residence program throughout the nation's outback, one that will give rise to a populist art identified with the overlooked populations of rural places, reservations, resource-industry jobs—something akin to 1930s regionalism (without WPA funding, of course). On my least cheerful days, I imagine a nation in which those who have something to say have nowhere effective to say it. I went to Seattle to protest the meeting of the World Trade Organization, and where my bohemian friends can now afford to live is much farther from downtown than it used to be, when they lived in now-gentrified-by-computer-capital Capital Hill. Political participation, along with access to the main museum, library, and bookstores, had become a little less convenient; it

could get inconceivably more so, and the Internet isn't going to make up for that.

It may be that the rise of an influential culture of bohemia in the United States was possible only during a special period like the era of postwar affluence; it may be that the GI Bill and cheap rents and the fat of the land helped to create a large cultural community that is today being downsized, like the white-collar workforce of corporate America. It may be that artmaking will become like blue-collar American jobs—it'll be relocated to places where it can be done more economically: to Marathon, Texas; Virginia City and Tuscarora, Nevada; Jerome and Bisbee, Arizona, just to name a few remote places to which artists have been migrating. Artists in small towns could become the equivalents of maquiladora workers, making goods for an economy in which they cannot afford to participate (writers who depend on large libraries are in a tighter bind altogether).¹⁶ It may be that cities have raised, so to speak, their admission fees—by obliging those who wish to stay in a city like San Francisco, for example, to join the dot.com economy, or an equally flush sector. But paying that fee—as Carol Lloyd almost admits—might mean abandoning the values and goals that brought one to the city in the first place and that perhaps made the city livelier, more tolerant and generous-spirited, than the suburbs and small towns one came from. Cities can probably keep their traditional appearance as they change fundamentally at heart, becoming as predictable, homogeneous, and politically static as the suburbs and gated communities. Those who can afford both to make art and to reside in the center will come with their advantages in place, and much good work might be produced; but work critiquing and subverting the status quo might become rarer just when we need it most. Art won't die, but that longstanding urban relationship between the poor, the subversive, and the creative called bohemia will. For a

long time it seemed that the death of cities would result from the decline of public space; but it may be that the disappearance of affordable private space in which public life is incubated will deliver the fatal blow. At least, it looks that way in San Francisco.

Notes

1. "Spectre of Eviction in the Mission," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 29, 1999.
2. The eviction of American Indian Contemporary Arts was covered by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and, on December 15, by the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, which reported that the monthly rent will increase from \$3,500 (AICA's rent) to \$10,000 (what the new tenant, Financial Interactive, will pay).
3. The issues I discuss here are remarkably similar to those of Manhattan a decade earlier, as documented in *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory and Social Activism*, a project by Martha Rosler, edited by Brian Wallis (New York: Dia Foundation for the Arts, 1991). This book describes the links between the very vulnerable communities of the poor displaced by gentrification and the somewhat vulnerable communities of the creative; and some of its speakers explore the same ambiguities I am trying to explore here. The artist Yvonne Rainer, for example, says that "On the one hand, we are the avant-garde of gentrification, or on the other hand, we are scavengers" (169).
4. "Neighborhood Profile: The Mission/Lofts and Lattes," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, special "economic cleansing of San Francisco" issue, October 7, 1998.
5. This figure was provided by the San Francisco Tenants Union.
6. San Francisco's rent control laws limit the grounds for evicting tenants; an owner moving in is one of the few grounds for doing so, although often the owner doesn't actually reside there for the legally required period before renting to a new tenant at a much higher rent. See "Fighting to Call a Place Home," Katherine Seligman, *San Francisco Examiner*, October 25, 1999. Seligman writes: "Owner move-in eviction notices have more than tripled in the past three years, going from 420 in 1995 to 1,301 last year, according to city records. But an *Examiner* analysis of 1998 figures shows the numbers are rising even faster this year, the result of a buying craze prompted in part by pending legal restrictions. There

were 983 owner move-in eviction notices during the first six months of 1998. At that rate, the *Examiner* found, The City may see more than 1,900 by year's end—an average of five tenants evicted every day."

7. Brian Godfrey, *Neighborhoods in Transition: The Making of San Francisco's Ethnic and Nonconformist Communities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 177-178.
8. "Go West, Young Man: Land Rush on the Urban Frontier," curated by Alex Van Praagh, exhibited in Cell Space's Crucible Steel Gallery, October 14-November 2, 1999; the discussion took place on October 21, 1999. Among the exhibiting artists was Eric Drooker, who, before relocating to the Haight district of San Francisco, was active in fighting the gentrification of the Lower East Side, in part with brilliantly incendiary posters.
9. Carol Lloyd, "I'm the enemy! At a meeting of San Franciscans trying to stop gentrification, I realize that I'm the Internet yuppie scum that's ruining my neighborhood!" *Salon*, October 29, 1999. Her essay recalls Baudelaire's "Eyes of the Poor," in which he and a female companion sitting in a café near the window are confronted by the gaze of a poor man and his children who look out of place on the new, grand Haussmann-built boulevard. While Baudelaire feels some kinship with them, his companion, like so many modern shoppers put out by the homeless, wants the manager to remove the unsightly spectacle.
10. *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990) features a still from Conner's movie of DeFeo's eviction on its cover and portrays this 1950s milieu at length. DeFeo and Conner are two of its six central artists.
11. David Antin, speaking at the Summer Criticism Conference, San Francisco Art Institute, August 1988.
12. Richard Walker, "An Appetite for the City," in James Brook, Chris Carlsen, and Nancy Peters, eds., *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 9.
13. Conversation with Michael McClure, December 1999.
14. Richard Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 80
15. "'70s Lifestyle vs. Dot-Com Silicon Valley is Zapping S.F.'s Cultural Revolution: The mayoral race between Willie Brown and Tom

Ammiano is a symbol of the battle between two lifestyles in the new San Francisco,” Mike Weiss, *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 9, 1999.

16. Although the happily uninformed tell me otherwise, the Internet—that bastion of term papers and advertising brochures—will not replace libraries in the foreseeable future. Some reports and publications may go online as they are generated, but no one is about to put, for example, the complete letters of Dorothy and William Wordsworth, or newspaper archives from the 1950s, online. Libraries and the recent anti-WTO demonstrations make it clear there is no substitute for being in the center, even if the Internet connects centers. And in the Bay Area, the Internet economic explosion is destroying the center by dispersing the populations that made it the center in the first place and by supporting decentralized lifestyles—i.e., driving rather than walking, cell phones rather than phone booths or conversation with strangers, lofts rather than light industry, online shopping rather than *flânerie*.

Rebecca Solnit is a writer living in San Francisco, thanks to rent control; her books include *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era*, and, most recently, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*.