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Digital Nomads and Settler Desires: Racial Fantasies of Silicon Valley Imperialism

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Beyond Settler Sex & Nature

L'autochtone et queer au-delà de la nature et du sexe coloniaux

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DIGITAL NOMADS AND SETTLER DESIRES: RACIAL FANTASIES OF SILICON VALLEY IMPERIALISM

ERIN MCELROY

Abstract: *This paper investigates the coloniality of contemporary digital nomadism, an identity that numerous Western tech workers use to describe lifestyles of location independence in which they travel the world while maintaining Silicon Valley salaries. Specifically, I assess colonial genealogies of digital nomads and more problematically defined “digital Gypsies.” It was during the height of 19th-century Western European imperialism that Romantic Orientalist texts proliferated, celebrating the racial and sexual “free and wandering Gypsy.” This deracinated figure was used to allegorize colonial desires and imperial violence alike. As I suggest, nomadic racial fantasy undergirds contemporary freedom desires today emergent from the heart of a new empire—that of Silicon Valley. In describing Silicon Valley imperialism and its posthuman digital avatar, I assess how nomadic fantasy transits technologies of gentrification into new frontiers. For instance, sharing economy platforms such as Airbnb celebrate the digital nomad, bolstering contexts of racial dispossession while continuing to deracinate Roma lifeworlds. Might nomad exotica in fact index coloniality and its ability to traverse time and space? How has this fantasy been abstracted over time, also entangling with posthumanist nomadic onto-epistemologies?*

Résumé: *Cet essai examine la colonialité du nomadisme digital contemporain, une identité que de nombreux techniciens de l’informatique emploient pour décrire des styles de vie caractérisés par une indépendance géographique dans laquelle ils parcourent le monde tout en conservant leurs salaires de Silicon Valley. Spécifiquement je détermine les généalogies coloniales des nomades digitaux et ceux que l’on définit de façon plus problématique comme les “Romanichels digitaux.” C’est à l’apogée de l’impérialisme occidental européen qu’ont proliféré les textes orientalistes romantiques célébrant le romanichel errant, racial et sexuel. Ce personnage déraciné était utilisé comme une allégorie des désirs coloniaux ainsi que de la violence impériale. Comme je le suggère, les fantasmes raciales attachées aux nomades sont la base des désirs contemporains de liberté qui émergent au coeur du nouvel empire—celui de la Silicon Valley. En décrivant l’impérialisme de la Silicon Valley et son avatar digital post-humain, j’étudie comment les fantasmes nomadiques poussent les technologies d’embourgeoisement résidentiel vers de nouvelles frontières. Par exemple, le partage de plateforme bon-marché telles que Airbnb célèbrent le nomade digital, érigeant des contextes de dépossession raciale tout en poursuivant le déracinement des styles de vie roma. La littérature exotique nomadique serait-elle en fait un révélateur de la colonialité et de sa capacité à transcender le temps et l’espace? Comment cet imaginaire a-t-il été absorbé au cours des ans, et mélangé à des onto-épistémologies nomadiques post-humanistes?*

In 1974, science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke was filmed speculating about the 2001 digital future. His predictions have since been lauded for their acute accuracy, as he prophesized the invention not only of the internet and search engines, but also of devices such as the smart phone and the Apple Watch, along with communication systems such as email and Skype. He also envisaged a techno-future of location independence, in which:

It will become possible for us to live really anywhere we like. Any businessman, any executive, could live almost anywhere on earth and still do his business. ... And this is a wonderful thing, because it means we won't be stuck in cities, we can live ... wherever we please, and still carry on complete interaction with human beings as well as with other computers. (qtd. in Australian Broadcasting Company)

Put otherwise, in Clarke's future, computer dependence enables location independence, but only for businessmen and executives. In a similar interview conducted two years later, he elaborated, "In the global world of the future, it will be like if you're living in one small town, anywhere anytime, about a third of your friends will be asleep... So, you may have to abolish time zones completely, and all go on the common time, the same time for everybody" (qtd. in AT&T).

Clarke's "common time" is the same time that many of today's digital nomads venerate as enabling both location independence. Digital nomads, also problematically self-ascribed as "digital Gypsies," refer to tech workers who both fantasize and actualize the dream of being able to live and work anywhere—in common time—while at the same time remaining plugged into Silicon Valley infrastructures, economies, and lifeworlds. Their vernacular usage of "nomad" and "Gypsy" cannibalizes the social, cultural, and political worlds of Romani people (Roma)—one of Europe's largest racialized minorities, as well as the material reference of the allegorical Gypsy of digital Gypsyism. Deracinated from Roma materialities and identities, digital nomad/Gypsy fantasies today rather resemble 19th-century Romantic Orientalist narratives written by white men from the hearts of European empires (Lemon; Saul; Trumpener). These feature bourgeois protagonists who fantasize the freedom and taboo of the racialized, sexualized Gyp-

sy—an allegorical figure that, like the digital nomad, abstracts and mutilates diverse Roma experiences. Outside of Western texts, most Roma are not “nomadic,” and many who are have been subject to violent histories of forced displacement, racial dispossession, and racist representation.

Just as digital nomad racial fantasies of today are no longer confined to 19th-century fictions, neither are they restrained to Clarke’s speculative fiction—though one can argue that differences between speculative fiction and reality have always been fictive (Bahng). Today’s digital nomads, being paid Silicon Valley salaries, enjoy easy transit between “exotic” locales, from the Latinx Mission District of San Francisco to spaces farther away from Silicon Valley, such as Bali and Bucharest. For instance, James Taylor, who identifies as an “award-winning entrepreneur,” a “white middle-class professional living in a first world country,” wrote a 2011 blog post describing the rise of this new lifestyle. He and his wife transit between Europe and the United States, running an app-enabled auto-pilot businesses. In his words, “being a Digital Gypsy is more a frame of mind than genealogy” (Taylor). As his testimony evidences, the Gypsy/nomad endures transnationally, enabled by Silicon Valley technology capital and infrastructure.

But what does it mean that Silicon Valley is the centre from which digital nomadic desires emerge today, and what does this have to do with earlier Western European imperial histories? How are these times and spaces connected, and what do they indicate about imperial desire? How does the transit of digital nomads, often enabled by Silicon Valley-designed infrastructure such as Airbnb, induce conditions of displacement and gentrification transnationally? As I allege, the arrival of the digital nomad in both Silicon Valley and its global form indexes the imperialism of Silicon Valley, or *techno-imperialism*. By this, I refer to the process in which Silicon Valley penetrates both global and intimate spaces alike to expand its power.

Digital nomads can in part be understood as a genre of “lifestyle migrants,” or middle-class and wealthy Western travelers who profit from incomes earned at high rungs of uneven global labour divisions, what is often called *geoarbitrage* (Hayes and Zaban). While urban studies scholars are importantly linking the landing of lifestyle migrants with

diverse contexts of transnational and tourism-related gentrification (Hayes and Pérez-Gañán; Mermét), digital nomads are also embedded in older yet enduring colonial allegorical structures. Thus, in addition to understanding digital nomadism through urban studies and globalization frameworks, cultural, literary, and decolonial analyses are also useful. As Claudia Breger suggests, to displace the dominant and disfiguring narratives written about “Gypsies,” we might have to read them “in terms of their discursive constitution as well as with regard to the (fictional and/or historical) lives of their protagonists, narrators and authors” (133). Following her lead, here I explore the fictional and historical lives of digital nomads—their desires, their ontologies, and their genealogies. In doing so, I focus on the racial, sexual, and colonial contours that undergird digital nomadic lifeworlds. As I argue, 19th-century forms haunt contemporary dreams of spatiotemporal independence.

Yet there are also discernable abstractions of the 19th-century Gypsy fantasy in forming digital nomadic ontologies of today. Attentive to these, I question: who is this new human parading the globe, and what ghosts trace its steps? Further, how is digital nomadism bolstered by posthumanist thought and techno-capitalism alike? In what follows, first, I position Silicon Valley as techno-imperial centre, focusing on the racial dispossession that transpires within and from it. Through literary and cultural analysis, I then map racialized appropriations of the Gypsy/nomad that saturate discourses of home and dispossession within contexts of Silicon Valley imperialism and sharing-economy structures. As I argue, in moments of techno-imperial growth, settler desires allegorized through the figure of the digital nomad appear to queer sedentary logics, but ultimately rescript settler heteronormativity. I go on to assess the coloniality that informs digital nomadic spatiotemporal fantasies. Lastly, I examine the nomad/settler’s posthumanist ontologies of freedom. As I argue, the mutations, discontinuities, and abstractions of nomadic fetishization from the 19th-century to the techno-present map the contours of modernity in novel ways.

In studying digital nomadic fantasies and materialities, it is important to note that, as a phenomenon, they appear during a moment in which, across Europe (but also elsewhere), Roma residents are disproportionately susceptible to forced evictions. While the contours of their dis-

possession vary due to factors ranging from post-socialist property restitution laws, urban gentrification projects, and white nationalist violence (Lancione; Vincze), current contexts of displacement rest upon prior ones, including slavery, failed reparations, eugenic racial science, and fascism (Achim; Pusca; Woodcock). Yet despite these harsh histories and contemporarily realities, Roma are now additionally being displaced by fantastical avatars of tech mobility. Put otherwise, diverse Roma lifeworlds are now being discursively disappeared through mechanisms of racial appropriation across global technoscapes in ways that not only allegorize, but that also enable, Silicon Valley imperialism.

IMPERIALISM

Gypsy novellas, poems, and plays crossed 19th-century imperial European nations, from Spain to England. These texts celebrated the figure of the “free and wandering Gypsy,” extolling the colonial crossing of national borders. They also scripted the Gypsy as a remnant of a preindustrial past, embedded within a verdant romanticized landscape. In this way, the figure discursively represented admiration of border transgression, and fear of a “free spirit” roaming outside the bourgeois order. Gypsy fictions of the era often render white male desires of miscegenation, featuring narrators who attempt to “become Gypsy,” but who then ultimately kill the sexualized and racialized object of their desire—thus allegorizing the impossibility of existence beyond bourgeois society, as well as the real violence of colonial incursion. From the French Prosper Mérimée’s figure of Carmen to the German Wilhelm Jensen’s Erica, the 19th-century Gypsy endured as a transnational fantasy. This indexed colonial desire for spatiotemporal and societal/cultural transit.

As becomes evident when studying Gypsy fictions and their colonial geographies, the figure of the Gypsy always emerged from the hearts of imperial geographies, thereby reflecting imperial consciousness. Walter D. Mignolo writes of how, by latticing itself with coloniality during the Renaissance, modernity became the inevitable present of history, with Europe as its centre. Afterwards, during the Enlightenment, Greenwich was remapped as “the zero point of global time,” or the common

time of the era (22). During the 19th century, at the height of Romantic Orientalism and numerous European colonial projects, imperialism encapsulated new times and spaces into the common time of empire. Gypsy novellas, poems, and theatre reflected colonial aspiration, along with imperial ambivalence and violence. In this way, Gypsy fiction transited imperial dreams into new frontiers.

As I suggest, it is no small coincidence that Gypsy allegorical forms are reinterpreted today, emerging from the heart of a new imperial formation: Silicon Valley. Unlike empires, as they are understood to rise and fall or expand and shrink, imperial formations are always in the process of becoming, thus refusing normative narratives of linear time. Occupying multiple historical tenses, imperial formations are produced when, as Ann Stoler describes, the past imperfect selectively permeates the present, shaping “the conditional subjunctive and uncertain futures” (194-195). Contemporary Silicon Valley imperium—a phenomenon in which the Valley materializes new nodes and edges to facilitate surplus capital accumulation—is enabled by a nomadic avatar conditioned by 19th-century subjunctive forms. In other words, digital nomads both empower and constitute Silicon Valley imperialism. Silicon Valley has now abdicated Greenwich’s throne, a resignation that remains illusory yet integral to digital nomadic spatiotemporal visions, or Clarke’s common time. Also illusory to the settler/nomad are its material effects, not to mention its genealogical underpinnings.

Take, for instance, digital nomad Matt Mullenweg of the San Francisco startup Automattic. In a recent film on digital nomadism by Youjin Do, “One Way Ticket: The Rise of the Digital Nomad,” Mullenweg brags that 95 percent of his 400 employees live outside of San Francisco, in 47 countries. He aims to attract talent that questions, “Why do I have to commute to Mountain View every day and sit in a bunch of meetings and things like that?” As Mullenweg ventures, prospective employees will think, “Maybe I want to live in Mountain View part of the year, but maybe during the summer I want to go to Italy, or to Thailand, or Australia, or wherever it is, it doesn’t matter” (qtd. in Do). But as much as he promulgates spatiotemporal flexibility, his company’s nomads remain tethered to the physical concreteness and centrality of San Francisco—Silicon Valley’s urban outpost. In-person meetings are still held

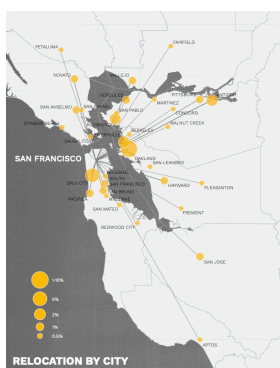
there, and physical mail is still sent. Also, rents there have become the United States' most expensive.

Beginning with the 1990s Dot Com Boom and then gaining momentum with rise of the 2011 Tech Boom 2.0, San Francisco and the wider Bay Area region has become infamous for heightened eviction and homelessness rates, soaring rents, and an array of effects endemic to hyper-gentrification (McElroy and Szeto; Mirabal; Stanley). During this era, technocapitalism and real estate speculation entwine anew, with real estate speculators buying up rental units, evicting tenants, and selling or re-renting evicted properties to those with more capital. In 2013, I cofounded the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP), a data visualization, data analysis, and storytelling collective to document these spatial struggles. Amongst other analyses that correlates technocapitalist expansion and dispossession, the AEMP has found that properties proximate to tech infrastructure are disproportionately vulnerable to evictions. For instance, in San Francisco, over two-thirds of evictions transpire within four blocks of "Google Bus" stops,¹ private transportation depots that facilitate the reverse-commuting of tech workers to Silicon Valley (Maharawal and McElroy). While tech corporations hire more young, white men than any other demographic, it is disproportionately poor and working-class Black and Latinx residents, single mothers, and seniors facing eviction (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project; Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and Eviction Defense Collaborative; McElroy). In other words, the settlement of highly mobile and largely white, male reverse commuters impels the dispossession of an inverse demographic.

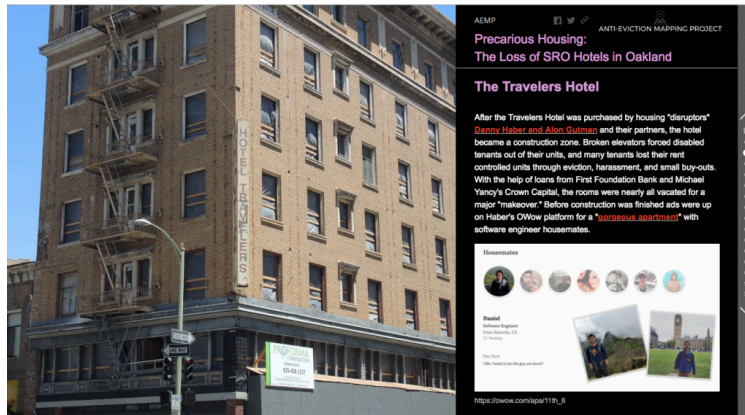
Despite the hegemony of young, white men developing and benefiting from Silicon Valley imperialism (as in Clarke's speculative fiction of decades earlier), it is important to note while tech companies disproportionately hire those with privilege for leadership positions within the Bay Area (McElroy and Szeto), precarious and exploitive labour also abounds within the industry (Amrute; Atanasoski and Vora). Also, there are an array of tech projects and collectives that create work outside of techno-capitalism and the racial capitalism that constitutes it, such as the AEMP. By utilizing AEMP images and analyses throughout this article, I aim to disrupt totalizing narratives that read all technology projects as imperial, while nevertheless maintaining critique of

Silicon Valley imperialism. I also include an AEMP map that I produced in collaboration with a housing justice collective in Cluj, Romania, Căși Sociale Acum (Social Housing Now). This map sheds charts the eviction routes of seven Roma residents who have lost their homes due to gentrification in Siliconizing Cluj, thereby disrupting narratives that read Roma mobility as romantic.

Back in San Francisco, despite the benefits of reverse-commute infrastructure for Silicon Valley tech workers, questions emerge as to why people remain locked into landscapes of high rent and Google buses when it is possible to digitally commute from anywhere, dwelling in easily navigable short-term vacation rentals in locales from Cluj to Bali. San Francisco's own short-term housing startup, Airbnb, facilitates transient dwelling for digital nomads worldwide, often inciting the conversion of long-term, affordable housing into short-term, expensive accommodations. Stories abound across the planet of residents being displaced as their former homes and neighborhoods become Airbnb-saturated tourist hubs (Gant; Opillard). Does the digital nomad of today appropriate and disappear Romani worlds to disguise settler ontology, meanwhile precipitating gentrifying conditions that disproportionately lead to the displacement of racialized people, some of whom are Roma? Is the nomad just a perverted code word for settler, much like Romantic Orientalist protagonists of 19th-century fiction?



Relocation Map: Web-map by the AEMP, 2016; Adapted for print by Austin Ehrhardt. Map details the demographics of displacement and relocation from San Francisco (<http://arcg.is/24RDGat>)



The Loss of SRO Hotels in Oakland; Web-map by the AEMP, 2017. Story map highlights the conversion of affordable housing in Oakland into tech dorms (<http://arcg.is/nymnW>).

MULTICULTURAL SETTLER DESIRES

The temporality of the digital nomad is enabled by liberal ontologies of freedom tethered to property rights, yet seemingly exceeds Lockean and heteronormative articulations of the free property-owning subject. More important to the digital nomad is freedom of mobility—a freedom often paired with techno-imperial speculative logics. As digital-nomad advocate Timothy Ferriss famously wrote in his 2009 bestseller, *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape the 9-5, Live Anywhere and Join the New Rich*: “\$1,000,000 in the bank isn’t the fantasy. The fantasy is the lifestyle of complete freedom it supposedly allows” (13). In his words, the capitalist fantasy of property ownership has been displaced by techno-utopic desires for freedom. Yet the logics of this displacement fall apart when studying colonial histories. To expand and control space, and to accumulate surplus value within it, colonial regimes have long privatized in the name of freedom (Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*). Otherwise put, mobility has long enabled the settlement of colonial regimes, materially, epistemologically, and ontologically.

Historically, racial appropriation has been one technology of such coloniality, functioning through the deployment of reiterative stereotypes of the other, strategically disciplining and domesticating alterity. Jodi Byrd observes that in the United States, the appropriation of Indigenous lives emerged as an effective colonial tool, in which indigeneity “becomes a site through which the US empire orients and replicates itself” (xiii). As has been argued, appropriating indigeneity abets settler culture, planting Native peoples into the past, obviating the present recognition of endurance (Morgensen; Povinelli). Relegating Indigenous people and culture to museums domesticates difference, and elides Indigenous understandings of land, sovereignty, and justice that would undo the logos of the nation-state. A similar argument could be made in thinking the object of the Gypsy as appropriated by the digital nomad, who readily distances itself from the contemporary lifeworlds of dispossessed Romani people while carrying Silicon Valley imperialism into new frontiers. By reducing Romani worlds to reiterative “Gypsy exotica,” racial appropriation renders the harshness Romani dispossession invisible (Silverman). As Katie Trumpener observes, these appropriations place Roma beyond the limitations of time and record, offering non-Roma amnesiac nostalgia for an imaginary past, “to restore innocence by covering other memories” (348). At the same time, this reduction obscures the gentrifying impact that digital nomadism has upon diverse social, cultural, and political landscapes.

Such appropriative mechanisms have been a vital tool of short-term housing sharing economies, particularly utilized by employees, hosts, and guests of the tech “unicorn” startup, Airbnb.³ For instance, Airbnb hosts Wendy and Fred, who rent out rooms for \$288 per night in San Francisco—of which they pay Airbnb a 3 percent per booking, and from which guests pay the corporation a 6 to 12 percent fee—articulate both their global ontologies and capitalist desires through the figure of the Gypsy (Airbnb, “What is the Airbnb Service Fee”). As Wendy writes:

Having our house on Airbnb is helping us with our daughter's college fund & is funding my (Wendy's) new business The Rogue Traders, a farm-to-city sustainable food business, Southern Oregon & San Francisco... Besides being a farmer, I will always be an artist, writer, entrepreneur, designer and

traveller. One of my passions is to see the world and study different cultures, which I have done extensively (I want to be an anthropologist when I grow up ;)... There still are a few places yet to discover and I am returning to my favorites to see them through the eyes of my daughter. Fred and I believe the world is her education, with 3 languages and several countries already under her belt she is a Gypsy at heart... I often ask myself is it possible to be part of a community while being a Gypsy and a nomad? So far it's working out to be yes. (Airbnb, "French Victorian-Views & Deck")

As Wendy elucidates, not only does Airbnb help her grow her business, but it also creates a "global community" for her daughter, inciting multicultural proficiency collapsed into disfigured Gypsy freedom. Most likely, throughout her own global traveling and hosting, she has obviated intersection with anyone who identifies as Roma. Instead, her desires habituate what Jodi Melamed conceptualizes as neoliberal multiculturalism, the utilization of antiracist imaginaries to proliferate U.S. global hegemony. Institutionalizing new forms of racialized privilege (liberal, multicultural, global citizen), neoliberal multiculturalism utilizes race to negotiate value. Applying this analytic to sharing economy logics of the Bay Area, racialization functions through the fetishization of the nomadic figure, rendered as liberal, multicultural, and global. Through access to mobile capital, this new nomadic human is free to enact settler desire, even if temporarily.

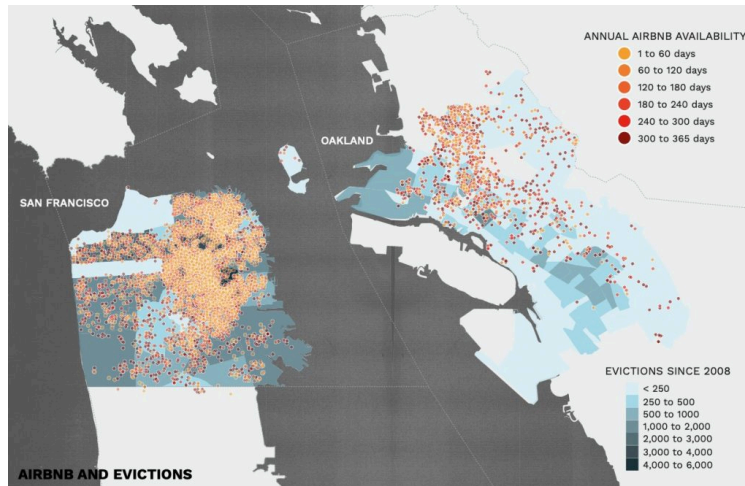
It is not Airbnb users alone who have circulated the corporation's multicultural colonial aspirations. In 2014, Airbnb released a periodical, *Pineapple*, chronicling "honest stories ... told by the unexpected characters" of their "community," from San Francisco to London to Seoul (2). Named after the New England colonial symbol of hospitality (Hyles), *Pineapple* provided an apt analogy for their gentrifying impact. *Pineapple's* goal, Airbnb detailed, was to "inspire and motivate exploration, not just within the cities featured, but within any space a reader finds themselves" (2). Its release followed the company's logo rebranding of what the head of branding described as the "Bélo, the universal symbol of belonging" (Levere). The homegrown symbol with an exotic name (abstracting "belonging") is said to "represent all of us,"

standing for (and visually combining) four things: a head symbolizing people, a location map pin representing place, a heart indicating love, and of course the letter “A” iconizing Airbnb (Levere). Further, the logo can be “drawn by anybody,” so that any Airbnb user can feel at home, anywhere. When read critically, both *Pineapple* and the Bélo utilize the language of multiculturalism precisely to shelter settler colonialism, expanding the San Francisco company into global frontiers.

This extension of neoliberal multiculturalism into the Tech Boom 2.0 sustains settler culture, while also reproducing homonormativity. For instance, in June 2015, days before the corporative-funded San Francisco Pride Parade, in which tech outfits from Google to Airbnb march down Market Street to affirm their corporate liberalism, Airbnb landed a rainbow-painted “welcome wagon” in the city’s Mission District, offering free pineapple juice, temporary tattoos, and DIY crafts to passersby. In that year, 29 percent of San Francisco Airbnb listings were relegated to the Mission, the neighborhood that has seen the city’s highest eviction rates; the welcome wagon was interpreted as a sore thumb in the eyes of those recently evicted (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project). Thus, one pre-Pride afternoon, a small protest culminated outside of the wagon, itself gross disfigurements of both Gypsy carriages and pilgrim coaches. “Don’t drink the Airbnb Kool-Aid!” one protestor yelled, while another jested that the 2015 San Francisco Pride was clearly themed “eviction assistance” (Lybarger).



Airbnb-induced eviction protest with the Housing Rights Committee and numerous housing justice collectives, 2016. Photo by Eviction Free San Francisco. Bélo image is included on the protest banner.



Airbnb Listings and Evictions, San Francisco and Oakland; Web-mapped by AEMP; Cartography for print by Austin Ehrhardt, 2018. The map shows that San Francisco and Oakland neighborhoods with the most Airbnb units have also maintained the most evictions (<https://antievictionmap.com/airbnb-sf-and-oakland>)

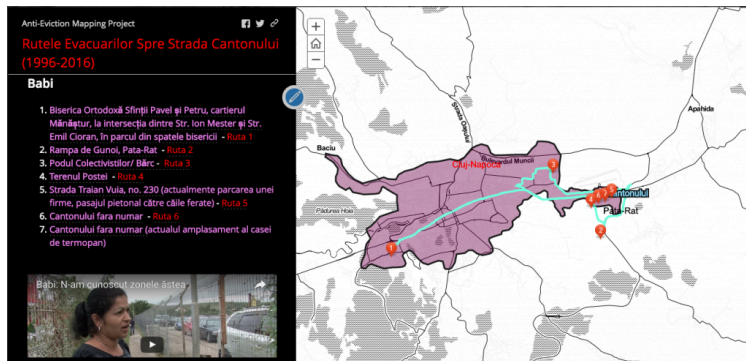
That same Pride, to further code their settler aspirations through multicultural homonormativity, the company began circulating a promotional video, “Love is Welcome Here.” The video featured several queer and multiracial couples, highlighting bourgeois family values, and encouraged hosts to welcome queer couples into their homes across the globe. As Airbnb was birthed in San Francisco in 2008, where and when gay marriage was first legalized in the United States, it now teleports what David Eng describes as *queer liberalism* across global terrains and into “less friendly” countries, accruing capital through moral purchase. While “queer” once marked critique of assimilation, positioned against the bourgeois coupling of intimacy and privacy—an entwinement constitutive of Euro-American modernity, the liberal individual, and the institution of marriage—today it stands in for assimilationist politics (Stanley). From battles for gay marriage to inclusion in the military, Eng writes that “queer” now has come to demarcate “gay and lesbian identity and identity politics, the economic interests of neoliberalism and whiteness, and liberal political norms of inclu-

sion” (xi). As such, “queer liberalism is a particular incarnation of liberal freedom and progress, one constituted by both the racialization of intimacy and the forgetting of race” (12). By coupling queer liberalism with neoliberal multiculturalism, Airbnb effectively masks the racialized and gentrifying effects that it carries into local contexts (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and Eviction Defense Collaborative). Further, by disseminating San Francisco/Silicon Valley liberal values globally, the company is part of a racial and homonormative techno-imperial project that pretends to be colourblind.

Airbnb doesn’t solely rely upon multicultural and homonormative tactics for global reach. Websites such as “Executive Nomad” advertise dozens of tourist metropolises ripe for Airbnb stints, San Francisco only being one. Airbnb’s global operations department, operating in 192 countries, boasts concentrations in cities worldwide. As emergent discourses in these cities illuminate, Airbnb-induced tourism engenders displacement of home and social worlds beyond San Francisco. Directed towards Barcelona vacationers on 2015 window fronts signs in Vila de Gracia, residents pleaded, “Tourist: the rent of holiday apartments is destroying the local socio-cultural fabric and promoting speculation. Many local residents are forced to move out. Enjoy your stay. Gracia is not for sale. *One tourist more, one family less*” (italics in original).

Yet Airbnb concludes that they are not eliminating families, but rather strangers. In 2013, their CEO, Brian Cheskey, launched his million dollar #OneLessStranger campaign, less imbricated in colonial semiotics and more interwoven with the vulgarities of multicultural knowledge production: “Our vision is that we want to bring the world together,” he trumpeted to Airbnb members in the online video. However, he lamented, “there’s one obstacle in our way.” After pausing and filling the digital air with suspense, he continued: “And that, is strangers... So, this New Year’s Eve, we’d love to do a fun little experiment. We’d love to rid the world of strangers.” Before the video draws to a close, he asks the online audience, “How far will you go to make one less stranger?” Here, Cheskey propagates Enlightenment structures of universal knowledge production in which “Man” is endowed with the right to know everything and everyone (Wynter and McKittrick). The stranger becomes a totem to be epistemologically eliminated by technologies of Airbnb nomadism. Further, Cheskey’s hospitality invokes

what Jacques Derrida describes as hospitality of *invitation* rather than *visitation*, an openness bound to conditions (81-83). Airbnb, put otherwise, only welcomes “strangers” already vetted by the corporation. Cheskey’s nomadic stranger is therefore hardly a stranger at all. And yet, the stranger must be abolished, cleansing the world of difference. Not coincidentally, from the Middle Ages onwards, Roma have been widely interpreted as Europe’s internal strangers—grounds for a different genre of elimination. Today, the nomad, as technology of stranger elimination, has become commodified by the sharing economy.



Dislocări: Rutele Evacuărilor Spre Strada Cantonului (Dislocations: Eviction Routes to Canton Street); By the AEMP and Căși Sociale Acum. The story-map details seven routes and narratives of Roma residents forced to relocate to Cluj-Napoca, Romania's local garbage dump, Pata Rât, 18 kilometers outside of the city centre (<http://arcg.is/2cZFBrm>)

SPATIOTEMPORAL FREEDOM

It is not only tourists on holiday utilizing Airbnb to traverse the globe, disrupting social fabrics and eliminating strangers, but also digital nomads who make similar circuits, residing in Airbnb and other short-term vacation units. Unlike traditional tourists however, digital nomads are not vacationing; they are working as well. As Jacob Laukaitis of the startup UpWork illuminates:

50 years ago, companies needed their employees to be gathered under a single roof to enable industrial production at

scale. But today, they've begun to understand that as long as employees deliver results, their physical location and work hours don't matter... As a result, a new class of employees has emerged: people whose work is completely location and time independent. Digital nomads spend their time traveling while working—taking freelance assignments from Bali, running their own businesses from Barcelona or working for an employer in San Francisco from Singapore. There are thousands of us around the world. And I couldn't imagine living any other way. (Laukaitis)

This new class of people, a new iteration of the human, collapses work and travel into one form, defying a bifurcation long entrenched into modern conceptions of labour—welcome to Ferriss' four-hour work-week. This collapse is part of a wider techno-utopic posthumanist vision which replaces human labour with digital technology, what Neda Atanasiou and Kalindi Vora describe as *surrogate humanity*. Digitizing labour, they suggest, feigns postraciality, but in fact perpetuates racism and sexism. Automation, for instance, often depends upon racialized outsourcing, much of which is also gendered. But what of those not subjected to extractive labour and instead profiting from extraction and its uneven techno-imperial geographies?

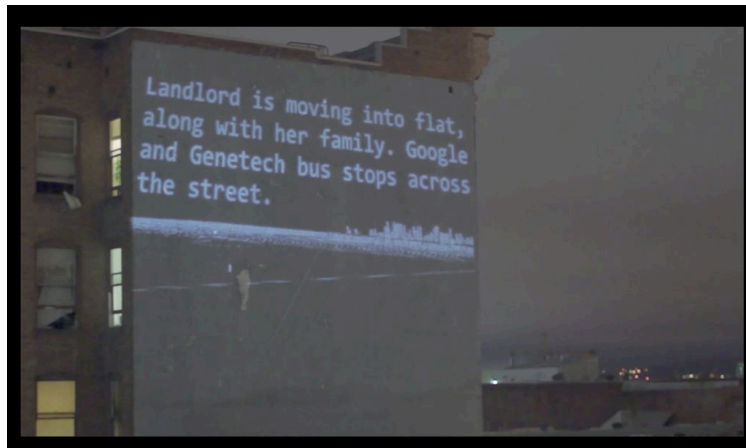
The cheap labour and accommodations that digital nomads often rely upon are only possible through geoarbitrage and the global unevenness that it inheres. In the posthuman age of “location independence,” who has the freedom to experience digital nomadism, and who is displaced to enable its materialities? In Do's documentary, Ferriss claims that “almost anyone can at least dip their toe in the water and test one aspect of location independence.” But how is this actually possible when forced displacement rates are at an all-time high (Sassen)? How, in an era when “one tourist more, one family less” is the adage of gentrifying neighborhoods, can the posthumanist dream of digital nomadism in fact apply to all humans? Neel Ahuja suggests that social theorists of posthuman and nonhuman vitality “take for granted the apparent universality of the human lifeworld from which they flee” (vi-ii). Otherwise put, we cannot all be posthuman if we are not all yet hu-

man. We cannot all be digital nomads if we are not all yet able to enjoy the stability from which digital nomads purportedly flee.

Yet harbingers of techno-imperial landscapes such as Jon Yongfook, digital nomad and founder of Beatrix and Intellihelper (who built an app while living in a hotel in Thailand), suggest the opposite. Analogizing digital assets with real estate, Yongfook describes:

I've sold two businesses now, which were like selling a mini house. I think it's perfectly possible to build up digital assets the same way that you build a physical asset. I guess that I look at in the same way as investing in a property, but it's just a lot more flexible. The world is going to get a lot more remote for various reasons... If you think it's too difficult to work remotely, then you're probably overthinking it. (qtd. in Do)

Here, Yongfook argues that just as anyone can invest in real estate, flip properties, and profit, so too can anyone amass capital through digital property; therefore, anyone can be a digital nomad. Property flipping, while benefiting one category of humanity—that which Sylvia Wynter describes as *homo oeconomicus*, or the “Western bourgeoisie’s liberal monohumanist Man”—relies upon the displacement of another (Wynter and McKittrick 22). As Wynter observes, *homo oeconomicus* depends upon systems of techno-automated profiteering, as well as its own descriptive powers, the latter of which it uses to reify itself as “monohumanist Man.” Thus, its singularity exists not only in the realm of bios, but also in that of mythos and historicity. Unwritten from its ontology are outlying models of the human that endure in “extant nomadic or sedentary indigenous traditionally *stateless* societies ... now being pushed out of their ostensibly ‘underdeveloped’ ‘places’ totally” (Wynter and McKittrick 22-23). *Homo oeconomicus*’s supremacy is thus predicated upon the existence of nomadic outliers. These it displaces to create new space for itself. The digital nomad, as an iteration of *homo oeconomicus*, still venerates the privatization of property as its forefathers did; only now, it additionally preys upon (and is enabled by) digital frontiers.



Light Atlas Project; By the AEMP and Delta_Ark, 2016. Projection project highlighting narratives of those impacted by gentrification (<https://antievictionmap.com/saitocollab-1>)



Airbnb protest signs, New Orleans, San Francisco, and Venice, Photos compiled by the AEMP, 2016

THE FREE AND WANDERING GYPSY

Timothy Ferriss suggests: “Practices of location independence for people who really wanted to separate themselves from society, even for a short period of time, that’s been around—practices of vagabonding for instance—for thousands of years” (qtd. in Do). Yet the digital nomad’s genealogy is more contemporary, coalescing during the height of European Romantic Orientalism. Romanticism, as a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement posited against industrialization, Enlightenment norms, and the logics of scientific rationalization, reached its peak by the mid-19th Century, remapping national geographies of self-determination. Aesthetically, it embraced the sublimity of nature, emotion, spontaneity, individual heroism, and imaginaries of ancient national traditions, characterized by “a new and restless spirit, seeking violently to burst through old and cramping form ... expressing an unappeasable yearning for unattainable goals” (Berlin 92). This restlessness interpellated the Gypsy into popularized epic poetry and novellas, where the figure effectively became the workhorse of national movements across the continent.

This interpellation coincided with the rise of Orientalism, a system that juxtaposed the exotic and haunting worlds of the Orient against those of a progressive, mechanistic, and cold Western Europe. While numerous debates have endured since Edward Said’s 1978 writing of *Orientalism* as to its spatial and temporal purchase beyond the Middle East, here I follow Lisa Lowe’s argument that there are many Orientalisms (“Rereadings in Orientalism”). I am particularly interested in its conceptual purchase within Europe and Russia, aligned with literary critics who suggest that Orientalist spatial distinctions between the “West” and the “East” are muddled across time and space (Bakić-Hayden; Khalid; Saul; Todorova; Wolff; Zăloagă). Roma, who have been more prevalent in Eastern than Western Europe since their medieval continental entrance, and who originally migrated in multiple waves from Northern India a millennium ago, have long been considered an Oriental European object. At the time, Orientalist fantasies of the East were often represented through racial and sexual symbolization, most prominently in graphic imagery of white Western men possessing sexually submissive Eastern women as a “male power fantasy” (Said 247).

So too were Roma racialized and sexualized in European Orientalist literature. Therefore, the Gypsy in 19th-century texts stands in for peripheralized, less-than European locales, while simultaneously legitimizing the ontology and sexuality of the nomadic colonizer.

In Britain, 19th-century Gypsy novellas and poetry invoked a “national nomadology” (Duncan 382), in which the state allegorized its territorial expansion through the figure of the nomad (Richards 19-20). These works encode a nostalgic fantasy of pre-industrial landscapes and disengagement from modern life, mapping an imperial, open-range cartography. As the British John Clare characterized in his 1825 “The Gipseys Song,” Gypsies fantastically “pay no rent nor tax to none / But live untythd [sic] & free ... In gipsey liberty” (*Poems of the Middle Period* 52). This figure possesses the ability to transverse frontiers, find shelter in the dwindling commons, and evade paying rent and tax (resonant with contemporary sharing-economy endeavors), but also blends into the bucolic landscape, conceptualizing a country unscathed by the mechanization and boundedness of an industrializing empire. Characterizing a nearby Gypsy camp, Clare journaled, “I thought the gipseys camp by the green wood side a picturesque and an adorning object to nature and I lovd [sic] the gipseys for the beautys [sic] which they added to the landscape” (*John Clare by Himself* 37). Here, by signifying a premodern past and spatial transgression, the Gypsy stands in for British indigeneity *and* colonial expansion, mapping a new and contradictory understanding of national space and historicity.

For instance, the protagonist of British George Borrow’s 1851 *Lavengro* and its 1857 sequel, *The Romany Rye*, is an Irish non-Roma scholar who performs the life of a Gypsy tinker, travelling with a band of Romani people upon English pathways. Borrow, a self-trained philologist, was fascinated by English Romanichals (Roma who migrated into Ireland and Britain as early as the 16th century) as well as Irish Travellers (semi-nomadic people indigenous to Ireland, many of whom migrated to England to escape British colonial and industrial forces). As the periphery to England and the British empire was in constant flux during this time, Borrow’s text recovers “an England deconstructed beyond ancestral Celts and Saxons, beyond a primordial Britain, into Gypsy origins, fastidiously unmapped in to secret margins and coverts,

and the inner darkness of an unsettled, quasi-autistic self” (Duncan 390). Thus, Borrow’s Gypsies, as Indo-European migrants untouched by modernity, are made the authentic carriers of Western civilization. While earlier British disfigurements falsely ascribed Romani origins as Egypt, hence the vernacular perversion “Gypsy,” Borrow also incorrectly ventures that Roma come from Rome—a Western imperial birthplace. As he writes, “I should not wonder after all ... that these people had something to do with the founding of Rome. Rome, it is said, was built by vagabonds” (107). Nomadized imperial Rome thus becomes the centrifugal space of the timeless Gypsy, who, with a clairvoyant crystal-ball mythos, time-travels a premodern imperial myth into the historic present. As Toby Sonneman observes, “While romantic metaphors freeze the Gypsy image in the past, they contradictorily allow them a special vision into the future as well” (130). Not only are Gypsies free to wander beyond the spatial boundaries of empire, but also, they are endowed with the ability to detach from normative temporality, remaining fixed in the past while time-travelling into the future.

These magical abilities to transgress time and space, arguably a dream of any empire, were construed through colonial sexual and racial fantasies. In the case of German Orientalism, which was informed by the solidification of the German Empire in 1871, textual forms utilize the Gypsy to consolidate German national identity. Wilhelm Jensen’s 1868 *Die braune Erica*, for instance, is narrated by a restless German natural scientist professor longing for exotic alterity. The text begins with this scientist desiring a rare plant, *erica janthina*, but as the text progresses, it is revealed that this plant in fact symbolizes the true object of his yearnings: A Gypsy woman who entices him to leave his settled life. Transfixed by Erica’s androgynous, racialized body, the professor murmurs her name in scientific language one night in his sleep, which she hears in her “natural language,” drawing her to him. Upon falling in love with him, she leads him to the rare and beautiful moor-dwelling heather that he had been searching for. When they arrive to the spot where the heather grows, Erica is bitten by an adder and falls ill. The professor recognizes that despite his scientific knowledge, he remains powerless to heal her. She accepts her death—not because of the bite, but because of impossibilities of miscegenation. When the professor

reasserts his love for her, to his astonishment, she heals herself by applying the antitheses of modern scientific orthodoxy—a wild, ecstatic, and unending dance, which mysteriously cures her. Although they then marry and live a settled life on the margin of German territory, she eventually leaves him—an expression of the spontaneous and uncontrollable Gypsy spirit. This spirit is still lusted after today, evidence in Gypsy exotica and digital nomadism alike. While digital nomads fantasize spatiotemporal transgression, there are important differences to be mapped as well.

Jensen, a Romantic writer, does not posit Gypsies as possessing magic or chiromancy, but rather as a foil to the lack of freedom in scientific knowledge. Gypsies are not a threat to German ascendancy, he infers, rendering them as dying and non-reproductive. As his scientist discovers, because of their nomadic ways, Gypsies have developed hybrid characteristics, like a maladapted species variant. Saul suggests that “they are a diaspora paradoxically without a homeland, adapted neither to their alienation (the Occident) nor their homeland (the Orient). They therefore cannot transmit their inheritance” (117). In this sense, Jensen pathologizes Roma to make them both intriguing and unthreatening to the longevity of the German Empire. The scientist can thus chase after freedom without Romani interference.

While Jensen invokes German nationalism and Social Darwinism, his text simultaneously conjures feelings of restlessness and nostalgia, accompanied by the ascendancy of German imperialism. He further invokes heterosexual desires for a racialized, exotic woman, one who evades his reach. But this is not unique to *Erica*, nor to German literary pieces depicting Gypsy protagonists. Alaina Lemon writes that “the passionate, dark Gypsy woman is a trans-European motif” (37). Across Europe and into Russia, numerous accounts depict aristocratic non-Roma men falling in love with ungraspable Gypsy women, ultimately defying possession. Often in these tales, everyone dies. For instance, in Alexander Pushkin’s famous 1824 Orientalist poem *Tsygany* (*The Gypsies*), a non-Roma outlaw, Aleko, falls for a Gypsy woman, Zemfira, and the freedom that she embodies. The narrative arc parallels Jensen’s, as does its colonial influence. In his overlooked epilogue, Pushkin recounts that his inspirations to become Gypsy stemmed from his own brief encounters with Roma on the imperial frontier of newly ac-

quired Moldovan lands. By cannoning and cannibalizing Gypsy freedom, he charts imperial lust by racializing and sexualizing Roma. While Pushkin's interactions with Roma were minimal, they are likely still more concrete than those of most digital nomads today. Thus, while the imperial fantasy is reflected in the former, distance and abstraction have rendered particular shifts. Today, the nomad is not something that one lusts after and kills; it is something that one already is.

As a movable (racial) figuration, the Romantic Orientalist Gypsy maps colonial desire—a desire that today transits between past and contemporary empire. But even historically, it charted imperial travel. For example, inspired by Pushkin, in 1845, the French Prosper Mérimée composed *Carmen*, influenced by *The Gypsies* and contains a similar plotline (Lemon). However, as Mérimée scripts in a letter, *Carmen* was additionally informed by George Borrow's *Gypsy* fabrications. In the words of Mérimée, "You asked me the other day where I obtained my acquaintance with the dialect of the Gypsies... I got it from Mr. Borrow; his book is one of the most curious which I have read" (qtd. in Northup 143). Thus, the disfigured Gypsy depictions in *Carmen* were informed by transnational myths. Like Pushkin's poem and Jensen's text, the heterosexual desires for the untamed figure of Carmen in the poem represents colonial dreams; it was right before the novella's conception that first Napoleon, and then Chateaubriand, occupied Spain, coinciding with Spain's fading as a global power. José Colmeiro suggests that, as Spain became a less threatening imperial rival, it morphed into France's submissive other, represented by the figure of the Gypsy (129). "Because exorcising the exotic other is ultimately a way for European bourgeois culture to exorcise its own demons," he writes, "*Carmen* always must die" (128). Yet within the novella, there endures a distinction between the Spaniards and Carmen/the Gypsies. This difference shows that even as Spain's powers wane, Spaniards remained connected to the European body, unlike Carmen. Time and time again, in her various incarnations, Carmen must die.

As a contradictory figure that both taunts settler desire yet remains fully irresolvable through the heterosexual, racialized logics of imperial reproduction, the Gypsy is repeatedly murdered within textual spaces—a death that represents the materiality of colonial landgrabs,

but also the taboo of Gypsy-becoming. From the Gypsy's death, different ghosts materialize. Today these spectres reverberate within techno-imperial ontologies of location and time independence. The crystal ball of fantasy mythoi, coupled with perspicacious gaze of the extrasensory Gypsy, has migrated along the perambulations of Romantic imaginary into the present. Yet it is not tech entrepreneurs today lusting after and aspiring to become the nomad; as James Taylor and Wendy articulate, they have already achieved this form, or so they claim.

POSTHUMANISM AND THE DIGITAL NOMAD

When comparing the 19th-century Gypsy to the digital nomad of today—both of which express freedom fantasies emergent from the heart of empire—the latter appears to have resolved some of the former's contradictions through abstraction. While the 19th-century Gypsy was both colonial allegory and aspiration, the digital nomad of today imagines that he *is* already Gypsy. This abstraction partly reflects the transiting of the Gypsy from her spatiotemporal origins; while 19th-century Western Europe experienced multiple migrations of Roma from “the East,” informing Romantic Orientalist Gypsy depictions, these illustrations have now wandered for nearly two centuries. Additionally, Roma migration/dispossession, while pervasive in Europe, remains geographically distant from Silicon Valley's imperial California hub. Yet it is no coincidence that Gypsy fantasy emerges in Silicon Valley today, perched upon the edge of digital Manifest Destiny.

It is not only geographical distance that dilutes digital nomadic understanding of racial appropriation. Obfuscation of the racial referent also results from a series of epistemic transits that have informed posthumanist ruminations, famously theorized by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Their work illuminates an ontological “nomadic” refusal of the national “state apparatus,” thereby objectifying the nomad as free from the confinements of the state. They argue for constant state of deterritorialization, one that can never be reterritorialized. Nomads, they say, live apart from the state in that they “have no history; they only have a geography” (393). These multivalent beings are “without property, enclosure or measure,” inhabiting space is

that which is “more like a space of play, or a rule of play, by contrast with sedentary space” (96). For Deleuze and Guattari, smooth space, as opposed to Euclidean geometric space, can only be explored by the footloose legwork of nomadic drifting, invocative of John Clare’s spatially transgressive fantasies.

Following the publication of *ATP*, Christopher Miller questioned Deleuze and Guattari’s boundless plane, magically free from the ethical burdens of representation (“The Postidentitarian Predicament”). How can one “read the referential within a universe that is supposed to be purely virtual?” he questions (“We Shouldn’t Judge Deleuze and Guattari” 129-133). Deleuze and Guattari could have easily chosen to abandon their codification of various nomadic people, based upon only 13 citational sources, but they did not. In addition to Roma, these include ancient Hyskos of the Middle East, Mongolian hordes of the 13th century, as well as contemporary Bedouins of Palestine, Iranian Basseri, African Mbuti groups, Australian Aborigines, and several Amazonian tribes (Deleuze and Guattari 118-122). The looseness of these references allows Deleuze and Guattari to transit from Kandinsky paintings to Mongolian nomadic motifs in one overarching sweep, and to taxonomize different genres of nomads. “Gypsies,” for instance, are conflated into a broad category of peripatetics, as opposed to collectives of “primitive” hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads, and “vagabonds, traveling thieves, migrant workers, bi-coastal executives, ‘academic Gypsies,’ and other such groups occasionally classified as nomads” (Bogue 172). For Miller, this ethnographic gesture remains the “epistemological paradox of nomadology: nomads don’t represent themselves in writing, they must be represented” (“The Postidentitarian Predicament” 10).

Eugene Holland, in a rejoinder of Miller’s critique, justifies *ATP* nomadology, which, he asserts, was not intentionally derived through “the real and the historical, but through a process other than representation” (“Representation and Misrepresentation in Postcolonial Literature and Theory” 163). The book, he suggests, “is not an image of the world... It forms a rhizome with the world” (ibid. 163). Otherwise put, by transiting real nomadism into an abstracted space, no harm is incurred upon nomads. Deleuze and Guattari’s intention was never to systematize anthropological taxonomies, but rather to articulate two

entangled tendencies—that of the nomadic and that of the sedentary (Holland 172). Rather they uncover a fundamental dialectic between the nomadic and the state forms.

While it may be that states and those rendered as nomadic (regardless of choice) are intimately tethered, connection alone does not excuse nomadology's representative violence. And yet, nomadology has remained a cornerstone of posthumanist philosophy as well as the “mobility turn” in the social sciences (Hannan et al. 5; Kaplan 89-90). As Tim Cresswell argues, “Mobility has become the ironic foundation for anti-essentialism, antifoundationalism and antirepresentationalism” (46). Predicated upon Deleuzian lines of flight and focus upon *routes* rather than *roots*, nomadology embraces anti-state ontologies and immateriality. Yet descriptively it remains bound to the materiality of nomadic and dispossessed peoples.

Nomadology has been to describe liberatory modes of thinking, but also resistance to global capital. In *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri suggest that while imperialism once empowered individual nation-states, today it is comprised by an agglomerated “Empire,” which includes the US, international trade organizations, non-government organizations, and the United Nations. Despite the subsuming powers of Empire, a surplus of nomadic immaterial labour (cognitive and affective work) may abet in anti-imperial resistance, they suggest. In their words, “throughout the ontological terrain of globalization the most wretched of the earth becomes the most powerful being, because its new nomad singularity is the most creative force and the omni-lateral movement of its desire is itself the coming liberation” (363). Otherwise put, despite Empire's nomadic powers, nomadic immaterial labour can resist empire. This resonates with Holland's later work, which demand “nomad citizenship” and an “affirmative nomadology” upon a deterritorialized global market (*Nomad Citizenship* 8, 152).

Such positive spins on nomadology coalesce with Rosi Braidotti's ethical accountability to “philosophical nomadism,” which has since influenced the field of posthumanism (*Nomadic Theory*). Braidotti envisions what a non-unitary subjectivity in which transient subjects embody a “nomadic, dispersed and fragmented vision,” one that is “coherent and accountable mostly because it is embedded and embodied”

(*Transpositions* 4). For Braidotti, nomadic freedom is a state in which material constraints fail to impact a dispersed subjectivity, permitting total location independence. The nomad, she writes, is “figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity” (*Nomadic Subjects* 22). And yet its constitution is predicated upon a nostalgic desire, one that 19th-century Romantic Orientalist literature makes overt. Braidotti argues that nomadic subjectivity exists as “we move about, in the flow of current social transformations, in hybrid, multi-cultural, polyglot, post-identity spaces of becoming,” but remains limited due to “a shortage on the part of our social imaginary, a deficit of representational power” (*Nomadic Subjects* 85). However, nomadic romanticism has long been constituted by imaginative and representative power, going back centuries. Today, her multicultural analytics time-travel into the techno-imperial future, in which digital nomads articulate a posthumanist subjectivity, yet remain bound by contemporary capital flows.

Technologies of empire have long conflated desires of expansion with desires of becoming nomad/Gypsy. Does it make sense to rely upon this abstracted figure to arbitrate anti-imperial refusals? Critical of Braidotti’s “joyful lines of flight” and resultant injuries, An Yountae questions, “Should not the call for accountability and mourning for the loss and suffering of others precede the joyful celebration of freedom and nomadic ontology? Should not the question of the other be at the center of ethics rather than the preoccupation for one’s endless becoming” (292)? Similarly, as Thomas Sutherland argues:

The fetishization of the nomadic identity is concerning, firstly because one might surmise that the true nomads of our age—refugees, displaced peoples, and the mobile working poor—would in most cases desire nothing more than the security of a somewhat fixed, static identity, and at present have little ability to take advantage of the multiplicitous interconnectivity of which Braidotti speaks. (946)

And yet, is there a better figure to allegorize the material and epistemic violence that contemporary techno-imperialism unhinges?

Throughout the 19th century, racial appropriation of the Gypsy/nomad expressed spatiotemporal fantasies of mobility and transgression. Unlike this repeatedly murdered figure, the digital nomad of today, sheltered by posthumanist ontologies, does not have to die. Its livelihood not only allegorizes, but also actualizes, techno-imperiality. Braidotti claims that nomadism impugns the “commercialization of planet Earth in all its forms, through a series of interrelated modes of appropriation” (*The Posthuman* 7). But how can this be when nomadic appropriation facilitates the appropriation of space and time? Posthumanist mobility disassembles anti-capitalism, but, in the case of techno-imperialism, it facilitates materializes dispossession.

In the midst of their #BelongAnywhere campaign, Airbnb released another video, this one more eerie than their previous. “Is Mankind?” begins in a dimly lit hallway, in which a white toddler awkwardly stumbles to a door as suspenseful melodies from the fantasy drama, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, saturate the air. The narrator, Angela Bassett, begins by slowly questioning, “Is Man kind? Are we good? Go see” (qtd. in iSpotTV). Willfully commencing, she demands: “Go look through their windows, so you can understand their views. Sit at their tables so you can share their tastes. Sleep in their beds, so you may know their dreams. Go see. And find out just how kind the he’s and she’s of this mankind are.” Cajoling Airbnb guests to embrace a nomadic subjectivity, to become one with hosts, to sleep in their beds, and to dream their dreams, Airbnb’s ad embraces nomadic territorial expansion. In this way, Airbnb aligns itself with Braidotti suggestion that nomadic subjectivity “consists not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere” (*Nomadic Subjects* 16). By embracing nomadic subjectivity, racial appropriation is overwritten with an inclusionary hospitality into the postracial terrain of “Mankind.” Not only have techno-imperial logics succeeded in appropriating 19th-century racial disfigurement, but further, they have unified colonial and ontological desires of becoming nomadic. The digital nomad now can colonize space and transgress the most intimate of borders and dreams. This fulfils its own liberal desires of freedom, as well as the techno-imperial machine that it feeds.



Airbnb-induced eviction protest with the Housing Rights Committee and numerous housing justice collectives, 2016. Photo by Eviction Free San Francisco. Bélo image is included on the protest banner.

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NOTES

1. Though called "Google Buses," there are numerous tech corporations that facilitate reverse commuting to Silicon Valley.↵
2. "Unicorn" startups are those that have achieved a mythical network of over \$1 billion.↵