

AUTHORING A CITY: A RHETORICAL EXPLORATION
OF SPATIAL PRACTICES AND GENTRIFICATION
IN SAN FRANCISCO

by

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ABSTRACT

The rhetoric of gentrification is problematically rooted in a perceived “us” versus “them” divide. Those writing and talking about the process of gentrification perpetuate the belief in easily identifiable categories pitting “authentic” long-term residents against elite newcomers. Gentrification inherently promotes the homogenization and commodification of a culturally diverse urban space. However, the insistence of portraying such a transformation in oversimplified oppositions ignores the multiplicity of experiences involved.

In this thesis, I examine narratives of San Francisco that both shape and contest the reductive discourse currently mapped onto the gentrification process. I argue for a collaborative understanding of authorship, of both texts and the city-as-text, to demonstrate how identities, boundaries, and binaries that may *seem* clear cut and uncontested are, in actuality, fluid and changing. Narratives of San Francisco cannot be studied for truth or falsity of experience, but can instead provide insight into the cultural construction of experience. A relational view of authorship and place-based identity formation renders sites of contention visible while creating a more in-depth approach for discussing the complex social process of gentrification.

INTRODUCTION

SAN FRANCISCO'S CHANGING SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Any large social process or event will inevitably be far more complex than the schemata we can devise, prospectively or retrospectively, to map it.

– James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (303)

Ruth Glass, the British sociologist who first coined the term “gentrification” in 1964, claims it is a process that will not stop once set in motion: “Once this process... starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the district is changed” (Mirabal 16). The current population flux occurring in San Francisco is not the city’s first, and it is likely not the last. Yet, this wave of gentrification sweeping the city, and the publicity the event is inciting on both local and global scales, remains worthy of further examination. Glass’s quote mentions gentrification typically occurs within a *district* of a city, but the recent outcry of San Franciscan residents, journalists, and activists suggests it is not just a single neighborhood in the city that is coping with the threat of cultural displacement and an overall lack of affordable housing. Rather, *all* of San Francisco appears at risk.

Nancy Raquel Mirabal is a historian who collected oral histories of residents living in San Francisco’s Mission District over a ten-year period spanning from 1998 to 2008 during the first “tech boom” in the area (one that later declined, slightly, due to the national economic recession before giving way to the current housing crisis or second tech boom). She was inspired to conduct interviews with those who were affected by gentrification and who were witnessing sudden changes in the neighborhood’s housing prices, businesses, and demography. In her article “Geographies of Displacement:

Latina/os, Oral History, and the Politics of Gentrification in San Francisco's Mission District," she describes gentrification as a process that is naturalized by local government officials as an organic revitalization of an urban neighborhood in response to an uncontrollable market economy, when, in reality, gentrification is a contrived displacement of a city's poor, elderly, and working class citizens who cannot keep up with escalating housing prices. The process is calculated and designed by local government and political leaders who hope to benefit "developers, real estate companies, speculators, and investors," and who advocate the change as a "cleaning up" of a city's poorer or "bad" neighborhoods (Mirabal 14). The result is the arrival of a younger, wealthier, and often whiter middle class population that brings with it the economic, political, and cultural transformation of an urban space. This began occurring in San Francisco's Mission District when the local government prompted a renewal of the neighborhood—an area once referred to as the "Spanish barrio"—in response to a growth in the city's population when young residents who worked for the burgeoning tech industry started moving to the Bay Area in the 1990s. Many of these tech workers moved to the Mission District, which has largely been defined by its working-class Latino¹ population since the 1960s and 1970s. As is common with gentrification, the younger crowd was (and still is) drawn to this locale because of its cultural diversity and affordable housing—the two factors altered most by the shift in population.

¹ Terming the community as simply "Latino/a" is problematic, at best, since the residents of the Mission District cannot be confined to, nor do all identify as, any single ethnonym. Here, I use Latino/a to refer to those who identify with Latin American culture or descent, but I realize the restrictive nature when ascribing any one word to an individual or community of multiple origins. I hope my work otherwise demonstrates an overall awareness of, and a resistance to, such limited categorizations.

Mirabal began her collection of oral histories in an attempt to document “stories of displacement” and endings, or the stories of those who were facing removal from the Mission District (9). The project quickly extended beyond its original scope, though, and she now acknowledges her analysis, like gentrification itself, “has no end” (8). Her interviews led to conversations with an array of individuals and varying experiences, and she came in contact with those who “promoted gentrification; those who resisted; those who were unaware, but concerned; those who believed it was a necessary evil; and everyone in between” (10). She found the stories of loss, displacement, and erasure she had initially sought, but she discovered stories that described the changes as new beginnings and means for revitalization, too. She encountered others still who feared increased rental prices and eviction, but who also appreciated the subsequent safety new businesses and inhabitants brought with them. Mirabal spoke to Latinos, local politicians, scholars, students, and urban planners; people who were new to the neighborhood and people who had lived there for decades. It therefore seems contradictory when, later in her article, she writes, “Gentrification and displacement are very contested processes that can easily polarize communities. There [is] no middle ground” (11). I agree with the first portion of her statement, but struggle to accept the lack of a “middle ground” following her previous documentation of this historical “moment characterized by chaos and consciousness” (9) and the responses of the hundreds of individuals—and “everyone in between”—she met while conducting her interviews. Gentrification, instead, seems rife with grey areas.

Mirabal's statement regarding the polarization caused by gentrification is precisely one of the issues apparent in the ways gentrification is written and talked about. San Francisco is now faced with its second wave of gentrification attributed to the tech boom, which is deemed a housing crisis once again, and residents and journalists alike are responding in an alarmist fashion as the process extends beyond the confines of the Mission District to the city as a whole. This process *is* alarming. However, the tendency to assume there is no middle ground creates a discourse that propagates such polarity among those encountering its effects. The result is an "us" versus "them" divide between city dwellers, and when writing about or discussing the process of gentrification, such dichotomies pit "authentic" long-term residents against elite newcomers, renters versus homeowners, commuters who utilize public transportation versus those who own and drive cars, and so on. Everyone seems to know who rightfully belongs in the city, who qualifies as a "true" San Franciscan, and who does not. Scholarly work and theorization regarding the process of gentrification, the local discourse of residents confronting the process firsthand, and media accounts of this second "tech boom" in San Francisco problematically create and preserve such binaries. One cannot deny that gentrification inherently prompts the homogenization of a diverse neighborhood through cultural whitewashing and the commodification of urban spaces, but the insistence of portraying such a takeover in oversimplified oppositions ignores the very multiplicity of experiences involved.

In this thesis, I analyze three narratives of San Francisco that, at first glance, appear to represent three distinct positionalities frequently assumed in the discourse

defining the process of gentrification. I examine the stories of those who are “gentrifiers,” or tech workers who live in the city and commute to work in the nearby Silicon Valley; those who are “gentrified” and who identify as Chicana artists in the Mission District; and the writer who neither contributes to nor faces the displacement of gentrification, San Francisco resident Rebecca Solnit. Though I wish I had the time to consider an even larger spectrum of stories and authors, I believe bringing these three narratives into conversation with one another demonstrates how the texts perform beyond any clear divisions or simplified identity positions assigned to their authors. The texts portray the fluid and emergent process of narration occurring in a historical moment and place, and my analysis draws from rhetoric scholar Nedra Reynolds’ understanding of place-based identity formation and spatial practices found in her *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Differences*. Using Reynolds’ theoretical framework, as well as other theories of autobiography, rhetoric, and writing studies, I look at the ways the three narratives chosen simultaneously shape and contest the discourse of gentrification. I am especially intrigued by how the following stories are created and told, what modes of narratives are available and to whom, and what effects can be witnessed in these accounts as a result of a rapidly changing urban space.

Ultimately, my research has led me to consider how residents tell their stories and thus author, or write, their versions of San Francisco. Nedra Reynolds writes about composition scholars who view the postmodern city as a metaphor for acts of writing, and, like Reynolds, I have chosen to invert this relationship in order to also view the city as an act of composition. In other words, I explore the possibility of viewing San

Francisco as a written and readable text that is constructed by its many inhabitants, or authors, concurrently. I look at authors who write and create texts about San Francisco while also considering how an individual's movement through the city influences the construction of its urban spaces. I therefore argue for a collaborative view of authorship that does not suggest a truth or falsity of individual experience, but instead promotes a conscious understanding of one's social position in relation to others. To view the city-as-text denies a privileging of experience and resists any one mapping, understanding, or interpretation of a place. To focus on one telling of San Francisco ignores the reality of other versions, other voices, and fails to account for the social formation of spaces and identities. A collaborative view of authorship (of both spaces and texts) then opens the possibility for reading Ruth Glass's "unstoppable" narrative of gentrification as only one conceivable option among the many narratives coexisting in San Francisco.

In the first chapter of my project, I introduce concepts of individual and collaborative authorship while examining Rebecca Solnit's work. Though born in Novato, California, Rebecca Solnit considers herself a long-term San Franciscan resident. She moved to the city at the age of eighteen, and though she documents her travels around the world, San Francisco is the place she refers to again and again as home. She has now lived in the city for over three decades of her life. Solnit is a homeowner and does not personally face the possibility of displacement or eviction caused by gentrification, but she does document the process as an invested author and activist. I situate Solnit as an urban observer or a modern (re)interpretation of the Parisian *flâneur*; she is an author who exerts rhetorical agency through her ability to read and evaluate San

Francisco in her everyday interactions with the city and its inhabitants. Theoretically, I draw from Nedra Reynolds' concept of "mental mapping," and I relate this to Solnit's literal and metaphorical mapping of San Francisco in her writing and everyday practices. Solnit argues for a collaborative view of authorship in her text *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, but later struggles to employ such a view of authorship when she addresses tech industry workers who are "invading" and altering her city. The tensions present in Solnit's work do not detract from the goals of *Infinite City*, but they do reflect the privileging of experience characteristic of the discourse of gentrification as well as the issues faced when authoring *any* text. It is easy to theorize about a collaborative view of a text, or a city-as-text, but it is quite another thing to relinquish one's individual authority in favor of a collaborative outlook in practice.

In the second chapter, I elaborate on another form of collaborative authorship, this time looking at zines created by Brenda Montaña, a self-described Xicanista artist and activist. The term "zines" refers to self-published, small circulation, and often non-profit texts that take the shape of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) magazines, books, pamphlets, and websites. Montaña writes from the geographic and rhetorical borderlands of San Francisco's Mission District and East Oakland. I analyze three zines written by Montaña, one of which is illustrated by fellow Chicana artist Breana Nuñez, and consider zines as textual locations from which authors can create counter-narratives to disrupt dominant discursive practices within a geographic location. The notion that zines may exist as "textual locations" comes from Renee M. Moreno's belief that texts are "fluid, contested space[s]" where an author can draw attention to power hierarchies and institutionally

imposed differences (225). Moreno's theorizations, found in her article "The Politics of Location: Text as Opposition," are situated in the university classroom where she encourages her bicultural first-year composition students to use written texts as a space for exploring their identities and developing academic literacy. She hopes her students can develop a "critical consciousness" that allows them to unmask "power relations...social and political positions of race, class, ethnicity, culture, and gender" within the university classroom (225).

Although I am not specifically looking at the politics of the higher education classroom, I believe Moreno's critique is applicable to Montaño's zines and the oppositional space they create within the Bay Area community. After all, Moreno views higher education as a bourgeois institution "that socializes people to follow the rules of society" (222), so it only makes sense the power structures found within the classroom are replicating those of society at large. Her argument relies on the idea that students are socialized to an academic community whose values are quite different from the reality of the bicultural student's existence beyond the university. Moreno's theories are especially applicable to Brenda Montaño's work since the first of her zines I examine, *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*, originated in a university classroom before later circulating throughout the city. Montaño's zines become a site for her to refuse the space that is being created for her—as a student, an artist, and a member of San Francisco's Chicana community—and she writes to disrupt, reclaim, and remap stereotyped representations of her culture, body, and experience.

Then, in my third and final chapter, I confront the topic of the infamous “Google bus” as it is talked about and portrayed in recently published news articles (several of which are written by Rebecca Solnit). “Google bus” is a term that is applied liberally to commuter buses that shuttle tech employees from their homes in San Francisco and Oakland to their job sites in the nearby Silicon Valley. While Google, the multinational corporation, *does* offer chartered buses to their employees, so do many other tech corporations in the Bay Area. Nonetheless, all chartered buses are frequently referred to with the singular title of “Google bus” just as the identities of many individuals are collapsed into the dreaded “tech workers” who become the targeted scapegoats in San Francisco’s narrative of gentrification. In this chapter, I apply Nedra Reynolds’ theory of the “discourse of loss” to what I view as the “discourse of crisis” surrounding gentrification in San Francisco (Reynolds 24). Reynolds addresses the impact of modern technology, and how technological advancements (such as cell phones) affect society’s notions of public and private spaces. I continue to argue that Google Maps, the location-based service and mapping system, promotes a consumption of urban spaces that is in direct opposition to the work of authors like Solnit and Montañó who strive to actively construct and reconstruct the city’s spaces. The tensions of gentrification are, again, traceable to issues of authorship and authority. Urban dwellers want to maintain control over their environment, or want to believe in space as a static entity, but modern technology has the propensity for making visible society’s ever-changing notions of space and place.

Like Nancy Raquel Mirabal, I have come to understand this project has no end. The research material available to me throughout my exploration of these topics continues to proliferate. The authors whose works I have chosen to examine continue to write and publish on the topic of gentrification in their city. Rebecca Solnit, for instance, is publishing work at such a rate that I cannot keep up. Brenda Montaña is currently working on a photography project promoted on her *Sing Your Life: Literature Projects* website. My friends who still live in the Bay Area regularly update me over phone calls and e-mails explaining the conflicts encountered daily in a quickly changing cityscape. My grandfather, who lives in Southern California, sends clippings from the *Los Angeles Times* (which demonstrates the extent of the situation, since the northern versus southern divide of California is another binary rarely transcended). So, rather than proposing that I have reached a point of termination, I want the work I have compiled here to inspire others to continue the conversation concerning San Francisco, gentrification, what it means to exist communally in a shared space, and what it might mean to consider oneself an author of a place. When discussing gentrification specifically, I hope I have expressed the importance of moving beyond a discourse rooted in dichotomous oppositions. The following chapters address the multifaceted stories of a city that cannot be reduced to neat binarisms. As Nedra Reynolds states, “Sense of place cannot be treated as singular or stable and neither can the identities shaped within” (59). Such an understanding of gentrification and place-based identities can better account for sites of contention and difference—of the grey and in between areas—while also encouraging a more in-depth approach for discussing and analyzing the complex social process of gentrification.

CHAPTER ONE

FEMME FLÂNEUR: REBECCA SOLNIT'S MAPPING OF THE CITY

Rebecca Solnit's work traverses many fields of study—from sociology to ecology, literary studies to photography, urban politics to history—and her texts similarly blur the lines between conventional genres: autobiography, journalism, travelogue, literary criticism, and nature writing. Though the writing style and topics broached in her publications vary, Solnit consistently remains an author concerned with place. In *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* she claims, “It was a place that taught me to write” (1), and later, in *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, she describes her understanding of places as “stable locations with unstable converging forces” (vii) where individuals establish their identities, imaginations, and beliefs. Place, according to Solnit, is where the mind and geographic terrain unite and shape each other. She writes of many places, through both theoretical and autobiographical lenses, but her work often returns to San Francisco, the city she deems home and where she has lived for the last thirty-five years of her life. San Francisco is “her” place.

Solnit dedicates her full attention to the city in *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*. In this text, she strives to redefine the traditional atlas by providing a compilation of essays detailing the lived experiences of San Franciscan residents alongside her own accounts and knowledge of the cultural history of this locale. Detailed maps accompany each of the twenty-two essays comprising this compendium, and while Solnit's name appears on the cover of the atlas, the title page mentions the three cartographers, twelve

artists, eleven writers, and additional researchers and designers who contributed to the project. In her introduction to *Infinite City*, Solnit declares, “no two people live in the same city” (5), and through this collection of essays, maps, and drawings she hopes to demonstrate the inexhaustibility of San Francisco—or of any place—in an effort to render “one citizen’s sense of her place in conversation and collaboration with others” (9). The resulting atlas not only challenges the idea of a stable city represented by an equally static form of mapping, but also contends with individualized notions of authorship and authority. *Infinite City* thus becomes a reinvention of traditional atlases and offers alternative modes of authoring the city-as-text.

In this chapter, I approach Rebecca Solnit’s *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* from two angles: first, I examine Solnit’s participation in, and writings of, urban life. She is an author who explores the intimate link between one’s sense of place and the creative process, and she identifies with the literary tradition of walking. Walking through the city and documenting her experiences provides Solnit with a resistant mode of authorship, or rhetorical agency, often lacking in her own historical moment that is so concerned with privatization, progress, and technologies. This portion of the chapter relies on the mental mapping of a city, a concept derived from the work of Michel de Certeau, Walter Benjamin, and Nedra Reynolds. I situate Solnit as a writer who revives and reappropriates the literary role of the *flâneur*, or one who observes and “reads” the city and its inhabitants. Then, in the second half of the chapter, I explore how *Infinite City* performs as a compilation of authors and identities. The text explicitly demands that its readers move beyond the maps contained within to form a mutual understanding of the

project's limitations. That is, “*no* quantity of maps” will allow the distance between a map and its subject, the distance between signifier and signified, to be “completely traversed” (emphasis added, Solnit 2). Similarly, no number of contained experiences allows for an “authentic” rendering of the city, and Solnit addresses the limitations of her role as the author of this text, as well as the limitations of the project itself. The atlas becomes a call to action willing its readers to break from the belief in maps as static texts containing facts, and to resist the desire for a map authored by a sole authority on the subject. Rather, the reader is prompted to explore and interpret his or her own modes of authoring a city in collaboration with others. *Infinite City* therefore serves as a starting point for breaking beyond the representations of San Francisco contained within. The text encourages its readers to discern the value of individual experience that does not privilege any one mapping of a city—an issue Solnit grapples with both consciously and unconsciously throughout this and other work addressing the gentrification of San Francisco—but instead acknowledges collaboration as a necessary means for providing a richer understanding of a place and one's position in it.

Nedra Reynolds addresses how rhetoric scholars have viewed the city as a metaphor for acts of writing. In *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Differences*, Reynolds writes: “To invoke a city is...to identify composition with postmodernism,” and “composition as a city invites more diversity because many activities can go on simultaneously and, following the logic of traffic lights, no one will cause accidents or pile ups; everyone cooperates” (33). Such a view of composition-as-city draws from the notion that, in a city, one encounters a diversity of

peoples, a diversity of places, and models of cooperation (Reynolds 32). This metaphor stresses the importance of writing as a social act, and can be used to encourage writers to accept excitement in any disorientation faced in the writing process or when encountering an unfamiliar text. The metaphor also enables one to consider the postmodern metropolis, or postmodern text, as a space where ideas may be exchanged. Reynolds goes on to describe the shortcomings of relying entirely on geographic metaphors for writing, arguing that it is important to move beyond imagined places to focus on the materiality of discourse as well. I would like to pause to similarly invert this metaphor of the text-as-city in order to examine the city-as-text. I agree that it is important to consider both material and imagined modes of inhabiting a place, and I would first like to consider the city as a readable text that informs and is informed by its inhabitants, so that I can then view Rebecca Solnit's role as one author among many contributing to the construction of San Francisco's urban spaces.

In "Walking in the City," a chapter from *Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau presents a theory of the urban landscape that has its own language and rhetoric. He views the city as a readable, and therefore also written, text and situates his argument in opposition to the theories and ideals of urban planners who address the city from a utopian, panoptic distance. He argues that urban planners, cartographers, and politicians approach cities from an "all seeing eye" or celestial vantage point that creates the fictional ability to read the city-as-text as though it were transparently comprised of "a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties" (94). This presents a view of a city that is made of accessible, dominant, and hegemonic structures, a city that

is subsequently devoid of spaces that can accommodate any forms of deviance or abnormalities that resist functional theorizations. de Certeau then claims that spaces such as these, spaces where ambiguities might exist, become the blind spots for planners. To avoid oversights, one must descend from a distant theoretical standpoint in order to experience the city through the everyday practice of walking. When one observes the city from a voyeuristic position of power, he or she misses the differences, the traffic, and the bodies inhabiting the spaces below and thus “leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself [the identities] of authors or spectators” (92). de Certeau’s theory relates to Nedra Reynolds’ belief that maps can be concurrently “informative and useless, accurate and empty, image and text,” and that most maps may contain exceedingly precise acts of measurement and logic while also having very little to do with the “mental maps” created by the residents who experience the city firsthand on the streets (Reynolds 80). In other words, to map a city from an authoritative position of power, and to view the city from the seemingly rational distance of de Certeau’s urban planners, is to ignore the very materiality of walking in the city.

When one literally “takes to the streets,” lived experience opens the possibility for transcending a limited reading of the city-as-text. de Certeau’s urban planners may *think* they can read the city as a transparent text, one structured clearly by dominant ideologies that resist transgressions of any kind, but it is the walking citizens who actually hold the potential to construct and reconstruct, write and rewrite the city spaces in unpredictable ways. Walking creates numerous paths that muddle the ability to neatly read or map the city in a uniform manner. Solnit addresses this when she writes:

San Francisco has eight hundred thousand inhabitants, more or less, and each of them possesses his or her own map of the place...but even to say this is to vastly underestimate. San Francisco contains multiple maps: areas of knowledge, rumors, fears, friendships, remembered histories and facts, alternate versions, desires, the map of everyday existence versus the map of occasional discovery, the past versus the present, the map of this place in relation to others that could be confined to a few neighborhoods or could include multiple continents of ancestral origin, immigration and lost homelands, social ties, or cultural work. (*Infinite City* 3)

Any given map of a place, regardless of accurate measurements or geographic detail, cannot contain the unbounded routes of city walkers. Nor can a mapped representation of a city account for the emergent identities of both its inhabitants and the place itself. When one walks through a city, imagined and material spaces combine through the process of mental or cognitive mapping, which Nedra Reynolds understands as a form of imagined geography that moves beyond visual reality (83). Mental mapping is the ability to construct and organize images of a place that carry memories and meanings, and cognitive maps provide insight into “how people perceive the world, and how ideology...is reproduced” and socially constructed (Reynolds 84). Gender, race, and social class also influence one’s cognitive mapping as well as one’s physical movement through a city, so that mental maps necessarily open possible readings of a place other than what can be represented on a conventional, individually-authored map. Alternative modes of mapping become tools for exploring individuals’ understandings of a place, and can make noticeable “the [cultural] and social spaces that mark inclusions or exclusions” (Reynolds 85) and any unforeseen modes of being in a given location. And as Solnit’s passage proposes, there are easily “tens of millions of maps” (*Infinite City* 3) coexisting within San Francisco alone.

However, in “Walking in the City,” de Certeau also claims that the city walkers on the streets (re)write the urban text without necessarily being able to read it. He views pedestrians’ intertwining paths as “poems,” yet the citizens’ knowledge of this poetry is often blind (93). Because walking is an everyday event, one makes use of city spaces in ways that are not always consciously observable. The walker’s path can “secretly structure” (de Certeau 96) social life in a subversive manner—these can be paths that resist the dominant ideologies of urban planners—without the individual realizing the act of agency when doing so. While the urban dweller forms his or her sense of place through cognitive mapping, the city correspondingly codes the walker’s sense of self, or identity. Sense of place is intimately linked with one’s sense of self, which is what Solnit refers to when considering place as the location where individuals establish imagination, experience, and beliefs (*Infinite City* vii). According to memoir and autobiography studies, one can never witness the process of “self becoming,” and in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Paul John Eakin explains, “We don’t...pay much attention to this process, not only because we want to get on with the business of our lives, but also because identity formation is not available for conscious interpretation as it happens...we never catch ourselves in the act of becoming selves” (x). Nonetheless, rhetorical agency can still be enacted from the streets, even though it may be impossible to wholly parse the “unmappable converging forces” structuring both the self and the city.

In fact, Robert J. Topinka provides an excellent example of the enabling abilities a jaywalker employs through his refusal to follow the traffic laws in a suburban setting in

the essay “Resisting the Fixity of Suburban Space: The Walker as Rhetorician.” Topinka describes Iowa Street in Lawrence, Kansas as an “overdetermined” space designed and constructed to support the consumerism of the area through a series of “regulating systems of order” (traffic lights, roundabouts, frontage roads, landscaped lawns) all leading to major retail outlets (66). The consumer is expected to access the outlets via automobile as he or she exits the nearby highway. Consequently, the sidewalk created for everyday walkers is merely decoration, and it begins and ends with inefficient irregularity. This space simply does not accommodate those on foot. A jaywalker who refuses to follow the ineptly built sidewalks, which reflect the ideology of consumerism of the area, exerts rhetorical agency through his decision to cut through the massive parking lots designed for cars. The jaywalker disrupts the structured spaces in his choice of a path that makes “cunning use of [his own] time” (71). The jaywalker also becomes more aware of the arrangement of this space by navigating on foot (an arrangement he was not meant to notice); the artifice of trees planted equidistant from one another amidst perfectly manicured lawns is far more noticeable when one is not quickly driving by the scenery in an effort to get to Walmart. This, again, suggests the jaywalker is disrupting the space itself, opening the possibility to read the location as a space built rigidly around capitalism and, at the same time, reworking the space and opening it to other possibilities. The jaywalker alters the timing the space is meant to be encountered, as well, by choosing to walk rather than drive through its features (Topinka 70).

The tactics employed by Topinka’s jaywalker relate to Rebecca Solnit. She exerts her agency as one who walks through the city and pauses in her everyday existence as a

San Franciscan to observe, to question her own movement through city spaces, and to write with the rhetorical awareness of her positionality in relation to other urban inhabitants. She organizes, evaluates, and therefore “reads” San Francisco through ground-level interactions, and the very multiplicity of such interactions and experiences further resists the transparent renderings of de Certeau’s urban planners, politicians, and cartographers. Walking creates a unique mode of rhetorical agency often overlooked in everyday practice.

Solnit takes up walking in great detail in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, and though she writes of Walter Benjamin and the importance of the *flâneur* as a literary figure within its pages, she does not identify as one herself, despite the apparent similarities between her own practices and those she describes. She claims that a satisfying definition of the *flâneur* has never been determined, but that Benjamin frequently associates him with “leisure, with crowds, with alienation or detachment, with observation, with walking” (*Wanderlust* 199). Benjamin, when discussing Charles Baudelaire’s role as a *flâneur* in Paris, describes him as one who is “out of place” and who is an urban observer moving among the crowd of citizens with both fascination and disassociation (*Illuminations* 172). He is an intrigued journalist, an ethnographer, and an urban botanist. Nedra Reynolds, meanwhile, deems the *flâneur* “the composer” whose main focus is to “absorb and render the city through writing” (70), so that acts of *flânerie* become ways of “moving through the world, collecting, arranging, and remembering, [all] dependent on seeing” (70). The *flâneur* is (in nearly all variations) a white, male citizen idly rambling through the streets of Paris, observing those who pass. Yet, I still

believe it worthwhile to consider Solnit as a reconfiguration of this literary figure, a *flâneuse* who observes San Francisco, a city frequently termed “The Paris of the West.”

In *Wanderlust*, Solnit describes her return to San Francisco after a sojourn in the deserts of New Mexico and how, once back, she begins to keep a walking journal of the city she calls home. Her brief departure from her everyday life in the city allows her to recognize how quickly the familiar can yield to the unknown in an urban setting (*Wanderlust* 174), and when reflecting on this phenomenon in her walking journal, she writes:

In the city, one is alone because the world is made up of strangers, and to be a stranger surrounded by strangers, to walk along silently bearing one’s secrets and imagining those of the people one passes, is among the starkest luxuries. This uncharted identity [of the urban walker] with its illimitable possibilities is one of the distinct qualities of urban living...it is an observer’s state, cool, withdrawn, with senses sharpened, a good state for anybody who needs to reflect or create. In small doses, melancholy, alienation, and introspection are among life’s most refined pleasures. (*Wanderlust* 186)

The above excerpt suggests a form of *flânerie* in concordance with most definitions of the term. It demonstrates the ambivalence of one who feels “out of place” in a crowd of strangers, but who is simultaneously drawn to observing and inferring the driving force of this crowd, akin to Benjamin’s interpretation. The luxury of walking and the pleasure found in doing so correlates with Solnit’s own description of the leisurely spectator she depicts later in *Wanderlust*, even though she does not mention a connection to the *flâneur* here. Her experience upon returning to San Francisco from New Mexico, and her ability to see the city anew, also relates to the historical context of the Parisian *flâneur* who arose during the nineteenth century when the modern city “had become so large and

complex that it was for the first time strange to its inhabitants” (*Wanderlust* 199). Her time spent away from the city makes it “strange” upon her return. This permits her to document the daily act of encountering the city from a new, removed position. Finally, the “illimitable possibilities” that lead to reflection and creation unite Solnit’s view with Reynolds’ belief that the *flâneur* is a composer of the city who transcribes and embodies the act of walking as writing.

Rebecca Solnit further exhibits acts of *flânerie* when she examines the ways modern technology influences and aids her ability to walk through San Francisco. It is important to note that Solnit generally rails against modern technology due to the growing impact the tech world has had on “her” city in recent decades. The subsequent process of gentrification following multiple tech booms in San Francisco provides yet another example of just how quickly the familiar can become the unknown. She and many of the city’s residents watch as San Francisco undergoes rapid changes in population and geography, and Solnit’s San Francisco becomes more and more unfamiliar on a daily basis because of such changes. Local businesses, long-term neighbors, and establishments vanish, and tech start-ups, hip cafés, and Google buses appear. She also laments that modern technologies—cell phones, Google, social media, etc.—create a false sense of urgency, or what Nedra Reynolds calls “time-space compression” (18). The illusion that the world is made smaller through global communication that is made easier by technology also creates the illusion of more time: more time to check e-mails, to make phone calls, to stay “connected.” In a capitalist society bent on progress, workers find they are responding to work-related phone calls

and e-mails long after hours and on the weekend. Accordingly, the act of simply walking—*without* a cell phone in one's hand—becomes an act of leisure. Solnit acknowledges how, ironically, she is a fortunate “member of the self-employed whose time saved by technology can be lavished on day-dreams and meanders” (*Wanderlust* 10) that others might not be able to afford.

Solnit thus recognizes the opportunities her social position creates. She is a self-employed writer who has the time to walk and to watch others. She can meander and contemplate how the routes of city dwellers function in relation to one another, and she writes from a position of leisure and privilege. She is both of the crowd and apart from it, and though she may have time for casual observances, she then creates writings that regularly demand political action, social awareness, and civic responsibility. Solnit's position of authority is problematic, as any privileging of experience is, but she also utilizes her positionality to address the experiences of those who might not otherwise have access to publishing their own accounts of San Francisco. She draws attention to the differences that exist in everyday interaction and beyond the sights of urban planners and traditional cartographers, and *Infinite City* includes the narratives of: immigrant day workers; female environmental activists whose names were often overshadowed by their male counterparts in the 1960s; queer sites, organizations, and leaders; displaced jazz and blues clubs; senior citizens facing eviction from the Market Street apartments they have inhabited for decades; African American shipyard employees from World War II; inner-city teenagers who have grown up in San Francisco, and who do not often have the opportunity to extend their mental maps beyond the neighborhood where they were born

and raised; ex-gang members, and many more. Solnit does not claim to speak for these individuals, a danger of ethnographic approaches, but instead incorporates their stories beside her own. So, while Solnit's name appears on the cover of *Infinite City* as both a marketing technique and a claim to authorship, she also compiles narratives that resist the limits of traditional atlases. These narratives display a range of identities and experiences of San Francisco that move quickly beyond mappable proportions.

Clearly though, there are tensions in Solnit's work stemming from her position of authority as a writer, or as a *flâneuse*, documenting San Francisco. These tensions are representative of the possibilities and problematic power structures inherent in all matters of authority and issues of authorship. She prompts her readers to view *Infinite City* as "a beginning, and not any kind of end" and asks that the audience "map their own lives and imagine other ways of mapping" (9). She instigates a call for collaboration in the authorship of any place, not just San Francisco, and asserts the necessity for viewing one's sense of place, civic duty, and self as a collaborative process that is always occurring and that does not prioritize any one version of a place; however, this is precisely the problem because she then continues to view San Francisco as "hers" in this and other writings.

Solnit is a very self-aware, intelligent writer and she takes great lengths in the introduction of *Infinite City* to address her own limitations as the author of this text, declaring, "An atlas is a collection of *versions* of a place, a compendium of perspectives, a snatching out of the infinite ether of potential versions a few that will be made concrete and visible" (emphasis added, vii). She is very careful to remind the reader of her own

awareness of the arbitrary nature of maps. Maps are always a limited selection of information, and in this case, she is the one selecting the content shared: “Every place deserves an atlas, but San Francisco is my place, and therefore the subject of this atlas...springs from my perspective” (vii). Though she recognizes that it is her interpretation of San Francisco within the pages of *Infinite City*, there are still instances when the discourse created moves beyond a depiction formulated *from* her perspective to a privileging *of* her perspective. Her writing, at times, belies her authorial intent urging a collaborative outlook, and instead favors her own view of the city. And, really, her simultaneous call for collaboration and a comprehensive view of *Infinite City* as her own account of San Francisco seems a difficult, if not impossible, balancing act to maintain. What then becomes of the contributions of the other twenty-six individuals who helped generate the project?

The tensions in Solnit’s work can be traced to what Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede deem a misunderstanding of “authorship.” In their essay “Collaborative Authorship and the Teaching of Writing,” Lunsford & Ede call for the development of a pedagogy of collaborative composition, claiming that most professional writing in the United States is collaborative despite the fact it frequently “flies under the banner of singular authorship” (Lunsford & Ede 418). They attribute this misunderstanding of authorship to American ideology traced from the Declaration of Independence, which simultaneously applauds individualism—the want to remove oneself from the larger public in favor of a small society of friends, family, and self-benefit—and commitment to community and civic involvement (418). According to Lunsford & Ede, the contradictions between the two

opposing ideals persist in all debates of authorship, and Western society contends with “author” as either the individual, Romantic genius or author as the product of social creation and power structures. When a writer is viewed as the sole author of an original text, the text itself becomes a piece of intellectual property belonging to the creative genius behind its formation; alternatively, when authorship is viewed as a collaborative endeavor, the possibility for challenging individual ways of knowing opens a text to multiple interpretations. The latter option acknowledges writing as a social act, and posits one’s “self” and knowledge are likewise socially constructed (Lunsford & Ede 426). This theory speaks to the concept of intertextuality often taught in composition courses. All texts are made up of other texts, of other ideas, and past events. Any new or “original” work necessarily draws from a web of previous knowledge encountered by an individual. A text, therefore, easily and always functions beyond authorial intent to perform in ways unanticipated by the author.

Lunsford & Ede mention writing scholars who subscribe to social constructivism and contradict themselves somewhere in the gaps of theory and practice, akin to Solnit’s negotiation of her role as an author of *San Francisco*. They call attention to the tendency of scholars and writing instructors who advocate for collaborative learning and peer response techniques within the classroom to also hold to ideas of individualism when believing in “personal authenticity” that comes from “searching inside the self for a unique voice” (Lunsford & Ede 427). The conflict then remains, and collaboration in the classroom is frequently introduced as a required stage in the revision process, but the initial stages of invention purportedly arise from the “mysterious creation” of the

individual mind (427). Despite better intentions, such a model of teaching continues to perpetuate the myth of solitary authorship requiring peer or collaborative action only in the later stages of composition. The model fails to look at writing as a relational practice throughout the entire process. Solnit similarly aligns herself with the social constructivist approach in her own theorizations, but *Infinite City* and later writings still create moments when the texts suggest her unwillingness to fully relinquish her role as an individual author who knows best how San Francisco ought to be represented and experienced.

One potentially problematic area of *Infinite City* is observable in the presentation of the text. As mentioned earlier, *Infinite City* is comprised of twenty-two maps of the city, each with a corresponding essay. Nine of these essays are attributed to Solnit, while the remaining thirteen are written by the eleven other authors mentioned on the title page of the text. Still, Solnit introduces all twenty-two essays with one to two paragraphs of her own. Sometimes her commentary references her own knowledge of the topics covered, and other times she attempts to make better sense of maps or illustrations through the use of further written description. Her primers frequently provide historical context for the topics addressed. On one hand, Solnit's input could merely translate to her role as a compiler of the essays, since an editor of an anthology typically introduces the work amassed in the collection. Her overviews also emphasize collaboration: the reader is presented with a bright, colorful map on one page, Solnit's introductory paragraphs and the following essay on the next, and both map and essay intermingle with the work of artists and photographers found in the columns of each of these pages. On the other hand, however, this could read as Solnit's need for further elaboration and a refusal to let the

works of others perform without her added interpretation. Her clarifications consistently appear in a noticeably larger font than the essays that follow, and they therefore take precedence on the page. Perhaps this is a visual representation of Solnit's desire to maintain her role as the authority figure who must make better sense of the essays to her readers, most of whom likely bought *Infinite City* because "Rebecca Solnit" appears on its cover. This example is ultimately an ambiguity of the text, one that, as a reader, I prefer to view as a visible representation of the written (and illustrated) conversation occurring among a collection of authors and artists. In fact, I find Solnit's struggles with authoring San Francisco occur more noticeably in her writings that exist beyond the pages of *Infinite City*, and in other work she repeatedly struggles to achieve the multidimensional view of the city she calls for here (Figure 1).

In *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism*, a text written in 2000 (a full decade before *Infinite City* was published) Solnit responds to the first wave of gentrification brought about by the tech industry of the late 1990s. Once again, Solnit notes how her city is rendered strange to her as she witnesses a loss of imagination in the face of homogeny created by gentrification. As rich, white bodies move into ethnically diverse neighborhoods such as San Francisco's Mission District, artists, activists, senior citizens, and ethnic minorities are pushed away. San Francisco is known for its history of blending culture and politics, and she urges political action and subversive lifestyles that urban centers tend to foster. This is the imagination she writes about, which she sees disappearing with the change in population. Her plea for

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THE MISSION

The juxtaposition of inner-city kids who've hardly left their neighborhood to cross a bridge or go to the country and day laborers who've survived extraordinary odysseys to come here from other worlds—surviving ordeals at the hands of coyotes and border patrols, walking days across deserts, leaving villages to become lost and anonymous in strange cities—always strikes me as extraordinary: in the Mission, these two different cosmologies coexist, and often both are called Latino as though the geographical particulars don't matter. Adriana Camarena, herself an immigrant from Mexico City now living in the neighborhood of this map, investigated both populations, finding stories of stasis and displacement, hope and loss, gang life and economic hardship. The decision to abut Cesar Chavez Street with the Mexican border was mine. Leaving out the gentrified Mission of restaurants and boutiques, so visible on Google maps, leaving out retail life altogether, was one of the pleasures of making this version of the place. CARTOGRAPHY: SHIZUE SEIGEL ∞ MAP APPEARS ON PAGES 92-93

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNSEEN BY ADRIANA CAMARENA

MY CORNER AT 24TH AND FOLSOM

I walk from my home at 24th and Folsom to the men who stand at two corners only four blocks apart in the Mission District: the day laborers at South Van Ness and Cesar Chavez Street, and the gang guys at Shotwell and 24th.

Being a light-skinned Mexican national with a PhD from a U.S. university who migrated into a Mission apartment with cheap rent, I am arguably closer to the culture of the white bohemian radicals and young hipsters of the Mission—the latter fueled by expensive organic coffee and cheap burritos—than to that of the day laborers from an imagined Macondo or the gang guys posting on the block. In recent years, cafés have gained ground on local shop space in the Mission, providing sanctuary spaces for the hipsters. When I look into the cafés, I see the hip sip liberally on Fair Trade roasts, while their laptop screens suction their brains into the ether-web. Concurrently, the other Mission residents bobble past the café windows, towing their children like cannons. I bobble on toward the cornerlands.

DAY LABORERS—JORNALEROS

On Cesar Chavez Street and onto Bayshore Boulevard, day laborers line the walls. They wait every day for *el patrón* (the boss) to arrive. There are many empty metered parking spaces where drivers seeking to pick up labor can quickly and discreetly pull over, inquire about particular skills, negotiate a fee (or not), and take off with one or more human beings in their vehicles.

Figure 1 – Excerpt from *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*. Solnit's introductory paragraph (top) demonstrates her struggle to determine which stylistic ideas are "hers" in the mapping process.

action is insistent, and she wonders what will become of her city if its diversity is diminished by the unaffordability of housing. This is, of course, a viable concern for any faced with the distress of gentrification. But, in her call for action, Solnit situates artists and activists as citizens who more rightfully deserve to remain in place, so they can continue to create and launch counterattacks to cultural homogeny and erasure. If, as she suggests in *Infinite City*, San Francisco contains infinite maps and experiences, who is to say which of these experiences is more “legitimate” or “authentic” than the rest? She even discusses the tendency for artists, often white and middle class themselves, to flock toward culturally diverse locations in urban settings, in which case, they too, are a problematic part of the gentrification process.

This is the recurring issue in the discourse of gentrification. It is a process that prompts a privileging of experience, a need to determine who belongs in a rapidly changing space and who does not. A need to determine who is “long-term” enough to remain in place, and who is the unwanted “newcomer.” In response to the crisis of gentrification, Solnit has a difficult time writing about her city without situating artists and activists as more deserving citizens than the newly arriving tech elite. In doing so, she then resituates herself from the position of casual observer to an authority on the subject of San Francisco and its inhabitants. Even in a text like *Hollow City*, one that is dedicated to the need to move beyond limiting categorizations in its call for diversity, Solnit inevitably finds herself in the compromising position of promoting reductionist classifications of identities and experiences.

In her more recent essays documenting what is now called the second wave of gentrification in San Francisco, Solnit continues to face complications between her theorization and her personal attachment to the city. An article published in a 2013 issue of the *London Review of Books* titled “Google Invades,” catches Solnit referring to tech workers who live in San Francisco city limits as an “invasive species” comprised of “mostly white or Asian male nerds” (Solnit “Google Invades”). In this article, Solnit takes her role as the *flâneur*, or urban botanist, to such extremes that she is able to identify which species of the crowd belong in her city and which need to be weeded out. She makes further dubious value judgments in an article titled “Get Off the Bus,” also published by the *London Review of Books*. In this essay, Solnit describes a protest that took place in Oakland in February 2014. The protest involved a “group of locals” who formed a blockade around a bus filled with Facebook employees, and she writes: “One protester shook a sign on a stick in front of the Google bus; a young Google employee decided to dance with it, as though we were all at the same party. We weren’t” (Solnit “Get Off the Bus”). First, Solnit introduces this bus as one containing Facebook employees before then collapsing the identities of all tech workers to a species that commutes via the infamous Google buses, or the “spaceships on which our alien overlords have landed to rule over us” (Solnit “Google Invades”). She then continues to rely on the pronouns “they” (the Facebook/ “Google” employees) and “we” (the upset locals) throughout the article, arguing that “they” do not comprehend the functioning of the city as well as “we” do. “Their” roles as San Franciscans are not as valid as “ours,”

and this distinction can be easily and immediately determined based on physical appearances.²

Solnit's struggle to negotiate her role as an author and an authority of the city-as-text is not unlike the conflicts present in the authoring of any text. It is no easy task to break from Western ideology, after all, and the issues Solnit faces when writing about San Francisco directly reflect the cultural forces shaping a view of American authorship that privileges individual creation and ownership of a text. Though she recognizes the value and potentialities that accompany a view of a city that accepts and makes visible many ways of being, a diversity of experiences, and a dispersal of authority, it is quite difficult for Solnit to remove herself from a position of "personal authenticity" when writing about the place she lives in and loves. She is able to theorize what a collaborative view of the city might provide, but to consistently implement a collaborative outlook becomes tenuous in practice. This is similar to what Lunsford & Ede notice within the field of writing studies, and they, too, observe the impossibility of fully escaping the pitfall of authorship as either an individual or collaborative process. Instead, Lunsford & Ede conclude their essay with the hope that scholars and writers "accept this challenge" of exploring the questions that arise when reconceiving the values and notions that accompany issues of authorship (Lunsford & Ede 438). Although her writing may at times contradict her proposed tactics, Rebecca Solnit is undoubtedly an author who is willing to accept the challenge of "constantly building and negotiating meanings with and

² Solnit's attention to physical appearances in this interaction with the Facebook employees likens her to Kristen Bartholomew Ortega's interpretation of Benjamin's *flâneur*: "Like the detective, the *flâneur* makes assumptions about people based on 'clues': style of clothing, posture, facial expression" (144).

among others” through her communal efforts (Lunsford & Ede 438), as evidenced by her work in *Infinite City*.

Infinite City provides a glimpse of what collaborative authorship can foster. When the text’s reader accepts this is an interpretation or a version of San Francisco, he or she is then encouraged to consider the many versions of San Francisco that intermingle within and influence any one view of the city. To understand a city and one’s self as socially constructed, as ongoing and relational processes of becoming, urges a refusal of a static sense of self, a static city, and a static text. The city then becomes a text authored by all of its inhabitants simultaneously, and this allows for a dispersal of authority that resists privileging of experiences and opens a reading of the text that can include acts of agency through everyday practices, by everyday citizens. *Infinite City* is not merely a text prescribing what a map is not or cannot be, but also what it *can* be. This text promotes writing as a social and conversational act, which might aid in the ability to transform how San Francisco is written and talked about.

Returning to the introduction to *Infinite City* once more, Solnit writes, “One of the pleasures of this project has been the encounters with people who are incarnate histories of this locality...I have met people who have become living atlases, met the glorious library of my fellow citizens” (5). Her fellow citizens each contain mental maps and stories of their own, and coming into contact with their narratives expands Solnit’s own knowledge, her own sense of place, and therefore her own sense of self. Her conversations allow her to re-envision her city, and she expresses her surprise when she realizes just how much of “her” city remains *terra incognita* (*Infinite City* 9). Her

interactions with other San Franciscans remind her of locations in the city she had once known but has since forgotten, and she is able to re-member her past and the city's past through her present interactions. This process of remembering and re-remembering demonstrates one way her recollections and history are constructed through the influence of others, and exemplifies the postmodern city-as-text as a space where ideas may be exchanged as an act of social, non-economic commerce. The narratives contained within the pages of *Infinite City* are products of a specific historical moment; they are set in the material, cultural, and imagined geography of San Francisco, and when put in conversation with one another, they create an endlessly unfolding, multidimensional history of this place and of the people telling their stories.

CHAPTER TWO

XICANISTA ZINESTERS ON A MISSION

Brenda Montañó is another author writing her story of San Francisco. Montañó was born and raised in Perris, California and moved to San Francisco at the age of eighteen. She is an artist, activist, and self-proclaimed Xicanista zinester who graduated from San Francisco State University's Raza Studies program. She frequently reads and speaks throughout the Bay Area, and her work—a series of independently published and locally distributed zines she refers to as the *Sing Your Life: Literature Project*—is written to “tell the stories that are not being told and to shed the light on the realities that have been purposefully silenced and destroyed” (*Sing Your Life: Literature Projects*). Though she did not grow up in the area, Montañó's writings depict the past fourteen years of her life spent in San Francisco's Mission District, and more recently East Oakland, alongside the stories of other residents. Her work embodies the philosophy Rebecca Solnit's suggests. For Montañó, San Francisco becomes a space where ideas may be exchanged in an act of non-economic commerce through the production and distribution of handmade, anti-copyright zines.

The term “zines” refers to self-published, small circulation, and often non-profit texts: magazines, books, pamphlets, and (more recently) websites. Countercultural zines provide a collaborative view of authorship founded on an intense connection to readership, community, and the rallying potential of political awareness. Feminist zines, in particular, tend to focus on issues of social injustice, the underrepresented voices of

women, representations of self, survival, and embodiment. The genre becomes an oppositional space where Montaño documents autobiographical reflections of her Chicana identity with the shared stories of those who likewise identify with Chicana/o culture, history, and community in San Francisco and the East Bay. In this chapter, I continue to view the city-as-text, but I also refer to Renee M. Moreno's article "The Politics of Location: Text as Opposition" in order to view zines as textual locations from which a writer can challenge the socially constructed knowledge of her ethnic, racial, and gendered identity.

I am particularly interested in the ways Montaño and her zines move through the city, and how both author and text intervene in the dominant discursive practices within these spaces. Montaño develops tactics—as an author of zines and as a walking citizen constructing San Francisco's urban spaces—that further demonstrate a resistant rhetoric grounded in the everyday materiality of discourse. Her zines trace her commute to work while also mapping her body's movement through contested regions of the Bay Area (specifically East Oakland and portions of the Mission District). Tourists and other walking citizens, who are not required to follow a route akin to Montaño's, purposefully avoid these areas because of the stereotypes and stigmatized depictions mapped onto the neighborhoods and the citizens who live there. These spaces of the city are simultaneously ignored and highly regulated by city officials. They are the "bad" parts of town where white tourists dare not tread; Montaño's zines become a space for portraying the community, families, and cultural surroundings often left unseen in such limited depictions. Montaño navigates the Bay Area, and her writing conveys how others

perceive her body and identity dependent upon location. Themes of embodiment found in her zines therefore draw attention to the workings of discursive exclusions, power structures, and the ways the narrative of gentrification incites the commodification of “bad” neighborhoods through an influx of white bodies and the removal and “surveillance of brown faces” (*High St. Este de Oakland* 5).³

Meanwhile, Montaño’s texts move through the city, too. Several of her zines began as projects written in a 400-level Raza Studies course at San Francisco State University before later circulating throughout the local community. Her zines challenge traditional narratives of academic writing, as I will explore shortly, and provide citizens with access to “alternative sources of information” beyond campus terrain (Moreno 121). The zines disrupt the university/community divide as the texts refuse to exist solely in either realm, which means Montaño’s academic knowledge reaches the streets while her bicultural experience and heritage are brought into the university classroom. Her work thus creates discursive disruptions, and the texts become a site where her Chicana identity is explored, reclaimed, remapped, and reconstructed in a way that contradicts stereotyped representations of her identity, her body, and Chicana/o community.

I am looking at three of Montaño’s zines from her *Sing Your Life: Literature Project*, each created in and distributed throughout the Bay Area: *Singin’ the Blues: Esa Que te Sirve*, *High St. Este Oakland: Tierra de Lucha y Limones*, and *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud! An Anti-Copyright Zine Chronicling Xicanas in Punk & Beyond*. I am reading these texts with an eye for moments of resistance, and I want to

³ Excerpts from Brenda Montaño’s work appear in the original dialect and grammar found within her zines. I have only provided English translations next to her Spanish phrases when the context seems necessary for my own readers.

focus on how Montañó's zines remap her identity and Chicana history to prove existence and document survival. She is an author who writes from physical and cultural borderlands and whose work transgresses geographic and discursive boundaries.

Establishing Xicanista Ethos

Brenda Montañó begins each of her zines with a dedication to the communities and readers she is addressing. She titles her dedication in *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* a "Love Note to the Reader," and, in this love note, she explains her need to disclose her identity to her audience. She claims it is necessary for the readers of her texts to "catch a glimpse" of the perspective and reality she, the author, is presenting; an understanding of her perspective will allow her readers to better interpret the work that follows (3). This is reminiscent of Rebecca Solnit's introduction to *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas* and Solnit's need to clarify the text is written from her own experiences, therefore representing one version of San Francisco among the infinite possibilities. Montañó continues her dedication by describing what it means to identify as a "Xicanista zinester." Since Montañó regards her readers' knowledge of her Xicanista identity as key to understanding her texts, I feel it is equally important to address here. Of the three zines I analyze, *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* spends the least time exploring San Francisco as a physical location, but this text provides the Xicanista framework Montañó explains is necessary for approaching her subsequent writing.

Montañó's Xicanista mentality relies heavily on a hybridization of Gloria Anzaldúa's theories of borderlands rhetoric and mestiza consciousness, punk's DIY (Do-

It-Yourself) culture, the Rasquache art form, and feminist theory. She acknowledges the theorists, artists, and musicians who have inspired her work, but she also manipulates and reshapes their ideologies to fit her Xicanista agenda. When describing her role as a Xicanista zinester in *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*, Montañó proclaims: “The term Xicana is defined as self-identified womyn of America who hold to their hearts and their consciousness the *herstory* and development of Xicana@ sociopolitical culture. Xicanas refuse to have a hyphenated identity. NO TO: Mexican-American, Salvadorean American, Nicaraguensa Americana” and so on (4). To identify as Xicana, then, is to refuse the colonial process of renaming groups of people and to instead claim an identity of “descendants of the indigenous people of America” (4). The “X” in Xicana is derivative of Nahuatl, an Uto-Aztecan language, and visually represents the connection to indigenous peoples on the pages of Montañó’s zines (the term is otherwise pronounced the same as Chicana with the “Ch-” sound). Montañó describes Xicanas as individuals who combat feminist movements that overlook the participation of women of various ethnic backgrounds. Although her texts are written from her Chicana perspective, she believes the Xicanista mentality is relatable to all women of color who have been pushed to the sidelines of history as “angry, cute figures not worthy of being placed in the books” (4). Rather than accepting a role on the sidelines of history, “Xicanas resist. They challenge the limitations placed on Chicana womyn by society, by their families, by their partners...they are the philosophers who do not stay within the constraints of their minds. They act” (7).

In *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*, Montañó connects her Xicanista identity with her involvement in California's punk music scene. She recounts her participation in the underground culture of punk, and how this music created a path for her self-discovery during adolescence. She remembers the importance of Glenn Danzig's music in her life, and she would sing along to the Misfits, "We walk the streets at night. We go where eagles dare!" (6) before realizing many of her punk heroes did not look like her and did not regularly face the dangers of walking city streets after dark as a lone female. She was a *mujer* (woman) of Mexican descent in a crowd of white boys—boys "who said they respected you but also tried to make out with you even if you had already said no" (6). A sixteen-year-old Montañó begins searching for women whose situations parallel her own once she comprehends her position as a Chicana woman within the male-dominated punk music scene. The zine's pages then become a space for an adult Montañó to share the women's stories; their stories allow her to make better sense of her past experiences and her present sense of self. *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* is a space for Montañó to record a history of Chicana music, from 1848 to present day, in order to "attest to the fact that we [Chicana women] have existed and therefore continue to survive" (11). She writes of female singers and musicians whose music transcended the airwaves of both Mexican and American radio stations throughout history, some of whom had national hits but who have since been forgotten or erased by mainstream voices, mostly men's, more frequently acknowledged. She extrapolates further to make connections to feminist scholars and mestiza journalists who historically adopted Xicanista and punkerista tactics for subverting patriarchal limitations. She situates her

individual experience in relation to a tradition of resistance, a collective view of womanhood, and shared Chicana/Xicana “herstories” (4).

When Renee M. Moreno theorizes about texts existing in oppositional spaces within her classroom, she supports her argument by examining novelist Eduardo Galeano’s propensity for (re)writing historical accounts as stories. Moreno claims the act of writing history as stories illustrates the “interconnectedness of people and locations” (224). When one chooses to investigate the ways histories are connected and acknowledges that history does not occur as isolated events, he or she can reimagine “how identities are linked” (225). Moreno believes bicultural students in her classroom can explore their complex identities through a relational view of collectivity. Texts then function as locations for interpreting identity in conversation with one’s community and heritage. An author who writes from a marginalized subject position, and who views history as a collection of communal stories, creates texts that replicate and resist power differentials found in the classroom. Disparities become more noticeable when considering the unequal relationships marginalized communities experience in relation to powerful societal institutions (223). Montaña’s texts blend personal storytelling with Chicana cultural history when she considers her role as a Xicanista zinester in relation to Chicana women, mestiza journalists, feminist theorists, and female musicians who faced challenges akin to her own.

One of the theorists Montaña refers to in *Xicanista Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* is Gloria Anzaldúa. Montaña views Xicana musicians as existing at a crossroads, or borderlands, in Mexican and American histories. A picture of Gloria Anzaldúa’s face is

collaged among images of other Chicana women, punk audiences, and Aztec symbols found in the zine. Montaño describes her understanding of borderlands as “the experience of constant exterior influence entering into your perspective, sometimes peacefully so, while at other times enacted by force or violence,” and “to survive in the borderlands, you must live *sin fronteras* [without borders]. Be a crossroads” (11). In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa describes the term as “physically present wherever two or more cultures edge together, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, and middle classes touch” (19) and borderlands manifest psychologically when one realizes she is in constant transition between such tension-filled, contradictory spaces and subjectivities. Borderlands are spaces where boundaries are blurred, and to exhibit a “border mentality” is to have a “greater boundary consciousness than others” (Reynolds 145); it is the ability to see where implicit social boundaries and divisions exist, as well as where they do not hold. Crossing borders is another ground-level tactic reliant upon the ability to read city spaces for their differences (Figure 2).

Brenda Montaño constantly evaluates her fluctuating identity in relation to her changing physical and social surroundings. She exists as a borderlands figure on multiple levels: she negotiates her role as a Chicana of Guatemalan, American, and Anglo descent (while also denying such simplistic identifications and any imposed hyphenation of her diverse heritage); her borderlands experience materializes in her position as a Chicana woman in the patriarchal punk scene, and she gathers inspiration from the stories of women who have inhabited equally underrepresented positions throughout history; she

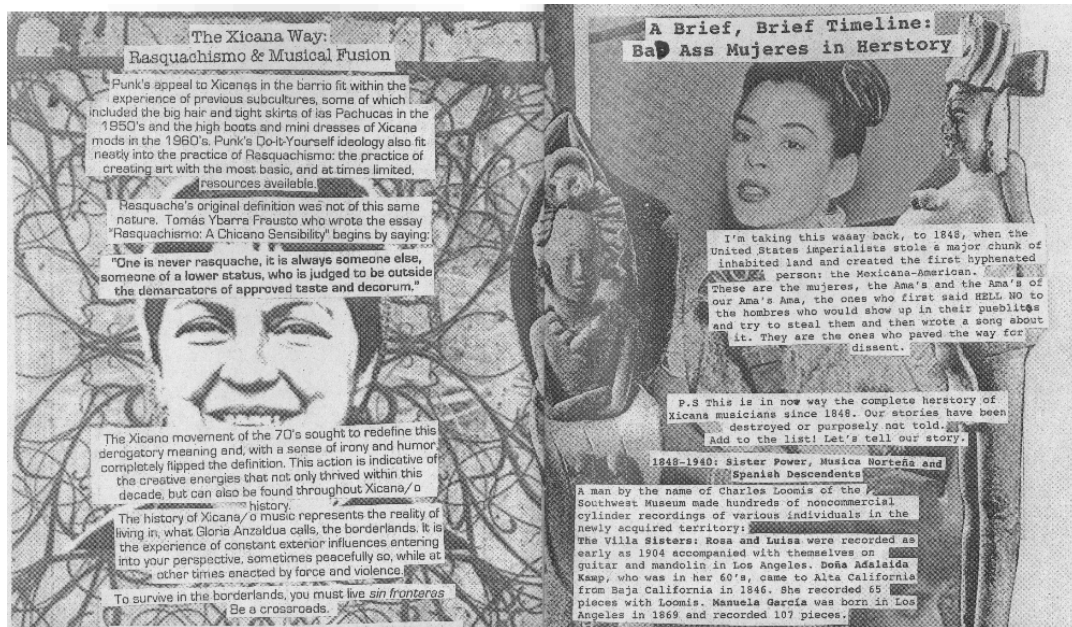


Figure 2 – Gloria Anzaldúa's image (left) in *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*

and her texts navigate the boundaries of academia and the Chicana community; and she maps her experiences living in and walking through the geographic borderlands of San Francisco's Mission District and East Oakland's High Street. Borderlands, both the physical and the psychological manifestations, are sites of difference that can be painful and exclusionary, but they are also locations where Montaño's fluid identity and texts resist the stability of social boundaries.

Montaño's zines blend punk ideology with borderlands theory, and the result is a Xicanista text that inhabits, and highlights, conflicting spaces existing between dominant and underground cultures. Her work calls attention to the tendency of institutional narratives to suppress those in minority, which reflects Renee M. Moreno's argument that a text can "articulate something about 'people's position within the hierarchy of power'" (225). Furthermore, the zines move through city spaces to accentuate hierarchies of

power, and Montañó's texts exist in borderlands spaces between university and community settings.

Ellen Cushman addresses this university/communal divide in her essay "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change." She notes, "many universities sit in isolated relation to the communities in which they are located" (8). Universities are regularly sequestered socially from the surrounding communities, and this separation is frequently magnified by a physical removal, too.⁴ Cushman refers to universities as the "ivory tower" where the "history of professionalization" and specialization further distances the campus from civic participation. She argues "higher ups" who exist on university campuses often theorize from a removed position beyond the "daily living of people outside academe" and beyond actual contact with the very subjects about whom they are theorizing (11).

Several of Montañó's zines originated within her Raza Studies classroom, and all of her texts now circulate freely in the broader social sphere of city life. Her zines are found in Bay Area art galleries, bookstores, and coffee shops, and she allows free access to scanned copies of her work through websites like ISSUU.com and POCzine.com (People of Color Zine Project). Her work disproves the existence of a firmly established binary dividing academia and the local community, and the zines themselves become borderlands sites existing in both locations simultaneously. Cushman locates activism in everyday events, instead of insisting social changes only occur as large-scale collective action or "sweeping social upheavals" (12). Scholarly activism then "begins with a

⁴ San Francisco State University is no exception. The campus is located in Daly City, just outside of San Francisco city limits. The commute to the university from the Mission District via public transportation requires multiple transfer points, and a one-way trip can easily take up to one hour.

commitment to breaking down the sociological barriers between universities and communities” (12). Social change can begin at the micro-level of “deroutinization” when one breaks from daily routine to objectify, alter, and reflect upon “the regular flow of events” (12). Cushman’s theorizations are not far removed from de Certeau’s model of resistant everyday practices, and Montaña’s zines move in a trajectory analogous to Robert J. Topinka’s jaywalker. Her texts disrupt the divide between the university and its surrounding community and display the “material conditions of writing” and the “different...languages spoken” between the two social contexts (16). The texts therefore challenge traditional notions of Western authorship the university promotes.

Montaña emphasizes the “material conditions of writing” and muddles the boundaries of academic and non-academic texts, languages, and spaces—of dominant and underground cultures—through the punk aesthetic of cutting up, rearranging, and reshaping of everyday materials. Montaña’s zines are comprised of photographs, doodles, typewritten text, and handwritten slogans layered into a palimpsest of histories, ideologies, and experiences. Most of her zines are presented in a black and white color palette attributed to the cost-efficiency of photocopied images printed on standard computer paper, which are then folded in half and stapled together for distribution (Figure 3). The texts combine DIY culture’s use of universally accessible items with the Rasquache art form and its claim to “making the most from the least” (*Sing Your Life: Literature Projects*). Rasquache is another term stemming from the Nahuatl language, and it refers to an artistic movement started by Spanish artists from lower social classes who worked with the limited and basic resources available to them. Critics initially

frowned upon Rasquache art and the Rasquachismo outlook because it strays from more traditional and widely valued art forms. When Montaña references “Rasquache” in *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*, she rouses issues of class and social value systems. The plight of the Rasquache artist is not unlike her own as an artist/student who inserts street-level ingenuity and the use of everyday resources and language into the privileged narrative of academia, an institution known for valuing knowledge that can be capitalized on through the specialization and professionalization Cushman mentions (11).

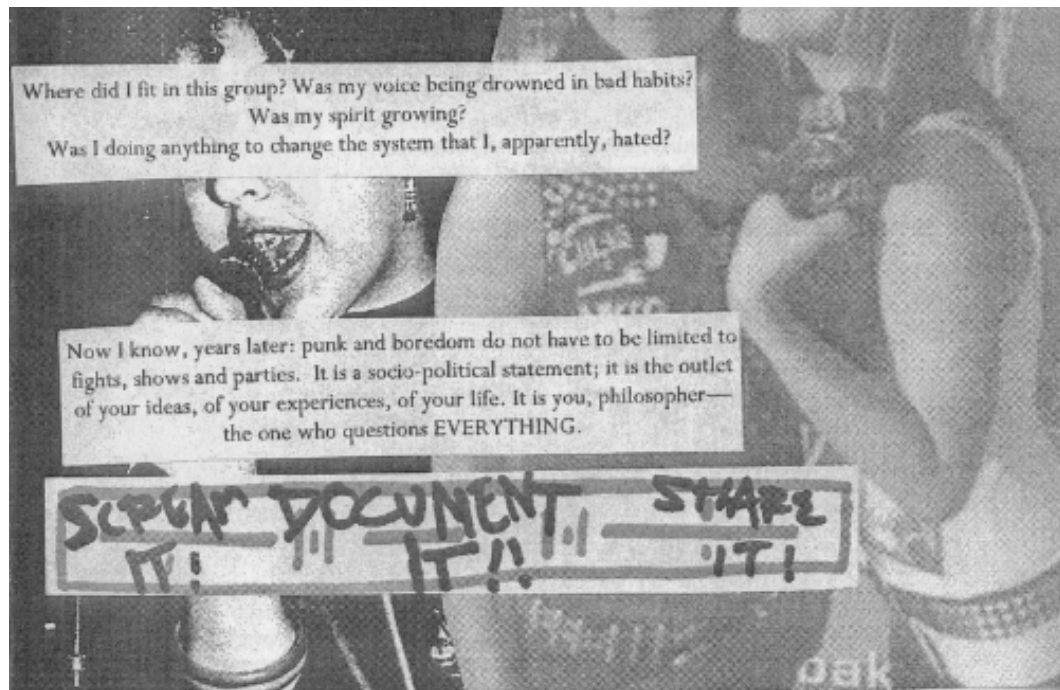


Figure 3 – “SCREAM IT! DOCUMENT IT! SHARE IT!” in *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*.

As a Xicanista zinester, Montaña challenges conventional Western notions of authorship because she believes knowledge and art should be accessible to all, rather than a privileged few. Her decision to make anti-copyright products resists the idea of texts as personal property, and anyone can choose to reuse, reprint, and redistribute her work and

the information contained within as he or she likes. This decision additionally contests academia and the stigma attached to plagiarism. Her “Love Note to the Reader” in *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* includes the promise, “I intend, now and forever, to create pieces that are available to all people...Property is theft” (3). She encourages collaboration and the sharing of texts within the zine by integrating a blank page in its centerfold that exclaims, “FILL THIS BLANK PAGE!” (10). Here, the reader is invited to incorporate her own story into Xicana and punk rock histories in an act of shared authority. The role of the reader quickly shifts to that of author who can take control of her own narrative. This page suggests each of the copies of *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* is unlike the rest, and Rebecca Solnit’s notions of inexhaustibility come to mind; however, Montaño manages a call for collaboration with fewer ambiguities than Solnit. Her text encourages, or rather *demand*s, the contributions of others directly beside her own. There is no competing for space on this page, nor is there an attempt to separate one author’s work from another’s (Figure 4).

Montaño’s Xicanista ethos is a form of meta-knowledge Renee M. Moreno calls “critical consciousness.” It is an awareness of, and a reaction to, the societal perceptions of oneself (Moreno 226). Montaño’s critical consciousness incites politicized reaction, and as an activist she writes to disrupt dominant cultural perceptions and to share her own knowledge, freely, with others. Her call for collaboration, then, transforms Moreno’s individualized critical consciousness into an act of “coalition consciousness” (Licón), and she invites other women to contribute their own stories. As a Xicanista zinester, Brenda Montaño not only reads the city-as-text, but she also challenges and refuses the

space that is being created for her in San Francisco, in academia, and in history. In *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* she rewrites her own story into Chicana history, and in her succeeding zines she employs similar methods to reshape Bay Area history from a Xicana perspective.

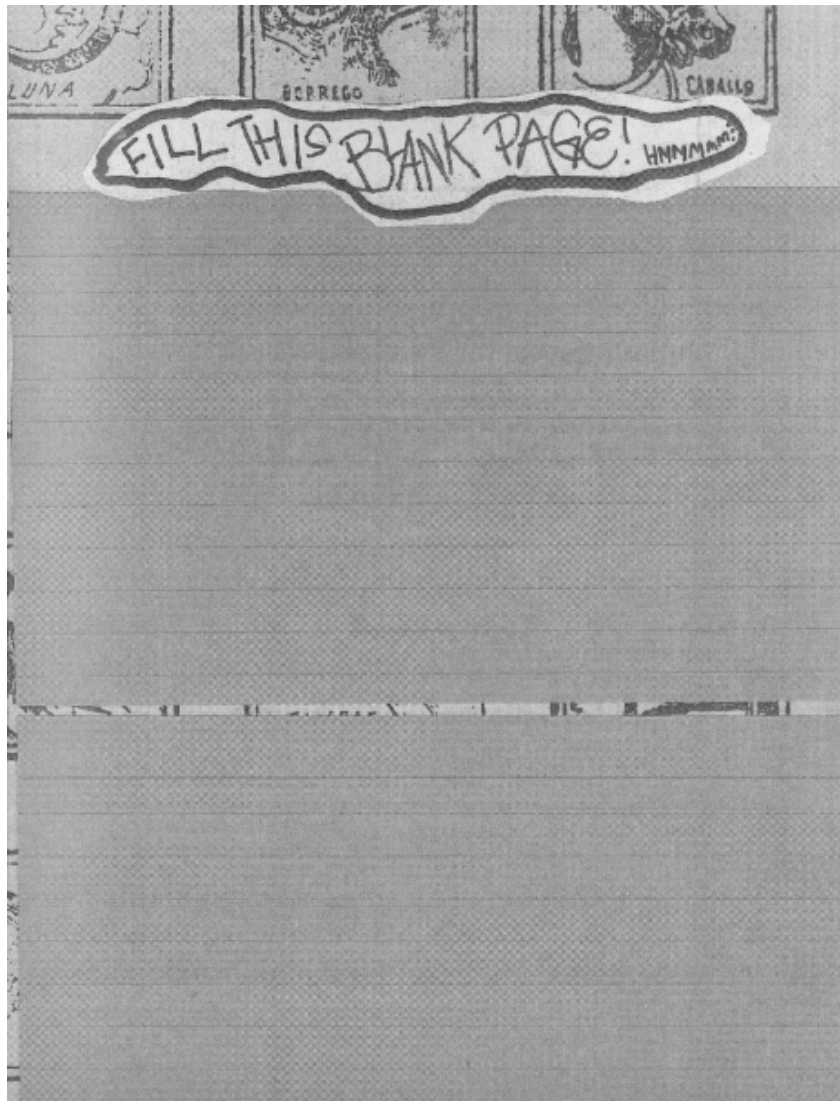


Figure 4 – “FILL THIS BLANK PAGE!” from *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*.

At a Crossroads: Text and the Materiality of the Body

Places only become meaningful when bodies occupy them.

– Nedra Reynolds (145)

Brenda Montaña's Xicanista tactics guide her narrative in *Singin' the Blues: Esa Que te Sirve*, which translates to *Singin' the Blues: Those [feminine] Who Serve You*, even though this zine stands apart from *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* in form and dialect. *Singin' the Blues* is printed on thicker cardstock than the standard printer paper of her other zines. The cover is yellow-tinted, rather than black and white photocopies, and it features three restaurant tickets, one of which has the title of the zine printed on it. The cover informs the reader that *Singin' the Blues* is illustrated by Breana Nuñez, an artist and graphic designer whose bold prints fill the pages and replace the DIY collages of Montaña's other work. Overall, this zine has a decidedly more formal appearance than the others (Figures 5 and 6). And yet, *Singin' the Blues* is predominantly written as an autobiographical account that lacks the theoretical and academic language interspersed in *High St. Este de Oakland* and *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*. Montaña code switches between English, Spanish, and Spanglish and provides an English translation for most, though not all, of the Spanish phrases found in *Singin' the Blues*. The presentation is formal, but the language is colloquial. The zine is printed on ruled paper that mimics a school composition book, but the images and text do not utilize the rigidity of its lines. It appears the organization provided by ruled paper was purposefully avoided during the printing process. This zine was not written in



Figure 5 – Covers of *High St. Este de Oakland: Tierra De Lucha y Limones* (left) and *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!* (right)

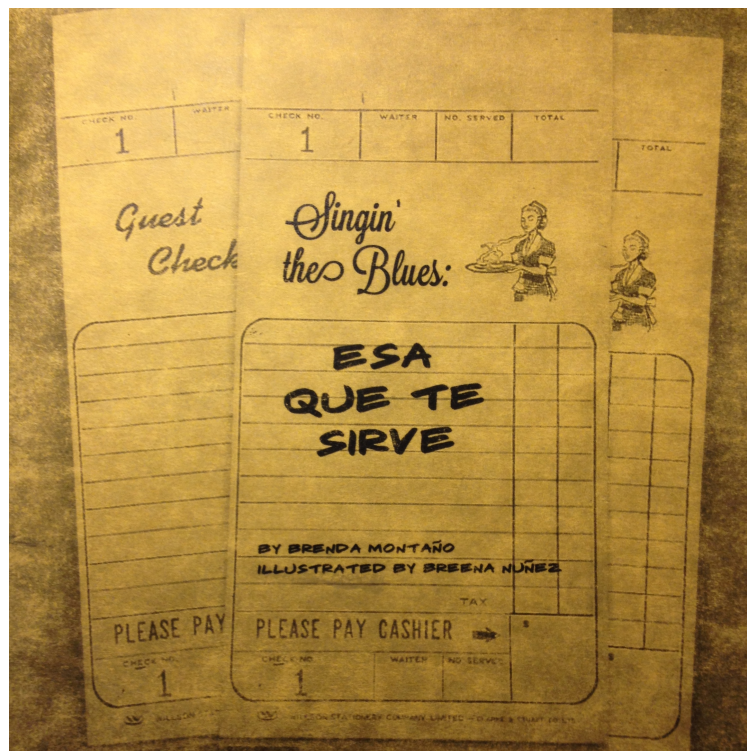


Figure 6 – Cover of *Singin' the Blues: Esa Que Te Sirve*.

conversation with the university, but the presentation still evokes images of school, formal documents (the restaurant tickets), and a refusal to conform to either.

Singin' the Blues opens with its own love note to the reader, which takes the shape of several lines dedicated to the working class women whose stories ensue:

This is for every woman
who has practiced the sacred ritual of sacrifice
in order to provide
and in order to survive. (2)

Montaño follows her edict from *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas*, and begins disclosing the position from which she is writing her version of San Francisco within the first few pages of the zine. She explains she is a waitress who serves rich, white doctors who come to the unnamed restaurant where she works from “up the hill” to eat cheeseburgers (4-5). The disclosure of her identity is immediately and intimately linked to a sense of place, and she depicts her work’s location “on the rich side of San Francisco, Califas” (4). She does not define her Xicanista agenda within this introduction, as she does in *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas*; however, there is a footnote at the bottom of the page that explains “Califas” is “Chicana/o slang for ‘California’” and the word is pronounced, “KAH-LEEF-AS...something like Kay-leave-us” (4). She may not explicitly outline her Xicanista perspective, but she is certainly addressing the friction present between working and upper class residents in San Francisco. She conjures images of gentrification written in Chicana slang, and her English translation—presumably provided for white readers—clearly conveys her position on the topic: ‘kay leave us. She is establishing her niche as a borderlands figure who navigates the city’s borderlands spaces.

Montaño's identity is so connected with her sense of place in *Singin' the Blues* that she frequently personifies San Francisco in her narrative, and San Francisco's story serves as a foil to her own. Themes of embodiment, both her body and the city's, saturate the text. She writes, "Most of San Francisco is what I'd call rich. It's basically suffocating itself in its wealth. And because it's suffocating, it feels okay with cutting off the circulation of wealth to some parts of the city, like cutting off just certain parts of the body" (4). When she mentions "the hill" where her customers reside, she is referring to San Francisco's Nob Hill neighborhood, an area of the city that has been associated with its "mansions on the hill" and blueblood residents since the late nineteenth century (Kamiya 213-218). The areas of the city that are "cut off" are those like the Mission District, the neighborhood with the highest eviction rate in the city, and the Tenderloin, a neighborhood that is merely blocks away from most Nob Hill sites and is known for its poor and homeless population. The Tenderloin and the Mission District are physical borderlands in San Francisco. The Nob Hill and Tenderloin neighborhoods, in fact, are spaces where the city's elite resides on (a hill on) top of its poorest citizens, and this disparity is visible when walking through the neighborhoods. The division of Nob Hill and the Tenderloin becomes so indistinguishable in some locations that one can walk in a rectangular route from California, Larkin, Geary, and Powell Streets to loosely outline what has more recently been named the "Tendernob." The gentrification of the city has prompted increased studio apartment rates in the Tenderloin, and the mapped and named neighborhoods are becoming less certain as a result of rapid changes (Figure 7).

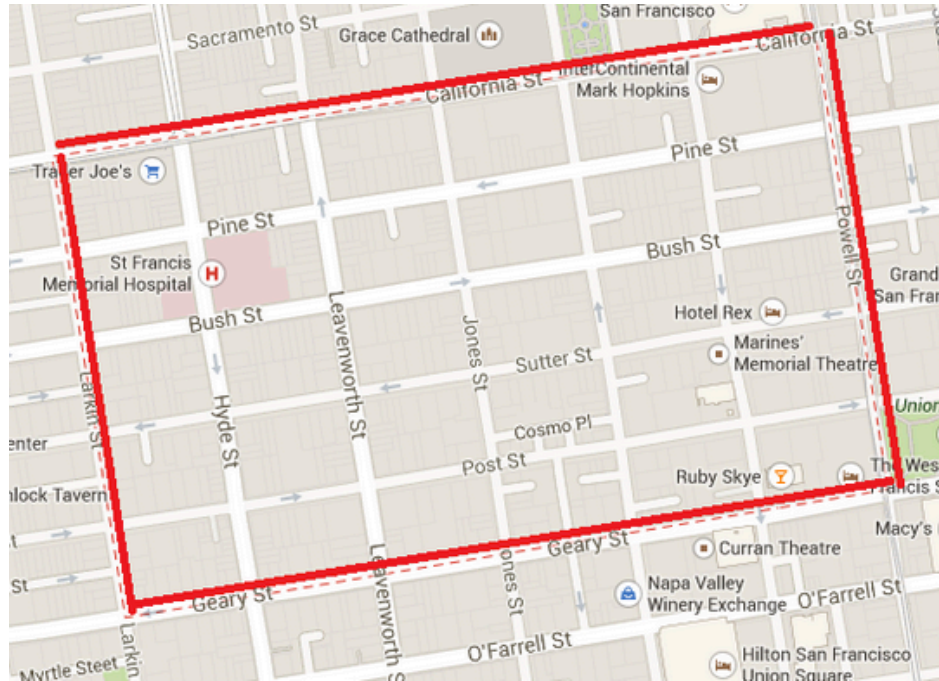


Figure 7 – San Francisco’s “Tenderloin” neighborhood.

These are the areas of the city where the rich and poor clash most tangibly, and where city officials tend to overlook the displacement of the poor, designating the shift in population as a “natural” process or a “cleaning up” of the area. Montaña, instead, exposes the violence of gentrification and the displacement it causes when she likens the process to an amputation of “insignificant” body parts, “like, maybe the ring finger or something” (4).

Montaña additionally documents the physical violence her own body endures as a female server: from the burns and acne caused by the grease of frying machines to the sexual harassment inflicted by her male boss who threatens to spank her if she is disobedient. The rich customers and doctors she serves comment on her physical appearance regularly, and their comments increase in correlation with her decision to wear makeup to work. She chooses to wear makeup despite the customers’ unwarranted

commentary and calls this her “warrior mask” (5). The warrior mask allows her to take control of her work environment, while also removing herself and hiding from the realities of the harassment, because “the more you put on...that stuff, the higher your tips are” (5). And tips are her primary means for paying rent and surviving as an underpaid waitress in the city (Figure 8).

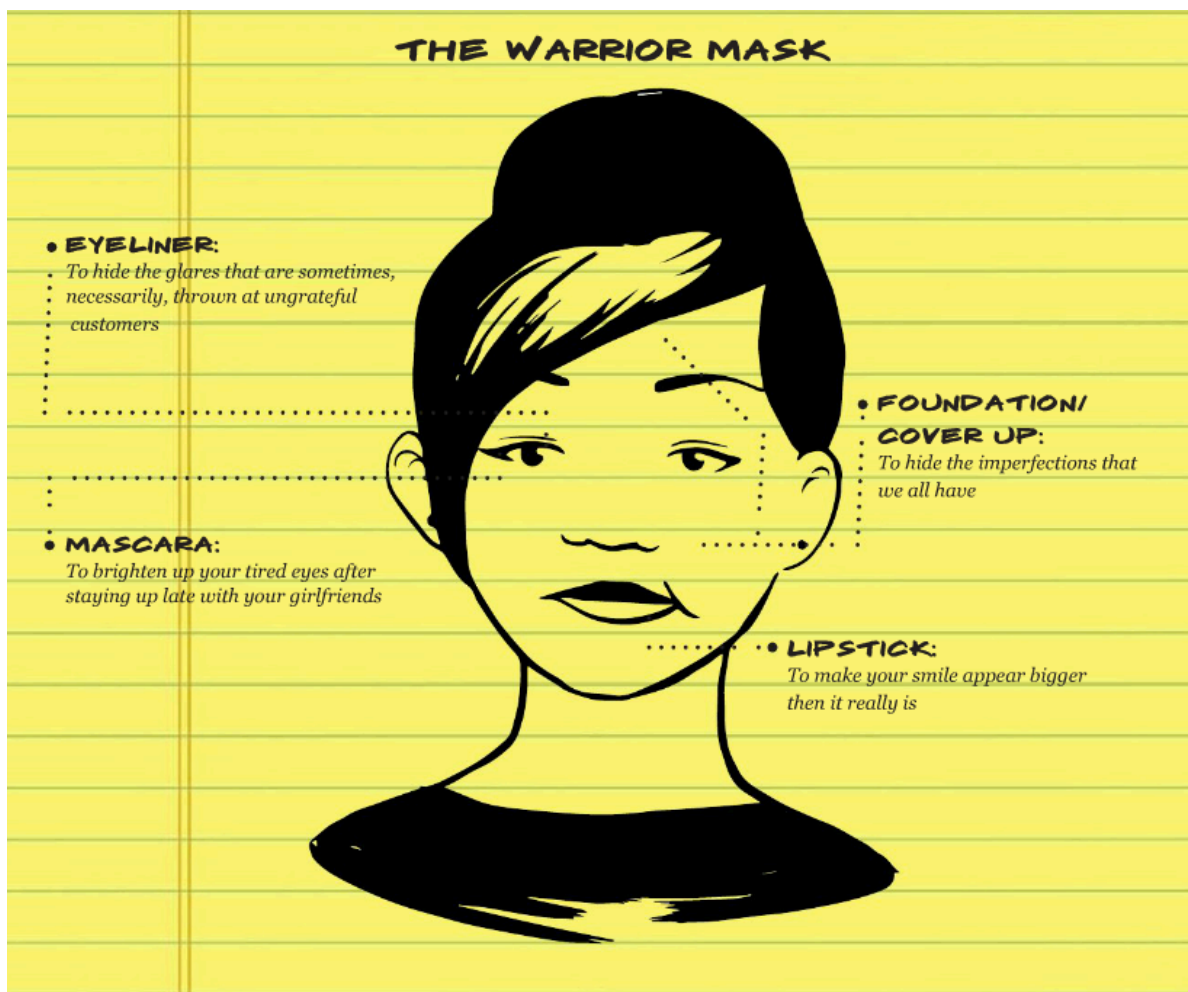


Figure 8 – “The Warrior Mask” from *Singin’ the Blues: Esa Que Te Sirve*

As she contemplates how weightily her tips affect her life, Montaña says, “I see them, the doctors, plotting my fate right before me” (5). She identifies the doctors as immediately

controlling her situation through their tips, and further associates them with the “think tanks” and the “folks up at the top” who more broadly determine the fate of American society (5). In doing so, she calls attention to power hierarchies on local and global scales. These are the individuals who are violating her city, her body, and her Chicana culture and relatives. These are the voyeurs of de Certeau’s urban theories who approach the city from their removed, utopian distance; they are doctors who likely received an education from Renee M. Moreno and Ellen Cushman’s bourgeois “ivory towers.” Her customers come to represent the dominant ideologies governing American and San Franciscan life. It is at this point in the text that her story diverges, and she begins to fight against—or disrupt—the narrative the rich, white doctors have prescribed for her life.

There is a subtle disturbance in the text, and the focus shifts from Montaño’s body to an examination of women’s bodies. She (re)positions her story in a history and “legacy of waitresses” and working women (9). She relates her fingertips, which are greasy and coated in dried ketchup, to her *tía*’s (aunt’s) fingers that were always callused from working as a seamstress. She considers how her mother’s fingers are put to work as a secretary and typist. Her narrative then begins alternating between the individual, first person point-of-view and the communal “we” of working women whose bodies are used to serve others. The discussion of fingers and fingertips relates back to the image of San Francisco amputating its own “insignificant” limbs, and Montaño proves how truly powerful the hands of working class women are. And, accordingly, how vital the working force is to the overall functioning of San Francisco.

She pauses the retelling of her present job in San Francisco, and begins reflecting on her earlier years of serving at the same Sizzler restaurant as her best friend, her *tía*, and her cousins. She remembers, “You walked into Sizzler and I swear, nothin’ but all these beautiful Chicanas!” (9). She maneuvers rhetorically to resituate herself and her focus from abuse to the beauty, and visibility, of Chicana bodies. She defines her own standards of attractiveness, and praises Chicana waitresses for their “big, black hair” held up with everyday resources like clips, pens, and scrunchies (10). She admires their beauty beneath the layer of canola oil splattered on their faces. Montaña sees a beauty in these women that exists beyond outward appearance and takes the shape of physical power, endurance, and cultural pride. She asserts her own authority on the matter and makes visible those who are often overlooked by dominant discourses. These are the working force, or those who are otherwise displaced, silenced, and marginalized within the broader narrative of a gentrified San Francisco.

Nedra Reynolds invokes Adrienne Rich in *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Differences* when she names the body “the geography closest in” (143). She explains bodies are coded by the social world, and marks on the body connote issues of class, race, gender, and body type. The attention Brenda Montaña gives to her own body, and to the bodies of Chicana women, presents images of heritage, sisterhood, motherhood, struggle, and survival. Her focus on the body allows her to reflect on her place in the “legacy of waitresses,” and she does so in a manner that *displaces* the notions of weakness, sexual objectivity, servility, and victimization her bosses and customers map onto her Chicana experience. Even her image of the “warrior

mask” allows her to take control of her own body through her denial of the cultural meaning ascribed to her face. She explains how others read her face and her decision to wear makeup as a sign of flirtation, an invitation for harassment. Nuñez’s image of the mask, though, explains her use of the makeup as a means for earning the tips she needs in order to survive beyond her work environment.

Reynolds continues her explanation of geographic embodiment and states, “[Bodies] imprint a place with identifiable or palpable characteristics” (145), which can allow one to inquire how social productions of space operate. How, for example, social boundaries grant access to some bodies while purposefully excluding others. When the bodies in a place all look alike, those whose bodies are marked as “different” develop an acute awareness of boundaries and borders preventing their acceptance, or very being, within a given location (145). Montaña’s boundary consciousness is prevalent in each of her zines, and she addresses the lack of safety she feels as a young woman walking city streets at night alone in *Xicanistas Y Punkeristas: Say It Loud!*. In *Singin’ the Blues* she describes her commute to a portion of the city largely inhabited by rich, white bodies who objectify her own, and she later maps her body’s movement through Oakland in *High St. Este de Oakland: Tierra de Lucha Y Limones* (translation: Oakland’s High Street: Land of Struggle and Lemons).

Brenda Montaña walks through city spaces and reads her urban surroundings, but I do not associate her with the *flâneur*. She moves through San Francisco and Oakland while commuting to work and school. There is a necessity and urgency in Montaña’s work that supersedes idle observation, and she does not write from a position of privilege.

She walks through city spaces Benjamin's white, upper class *flâneur* would not likely travel, and, if he did choose to visit areas like Oakland's High Street, he would find it difficult to blend into the crowd to present an objective view of the neighborhood. This further demonstrates how some bodies are not welcome, or choose not to navigate, select areas. Nedra Reynolds calls such spaces "no-go" zones, and she encourages her students to ask, "No go for whom?" when discerning regions of their own surroundings they choose to avoid. "No-go" locations are sites of geographic exclusion that help to realize the "invisible" types of difference that are hard to immediately define, but are always determined by issues of gender, race, class, ability, and methods of transportation available (87). The physical separation of bodies caused by "no-go" zones contributes to "us" versus "them" divisions among city residents, and it is not easy to voluntarily enter an area that marks one's body as "different" or "other."

High St. Este de Oakland follows Brenda Montaña's change of residence from San Francisco to East Oakland in the summer of 2012. This is an increasingly common trajectory for those who cannot keep pace with San Francisco's mounting rental prices. East Oakland is considered a "no-go" zone for many in the Bay Area who do not live there or who can afford to avoid its spaces. When Montaña tells her cousin about her move, she responds, "*Be fearful*" (4). Montaña understands, "She, like the news media, like the Guatemaltecos at my work, like my parents in Southern California, is afraid of Oakland" (4). She comprehends her family's worries: crime *does* occur in Oakland. But, as she points out, "This is not the only reality that exists here" (4). *High St. Este de Oakland* traces Montaña's ten-block walk along the city thoroughfare, and she

photographs, draws, and writes her mental map of the region. She includes clippings from Bay Area newspapers reporting crime in the area, oral histories from Oakland residents, and statistics found on government websites. Her map is written from her perspective—the reader actually “sees” Oakland from her point of view through the camera lens—but she includes her story among others to present one possible excerpt of everyday reality in Oakland:

It is a fact that Oakland, East Oakland, was/is a place where crime happens. Young mamas and homeboys do steal from each other and jump white boys for walking down the street late at night... You also find young mama's taking their baby boy to pick up his 4th birthday cake... You find abuelitas con pelo lacio y gris, como las nubes después de una tormenta hermosa [grannies with lank grey hair, like the clouds after a beautiful storm]. Homeboys, on warm summer nights, stand outside their homes with cousins, primos, cuñados [brothers], sons and nephews, listening to cumbia hits through the sound system of a car parked in the driveway. I will never bring myself to be afraid of them, these beautiful smiling humans. I understand that crime exists everywhere. I also understand that the disproportionality of crime in East Oakland is not because of these beautiful smiling humans. East Oakland is under constant surveillance. (*High St. Este de Oakland* 4)

Again, the surveillance of city officials is mentioned, and Montaña discusses the government's “[regulation of] brown bodies” (6). City officials generate one understanding of Oakland that is not wholly representative of those who experience the city through everyday practice, and the general public's understanding of Oakland equates “brown bodies” with difference, crime, and danger because of government and journalistic reports. Brenda Montaña moves beyond the oversights of city officials to depict a side of Oakland often neglected by those who do not live there. Her mapping of High Street offers layers of experience, and she narrates stories of violence and life, beauty and crime, history and family. Her zine creates a relatable map of High Street for

urban dwellers who are familiar with its spaces, and allows such readers to continue constructing their own versions of Oakland. Perhaps more importantly, though, she shares an account of Oakland for the unfamiliar reader who is then offered a view of the city unlike the stories commonly urging people to “*Be fearful*” (4) of its differences.

At the end of the *High St. Este de Oakland*, Montañó contrasts the diversity of her walk with a 2010 demographics report from the United States Census Bureau detailing the “Hispanic or Latino” population in Oakland. Categories include: “Hispanic or Latino (of any race),” “Other Hispanic or Latino,” “Not Hispanic or Latino,” “Naturalized Citizen,” and “Not a Citizen” (15). Beneath the table of statistics, Moreno asks, “Who decides these categories?! Who decides who I am?!?” (15). Montano’s boundary consciousness indicates her awareness of the reciprocal relationship between geography and identity formation: “Identities take root from particular sociogeographical intersections, reflecting where a person comes from and, to some extent, directing where she is allowed to go” (Reynolds 11). She does not willingly accept the spatial and societal restrictions defining who she is or where she can and cannot go, and neither do her texts. She writes about the borderlands she navigates with a knowledge of the multiple realities that exist within any one place or person. Renee M. Moreno declares, “Writing allows us to build meaning in troubling times...it is possible to imagine ourselves through literacy” (237-238). Montañó’s articulation of gentrification and borderlands spaces helps her to situate her stories in relation to Chicana history and community. She creates texts that inhabit oppositional spaces and perform as counter-narratives to institutional and societal versions of history that too often conflate and ignore experiences of difference. Her zines

counter stereotypical views of her body, culture, and identity. She depicts alternative stories of San Francisco and Oakland, and uses them to (re)imagine a future with opportunities—a future that rejects Chicana/o culture's erasure as the inevitable outcome of gentrification.

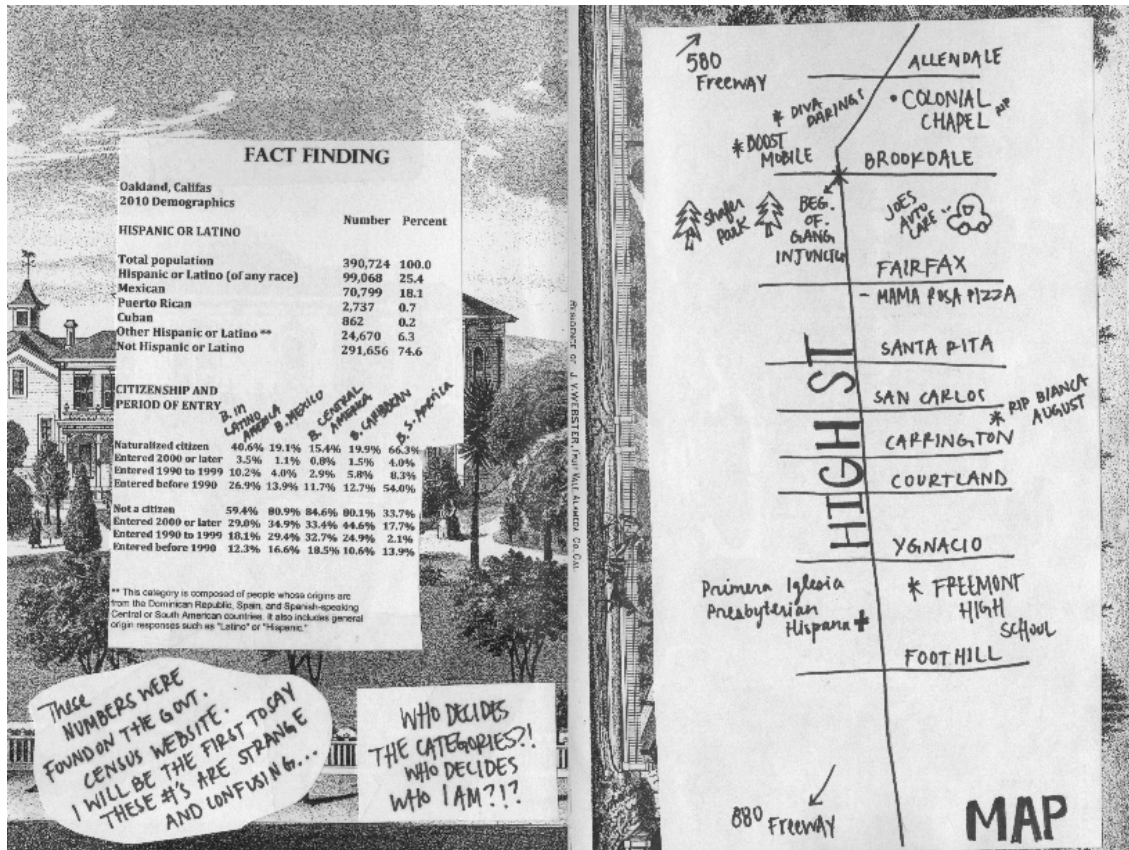


Figure 9 –United States Census Bureau's 2010 demographics of Oakland (right) and Brenda Montaño's map of High Street (left)

CHAPTER THREE

SPATIAL PRACTICES OF THE “TECH ELITE”

Big Hipster Brother is everywhere...other than Maps, I am mostly Google free.

– Rebecca Solnit, Facebook post, 9 Nov. 2014.

Rebecca Solnit refers to ‘San Franciscans’ to describe legitimate citizens of San Francisco, as compared to tech workers, usurpers who ‘often displace San Franciscans from their homes.’ What is Solnit’s definition of a ‘San Franciscan’? Someone born in San Francisco? Someone who has lived in San Francisco for five years? Two years? She seems to consider San Francisco a city state like Florence in Dante’s time, as if one needed credentials to live there.

– Tara Lamont’s online response to Solnit’s “Get Off the Bus,” 3 Apr. 2014.

I have so far addressed two authors whose works counter the stability of urban spaces and the dominant ideologies mapped onto them. Rebecca Solnit and Brenda Montaña write about and move through San Francisco in unpredictable ways, and they open possible readings of the city-as-text that challenge “regulating systems of order” (Topinka 66), stable identity positions, socially constructed stereotypes, and universality of experience. Both women observe the differences present in San Francisco and comprehend the impossibility of creating any one map to fully represent such diversity. Their texts demonstrate that an “authentic” rendering of San Francisco does not exist, which implies one’s experience of the city is no more “legitimate” than another’s. Why, then, do savvy writers like Solnit still suggest the presence of a species of “tech worker” whose identities are easily collapsed to “Google employees,” and who are blamable for the complex social process of gentrification? Just as there is not an authentically

“Chicana experience,” or even a true “San Franciscan” experience, there is not one distinct species of “tech worker” solely at fault for the city’s shifting cultural landscape.

I have pondered this question throughout my research, and I have come to two possible theories explaining how tech workers so often become the scapegoats of the gentrification process in San Francisco. First, authors like Solnit and Montañó actively work to (re)construct and *produce* urban spaces through their writing, movement, and everyday practices. Meanwhile, Google (the corporation, search engine, and software) prompts the *consumption* of urban spaces through the location-based services and technologies it offers. Second, journalists and city residents reacting to gentrification tend to create and perpetuate a “discourse of crisis” (Reynolds 24); the term gentrification is used synonymously with “housing crisis.” There is an overwhelming concern about San Francisco’s uncertain future; many wonder how the city can be saved, and others are already lamenting its ruin. Thus the discourse of crisis created in response to gentrification is reflective of the “discourse of loss” Nedra Reynolds attributes to the impact modern technology has on society’s perceptions of public and private spaces. I would like to explore each of these ideas in greater detail in an effort to better understand how one corporation’s spatial practices become representative of an entire social group of “tech workers” in the Bay Area.

In this chapter, I argue Google’s mapping of San Francisco promotes the consumption of public spaces through the corporation’s aim to share the best, fastest, and easiest modes of traveling through the city via Google Maps. The company claims its mapping services will prevent users from ever “getting lost” (“About” Google Maps),

which restricts the improvisational openings an urban dweller creates when walking through the city. Google Maps threatens to position a single corporation as the panoptic cartographer of the city-as-text whose authority directly challenges the development of a collaborative outlook, the establishment of local knowledge, and the opportunity for creating counter-narratives through lived experience. This, in turn, advances a discourse of crisis situating tech workers as the symbols for the displacement caused by gentrification.

Modern technology is one of Nedra Reynolds' primary concerns in *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Differences*. This text, published in 2004, examines how technological advancements—namely, cell phones—alter the perception of space, place, and time. Reynolds argues, “people feel alarmed and regretful about [the] perceived takeover of public space” associated with the use of cell phones (24). Cell phones allow individuals to take what is often considered private conversation into public spaces. Reynolds neither condemns nor condones the insertion of private conversations into public spaces, but she does explain cell phone use causes the very terms “private” and “public” to lose meaning, even if the two spatial realms were never truly separated to begin (22). She believes the use of cell phones contributes to a “perceived conflation of public and private space that feeds into a discourse of loss” and frustration (23). People prefer to keep spaces regulated, and most have strong opinions about who should use public spaces and how. A loud cell phone argument is rarely permissible in the middle of a grocery store, for instance, yet it happens regularly.

The discourse of loss of public spaces is built around misunderstandings of “static” space and the nostalgic belief that there ever was a clear division of what was private and what was not (23). A nostalgic view of space presents a city where people gather to discuss local politics and events in town squares, shops, and on street corners. The postmodern city, and its increased focus on progress and technology, assumedly renders such sites irrelevant. Cities’ thoroughfares are no longer points of contact for citizens, but are spaces existing between Point A and Point B where quick phone calls can happen before shuttling to the next location (Reynolds 24).

This discourse of loss is directly connected to the notion of time-space compression briefly addressed in my first chapter. Various technologies—e-mail, cell phones, social networking sites, the Internet—create the illusion of productivity and movement. Reynolds describes the common belief that the world is shrinking because information is shared instantaneously and across great distances with the click of a mouse. The immediate information transfer made possible by technology produces the effects of movement, travel, and a sense of closeness through the attempt to “bypass the material world and geographic distance” (Reynolds 18). Ebony Elizabeth Thomas discusses technology’s ability to shatter preconceived notions of space and time in “Landscapes of City and Self: Place and Identity in Urban Young Adult Literature.” She postulates, “The virtual nature of today’s communication modes has inspired a return to that which is tangible, local, and immediate—that is, a sense of place” (14). Thomas’s article proposes society’s increased awareness of the false sense of movement and connection produced by technological communications creates a need to return to place.

Reynolds reaches a similar conclusion through her analysis of cell phone use, and she notices how frequently cell phone conversations revolve around the reporting of one's geographic location. Cell phone users are constantly asking or responding to the question, "Where are you?" (22). Reynolds' theory becomes even more intriguing in a modern context where most smart phone applications require geographic information simply to function.

Reynolds and Thomas identify a major paradox of modern technology: on one hand, "cell phones 'seem out of place' because we have such rigid notions of what constitutes public and private" spaces and conversations, and on the other, "[cell] phones draw attention to place precisely because they violate social codes [dictating] where one can speak (loudly and one-sidedly)" to another (Reynolds 22). Cell phones magnify modern society's "need for closeness in a culture of distance" (23), and even if an individual seems oblivious to where he or she is, physically, when engaged in a phone conversation, there remains the need to report the site from which one is making the call. This relates back to the irony of Solnit's frustrations with the very technology allowing her the time to explore and to write about her sense of place and physical surroundings. The factors contributing to a discourse of loss of public spaces are apparent in the discourse of crisis surrounding gentrification. These crises stem from conflicting notions of how public and private spaces should be used, and a romanticized notion of how spaces were once used and regulated. When talking about gentrification specifically, people lament quickly vanishing public spaces and it therefore becomes easier to assume one knows best how the city's spaces should (and should not) be used. Simply put,

people want to maintain individual authority over their environment, but technology and gentrification highlight the ever-shifting, uncontrollable properties of space and place.

Reynolds' cell phones seem relatively benign in comparison to the growing reports of Google Glass,⁵ Google buses, and the use of domestic drones in the Bay Area. Competing notions of space are heightened in San Francisco due to gentrification and the city's proximity to Mountain View, San Jose, and Silicon Valley. These three nearby California cities are all located in Santa Clara County and they host Google, Facebook, YouTube (which Google owns), Apple Inc., Yahoo! and Wikipedia's headquarters, not to mention the other hundreds of tech start-ups varying in scales of magnitude within the industry (Solnit "Get Off the Bus"). San Francisco has become a virtual testing ground for new technology. It is certainly reductive to assume all "white or Asian male nerds" (Solnit "Google Invades") are inevitably tech workers, but the increased presence of technology—especially wearable technology like Google Glass—does create recognizable tech symbols that appear "out of place" to those who do not subscribe to the products themselves. An individual wearing Google Glass may not work for a tech business, but his or her use of the product remains noticeable and incites reaction when in public spaces. Local newspapers and blogs report such instances again and again, and individuals who choose to flaunt the use of technology have faced verbal harassment, vandalized personal property, and, in some cases, physical violence. In San Francisco, technology fuels the discourse of loss while technological devices also become

⁵ Google Glass is a wearable product that mimics glasses frames with the addition of a touchpad, camera, and display screen located above the user's right eye. Glass is meant to provide hands-free access to the technology of a smart phone, and Google calls its customers "Explorers" who can experience the world around them "faster and easier" ("About" Google Glass).

emblematic of a lack of affordable housing, the loss of local businesses, the gap between lower and upper classes, and the loss of culture credited to gentrification. Products like Google Glass create the illusion of a clear culprit, or the identifiable “them” responsible for gentrification, and the second tech boom continues a discourse of crisis rooted firmly in problematic binaries.

Another tech symbol prevalent in the Bay Area is the Google bus. The “Google bus” is, in actuality, a combination of private buses used by tech businesses to shuttle employees from the city to Santa Clara County where tech headquarters are located. Most commutes range from forty to fifty miles beyond San Francisco city limits, and the buses provide Wi-Fi for the riders to begin the workday in transit. For Rebecca Solnit and many other San Franciscans, the Google bus means “the minions of the non-petroleum company most bent on world domination can live in San Francisco but work in Silicon Valley without going through a hair-raising commute by car” (Solnit “Get Off the Bus”). The buses are often unmarked with tinted windows, and even though this would appear to provide relative anonymity, Solnit portrays the stark contrast between a large, white bus and the “funky orange public buses [of Muni, San Francisco’s Municipal Transportation System] that wait behind them” (“Get Off the Bus”). The shuttles utilize the same stops as San Francisco’s Muni buses, and residents complain this interferes with daily bus schedules—especially when both bus systems are held up by anti-tech protests. Others claim rental and housing prices skyrocket in correlation with Google bus accessibility. Craigslist advertisements often boast an apartment’s nearness to “Google buses.” (I am hesitant to support this claim, however, since the private buses share the same stops and

major transfer points for BART and Muni. Living near a commuter hub can be a selling point for any city resident who does not drive or own a vehicle.)

The Google bus has become an extension of Reynolds' cell phone. These buses are privately owned, "private" spaces that shuttle through the public spaces of the city. The use of public spaces by privately owned transportation intensifies the animosity directed at tech workers who are viewed as using San Francisco as "a bedroom community for the tech capital of the world at the other end of the peninsula" (Solnit "Get Off the Bus"). The relationship between San Francisco and Silicon Valley reverses the typical suburbs-to-city commute; the "suburbanization of San Francisco" is another oft-repeated phrase guiding the discourse of crisis.

Riders who decide to commute via privately owned buses to and from San Francisco forgo direct contact with the city's spaces, residents, and other modes of public transportation offered. The workday begins once onboard the buses, and this confirms the effects of time-space compression and contributes to the sixty to seventy-hour workweeks many employees log (Solnit "Google Invades"). The negative responses of anti-tech protestors suggest the loss and misuse of public spaces, and dissenters point to the "Google" employees' disregard for establishing contact with others and a lack of knowledge regarding locally established protocol. Essentially, tech workers are portrayed not only as "out of place," but also as lacking a sense of place. Not every tech worker in the Bay Area uses private buses for transportation, but those who do are literally shuttling from Point A to Point B in a manner that excludes public interaction, chance encounters, and familiarity with the "rules" of the surrounding physical environment while

simultaneously impeding the movement of others. Privatized transportation denies the subversive opportunities Solnit and Montaña practice when walking through the city, and one cannot read or author the city-as-text in a similarly collaborative manner when he or she is not actively experiencing the city's public spaces.

Of the hundreds of tech companies located in San Francisco and the Bay Area, Google is the corporation most often written and talked about. Tech workers are labeled Google employees, commuter buses become the singular Google bus, and Google is the "Big Hipster Brother" upon which so many rely and also fear. Rebecca Solnit's Facebook post surprised me, not just because I discovered Facebook is one of her primary social platforms and the very invasive species she misidentifies in her article "Get Off the Bus," but because she admits, specifically, to using Google Maps. Google Maps, after all, functions in direct opposition to Solnit's relational views of mapping, place, and spatial practices. Even if not the "culprit" of gentrification, Google *is* heavily implicated within the process.

Google Maps is a web mapping application that provides street-level maps, 360-degree panoramic photographs of street views, and satellite imagery for locations on all seven continents. The maps offered are available via personal computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. Google launched its "never-ending quest for the perfect map" ("About" Google Maps) in 2004 when Google employee, Luc Vincent, started a project to "photograph every inch in San Francisco [to] put those pictures inside the map" (Fisher). Google claims its customers will "never get lost" as they navigate through the world with ease ("About" Google Maps). Google Maps is a land-surveying program that

is quickly becoming “part of the information infrastructure, a resource more complete and in many aspects more accurate than what governments have” (Fisher). Google Maps has transitioned from an experimental mapping project in San Francisco to the threading together of panoramic photographs covering over 3,000 cities in fifty-four different countries (Fisher). Vincent and his Google team have shifted from photographing every square-inch of San Francisco to covering and creating a massive photographic map of the world. Google is quickly becoming the commanding source for mapping information, and the “all-seeing” authoritative cartographer. Google has even surpassed urban planners and the government in its quest for a comprehensive map, and the company appears intent on closing the impossible distance between map and its subject.

At the same time Google began its mapping project in 2004, Reynolds was writing about the potential of “affordable software,[...]access to GIS databases, and a growing reliance on satellite imagery [that] might make possible the ‘democratization’ of cartography” (81). She also intuits, however, that the availability of technologically sophisticated maps is just as dangerous as it is exciting because many view them “as the new source of truth without also acknowledging the shifting, fragmentary nature of *all* of knowledge and information” (emphasis added, 82). Google has since validated Reynolds’ hypotheses, and its services blur the lines of democratic accessibility and virtual inescapability, land-surveying and monopolistic surveillance. I am both surprised by and sympathetic towards Solnit’s claim for using Maps because Google’s mapping system is ubiquitous for any who use modern devices (as is Google’s search engine). And, because of its omnipresence, Google Maps is not so easily recognizable as being “out of place” as

are the unmarked commuter buses or the individuals who walk down a city street wearing Google Glass.

Google has surpassed urban planners and government officials by stepping into the God-like role of Michel de Certeau's urban cartographer, or the voyeur who does not comprehend the "panorama-city is a 'theoretical' (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of [spatial] practices" (de Certeau 93). Visual consumption is the persisting threat of maps, and Reynolds describes the "commodification of spatial images" (62) enacted by commercialized geographic information systems such as Onstar and Magellan—and, now, Google Maps. On-screen maps, directions, and databases rely on a "visual epistemology" (62) that suggests what one sees is "real." Visual images and GIS data influence consumers who then associate commercialized images with actual places. For example, when one thinks of San Francisco, an image of the Golden Gate Bridge likely comes to mind even if the individual has never visited the city before. A visual epistemology and the consumption of images creates a sense of "knowing" a place based on virtual conceptions encountered (62). GIS systems position their viewers in the removed, overhead vantage point, which suggests the city-as-text is transparently composed and can be known without the familiarity of lived experience. While it is not incorrect to associate an image of the Golden Gate Bridge with San Francisco, it becomes troublesome when a reproduced image stands in for reality.

Google's mapping, akin to the mapping of city planners, is based on capital and consumption, a term de Certeau defines: "[Consumption] is devious, it is dispersed, but it

insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisible” (xii). Google Maps promotes the commodification of its images by linking physical locations to business websites, restaurants, and retail reviews. The “About” section of the Google Maps website depicts a bird’s-eye view of San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood with a magnified review for Rye, a four-star lounge with “a good crowd, bartenders, and mixologists” (Google Reviews). Above the image, Google declares, “The new Google Maps draws you a tailored map for every search and click you make. So whatever you’re trying to find or wherever you’re trying to go, you’ll always have a map highlighting the things that matter most” (“About” Google Maps). What matters most in Google’s depiction of San Francisco’s Tenderloin district is the existence of bartenders who “craft top-shelf cocktails at this sleek bar done up with exposed brick and polished wood” (Google Reviews). There is no mention of the violent, poverty-stricken Tenderloin Brenda Montaña witnesses in her commute to the richer Nob Hill neighborhood. A visual epistemology cannot convey local knowledge of an area’s “no-go” locations, class tensions, and other social boundaries present. Neither can it communicate a history of the neighborhood, which led one customer to write the following Yelp Review for Rye: “I hate that this kind of place is on the block...the people drinking and working there don’t live or care for the neighborhood and I wish they would leave” (Chizzy T’s Yelp Review).

Google is promoting, or at the very least documenting, the gentrification process as it occurs and in which the corporation is implicated. Since launching Google Maps in 2004, the Google team has photographed San Francisco between seven and thirteen times

(contingent upon location) and each of the maps is accessible through the “time machine” function offered by Google Maps. A Maps consumer can access San Francisco street views in yearly increments spanning from 2007 to 2014. Street views allow users to “walk” down San Francisco streets at varying moments during this seven-year period, and the function makes changes observable (Figure 10).



Figure 10 – 18th and Mission Street, San Francisco on Google Maps: Nov. 2007 (top) and Feb. 2015 (bottom).

The company’s insistent sponsorship of new businesses, restaurants, and bars only strengthens the connections made between Google’s practices and the process of gentrification. The dangers of a visual epistemology are double-edged, though. It is

problematic, first, to assume Google Maps is providing reality of experience in San Francisco—even when one can “walk” down its photographed streets—because, as is true of any map, this is just one of the many available representations of the city.

Google’s version of San Francisco promotes sites based on capitalistic gain. It is equally questionable to assume all images of change, such as those in the figure found above, are visual proof of gentrification without investing time to research the set of circumstances that led to the transformation seen. A visual epistemology threatens to make the grey areas of gentrification appear concrete dependent upon who is consuming and interpreting them.

Furthermore, the modes of transportation Maps offers support the ideology of consumerism as well. When one uses the site for directions, Google first provides a route for traveling by car, then transportation by bus and public transit, and, finally, paths for walking (bicycle routes and commercial airline schedules are two additional options offered in an expanded window). This hierarchy of movement reflects the corporation’s insistence on making travel easier and faster for its customers/consumers (Figure 11). Maps provides step-by-step directions from one location to the next. The “best route” is depicted in blue, and alternative routes appear in grey (“Get Directions”). When one accesses Google Maps on a cell phone, he or she needs only to follow on-screen cues or directives voiced by artificial intelligence programs like Apple Inc.’s “Siri.” This then reduces one’s inclination to engage with and respond to the cues of the social and geographic environment traversed. Still, even Google’s alternative itineraries provided in lieu of the “best route” cannot anticipate everyday events like road construction, delays in

traffic incited by a Google bus protest, the impromptu decision to walk down a back alleyway instead of a main thoroughfare, etc. There is simply so much information a map, even a technologically sophisticated map, cannot give.

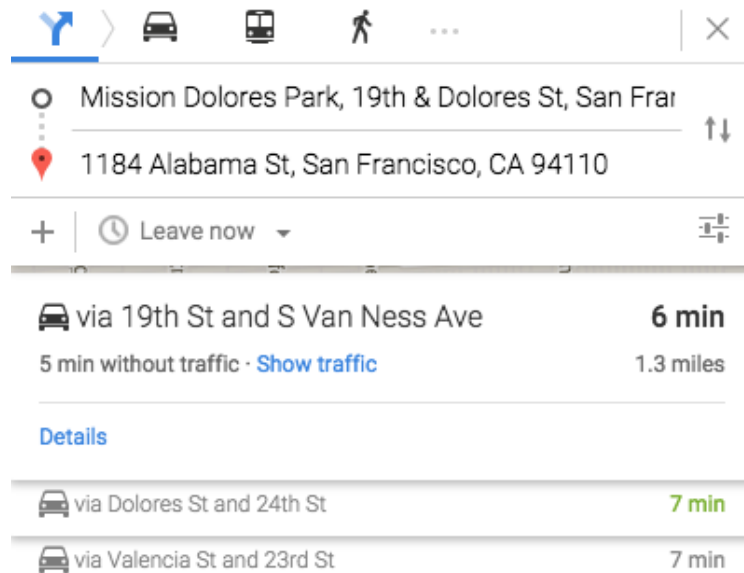


Figure 11 – Google Maps’ suggested modes of transportation (top left).

Google’s emphasis on travel efficiency derives from the goal of preventing Maps users from ever getting lost, and this reinstates Google’s impossible aspirations for generating “precise, measureable, and reproducible forms of ‘reality’” (Reynolds 81). Rebecca Solnit, on the contrary, argues for the necessity of losing oneself and for getting lost in her aptly titled *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Solnit’s argument for losing oneself springs from Walter Benjamin’s belief that:

[To] be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery. And one does not get lost but loses oneself, with the implication that it is a conscious choice, a chosen surrender, a psychic state achievable through geography. (*A Field Guide* 6)

For Solnit and Benjamin, the willingness to get lost invites the exploration of oneself and one's geographic surroundings. Getting lost allows the world to become "larger than your knowledge of it" (22). Solnit's philosophy suggests her readiness for "encountering differences" and her ability to surrender control to the possibilities of the unknown and the unmappable. This is precisely the spontaneity Google Maps endeavors to eliminate.

Google's aversion to getting lost further links the corporation with government and state practices that are founded on surveillance and control: Google Maps began as a project to map every inch of San Francisco, and the company has just recently mapped the floor of the Grand Canyon. The corporation's scope of power is rapidly expanding, and Google's objectives not only express the desire to authorize how the world should be viewed (determining "what matters most" in a given location), but also dictating how its citizens should move through it (via the "best routes"). When map users are denied the opportunity to get lost, there are then fewer opportunities for establishing alternative modes of being in the world. One result of "getting lost" is the development of what Reynolds terms "cultural literacy" (152), or what James C. Scott refers to as "mētis" in his *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Reynolds describes cultural literacy as "street smarts" (152), and Scott expands this definition through the concept of mētis, or "practical improvisations" and local experience that exist beyond state plan (311). Scott's improvisations are quite similar to de Certeau's spatial tactics, and the term "mētis" broadly entails an "array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment" (313).

The discrepancies between Google's and Solnit's outlooks—and the contributing factors spurring the perceived “us” versus “them” divide between tech workers and anti-tech residents in San Francisco—are founded on issues of consumption and production, capitalism and a resistance to state-imposed ideologies, and subjective and objective portrayals of reality. Each of these oppositions is traceable to a desire for individual authority over the city-as-text. The misunderstanding of how space and place operate, and the want for control over public and private spaces, is not unlike the Western belief in texts and ideas as “private” intellectual property. Likewise, a nostalgic view of how spaces function is reminiscent of Romantic views of individual authorship. A collaborative view of the city-as-text, as Solnit invites in *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*, offers a multidimensional production of a fluid sense of reality. It suggests multiple versions of a place exist at once, and that each author's interpretation informs and is informed by other authors. Google's authoritative representation of place conversely creates a singular version of reality for mass consumption. Google, Solnit, and anti-tech protestors may harbor conflicting views of gentrification, but all are ultimately struggling with romanticized notions of space and authorship of the city-as-text.

Gentrification in San Francisco is therefore much more than a “housing crisis.” When talking and writing about the process, city residents and journalists are also demonstrating resistance of technological advancements and the changing spatial practices of society at large. The public response to gentrification in San Francisco continues a “discourse of crisis” that fails to recognize urban spaces as social products: “spaces are *always* about, and have always *been* about, control and consumption”

(emphasis added, Reynolds 24). Spaces are continually being made, remade, and used in new ways. Spatial changes often occur in direct response to promoted consumption and profit encouraged by government officials. I argue, then, that the problematic “us” versus “them” mentality exhibited by city residents is caused by a heightened awareness of competing notions of space and how it should be used. Gentrification calls attention to the ways urban spaces are socially produced because it makes visible social divisions—especially racial and class differences—that are *always* present but become more readily observable in a rapidly changing and highly contested urban context.

To simply deem gentrification a crisis, and to respond by determining who belongs and that “tech workers” are at fault within this process, is to ignore the increased ability to visualize social boundaries that are typically naturalized and concealed from public view. A process like gentrification opens opportunities for producing counter-narratives to the dominant ideologies and images mapped onto a region because it increases one’s ability to read social spaces that are in flux. As Nedra Reynolds explains, “The more that spaces are ‘controlled,’ the more likely that new uses or practices [can] develop as forms of resistance” to the very order and control imposed (17). Gentrification increases one’s ability to “read” city spaces and social constructs that are not always available for conscious interpretation, but that become more accessible in such moments of “crisis.”

AFTERWORD

Ruth Glass's "unstoppable" narrative of gentrification is only one of the "tens of millions" (*Infinite City* 3) of narratives coexisting in San Francisco. This is not to say the process of gentrification can or ever will be "solved," nor is it to say the effects of gentrification are purely imagined. The city will move forward and it will continue to change. When city residents interpret gentrification as an inevitable process that cannot be stopped, the discourse that follows is driven by panic, loss, and crisis. The polarity exhibited by residents encountering gentrification's effects results from a desire to then claim a part of the fluctuating city for oneself. Each urban dweller has an idea of who belongs in the city's spaces and who does not, and each holds strong beliefs regarding how urban spaces should and should not be used. There is often a want to maintain individual authority over the city-as-text, just as there is a want to maintain control over one's housing and property costs in the city.

As Nancy Raquel Mirabal explains, gentrification is a process naturalized by government officials who are intent on increasing the capital in an area of the city through the removal of its poorer, working class citizens. The "revitalization" of a neighborhood is dependent upon the arrival of richer residents who will stimulate economic growth. The discourse of gentrification is therefore a mechanism of power. I am not suggesting city residents can fully escape the institutions and ideologies governing social existence in San Francisco: one cannot simply ascend to a position above Michel de Certeau's cartographer to neatly detangle the converging forces structuring the city and one's sense of self. What I am suggesting, though, is that the

increased visibility of a shifting urban landscape creates opportunities for implementing and narrating acts of agency from within the spaces and systems in which an individual is subjected. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson describe the nature of life narratives when writing, “People tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them” (56). In the face of gentrification, urban dwellers perpetuate a belief in personal authenticity of experience; however, an alternative “cultural script” available is a relational outlook, or a collaborative view of authorship, places, and place-based identity formation. Gentrification heightens one’s awareness of the fluid and emergent properties of space, which, in turn, opens the possibility to read the city-as-text for (and from) its grey and in-between areas, its borderlands spaces, and other sites of ambiguity. These are sites from which one can create a counter-narrative to resist the dominant and singular ways spaces are constructed and mapped.

Rebecca Solnit provides one example of resistant rhetoric grounded in lived experience. Her movement through city spaces combines acts of *flânerie* with cognitive mapping, which are both practices that mirror de Certeau’s conceptualization of transverse spatial tactics. Solnit walks through San Francisco and reads its spaces and social interactions. She rewrites city spaces when encountering them on foot, and she generates texts that convey her story in relation to the stories of others. Her willingness to “get lost” allows her geographic terrain to expand alongside her conscious observation of the relationship between places and identity formation. Solnit’s interactions with the “glorious library” (*Infinite City* 5) of San Franciscan citizens are what led to her project

Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas, a project that moves beyond the traditional atlas in its call for a collaborative and continuous mapping of the city.

Brenda Montaña reads and moves through the city, too. Her representation of the Bay Area's "no-go" zones challenge stereotypes mapped onto her body and her Chicana identity. Her borderlands consciousness is a ground-level tactic that differs from the *flâneur* because Montaña's movement is an act of survival rather than an act of privileged observation. Her countercultural zines document her existence and therefore disrupt the discourse of gentrification that depicts the "Latino" population as members of the displaced and silenced community whose cultural erasure is unavoidable.

Solnit and Montaña author versions of San Francisco that exist beyond what maps, even technologically sophisticated maps like those offered by Google, can convey. The authors' texts and their use of urban spaces demonstrate the possibilities that emerge when one accepts the challenge of working toward a collaborative view of authorship and a relational view of identity formation. To "constantly build and negotiate meanings with and among" other authors (Lunsford and Ede 438) is to deny stable understandings of identity formation, social positions, and the city-as-text. A collaborative view of authorship also destabilizes claims of authenticity and individual authority over a text. Gentrification in San Francisco can thus be written and talked about as an ongoing conversation, not a dichotomous battleground.

∞

To suggest that this project concludes here denies all that I am arguing for, and all that Rebecca Solnit, Nancy Raquel Mirabal, Brenda Montaña, and Nedra Reynolds argue

for, as well. My research has grown and transformed over the course of the last twelve months, and I have worked to trace the arguments that intrigue me most—only to then discover additional routes worthy of pursuit. As I continue forward with these ideas, I am first interested in returning to autobiography theory and the critical analysis of life narratives. I have introduced this project as an examination of three narratives of San Francisco, but I have yet to specifically address the presence of a fourth—that is, my story.

I happened upon a quote in the earlier stages of my research, and I have kept it in mind throughout writing this project. Joseph Harris begins his article “The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing” ruminating on the “odd double movement” by which one “only begins to understand the place one has come from through the act of leaving it” (748). This relates to my own trajectory as a student who left San Francisco five years ago, only to find myself reading and writing about the city during the two years spent in the graduate program in Bozeman, Montana. Harris’s quote alludes to the autobiographical act of looking to the past in order to make sense of one’s present sense of self; examining the place one has come from creates a stronger sense of where one now stands. Even though I have not visited San Francisco in over two years, this project has marked a return.

Writing about San Francisco from my current location in Montana has allowed me to consciously reflect on the city from a more removed, critical distance than I may have achieved when living in the midst of it. However, I am equally aware that the desire to somehow access a version of San Francisco from my past (a version that is being re-

membered five years later) is just as problematic as it is to try to claim a part of the city for one's own when living in it. In many ways, the tensions I see in my work are comparable to those I find in Solnit's. I understand how very easily one can fall somewhere between the gaps of theory and practice when striving for a collaborative approach when authoring any text.

As I continue this work, I would like to better account for the tensions that arise when trying to make sense of my own role as one author of San Francisco. (Knowing full well, of course, that my work will always perform beyond my knowledge of it.) I have so far found my struggles most noticeable in the second chapter of this project when I address Brenda Montaña. I aim to refuse the notion of authenticity of experience, yet I also sense myself searching for it. It is easier for me to critique Solnit for moments when her language undermines her proposed goals of collaboration (likely because my own social position most relates to Solnit), whereas I struggle to do the same when critiquing Montaña's texts. I have worked to more clearly distinguish what her zines accomplish in their movement through the city, and I am still contemplating whether they fully perform according to the Xicanista agenda Montaña claims. I am intrigued by the challenges I faced when distinguishing author from text and authorial intent from agency. I continue to ask questions, and I intend to pursue the analysis I have so far begun in this second chapter.

I see further connections between my research and autobiography when reading theories of the trauma narrative, as well. One's sense of self is intimately and inextricably connected to a sense of place; the lack of affordable housing caused by gentrification

often results in displacement from city limits. So, what happens when an individual is quickly, or as Montañño suggests, violently, removed from the site where identity, imagination, and beliefs are formed? I wonder how this might relate to trauma narratives, and how it might allow for an expanded definition of a “discourse of loss.” An interruption in one’s narrative of San Francisco suggests an interruption in one’s sense of self. In fact, Rebecca Solnit briefly mentions this in *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism* when she writes, “To have your city dismantled too rapidly around you is to have the relationship between mind and place thrown into disarray, to have it stripped of meaning, silenced” (138). I think this would make for a compelling argument in light of Nedra Reynolds’ theories about learning to “dwell” in a text: what happens when city residents are losing both physical and metaphorical opportunities for “dwelling” in the city-as-text?

This project does not end with a return to autobiography either. An element of Rebecca Solnit’s writing that I admire most is her interdisciplinary approach. I want to expand my own range of research, and I see the necessity for reading more about the fields of urban studies and sociology; I would like to dig deeper into San Francisco’s history of gentrification because the “second tech boom” is only one occurrence among many; and, even though I hope to avoid a similar privileging of experiences as Solnit promotes in *Hollow City* when suggesting activists and artists more rightfully deserve to remain in place in order to combat cultural homogeny, I would like to develop my historical knowledge of political activism and resistance.

Lastly, there was a moment only several months ago when I wondered if what I was writing remained an “English” thesis. While an interdisciplinary approach is crucial for analyzing gentrification, I cannot help but find connections between what I have written here and what I notice in the classroom (as a student, writing tutor, and first-year composition graduate teaching assistant). I am currently inspired by Michel C. Pennell, who writes about his use of Google Maps in the classroom as a way to reinvent the traditional genre of the literacy narrative. The omnipresence of Google, which I address in my third chapter, situates most of its users in the position of passive consumer. Yet Pennell’s approach to the literacy narrative encourages students to use Google’s technology to produce maps that document their literacy “trade routes” after they have read Deborah Brandt’s theories of literacy sponsorships. The students use Maps to visualize their literacy acquisition through physical locations marking major literacy events in their lives. Pennell’s assignment shapes an occasion for students to resituate their role from passive consumer to thoughtful creator; the project returns a sense of spontaneity and creativity I argue Google Maps otherwise intends to eliminate. I wonder how I might help my own students to create a counter-narrative such as this in order to consciously reflect on the power of maps, literacy, and their own stories.

This thesis marks the beginning of my representation of San Francisco. It is a version of the city that continues to evolve as I reflect on my past and current experiences, and it grows further still as I come into contact with the narratives of others. I intend to move this conversation forward, and I remain excited by the countless opportunities for “getting lost” in its breadth.

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