Nomadic Urbanism:
The Senior Full-time Recreational Vehicle Community

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1. The full-time senior RV community "present[s] a familiar problem to researchers and statisticians: a moving target, dissolving and reforming, traveling in scattered bands and hard to distinguish from their semi-nomadic counterparts" (Grant, 2003: 286).
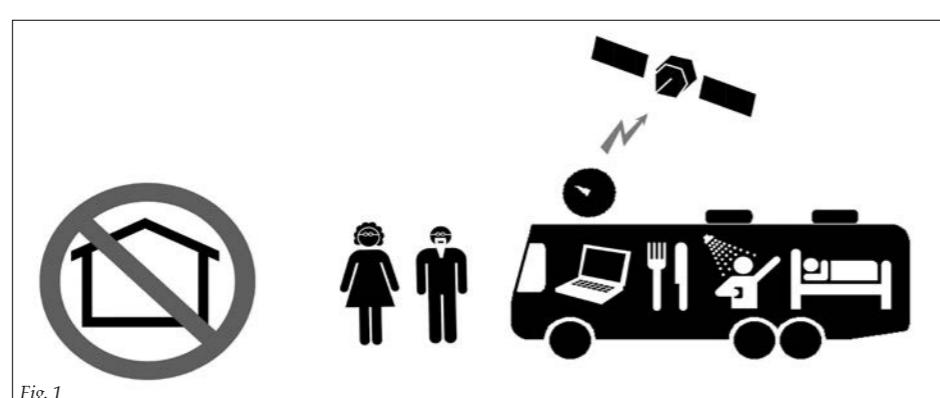
This paper frames the spatial practices of a particular contemporary social formation in the United States. While little in the way of official governmental statistics exist for the senior full-time recreational vehicle community (SFTRVC), this so-called 'nomadic' society is conservatively estimated to number between two and three million retirees who have relinquished their sedentary homes and lifestyles for a continuous year-round life 'on the road'[1] (Fig. 1). While nomadic communities are not a new occurrence, it will be suggested that one of this scale, sophistication and level of connectivity is unprecedented.

Fig. 1

*Fig. 1: RV Urbanism.
Source: Deane Simpson.*

Historically, nomadic societies have been defined in dialectical opposition to sedentary urban ones. In the preeminent historical text on nomadism, *The Muqaddimah*, medieval social historian Ibn Khaldun describes the two fundamentally opposed environments from which all human cooperation and social organization developed: a) the desert life of nomadic tribal societies; and b) the sedentary life of towns and agricultural villages. For Khaldun, "the very nature of [nomadic] existence is the negation of building, which is the basis of civilization" (1967 [1377]: 118). Nomadic societies therefore have been structurally defined as anti-urban, representing a mobile 'other' functioning outside of the heirarchical construction of sedentary urban society and the state apparatus. Within this context, it will be suggested that the practices of the SFTRVC problematize this opposition.

The practices of the SFTRVC exceed conventional classifications of pure nomadism by, firstly, embracing nomadic mobility as a leisure activity rather than one practised for subsistence and, secondly, operating with a high degree of instantaneous and uninterrupted connectivity across a scale not previously typical of nomadic societies. The practices of the SFTRVC exceed typical anti-urban

categorizations of nomadism by operating as a physically spread, but densely connected social field, one that holds the potential to produce instant bottom-up formations of actual physical urban density. Rather than producing urbanity with its most common building block (built fabric), the SFTRVC constructs it through an urbanism of infrastructure consisting of two overlaid networks, one physical and one non-physical.

The SFTRVC and its associated practices do not operate as a purely anti-urban phenomenon. Rather, they lead to a collision of the most urban and the most anti-urban of conditions, suggesting an alternate spatial model that could be provisionally termed *nomadic urbanism*. This paper refers to contemporary and historical models and theories related to both nomadism and urbanism. It is presented through the actions *homemaking, touring, communicating, plugging in, clustering, squatting, infrastructuring, pioneering, escaping, imagining* and *evolving*. Each describes a particular aspect of SFTRVC spatial practice.

Based predominantly on field investigations undertaken in a recreational vehicle, this research has also involved interviews with SFTRVers, membership in RV and SFTRVC clubs, online participation in SFTRVC forums and on-site aerial photography.[2]

Homemaking: On the Road

A recreational vehicle – or RV as it is commonly known in the US – is a "vehicle that combines transportation and living quarters for travel, recreation and camping … [an RV will typically] provide kitchen, sleeping, and bathroom facilities and be equipped with the ability to store and carry fresh water and sewage" (RVIA, 2006)[3] (Figs. 2 and 3).
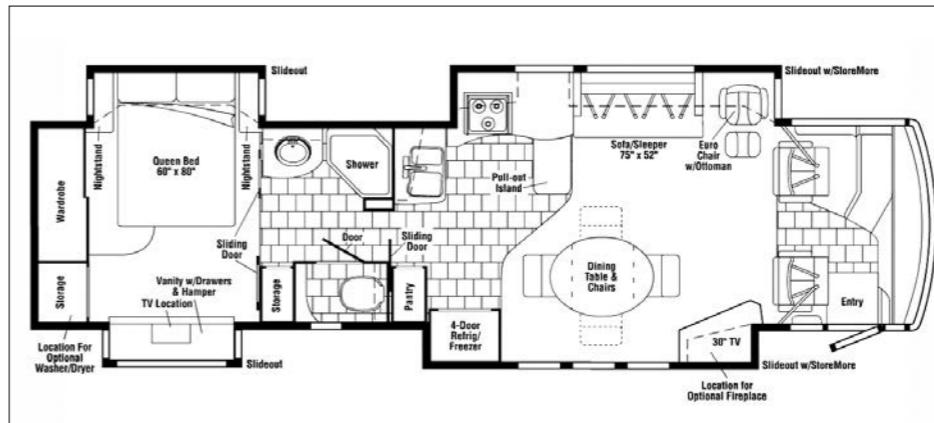

Fig. 2a

Fig. 2b

Fig. 2a,b: RV motorhome floor plan and interior. Source: Winnebago Industries Inc.

RV TYPES

A. TOWABLE

FOLDING CAMPING TRAILER

TRUCK CAMPER

TRAVEL TRAILER

5TH-WHEEL TRAVEL TRAILER

B. MOTORIZED

TYPE-C MOTORHOME

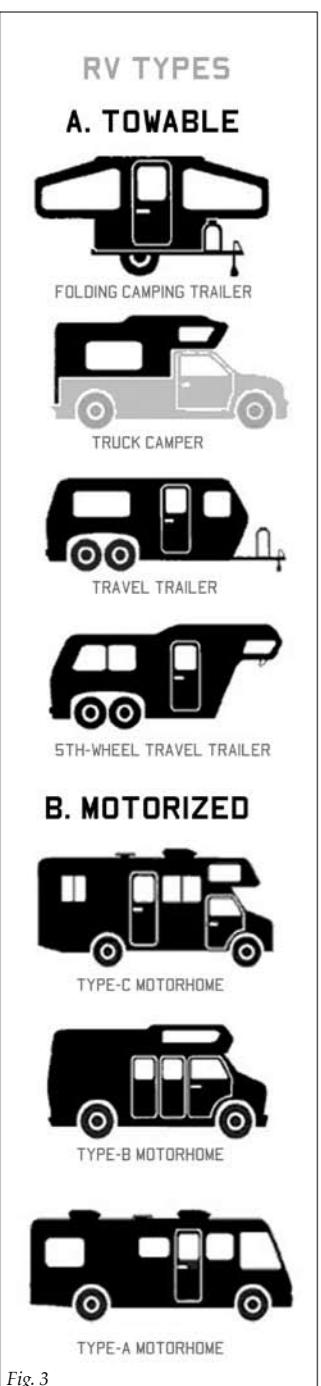TYPE-B MOTORHOME

TYPE-A MOTORHOME

Fig. 3

Fig. 3: RV types. Source: RVIA.

4. The SFTRVC consists of individuals from a wide range of socio-demographic segments, but those living this lifestyle have been categorized as predominantly middle class, most of whom formerly lived in suburban or exurban areas (Counts & Counts, 1996: 283, 315).

5. See Barfield (1993: 12).

RV enthusiasts are typically divided into three categories: *vacationers, snowbirds* and *full-timers*. *Vacationers* spend the majority of their time in an owned or rented sedentary residence, and vacation in an RV for a period typically numbering in weeks. *Snowbirds* maintain a sedentary residence, in which they typically reside during the summer months, travelling south in an RV in the winter months. *Full-timers* relinquish their sedentary residence, adopting a full year-round nomadic lifestyle. The vast majority (approximately 80 percent) of the two-to-three million *full-timers* in the US are both elderly and retired (Counts & Counts, 1996: 148). The community of *full-timers* – retired third-agers whose only 'home' is the RV they travel in – constitutes the focus of this paper.[4]

Particular tendencies emerge in the process of permanently making one's home 'on the road'. Compressing the former suburban home often into a fraction of its original size suggests the need for drastic spatial recomposition. Objects of weight and bulk that typically play an important representational function in the original domestic home – such as furniture pieces, books and paintings – are replaced by more compact built-in elements. However, it is common to observe an exaggerated quality of domesticity in the interiors, as if to counteract potential feelings of constant displacement or homelessness. This is evident in the material and colour palettes, along with the layout and designated function of 'rooms'. Familiar aspects include carpets, tiles, upholstery fabric, and stained oak or mahogany wood-veneer panelling in the 'kitchen', as well as the constant refurbishing and replacing of interior ornaments such as cushions, flowers and small tchachkas that are stowed in transit.

A similar phenomenon occurs in the immediate external surroundings of the parked RV, where semi-private, semi-public and public spaces are consciously demarcated. This occurs through the positioning of the RV in relation to existing site objects and constraints such as sun orientation, trees and other vehicles, and the placement of particular objects and furniture. Most vehicles have a retractable awning that can be extended to produce a domestic verandah, a semi-private space that is usually reinforced through ground surfacing practices. This surface is typically a green artificial turf – mimicking the domestic lawn – upon which is often placed a doormat, foldable tables and chairs. Additional items such as barbeques, fireplaces, potted plants, exercise equipment, whirligigs, neon palm trees and garden gnomes personalize and demarcate the extent of the exterior domesticated space of the home. Semi-public spaces are often produced through the cooperation of more than one RV, the focal point of which is typically a campfire, particularly in informal camping areas. These particular practices suggest that while SFTRVers relinquish their sedentary house (or apartment), the notion of 'home' is consciously amplified.

Touring: The Leisure Nomad

Historically, there are three broad categories of nomadism: *hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads* and *peripatetic nomads*. SFTRVers function in a similar fashion to these three forms inasmuch as they do not reside in a 'fixed' sedentary dwelling, instead moving from place to place on a predominantly seasonal basis.[5] Importantly, however, as they do not rely on nomadic behaviour for subsistence or survival, but take part in it by choice, as a leisure-oriented lifestyle, SFTRVers suggest the necessity for a fourth category of nomadism: *leisure nomads*.

The leisure-oriented lifestyle of the SFTRVC is a product of the institution of retirement, creating a subject distinct from both Torstein Veblen's idle wealthy of the late nineteenth century and Dean MacCannell's mass tourists of the late twentieth century. The Social Security Act of 1935, entitling Americans over 65 years of age to financial support from the state, was designed both as a benefit for those 'too old to work' and an incentive for the ongoing replacement of 'obsolete' workers. It led, over the years in which the average life expectancy has risen drastically and the population has aged accordingly, to "the emergence of a large (and potentially vast) social group whose daily experiences do not consist of work or schooling – at least, not in the traditional sense of socialization for work – and who, crucially, can expect to live up to a third of their lives in this state" (Blaikie, 1999: 69).

The emergence of the new third age overlaps with the process the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992) calls *individualization*: the social transformation occurring in Western countries in recent decades in which dominant traditional social hierarchies have become increasingly subordinated to individual choice and freedom.[6] Similarly, it is the possibility of freedom, independence and adventure that attracts SFTRVers to their lifestyle. This suggests a radically different basis for constructing a nomadic practice, producing a form of distributed leisure space, one aligned to the logic of full-time tourist rather than the traditional survivalist logic of the pastoral nomad or hunter-gatherer. The tour in this case is based both around sites of a conventional touristic nature and kin- and peer-based social interactions.

Descriptions of the spatial practices of nomads by social historians and anthropologists such as Khaldun (1967 [1377]), Jabbur (1995) and Barfield (1993) and theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari (1986) are relatively consistent. The nomad functions according to a territorial occupation of space rather than one that is codified, divided and controlled. Nomadic space is characterized by the dominance of the trajectory of movement (pathway or line) over the importance of destination (node or fixed point). For the nomad, the space between points is critical. Points are secondary – inasmuch as a point is arrived at only to be left behind. This functions in contrast to sedentary space that privileges the fixed point over the line. This is no more evident than in the SFTRVer disease known as 'Hitch Itch', or what would be referred to clinically as *dromomania* (an abnormal, obsessive desire to roam.)

The nomad plays a key role in Deleuze and Guattari's discourse as a subject who resists the forces of the territorializing apparatus of the sedentary state. The emblematic space of this nomad is the desert, defined by characteristics rather than borders, in contrast to the divided and striated space of sedentary territory. They describe the function of the sedentary road, "which is to parcel out a closed space to people, assigning each person to a share and regulating the communication between shares. The nomadic trajectory does the opposite, it distributes people (or animals) in an open space, one that is indefinite and noncommunicating" (1986: 50). In addition to this non-communicating aspect of nomadic space, it is the limitation of communication between the dispersed individuals and factions of nomadic societies (communication that typically took place through serial chains)[7] that is challenged by the contemporary leisure nomad.

6. See also the excellent description of similar social transformations related to retirement migration on the Spanish coast by Andreas Huber and Karen O'Reilly (2004).

7. From an overview of literature on early nomadic societies (see References, especially, Carmichael (1991); Cresswell (1997); Khaldun (1967 [1377])), social communication might best be described in terms of serial chains.

Fig. 5

Fig. 4: RV satellite dishes for TV and two-way internet. Quartzsite, 2008. Photograph by Deane Simpson.
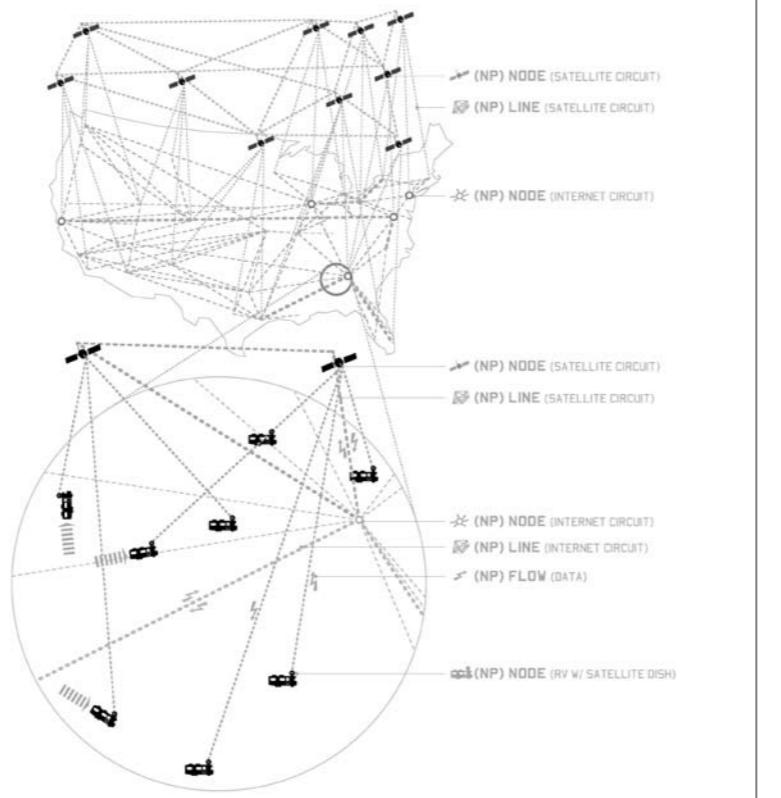
Fig. 5: RV non-physical network. Source: Deane Simpson.

Communicating: Satellite Internet

Portable satellite internet technologies – developed initially for military purposes – have in recent years become available in a civilian context, supporting an unprecedented level of communication and interconnectivity for the SFTRVC in real time (Fig. 4). This communication system – constituted as an infrastructural network that is predominantly non-physical in nature – consists of two main elements: the mobile RV-based communication equipment (computer and two-way satellite internet dish and box) in which each moving vehicle operates as a node or point, and the series of circuits or lines of communication, in particular the web-based RV club sites and the internet that supports them (Fig. 5).

On-board RV communication equipment is increasingly sophisticated and remarkably widely used amongst the SFTRVC. With a satellite dish mounted to an RV, a user is able to access the internet from any remote location in the US with a view toward the southern sky.

In recent years, the dominant staging area of RV communities – typically known as RV clubs – has become the internet. Clubs, as one of the central aspects of the RV lifestyle, not only organize yearly or seasonal rallies and conventions but also keep members in close communication through newsletters and magazines. Many clubs supply parking spaces and some redirect mail. Clubs have increasingly cemented a web-based presence with forums, chatrooms and info sites. Forums, for example, offer support on travel itineraries, technical issues, buying and selling RVs, RVer dating, RV friendly recipes, discount RV merchandise, security tips, rallies, conventions and more. The largest and best known RV community is the Good Sam Club, with a 2006 membership of over one million RVers. Founded in 1966, it publishes *Highways* magazine and has a considerable web presence (at www.goodsamclub.com). Escapees (www.escapees.com) is one of the first RV clubs exclusively for SFTRVers (Fig. 6). It was founded in 1978 and in 2008 has over 100,000 members.

Rather than suggesting that the internet led to the invention of this form of nomadism, it is proposed here that the commercial availability of portable

satellite internet systems has expanded instantaneous and remote communication to and from nomadic vehicles, leading to a dramatic increase in access to, and 'online-ization' of, the social networking operations of this community – communications that previously took place via telephone calls, message services and mailed newsletters to post office boxes around the country. As a massive clearing house of information, these websites support the large-scale coordination of events, actions and spontaneous meetings. The website www.datastorm. com is just one example of a micro-community in which individual RVers are spatially located on a communal map and messaging board (Figs. 7 and 8). This level of instant connectivity at a distance has radically increased the social coherency of the community to the point that one may begin to understand it to be as socially dense as it is physically sparse. This is supported both by the staggering numbers of SFTRVers active in clubs online and the intensity of information traffic.

Plugging In: Lines/Nodes

If the first form of infrastructure supporting the SFTRVC is relatively non-physical, the second is of a more physical nature. It consists of two main elements: the road and highway system (constituting a system of lines or circuits); and parking/camping sites for vehicles (constituting a series of points or nodes). The RV vehicles themselves operate as mobile elements that flow within this physical network (Fig. 9).
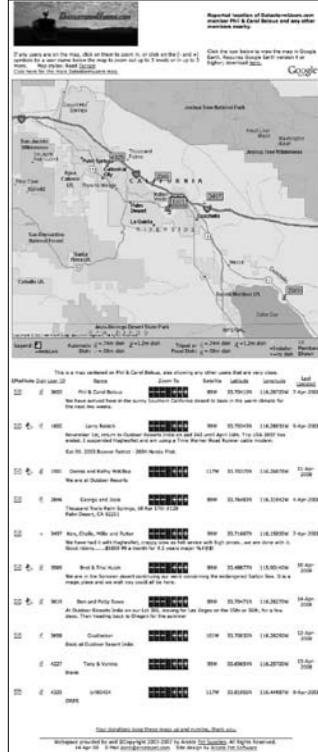

Fig. 9

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Fig. 6: RV website: the Escapees RV Club: forum directory. Source: escapees.com

Fig. 7: Automatic reported locations. Courtesy of Don Bradner.

Fig. 8: Close-up of automatic reported locations. Courtesy of Don Bradner.

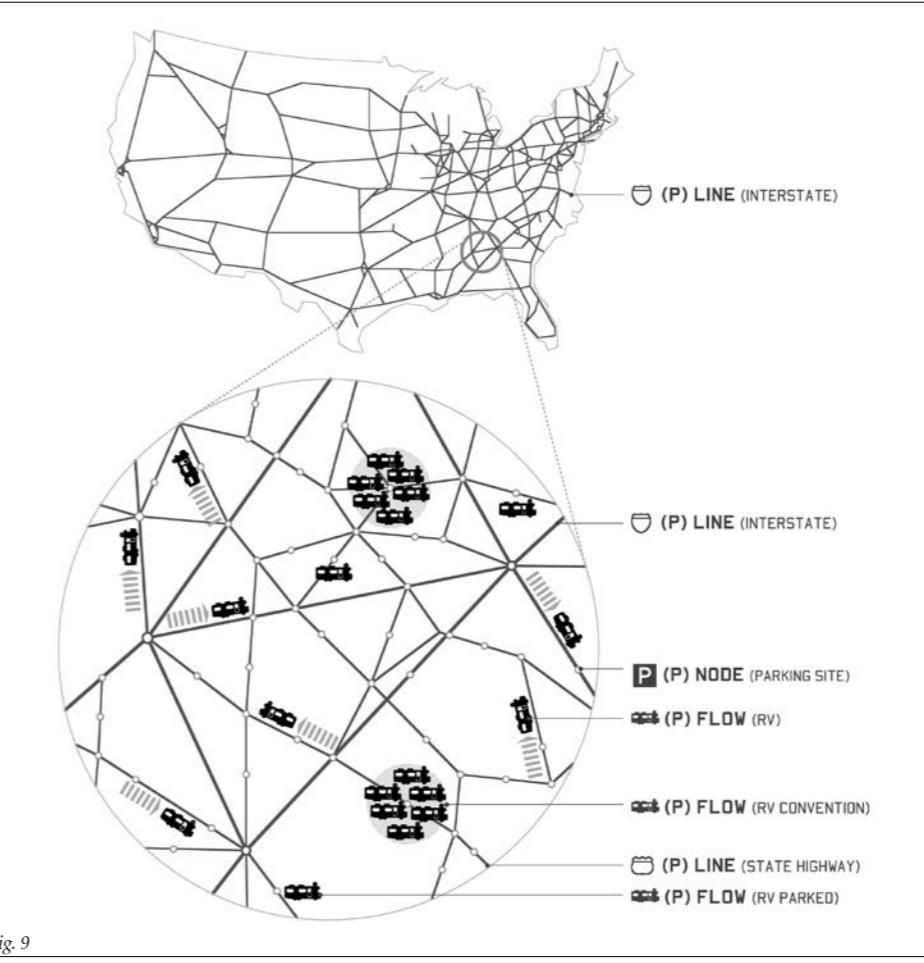*Fig. 9: RV physical network. Source: Deane Simpson.*

Fig. 10: Quartzsite, Arizona, 2008.
Photograph by Deane Simpson.

Parking and camping sites function as a series of infrastructural nodes that may be classified as either formal or informal sites. Formal campsites include public RV parks, membership or co-op parks, and private parks, and typically offer what is referred to as a 'hook-up'. Hook-ups supply electricity and water and sometimes waste removal services – not available at informal sites – directly to the RV. Although RVs are somewhat limited in their 'off-roading' capacities – implying restrictions in freedom of movement – there are various non-paved off-road surfaces that are easily accessible. The most notable include the deserts of the south-west, where RVs are able to drive and park in almost any location.

Clustering: Instant Cities

Common informal sites include Long-term Visitor Areas (LTVA) administered by the US Department of the Interior. These sites are available to *boondockers* – or those who stay in areas where there are no power or water hook-ups and no charge for occupying the space. A high proportion of RVs are equipped to boondock. This requires self-contained water and waste disposal tanks and a 12-volt electrical system, which is normally powered by either solar panels or a generator. Some LTVAs also offer a centralized water supply and waste dumping facilities.

The points or nodes within the physical network vary greatly in size, from single RVs parking alone or in small groups on a remote site, to instant cities of RVers numbering in the hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. The most famous informal site is Quartzsite – a small Arizona desert town close to the Californian border. Its permanent population of 3,500 inhabitants expands exponentially in the winter months. While there are no official Quartzsite RV population figures,

Fig. 11: Quartzsite, Arizona, 2008.
Photographs by Deane Simpson.

estimates of the peak number in late January range from 300,000 to one million (Counts & Counts, 1996; Grant, 2003; Varnelis, 2007), defining an *instant city* of new third agers (Fig. 10). The movements of such large numbers are coordinated predominantly online through club websites. The Escapees club, for example, has several pages online dedicated to social events and activities, running three or more get-together locations in the Quartzsite area simultaneously. The majority of winter RVers at Quartsite boondock on LTVAs. They arrange themselves in various spatial formations ranging from individual detached stand-alone vehicles, to four vehicle 'courtyards', to linear bands and pinwheel corrals, constructing micro-communities or neighbourhoods of temporary association (Fig. 11). The instant city phenomenon takes place not only at Quartzsite. There are many other examples of large-scale club events also coordinated online, such as the Good Sam Club rallies ('Samborees'), sometimes attracting tens of thousands of RVers. Many 'clustering' actions are organized online in very short periods of time, such as the organizing of SFTRVers to distribute aid and offer building labour in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005.

'Clustering' is related both to the socio-cultural rituals of the SFTRVC and the technological support that allows for communication and coordinated move-ment. In effect, these instant cities, like Quartzsite, constitute a form of urbanity produced almost entirely from bottom-up forces without top-down planning, apart from basic planning of vital infrastructural services.

Squatting: Destination Boondocking

The points or nodes associated with the physical infrastructure exist not only in what are traditionally understood as 'non-urban' areas. In many cases, informal RV parking sites are embedded within the existing urban fabric, operating on an un-written 'timeshare' basis. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as *destination boondocking*. According to one RVer, these sites include, "in the winter, hotel/motel parking lots. In the summer, school yards. Anywhere else that is quiet and that we won't be in anyone's way. Shopping centers, church parking lots (except on Saturday night)" (Counts & Counts, 1996: 173). The discount retailer Walmart has a well-known policy of allowing free overnight parking for RVs in most of its retail parking lots. This functions for mutual benefit: RVers have a free, relatively safe, accessible and reliable network of locations in which to stay overnight, with access to bathrooms and store supplies; and in return, Walmart maintains a large number of loyal customers who occupy parking lot space only during the over-
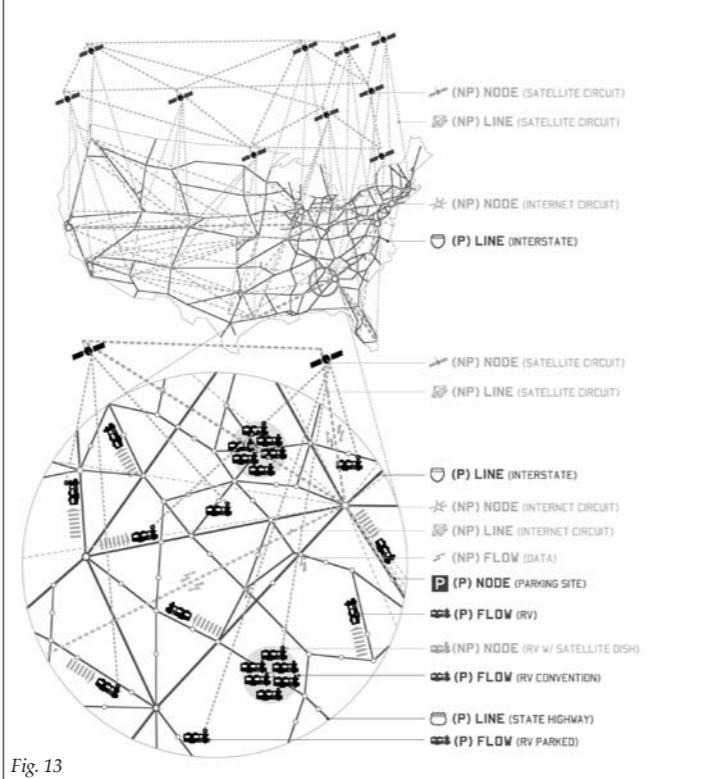
Fig. 12

Fig. 13

Fig. 12: Destination boondocking, Walmart, Arizona. Photograph by Deane Simpson.

Fig. 13: RV physical and non-physical networks combined. Source: Deane Simpson.

night off-peak period (Fig. 12). Destination boondocking has become a widely accepted spatial practice, so widely practised that several guidebooks have been published listing locations and directions to every Walmart in the US, as well as supplementary titles that list the few Walmarts not allowing overnight parking (for example, Wiley & Wiley, 2006).

The Walmart case is interesting as an example of a large corporation willing to tolerate what would normally be understood as illegal squatting. The possibility for the transient RV occupation of existing urban environments is supported by the fact that these practices are relatively indistinguishable from regular parking, especially in the case of smaller RVs, making it difficult for law enforcement to control. Destination boondocking is the most obvious engagement on the part of SFTRVers in marginal behaviour typically associated with other forms of transient nomadic lifestyles. It is precisely these practices that skirt and challenge the logic of accepted spatial and legal behaviour of the striated sedentary environment. It would be possible to conceive of this practice, whether it takes place in a school parking lot or retailer parking lot, as an opportunistic occupation of urban space, producing an agile additional layer of urbanity infiltrating the existing sedentary fabric.

Infra-Structuring: Nomadic Urbanism

In overlaying the two broad categories of infrastructure – the physical and the non-physical – the RV operates as both a node (in the non-physical case) and material flow (in the case of the physical infrastructure). This suggests a complex network of interconnected flowing nodes functioning in between the physical and non-physical realms (Fig. 13).

In *The Rise of the Network Society,* Manuel Castells theorizes a shift in the dominant mode of urbanism at the end of the twentieth century. Castells argues that the traditionally defined urbanism of the 'space of places' (which we associate with the traditional sedentary city of identity, centrality and materiality), is increasingly subordinated by that which he refers to as the 'space of flows', the space that "links up distant locales around shared functions and meanings on the basis of electronic circuits and fast transportation corridors, while isolating and subduing the logic of experience embodied in the space of places" (Castells, 2001:

171). The 'space of flows', in other words, refers to an emerging spatial logic in which social interaction occurs in between others who are both absent and distant in time and space – a schema in which living, inhabitation and social connectivity transgress immediate physical distance.[8] In this context, the SFTRVC is emblematic of the space of flows – an arrangement in which houses themselves and their inhabitants are literally in a state of flow, along with the information flowing between them – producing an urbanity that is physically spread (to varying degrees), but densely connected socially. The nomadic community of the SFTRVC therefore deploys practices that are not anti-urban by definition, but produce an alternate form of decentralized urbanism – a socially coherent urban field. From Castell's point of view, density as an urban concept shifts from describing purely physical material conditions to include socio-informational ones. Additionally, the mobility and clustering of the SFTRVC suggests a shift in the understanding of urban density from something stable, toward something in a constant state of fluctuation and instability. Instead of generating urbanity from its most common component – sedentary buildings – this highly mobile, dispersed and connected field produces a *nomadic urbanism* of infrastructure.

It is useful to contextualize the contemporary spatial practices of the SFTRVC with other historical mobile practices. There are three examples that resonate: those of the early pioneers of the nineteenth-century American west; those attached to the suburban flight from urban America in the mid-twentieth century; and those proposed by the architectural avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly Archigram. All three examples may be linked together under the umbrella of urban decentralization, of which the so-called 'exurban' condition of the American edge city is the most documented contemporary form. According to Castells: "this spatial form is indeed very specific to the American experience. Because … it is embedded in a classic pattern of American history, always pushing for the endless search for a promised land in new settlement" (1996: 400).

Pioneering: From Westward to Interstitial Frontier

SFTRVers often frame their own actions as the "modern embodiment of the early pioneers" (Counts & Counts, 1996: 94). As well as a psychological state of freedom, adventure and independence, the 'pioneering spirit' also defines a social attitude with clear micro-scale spatial implications, most obvious in the circled and closed courtyard formations of RVs that echo the circled wagon corral originally intended to offer protection from external attackers. This has been adopted by RVers as a way of producing a central space for communal activities – activities that also echo the social activities of the pioneer period: the communal (pot-luck) dinner around the camp-fire, games and the sing-along (Fig. 14).

At the macro-scale, the SFTRVC reconfigures the westward expanding line of the frontier as an "interstitial frontier" (Counts & Counts, 1996: 111). Spatial expansionism for the SFTRVer is directed toward the production of a form of nomadic urbanity in areas where urbanity is not yet present (at least in conventional terms.) The practice of destination boondocking extends this frontier beyond one based upon a finding or filling of gaps where 'the city' has not yet manifested itself, to include the extension of frontiers of transient occupation within the already existing 'city'. While the former opens up questions concerning the sustainability of such practices, the latter is particularly interesting in the way it contests the legal and social frontiers of urban space.

8. Penelope Dean's paper on the Australian Royal Flying Doctor Service is a highly relevant case study precedent in dispersed urbanism (2000: 86-91). According to Dean, "Whilst it bears no historic reference to the evolution of the 'city' as we know it, it is an extreme example where minimum density is coupled with maximum social cohesion." If the Royal Flying Doctor Service functions as a fixed decentralized network, the RV community operates as a mobile distributed network.

Fig. 14: RV camp-fire. Photograph by Deane Simpson.

9. The argument for suburbia's failure to address the needs and desires of the new third age is most clearly stated in Del Webb's Sun City film, *The Beginning*, from the mid-1960s.

Escaping: The Second Wave

The decentralized practices of the SFTRVC also have a particular resonance with the spatial practices of mid-twentieth-century urban 'flight'. If this first wave of flight, from the urban centre to the suburban edge, was driven by fear of urban crime, falling property values and public school integration as well as government and military policy, then the SFTRVC may be interpreted as a second wave of flight, from the suburban and exurban edge, to 'anywhere' and 'everywhere', one carried out by the same cohort that took part in the first wave. In light of the conventional three-part RV maxim – 'freedom, independence and adventure' – it would be possible to speculate that the second wave is at the same time driven by a fear of confinement, dependence and boredom in the suburban periphery. Based on the "endless search for the promised-land in new settlements", Castells comments that this also means that "each wave of social and physical escapism (for example, the abandonment of inner cities, leaving the lower social classes and ethnic minorities trapped in ruins) deepened the crisis of American cities" (1996: 400). The abandonment of the suburbs by retirees may be interpreted in its most negative light as another form of self-interested escapism from territory – designed predominantly for the young nuclear family – that neither delivered the lifestyle promised, nor structured a lifestyle suitable for an increasingly aged population.[9]

Imagining: Technological Arcadia

The strongest historical resonance to the SFTRVC is located in the projected spatial visions of members of the 1960s and 1970s architectural avant-garde such as Superstudio and Archigram. Archigram in particular – through projects such

as *Instant City, Walking City, Living Pod* and *Freetime Node* – engaged in themes of nomadism, networks, mobility and transience; they focused on the exploitation of technology to further personal choice and freedom. This approach – characterized most distinctly in their declared moratorium on building – challenged (to paraphrase Archigram) an architectural establishment distracted in the tenets of permanence and good-taste. The suspension of 'building' in Archigram's work was not meant to signal the end of urbanism, but the emergence of a new form of urbanism based upon an (increasingly invisible) infrastructure. For this new urbanity to emerge, wrote Archigram's David Green:

> … we will have to wait until the steel and concrete mausoleums of our cities, villages and towns etc., decay and the suburbs bloom and flourish. They in turn will die and the world will perhaps again be a garden. And that perhaps is the dream, and we should all be busy persuading not to build but to prepare for the invisible networks in the air. (Green, 1969: 297)

This particular urban vision – described by commentators as techno-primitivism, high-tech ruralism or techno-pastoralism – is centred on a return to nature through technology; escaping the constraints and the monotony of the city through 'urbanism'.

In the 1969 project, "Instant City: Children's Primer", Green described a scenario for a dispersed city of nomadic inhabitants living in trailers. He referred to trailer nomads as 'node-owners' plugged into camouflaged 'logplugs' and 'rokplugs' in the wilderness. Logplugs, for example, would offer vital services such as water and power, and importantly what was referred to as the 'international information hookup' – an Archigram-ism for the yet-to-be-invented internet: "Plugs will increase the service to these [instant and remote] communities…. The whole of London or New York will be available in the world's leafy hollows, deserts and flowered meadows" (Green, 1969: 297). Imagined is a utopia formed from the collision of the most urban and the most anti-urban of conditions, in which the most 'ideal' aspects of the urban realm would be brought to the 'natural' environment. With this in mind, *Instant City* may be considered as a premonition of the contemporary SFTRVC, an urban vision realized by the same generational cohort, 30 to 40 years later, as retirees.

Evolving

In this context, it is necessary not to underestimate how radical the realization of this set of practices on such a large scale is. The SFTRVC represents a social movement operating as a distributed city – roughly equivalent in inhabitants to the City of Chicago, the third largest city in the US – produced without planning or buildings (in the conventional sense of these terms). By virtue of having been realized, these experiments produce an urbanism that exceeds the somewhat uncomplicated imaging of Archigram's technologized arcadia, with its romantic vision of technology and nature as a means of transcending the limitations of the city. Grown from a particular set of socio-demographic, technological and cultural conditions, this form of spatial organization clearly problematizes the conventionally aligned series of relations between sedentary and nomadic, urban and rural, dense and sparse, town and country, home and away, and culture and nature. The short-circuiting of these constructs, with the support of infrastructural networks, offers potential (both positive and negative) for recon-

figuring approaches to defining contemporary urbanity: in discarding conventional notions of 'home', for example, alternative practices of 'homemaking' are developing; in being forced to give up regular consumptive practices, new ones are evolving; and in abandoning traditional forms of sedentary civic engagement, other modes of civic action are emerging.

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