

The Wolves of Silicon Valley: how megalomaniacs in hoodies became tech's asshole answer to Wall Street



Antonio Garcia Martinez has written an exposé about the reality of Silicon Valley

- [Alix O'Neill](#)

As far as commutes go, an air-conned shuttle bus kitted out with wi-fi is a pretty sweet ride to work. Then there's all that free food – breakfast, lunch and dinner sorted. Ooh, and “graffiti” walls, where you can stick it to the man without getting hauled off to HR. And what could beat a game of mid-afternoon of table football or meditation in a sleep pod to stave off RSI? Few places are so enshrined in urban myth as [Facebook](#), [Google](#) and co. Silicon Valley has long been considered the Neverland of corporate life – a place where office slides and oversized Lego figures are as ubiquitous as water coolers. But what's it really like to work at one of these Silicon Valley behemoths?

'Everyone freaked out when they found out I'd written this'

One person should know – Antonio Garcia Martinez. His CV includes Facebook product manager, Twitter advisor and start-up CEO. Today, however, the 40-year old is casting himself as lowly writer, soon-to-be “unemployable in tech”, thanks to *Chaos Monkeys*, his newly released exposé of life inside Silicon Valley. Martinez joined Facebook's nascent advertising team in 2011, but a vocal critic of the company's strategy, he was pushed out after just two years.

Dubbed “*Liar's Poker* meets *The Social Network*”, the book is his sweet revenge – a sneering critique of the swelling wealth and influence of Silicon Valley. Charting the evolution of social media through Martínez's career, from Wall Street quant to tech entrepreneur, he says: “everyone freaked out when they found out I'd written this”.

You can see why too. Martínez's portrayal of [Mark Zuckerberg](#)'s empire and the rest of Silicon Valley is pretty damning stuff. The tech hub's elite are painted as sociopaths in hoodies. Forget the dog-eat-dog capitalism of Wall Street - these guys make Gordon Gekko look like Ghandi.

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“Wall Street is the open ruthlessness of gladiatorial combat,” says Martínez. “You’re tossed in there, a lot of blood flows and one man triumphs. In Silicon Valley, it’s more like this mafioso drama with a lot of aggressive behaviour and back-room dealing. Behind the manicured exterior of being an entrepreneur or an investor, there are all these knives in the back which are never discussed publicly.”

The changing face of the Valley

The spirit of Silicon Valley, he says, is changing. What came from a 1960s counterculture is morphing into just another industry where Ivy League kids go to try to make a name for themselves. ‘So many people in tech have no sense of right or wrong’, he says describing one guy he saw close up expressing abuses and intimidation in the form of a company rather than an organised crime outfit. ‘He’d probably be in jail if he had a bit more violence to him’, he says. ‘These companies are temples to the founders’ egos. You don’t even have that level of self worship on Wall Street.’



Wall Street character Gordan Gekko is made to look like Ghandi by some in Silicon Valley Credit: reuters

But you do have comparable levels of wealth. The Economist recently identified 99 listed tech companies in Silicon Valley with market values over \$1 billion. Together, they account for 6% of all corporate America's profits. Meanwhile, a new report published by the California Budget and Policy Center revealed middle-class families now make up less than half of households in the area and while the state has more billionaires than any country except the US and Chine, San Francisco has the highest levels of homelessness in the US.

Behind the manicured exterior of being an entrepreneur or an investor, there are all these knives in the backAntonio Garcia Martinez

“There are literally shanty towns underneath most highway overpasses in the city,” says Martínez. “But that techie kid who goes and gets his \$5 single-origin, cruelty-free pour-over in some trendy coffee shop? He doesn’t give a s***. He just wants to get some liquidity around his shares and steps over the homeless guy en route to his yoga class.”

Generally speaking, with start-ups, those who join in the early stages are entitled to a greater share of its equity. So when Facebook decided to launch IPO proceedings in 2012, anyone who arrived pre-2009 was in for a windfall. Martínez recalls the day Zuckerberg made the announcement. “I was sitting behind a 25-year-old, who at the time was one of Facebook’s longest-serving employees. She was scanning \$3 million San Francisco real estate listings, while Zuck was on stage telling everybody else who wasn’t about to make that kind of money to ‘stay focused on the mission.’”



Zuckerberg rings the opening bell as

Facebook begins trading on the Nasdaq Credit: getty images

The rise of newly minted millennials

Publicly, flashing cash is against the Facebook ethos – Zuckerberg famously wears a grey t-shirt to work every day, claiming, “I feel like I’m not doing my job if I spend any of my energy on things that are silly or frivolous”. Newly minted tech-millennials, therefore, are forced to set up private groups (on Facebook, of course), where they can discuss the pressing needs such as where to buy private aviation, the best five-star resorts in Maui and “how to buy a bunch of land then put it in a trust so people don’t realise you’re amassing a compound and you can maintain your privacy”. One such group bears the imaginative title NR250– the “Nouveau Riche first 250 Facebook employees”.

“You basically have a two-tier society at Facebook – those worth double or even triple-digit millions and then people who are worth decent money. It might seem a lot to those not in this world, but if you make one or two million after four years of pretty hard work at Facebook, you’re basically kind of middle class. It caused a lot of resentment.”

Still, you can’t say it’s easy money. The book depicts an all-consuming work culture too. Martínez encountered interns sleeping in meeting rooms and a programmer coding in the toilet cubicle next to him. “I was emotionally frazzled by the end. I gained 30lb, barely saw my kids [now aged six, four and nine months] and suffered two subsequent failed relationships. My life was a complete mess.”

However, surprisingly, few seem to share his sentiment. Zuckerberg has no shortage of willing disciples, dedicated to “the mission. If you’re an engineer at Facebook and you own a piece of code you could have 50million people engaged with something you created, the impact is way more than a CEO of even a moderately successful start-up. It’s perfect for the sort of person who doesn’t necessarily need to be the star of the show, but still wants to make their mark. That’s the genius of Zuck – he’s created a culture that gets these 23-year-old kids tethered to a corporate campus for fourteen-hour days.”

Which also goes some way to explain how Facebook also seems to shrug off charges of a sexism in the workplace and a recent left-wing bias controversy after being accused of deliberately suppressing conservative views in its trending topics section. “At the end of the day, there’s nothing restraining Zuck’s vision. One of the jokes that we had was that Facebook could throw an election by showing reminders to go vote in certain districts but not others. That’s the level of control it has. It’s scary.” Still, at least you get to sit on a bean bag while toppling governments. You don’t get that on Wall Street.

Chaos Monkeys: Inside the Silicon Valley Money Machine, £12.99, Ebury Press, is out now

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[READ MORE ABOUT: Facebook, Social media, Twitter ,Google ,Mark Zuckerberg, silicon valley assholes, tim draper, Elon Musk, Larry Page Silicon Valley — Where The Assholes Are - Decline of ...](#)

I believe Silicon Valley is where the biggest group of assholes lives. This post was prompted by yet another write-up of these grown-up children ...

[http://www.declineoftheempire.com/2013\[...\]con-valley-where-the-assholes-are.html](http://www.declineoftheempire.com/2013[...]con-valley-where-the-assholes-are.html)

[Pando: Venture capital and the great big Silicon Valley ...](#)

Silicon Valley has an asshole problem, and it’s high time we owned up to it. ... Further, even assholes can have an outsized positive impact on the world.

[https://pando.com/2014/10/06/venture-c\[...\]great-big-silicon-valley-asshole-game/](https://pando.com/2014/10/06/venture-c[...]great-big-silicon-valley-asshole-game/)

[Asshole CEOs, startup founders and success - Business Insider](#)

"Sometimes, assholes create great businesses." ... Inside Silicon Valley, arrogance runs rampant and investors seem to reward ruthless ...

[http://www.businessinsider.com/asshole\[...\]s-startup-founders-and-success-2014-11](http://www.businessinsider.com/asshole[...]s-startup-founders-and-success-2014-11)

[‘Silicon Valley’ Recap: a Confederacy of Assholes | ...](#)

There are many nice things to be said about Silicon Valley and steadily fewer nice things to be said about the show’s supposed protagonists. Even Richard, the only ...

[https://www.inverse.com/article/3198-s\[...\]valley-recap-a-confederacy-of-assholes](https://www.inverse.com/article/3198-s[...]valley-recap-a-confederacy-of-assholes)

[Are assholes more likely to succeed as entrepreneurs in ...](#)

Are any of them correlated with the assholes of the world? ... Are assholes more likely to succeed as entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley? ... Silicon Valley ...

<https://www.quora.com/Are-assholes-more-likely-to-succeed-as-entrepreneurs-in-Silicon-Valley>

[The Assholes of Silicon Valley | TECHNOCRACY JOURNAL](#)

The Assholes of Silicon Valley Popularized, and globally exposed, by the hit television series: "Silicon Valley", the arrogant, white, male venture ...

<https://googlespieson.wordpress.com/2014/08/12/the-assholes-of-silicon-valley/>

[The art of being an asshole: Our recap of HBO's "Silicon ...](#)

The art of being an asshole: Our recap of HBO's "Silicon Valley" Episode 2. ... kind of asshole vacuum and that void is filled by other assholes." - Erlich, "Silicon ...

<https://pando.com/2014/04/14/hbos-silicon-valley-episode-2-recap/>

[To what extent are assholes pervasive and problematic in ...](#)

To what extent are assholes pervasive and problematic in Silicon Valley? ... Quora users who watch Silicon Valley: ... Why are there so many assholes in Silicon Valley?

<https://www.quora.com/To-what-extent-are-assholes-pervasive-and-problematic-in-Silicon-Valley>

[The "Silicon Valley Asshole" theory | VatorNews](#)

The "Silicon Valley Asshole" theory Late Night with David Hornik panel discusses assholes in Silicon Valley. Financial trends and news by Faith Merino

<http://vator.tv/news/2013-02-15-the-silicon-valley-asshole-theory>

[Why Are Tech Founders Such Assholes? - Gawker](#)

As Tom Foremski at Silicon Valley Watcher has noticed, it seems like there's been a spate of news about ethics-challenged startup founders ...

<http://gawker.com/5793734/why-are-tech-founders-such-assholes>

[Double Asshole Silicon Valley Scene - S02E06 - YouTube](#)

Uploaded by Ashley NeilMy favourite scene, double asshole! With the character Erlich Bachman. Season ... Double ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4JIGgYAuDv0>

[Silicon Valley isn't Autistic, It's Just Full of Assholes | Elaine's Idle Mind](#)

I wasn't aware that Silicon Valley had become some sort of leper colony for autism patients. I guess I haven't been paying attention. It is also ...

<http://elaineou.com/2015/10/11/silicon-valley-isnt-autistic-its-just-full-of-assholes/>

Previous : Why I Don't Want My Daughter to Work in Silicon Valley

But if you think that SV (or the larger Bay Area) is FILLED with sexist assholes? Well... let's just say it's obvious that you don't live in Silicon Valley. Or the Bay.

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2455042,00.asp>