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FROM COUNTERPUBLICS TO COUNTERSPACES: Livable city advocates' efforts to reshape cities through carfree-streets events

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Livable city advocates' efforts to reshape cities through carfree-streets events

by

Lusi Morhayim

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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Committee in charge:

Professor Galen Cranz, Chair

Professor Margaret Crawford

Professor Nathan Sayre

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**Abstract**

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American cities have gone through major transformation as the automobile has become the primary means of transportation for the masses. This change has come with long-lasting implications for the experience of urban life and for the streets. This dissertation analyzes various livable city advocates' efforts to reshape cities, and particularly, to challenge automobiles' dominant influence on urban form. The analysis first focuses on three carfree-streets events—Critical Mass, Park(ing) Day and Sunday Streets—and later, on the recent physical and social transformations in San Francisco, California. This study uses a combination of research methods ranging from participant observation, interviewing and visual analysis to archival research and content analysis in order to examine the implications and limits of carfree-streets events on urban social and spatial justice.

Each carfree-streets event is different and unique, yet each reclaims public space from automobiles and assumes an underlying need to make cities and urban streets more inclusive of multiple users and uses. Thus, the research is situated at the intersection of discussions about right to the city, public sphere, appropriation of urban space, and the right to green and livable cities. Two foundational theoretical concepts help frame the analysis: "counterspaces" (Lefebvre 1991) and "counterpublics" (Fraser 1992). During the events, carfree-streets counterpublics demonstrate their right to the city demands in the public sphere, by appropriating urban streets and enacting their ideal spaces, as a way to foster temporary and permanent change. Analysis of the three carfree-streets events details temporary counterspaces created during the events and the multiple reasons that underlie the carfree-streets counterpublics' interest in alternative uses of streets, including, but not limited to, an increased sense of community, play, empowerment, freedom to choose alternative transportation, and environmental values. Analysis of spatial changes details the City's recently developed programs through which the local government's role is reduced to a manager, and the cost and efforts involved in providing improvements to public spaces are significantly outsourced to community groups, private and civic sector.

I argue that such spatial transformations may indicate an extreme case of neoliberalism in which the do-it-yourself attitude is institutionalized. Further, the marginalized position of non-motorists in the context of their limited access to streets, in contrast to the carfree-streets events'

organizers/initiators' considerably powerful standing in society, reveals the complexities of spatial justice. Finally, although the events help alleviate the automobile's hegemony in urban space, and make the city more just and inclusive of non-motorists, the ways in which the City provides new public infrastructure might result in social and spatial inequalities in other respects. In sum, the research points to continuous struggles among the plural publics who produce urban space.

## Acknowledgements

**Table of Contents**

**Table of Figures**

**List of Abbreviations**

CFS          Carfree-streets

CM           Critical Mass

CORA       California Outdoor Rollersports Association

DIY           Do-it-yourself

PD           Park(ing) Day

SFBC       San Francisco Bicycle Coalition

SFMTA     San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

American cities have gone through major transformation as the automobile has become the primary means of transportation for the masses, however with long-lasting implications for the experience of urban life, and the streets (Mumford 1961; Kay 1997; Jacobs 2004). Further, as automobiles provided comfort and individual mobility at a faster speed, pedestrians and bicyclists were put in a marginal position in terms of their access to streets.

Today many citizens are witnessing a trend regarding overturning the automobile's dominance. Major cities in the US, such as San Francisco and New York City, are leading examples. Resistance to automobile dominance comes from the various actors that shape the city, and it is not only grassroots groups who are taking action—some local government agencies and non-profit organizations are supporting change as well. However, three carfree-streets events taking place in San Francisco—Critical Mass (CM), Park(ing) Day, and Sunday Streets—stand out. They are noteworthy first because all three are celebrated in many cities across the world (and the first two originated in San Francisco), and second, because physical and social transformations that have been happening in San Francisco in recent years have been showing parallels to the issues raised through these events.

Each carfree-streets event is different and unique, yet they all reclaim public space from automobiles. Critical Mass is a monthly bicycle ride in which hundreds, and at times thousands, of bicyclists get together to take streets over from automobiles and demand the bicyclists' right to the streets. The rather insurgent, anarchistic, and political character of Critical Mass separates it from the other two events. Park(ing) Day is an event that promotes green public spaces in cities. It was initiated in 2005 in San Francisco by an art collective, Rebar. It became a global grassroots event the next year and was celebrated in 13 cities in 2006 and in 162 cities in 35 countries in 2011, according to its website. During Park(ing) Day people occupy on-street parking spots and appropriate them for various purposes ranging from spaces to play, socialize, and rest, to real-scale modeling of physical transformations they would like to see happen on the streets. Sunday Streets is an institutional event made possible by collaboration between Livable Cities (a non-profit organization), the City and County of San Francisco, and private support. During the event, streets in selected neighborhoods are closed to motor vehicle traffic, and people are encouraged to be out on the streets. The Cyclovia events celebrated in Bogota, Colombia were the source of inspiration for San Francisco and other cities in the US. Sunday Streets was first celebrated in San Francisco in 2008. By 2010, an estimated average of 25,000 to 50,000 people were attending each event (Montes et. al. 2012; San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency 2012).

This research analyzes these three carfree-streets events and their role in urban transformation in a two-part study by employing theoretical frameworks from both social and spatial studies. The first part of the research focuses on the *ideas* that are disseminated during the carfree-streets events in respect to alternative urban design and planning and on the temporary alternative spaces created through the events. The analysis in this portion of the project relies on an ethnographic lens, open-ended and semi-structured interview questions regarding participants'

motives for participating in the events, observations, participatory research methods, and content and visual analysis of archival, online, and print material.

The second part of the research focuses on analyses of the actual *physical and social transformations* of the city. Part of this analysis involves examination of the other actors and processes that made the transformations possible, in addition to the role the carfree-streets events played. Because the recent physical changes in the City of San Francisco show parallels with the alternative ideas regarding urban form that are largely observed through the carfree-streets events. The analysis in this portion consists of content analysis of government programs, non-profit organizations, accounts of examples of physical changes, and social processes that influence these changes.

Because the research topic is posited both in social and spatial realms, the analysis of the carfree-streets events and their influence on urban processes and transformations relies on the use of an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. I refer to the public events as carfree-streets (CFS) events, because despite many differences (organizational, cultural, and tactical to name a few), the events allow people to take space away from automobiles and open streets to multiple uses and users. Thus, the events assume an underlying a need to make cities more inclusive and just. Two foundational theoretical concepts are employed in the analysis of the carfree-streets events and accounts of physical and social transformation: "counterspaces," (Lefebvre 1991) which is situated in the context of "right to the city" and recent "do-it-yourself urbanism" discussions, and "counterpublics," (Fraser 1992) which is derived from theories of the public sphere. Empirical evidence is provided to situate the analysis within these theoretical frameworks. Finally, I discuss the limits of the unique tactics employed in carfree-streets events as tools for advancing social and spatial justice.

My research is based on the following questions.

1. What are the problems associated with automobile-dependent urban form, according to participants of the CFS events?
2. What defines participants of CFS events as a counterpublic, and what motivates people to participate in CFS events?
3. What are the new meanings of "public space" produced during the events?
4. What are the ways in which CFS events relate to the power dynamics embedded in urban space? What are the implications of carfree-streets events for urban social and spatial justice?

The chapters are organized in the following order. *Chapter 2 Methodological and Theoretical Approaches* is divided into two portions: a literature review and data collection techniques. *Chapter 2.1 Literature Review* is also divided into two portions: *2.1.a* starts with an overview of automobility in the US and narrows down to a discussion of freeway revolts in San Francisco in order to contextualize local, grassroots reactions to automobility in the past. Freeway revolts signify a turning point in planning: the birth of livable city theories and a move towards participatory planning. Similarly, the carfree-streets events demonstrate multiple publics' demands for the right to the city, and more specifically, the right to "livable" urban streets. Thus, the literature review continues with the importance of "livable cities," focusing on social aspects

of urban form and alternative transportation, walkability and sense of community, and politics of parking spaces.

*Chapter 2.1.b Theoretical Framework.* Two theoretical concepts of "counterspaces" and "counterpublics" are employed in relation to discussions about right to the city and other relevant concepts such as *inhabitant*, *spatial appropriation*, *tactics and strategies*, *oeuvre*, and *DIY urbanism*. The right to the city framework highlights social and spatial injustices in urban processes; however, alone it does not provide an adequate theoretical explanation regarding processes and structures in which alternative discourses are distributed. The theories about the public sphere help explain the social transformation that happens alongside the physical as counterpublics appropriate urban public space and generate their counterspaces. Therefore, a theoretical framework that brings theories on counterpublics and counterspaces together contributes to the analysis of the carfree-streets events and transformations and the relationship between the two.

*Chapter 2.2 Data Collection Techniques.* The research relies on mixed-research methods. The events were analyzed with an ethnographic perspective in order to illustrate the events from their participants' point of view. The study involves participatory research conducted during 2010 involving observations and semi-structured open-ended interviews. The interviews were analyzed through transcription and coding. Additionally, archival material images and illustrations were analyzed in order to form a comprehensive understanding of carfree-streets events and their counterpublics, A content analysis of archival, online, and print materials and organizational websites was conducted in order to examine spatial and social changes in San Francisco.

*Part 1 Carfree-streets Events: Counterpublics and Temporary Counterspaces* is comprised of four chapters that are organized in chronological order. *Chapter 3* situates carfree-streets events in San Francisco in the historical context. It discusses two examples—the Great Bicycle Protest that happened in San Francisco in 1896 and the thousands of skaters that used to occupy San Francisco in the 1980s. The remaining chapters of *Part I* focus on a deeper analysis of the three contemporary carfree-streets events—Critical Mass, Park(ing) Day, and Sunday Streets. The chapters provide descriptions of the events, the counterpublics that comprise the events, their counterdiscourses about urban space, and the temporary counterspaces created by the events.

*Chapter 4 Critical Mass: Urban Streets as Playground* sets the tone for the rest of the dissertation by discussing the marginalization of bicyclists and pedestrians in the context of their access to streets, right to the city demands, and lifestyle politics. Since CM is the most insurgent of all the events in this research, the participants' right to the city demand is the most evident. Chapter 4.1 explains the reasons for which bicyclists and pedestrians are considered marginalized users (compared to motorists), specifically in terms of their access to the streets. Surveys of CM bicyclists demonstrate that this specific marginalized position does not always equate to marginalization in the common understanding (based on race, gender, or class). On the contrary, the survey results from the CM participants demonstrate that, for CM bicyclists, bicycling is a choice rather than an economic necessity. The history of the CM rides provides evidence regarding the ways in which a counterpublic concerned with greater access to streets was first formed. Further analysis of the CM rides demonstrates the common values and lifestyle choices that unite bicyclists as a counterpublic. The last section of the chapter compares recently

evolved bicycle rides with CM, showing that the same desire for greater access to streets for bicycle riding is not unique to CM bicyclists.

In *Chapter 5 Park(ing) Day: Fixing the City*, empirical evidence demonstrates that the event provides a great backdrop for residents of San Francisco to showcase what additional activities they desire to have on the streets. Park(ing) Day also provides opportunities for disagreeing groups to have face-to-face encounters about what uses are deemed more important for each group. The event is largely appreciated because of the social and casual interactions it provides, even though most Park(ing) spots are set up by organizations or business, rather than residents with no affiliation. The bicycling community is a prominent participant of the event, given that the DIY aspect of the event closely relates to the values of the bicycling community—fixing the city is an extension of such DIY activities as fixing bicycles. An art collective, Rebar, comprised of people who are professionals in fields of landscape architecture, biochemistry, law, and the arts, made Park(ing) Day possible by initiating the first Park(ing) spot. Thus, even though the event is public, and it encourages anyone to set up park(ing) spots, Park(ing) Day was founded by a particularly well-educated sector of society, and the event runs because of the City's support.

*Chapter 6 Sunday Streets: City Cracked-open* discusses Sunday Streets events. While CM rides stand out for their insurgent publics and bicyclists, Sunday Streets events accommodate a much broader public. Pedestrians, families, elderly, and children are some of the publics that crowd the monthly events in addition to the large number of bicyclists. Participants' narratives about the events emphasize experiencing a sense of community in these events vs. a sense of minority in their everyday lives. One obvious explanation for this feeling is the presence of a diversity of people during the events—people who are not as visible outside of the event since vehicles occupy the streetscape. The event is not an insurgent appropriation of streets from motor traffic, since it is made possible by contributions of the City's agencies in addition to those of non-profits. Similarly to Park(ing) Day, the event stands out as a strategy used by these relatively powerful organizers in order to temporarily eliminate motor-vehicle traffic and to provide such carfree-streets experiences in part to make future permanent changes easier.

In *Part 2 Towards Real Counterspaces, Chapter 7 Social and Physical Transformation of San Francisco* demonstrates indicators of social and physical change towards more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly urban spaces. Examples come from the City's new programs, the growing power of membership-based organizations, and the actual physical changes that have been happening in the last 20 years. This chapter also discusses the ways in which the City is taking advantage of residents' willingness to transform urban space by developing programs that encourage residents and other entities in the private sector to finance and construct extra public spaces.

*Chapter 8 Analysis and Discussion* discusses and compares temporary counterspaces created by the events and carfree-streets counterpublics' alternative discourses on urban planning. The chapter compares the events' characteristics (insurgent vs. institutional), tactics, and strategies. Finally, the chapter questions whether outsourcing the construction of new public spaces and institutionalizing DIY urbanism is part of a neoliberal approach in governing the city. Part of the chapter discusses just how far the carfree-streets events can go toward achieving spatial justice.

This research is significant both empirically and theoretically. Understanding the spatial needs of those who do not have access to streets is a challenging research endeavor because such groups are not readily accessible. The CFS events, however, provide visibility to non-drivers and make them available as research subjects. Given that streets are collectively the largest public spaces in cities, yet most of the streetscape is occupied by automobiles, part of the significance of this research lies in exposing the plurality of publics' right to the city demands and the importance of access to urban streets from the perspective of these publics. Moreover, this research reveals the complexities of spatial justice and introduces a counterpublic that is overlooked. With their unique tactical characteristics, the CFS events present possibilities for non-motorists to subvert the automobile's hegemony. Appropriating streets allows them to enact the spaces that accommodate their needs, values, and lifestyles. In regards to this project's theoretical contribution, employing the concept of counterspaces together with the theories of counterpublics and the public sphere helps reveal both social and spatial aspects of marginalized populations' role in the production of public space through the unique CFS events. Analysis of these events and their influence on urban form brings a nuanced understanding to the meaning of public space, livable streets, social and spatial justice, and right to the city, while providing a critical look at the effectiveness of such citizen-based activities in achieving their spatial justice goals.

# CHAPTER 2  METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

This chapter explains the theoretical and methodological approaches to the research. It is divided into two portions: literature review and data collection techniques. The first portion of the literature review presents the history of urban planning in regards to automobility. That is followed by an account of freeway revolts in San Francisco and the birth of livable city theories. A further review of livable city theories is presented through a discussion of social aspects of urban form and alternative transportation, walkability and sense of community, and politics of parking spaces. The second portion of the literature review explains theoretical concepts employed in the research borrowed from social and spatial studies. First, a discussion on production of urban space, the right to the city, and theories on the public sphere is presented, with a focus on theoretical concepts of "counterspaces" and "counterpublics." A review of literature on appropriated urban spaces concludes the literature review. The section on data collection techniques provides details on the mixed methods used in the research, ranging from interviews, observations, and archival, visual and content analysis.

## 2.1  Literature Review

### a.  Freeway revolts and livable cities

As early as the 1920s, traffic jams became a common problem in the inner cities and presented a danger to pedestrians and bicyclists. Dennis (2008, 126) quotes Foster's account of the changing experience of street life in the 1910s:  "In the streets of the city [Margaret Schlegel] noted for the first time the architecture of hurry, and heard the language of hurry on the mouths of its inhabitants—clipped words, formless sentences, potted expressions of approval or disgust."

Le Corbusier's Radiant City planted the first seeds of modern urban planning. Modern urban planning, with its characteristic qualities of clean lines, efficiency, top-down planning, and use of technology, was the complete opposite of what traditional European city centers had to offer with their small plazas, ornate surfaces, human scale, and organically developed street patterns. Designing streets to accommodate the rapid flow of automobiles became one of the primary goals of planners. Le Corbusier conceptualized new streets as a "machine for traffic" and the city as "a factory for producing traffic" (Berman 1982, 167). As automobiles and housing became more affordable, more people moved to the suburbs, leaving urban downtowns deprived of economic activity and creating social segregation based on race and income. Federal highway acts of 1947 and 1956 cut through cities and destroyed the social and physical fabric of close-knit neighborhoods. Robert Moses's transformation of New York was the most notable example. Prominent anti-automobile activist and urbanist Jane Jacobs (1961) argued that cars are a symptom, but the problem is loss of public life and the worldviews that transform public space.

Edwards (2003) argues that automobility is one of the technological systems that co-construct modern society across the globe. Like other similar technologies, such as railroads, electric

lighting, and the Internet, it has become such an essential part of our lives that we do not notice it; yet, we depend on automobility extensively (Edwards 2003.) Urry (2004) argues that the system of automobility is more culturally dominating in character than the media or use of personal computers. A combination of factors makes automobility global and irrevocable: the powerful oil and automotive industries, urban planning, related industries that support and depend on automobiles, people's emotional ties to their vehicles, and cultural and behavioral dependency. Thus, despite obvious global problems such as the oil crisis, air pollution, and climate change, we continue to live an automobile-dependent life (Ladd 2008). The enduring influences of automobility are perhaps most obvious in the reorganization of physical landscapes. Jacobs contended that modern urban planning indicates that the purpose of life has become to produce and consume automobiles (Ladd 2008).

Across the nation freeway revolts were one of the milestones of grassroots reaction. The San Francisco Bay Area in California has been a very progressive region that has seen a fair share of civil rights movements, antiwar protests, environmental conservation, and historic preservation movements. San Francisco is also a city among many across the nation where freeway revolts took place. Since the 1950s, residents of San Francisco have formed "cross-city and cross-class alliances" (Mohl 2005, 687) and persuaded the city's board of supervisors to vote against seven out of 10 freeway proposals (Faigin 2006).

Faster and easier transportation has connected cities to further distances, making the transportation of goods and people possible. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 provided 90% of the financing for a national highway system that connected major cities all across the country (Ladd 2008). Like Haussmann did in Paris in the 18th century, Robert Moses opened up new arteries connecting Manhattan with its surrounding boroughs and extending the city's limits. New roads, highways, and bridges all signified modernity and progress and allowed the transportation of goods and people at much faster speeds and in greater amounts. Progress was aimed at the greater good but did little good for established communities that were located on new highway paths. Highway projects cut through cities, destroying 19th century houses without paying any attention to neighborhoods that were vital public spaces for the communities that had lived there for a long time. New York was a prominent case that showed the ways in which modernist and functionalist ideas implemented by the authorities, through top-down planning, neglected the city's existing social and physical fabric.

The influence of modern urban forms and subtle social engineering projects did not always go unnoticed. Those same streets that were under risk of being eliminated from the memory of the city usually served as spaces of contestation, resistance, and community formation for communicating to authorities what was important for the residents of the city. Many highway projects targeted poor and minority neighborhoods. Freeway revolts took place in many cities including New York, Toronto, Melbourne, and Frankfurt (Ladd 2008).

The first and longest highway battles took place in San Francisco between 1955 and 1966, and they inspired other cities with similar problems. Neighborhood associations, city boards of supervisors, newspapers, the political elite, and environmental groups allied against city planners, state governments, suburban commuters, and central business district interests who were proponents of growth and development in the city in the age of the automobile. Compared to other cities, highway revolts in San Francisco were primarily a middle-class grassroots

opposition, rather than an ethnic and minority problem (Ladd 2008). Highway engineers conceived congestion as a traffic problem that could only be solved by adding more and limited-access roads. Opposed to that viewpoint, citizen groups in San Francisco raised aesthetic, environmental, and historic preservation issues that were not part of city planners' and highway engineers' agendas in those days (Issel 1999). These oppositions emerged partly from the "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) attitude that is not independent from the desire to preserve property values (Ladd 2008, 117). As Issel (1999, 617) argues, "local control over land use decisions represented absolute values, not susceptible to bargaining or compromise, to growing numbers of Americans during this period." An important factor that paved the way for oppositional groups' success was local governments' power to veto road closures that were necessary for highway constructions, a factor that other cities did not have (Ladd 2008.) After long campaigns and the support of newspapers, residents of San Francisco managed to protect Golden Gate Park from being sliced by a freeway, as well as cancel other highway plans in the city, defend mass transit as an alternative to freeways, and expand urban outdoor recreational space. The residents argued that functioning urban spaces and the unique character of San Francisco and its ecologies could not be sacrificed for the sake of growth and redevelopment.
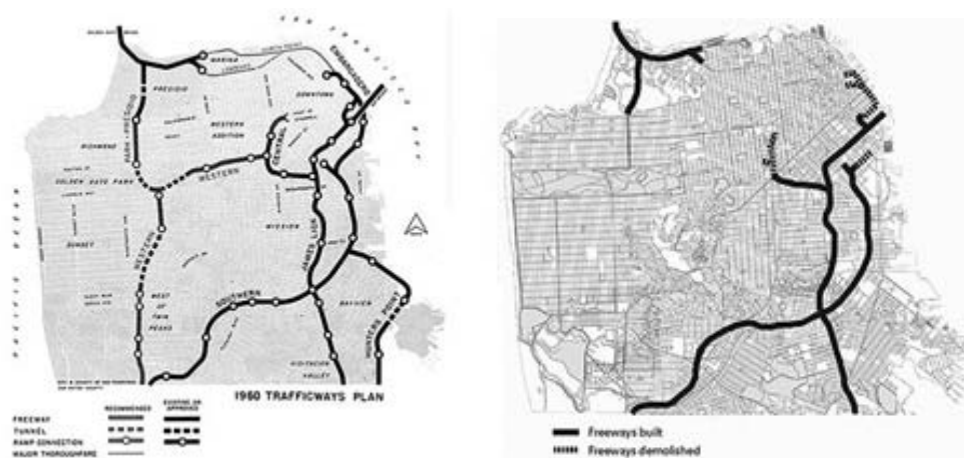


Figure 2.1 Freeway plan in 1960 for San Francisco (left) vs. actually built and demolished portions of the planned freeways (source: http://sf.streetsblog.org).

After the revolts, on January 27, 1959, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted against seven out of 10 routes (Faigin 2006): "The routes opposed included the unconstructed portion of the Embarcadero/Golden Gate Freeway (Route 480) (from The Embarcadero to the Golden Gate Bridge), the entire Serra and Park Presidio Freeways (proposed I-280), the entire Western Freeway (extension of I-80), the Central Freeway (from Turk Street to the Golden Gate Freeway [Route 480]), the enter Crosstown Freeway, and the Mission Freeway (from 13th Street to the connection with the Southern Freeway)." According to Johnson (2010), one of the direct victories of the freeway revolts was that the funding was secured for the Bay Area Rapid Transportation.

Freeway revolts are an example of San Francisco communities' counter-culture, activist spirit, and civic participation. The San Francisco Bay Area is famous for other social movements as well, including civil rights and free-speech movements and environmental activism. Stemming

8

from this social and cultural background, carfree-streets (CFS) events shed light on urban rights issues that intersect environmental worldviews, healthy lifestyles, and demands for urban rights and social justice.

Freeway revolts were part of the transition from modern to post-modern planning and the birth of livable-city ideas in the United States. Jane Jacobs, journalist, social commentator, and Greenwich Village resident, criticized Moses's renewal projects in New York in her influential book titled *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961.

Jacobs's critique came from the point of view of an observer and a resident who did not have an education in urban planning, but she was highly knowledgeable about the social life that was contained in the crowded streets of the city. She observed that social networks, economic opportunities, and safety provided by neighbors watching out for each other were possibilities that only mixed-use, high-density, walkable old neighborhoods could provide. Jacobs was also influential in organizing communities to speak up against the destruction of their neighborhoods and rooted lives. In the 1950s such debates were only beginning to heat up, but in the 1960s, communities such as Greenwich Village in New York revolted strongly against highway constructions that were ordained to pass through their neighborhoods, just as the San Franciscans had already done.

Creating livable cities became a focus for researchers, architects, and planners, as well as nonprofit groups such as Project for Public Spaces and Livable City. Jane Jacobs, Allan Jacobs, Jan Gehl, William H. White, Donald Appleyard, and Kevin Lynch were among those who defined the field. In the early 1990s, Congress for the New Urbanism revived the same foundational design and planning elements under a set of design guidelines such as transit-oriented development, smart growth, and regional cities.

Walkability, mixed use, compact urban from, inviting public spaces, multi-modal street design, and design for various populations were among the characteristic design principles of livable city ideas. Appleyard, Gerson, and Lintell's famous study on the streets of San Francisco demonstrated that heavy traffic disturbs social relations between neighbors. The livability principles promoted multi-modal/complete streets. One of the great street design examples, "Woonerf" (also known as Dutch streets), combines various activities such as walking, bicycling, vehicle traffic, and play by incorporating traffic-calming strategies. It exemplifies how streets can serve as public spaces and not just as spaces for transportation.

As the automobile became the primary means of transportation for the masses, the public space qualities of the streets diminished. More often than not, social and spatial justice and right to the city are defined on the basis of race, gender, and class. One of the arguments in the research is that publics who demand better access to streets are marginalized in terms of their access to streets, even though they are not marginalized in the usual sense that marginalization is discussed—that is, along the lines of race, gender, and class. As discussed in Chapter 4.1, bicyclists especially stand out, given that some of them actively make claims to streets and alternative transportation during events such as Critical Mass (CM). Access to streets problematizes the realm of spatial justice and the right to the city in the context of the freedom to choose alternative transportation, the right to clean air, the right to public space, and the ability to be physically active in urban public space. The rest of this section explains significance of

livable cities from the perspective of alternative transportation, walkability and sense of community, and the politics of on-street parking spaces.

### i.   *Alternative transportation*

Living among a network of motorways and having to drive everywhere is taken as an absolute way of living in most cities in the United States. Many people live in cities and suburbs built for the efficient transportation of motor vehicles, where bicyclists' and pedestrians' needs are only secondary. Critical geographers argue that space matters and reflects social inequalities. The lack of infrastructure for alternative mobility perpetuates already existing social inequalities. Soja's (2010) account of the Bus Riders Union's successful lawsuit against the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority in the 1990s is one such example in which the lack of alternative transportation is recognized as discrimination even in the legal arena.

More than 30 million Americans either cannot drive (because of economic restrictions, age, or disability) or choose not to drive (Gotschi and Mills 2008). According to San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) report in 2008 in San Francisco, approximately one-third of respondents reported that they bicycle because of its low cost compared to driving or mass transit (SFMTA 2008).

The health benefits of physical activity that can be gained through walking and bicycling are countless. Some ethnicities, as well as older and younger populations, are more vulnerable than others to the effects of a sedentary lifestyle. Obesity, an increasing health problem in the US is a case in point.[1] Obesity, a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, certain types of cancer, and Type 2 diabetes, has been dramatically increasing for the last 20 years in the US (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011). Living in automobile-dependent physical settings decreases the likelihood of physical activity and increases the risks of such health problems. Bicycling and walking are among the most cost-effective solutions for disease prevention. A number of studies show that even a slight increase in daily bicycling and walking can decrease a number of diseases (Oja, Vuori, and Paronen 1998; United States Surgeon General 1996). Short trips of three miles or less, which account for about 72% of all automobile trips taken in the US, could be replaced with walking and bicycling (US Department of Transportation 2010), thus contributing to overall improvement in the health of vulnerable populations.

Pucher and Buehler (2010, 10) argue that traffic danger is a significant deterrent, especially for women, children, and the elderly, and they "strongly prefer separate facilities that give them more protection from motor vehicle traffic." When bicycling does not feel safe, such groups may not even consider taking up bicycling. San Francisco is a case in point where this is a reality.

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[1] According to data analyzed over a three-year period, when compared with non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks had a 51% and Hispanics had a 21% greater prevalence of obesity (Pan et al. 2009). Furthermore, approximately 12.5 million American children and adolescents are obese (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011).

The demographics of San Francisco bicyclists do not reflect the demographics of the city. Forty-nine percent of San Francisco's population is male, and 50 percent is female (Bay Area Census 2010). While among bicyclists people from all ages, races, and genders are found, the majority of frequent bicyclists in San Francisco are men (72%), Caucasian (70%), and between the ages of 26 and 35; only 23 percent of frequent cyclists are women (SFMTA 2008). Asians make up 32 percent of the city's population, but only 12 percent of frequent cyclists. The same applies to African Americans (7% vs. 2%) and to Hispanics (14% vs. 10%) (Table 1). Among several deterrents to bicycling, between 71 and 79 percent of respondents state that they are not comfortable sharing the road with cars, and between 75 and 80 percent state that there are not enough bike lanes (SFMTA 2008). According to Pucher and Buehler's (2008) report, in countries with extensive cycling facilities (such as the Netherlands), cycling is fairly evenly distributed among age and gender groups.

|  | % of overall San Francisco population | % of frequent bicyclists in San Francisco |
|---|---|---|
| Men | 49[2] | 72 |
| Women | 50[2] | 23 |
| Caucasian | 53 | 70 |
| Asian | 32 | 12 |
| African American | 7 | 2 |
| Hispanics | 14 | 10 |

Table 1. Percentage of San Francisco's population compared with the percentage of bicyclists in San Francisco (derived from San Francisco Municipal Transportation, 2008 and Bay Area Census 2010 website).

Equal access to alternative transportation and to urban amenities across different age, gender, and ethnic groups is an important means of achieving social justice. Despite robust evidence demonstrating the social, monetary, environmental, and public health benefits of bicycling and walking, and in spite of the fact that bicycle and pedestrian transportation comprises 12 percent of all trips, only two percent of federal transportation funds were spent on pedestrians and bicyclists in 2009 (United States Department of Transportation 2010). This disproportionate allocation of federal transportation money suggests the low priority given to populations that need or choose alternative transportation.

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[2]These figures are based on the 2010 Bay Area Census website.

Robert Putnam (2000) in *Bowling Alone* stresses the role of informal social connections in social capital and the civic life of a society. Despite the fact that informal social connections do not necessarily lead to formal participation in civic life, such as by belonging to unions, political parties, and community organizations, such connections as getting together with friends over dinner and going to bars and concerts play a significant role in sustaining social capital (Putnam 2000).

According to surveys conducted between 1986 and 1990, twice as many Americans participated in informal social gatherings than in formal/civic meetings (Putnam 2000). However, Putnam (2000, 93-115) observes a general decline in informal connections based on the following indicators: between 1970 and the 1990s, the number of times Americans entertained friends at home declined 45 percent. Dining out with friends has increased, but very little. Only 34 percent of families say the whole family "definitely" eats dinner together, compared to 50 percent two decades before. Outings to bars and nightclubs "declined by about 40-50 percent over the last decade or two … Between 1970 and 1998 the number of full-service restaurants per one hundred thousand population fell by one-quarter, and the numbers of bars and luncheonettes were cut in half." Between 1981 and 1999, the frequency of card-playing per year dropped about 50 percent, taking with it opportunities for neighbors to discuss informally and face-to-face community matters currently on the table. The frequency of neighbors visiting each other fell by about one-third between 1974 and 1998, both for singles and married people. All these trends presented by Putnam (2000) demonstrate that there is less face-to-face interaction in American society today as compared to earlier decades.[3]

In addition to the countless benefits of walking for physiological and psychological health, scholars also discuss the link between walking, characteristics of built environments that foster walking, and social capital and sense of community. Hanibuchi et al. (2012) argue that in the context of a single region in Japan, variables such as the date of community settlement and degree of urbanization at the geographical context are more strongly associated with social capital than built-environment characteristics that make neighborhoods more walkable. Contrary to the findings of Hanibuchi et al., several scholars report that neighborhoods with higher walkability do play a role in an increased sense of community and social capital. Such research is based on self-reported walkability and objective measures of the built environment that indicate walkability, such as mixed land use, street connectivity, residential density, and commercial floor area ratio. Studies point to different indicators of a built environment's walkability as being effective on increasing sense of community. For instance, Wood, Frank and Giles-Corti (2010) surveyed 609 participants in a commercial area in Atlanta and concluded that walkability and sense of community are higher in neighborhoods with lower levels of land use mix and higher

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[3] Possibilities provided by the Internet and social media to form social capital have proven to be powerful against governments in Arab countries. However, at the end of the day, those publics' success depends on their access to public spaces of the city.

levels of commercial floor area ratio.[4] Lund (2002) found that compared to a suburb, residents in a traditional neighborhood (characterized with mixed densities and connected streets) report a higher psychological sense of community. Lund's study showed that an individual's subjective view of the pedestrian environment (whether it provides opportunities for social interaction and a safe and interesting walking environment) has the strongest influence on sense of community. A common concern, residents' neighborhood self-selection bias, was controlled and found not to have an effect in Lund's study.

The studies referenced above demonstrate that built environment variables and urban design are important factors in inhibiting or promoting walking. However, research on the role of automobile traffic as a determinant of to what extent people will be out on the streets requires further investigation. Moreover, most of the research on the relationship between walkability and sense of community relies on statistical analysis of surveys with hundreds or thousands of residents, but the residents' point of view from an ethnographic perspective is rarely presented, thus the experiential component is missed.

Only a handful of studies focus on the influence of traffic on walking and sense of community. Appleyard, Gerson, and Lintell's (1981) well-known study demonstrates that in San Francisco, neighbors who live on opposite sides of a street with lighter traffic have stronger social relations than those who live across from each other on streets with heavier traffic. Studies in Bristol, UK and New York, US support Appleyard et.al.'s research and show that independent of social and cultural differences, traffic deteriorates social relationships (Hart n.d.; Transportation Alternatives 2006). These studies demonstrate that in comparison to residents of medium and high-traffic streets, residents of streets with less traffic know more people in their neighborhood; define a broader geographical area as their home territory; report three times the number of sports gatherings; spend more time shopping, walking, and being with their children; hold more positive views of their block; and are less frequently interrupted during sleeping (Hart n.d.) Besides traffic, parking is also a factor that influences walking. Wood, Frank, and Giles-Corti (2010) argue that having less surface area dedicated to parking in commercial areas may potentially increase the sense of community, but the authors also add that further research is needed to validate such a finding.

### iii.    Politics of Parking Spaces

Parking spaces are at the heart of spatial politics of urban spaces. Parking spaces are leasable land and a valuable commodity in dense cities. Some residents even rent out their parking spaces for extra money. For instance, on an online parking marketplace, www.parkatmyhouse.com, a private driveway on Bernal Heights in San Francisco is listed for $120 per week. They generate revenue, but their real cost is hidden. Minimum off-street parking space requirements for new

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[4] A higher floor area ratio (FAR) indicates less surface parking and places where shops and services are likely to be close to the sidewalk, and a lower FAR indicates larger areas devoted to parking, with the establishments often set further back, often with a parking lot at the front.

housing redevelopments increase housing cost by more than 10% in San Francisco, according to Jia and Wachs (1999). Thus, excessive parking is a concern in regards to provision of affordable housing (Henderson 2009). Easily available parking space reinforces social segregation for lower income people by increasing housing price.

On-street parking too generates great revenue. Ferguson (2005) estimates that in commercial areas, parking lots comprise about 60% of the built cover. There are a total of 448,000 parking spaces in San Francisco; 281,700 of them are on-street parking places, and 29,103 of the total number are metered parking spaces, according to 2011 counts (SFMTA 2011). Parking meters generated $40,520,486 for the city of San Francisco in the 2010-2011 fiscal year (SFMTA 2011). Parking permits add $9,040,407, and parking tickets add $86,306,584 to the total revenue (SFMTA 2011).

On-street parking spaces are public spaces, just like the rest of the street. In most streets, automobiles are prioritized, and to accommodate enough parking and vehicle lanes, sidewalk widths are kept at the minimum standards adequate for traveling by foot, but for no other activities, leaving little space for informal interactions and for people who choose to walk and bicycle.

Shoup (2005) argues the availability of parking creates a cycle of automobile dependency and reduces mobility by proximity. More parking makes driving easier and encourages lower densities. Lower densities increase the demand for driving. At the end of the day, easily available parking space limits bicyclists' and pedestrians' access to the city (Shoup 2005).

A considerable portion of San Francisco's population does not own an automobile. In San Francisco County there are 0.58 automobiles per capita according to a SFMTA (2011) report. Only 43.9 percent of workers commuted to work by driving (36.0%) and carpooling (7.9%), and these numbers were lower by 4.5 and 2.9 percentage points respectively compared to 2000 data (SFMTA 2011).

According to Klipp (2004, 15), "household owners are more likely to own vehicles than renters." Only 11.1 percent of owner-occupied households do not own a vehicle, compared to 38 percent of renter-occupied households (Klipp 2004). Likewise, the percentage of vehicles per household is 155 percent in owner-occupied houses and 87 percent in renter-occupied households (Klipp 2004). Furthermore, renter-occupied housing units in San Francisco make up about two-thirds of the total housing units, while owner-occupied housing units make up the remaining third (212,884 and 123,128 units respectively) (SFMTA 2011). These figures may indicate that a large percentage of people in San Francisco may not care greatly about the availability of parking space on their streets.

Besides the importance of access to streets in terms of alternative transportation and as public spaces, the revival of concern for the environment influences the ways in which residents want their cities to be governed and designed, and this adds another dimension to residents' right to the city demands. San Francisco is one of the leaders of this trend. According to the Public Policy Institute of California's website 2011 statewide survey about environmental opinions, San Francisco Bay Area residents think that personal vehicle emissions contribute the most (by 29%) to air pollution in their region, and 51 percent of residents of the San Francisco Bay Area report

cutting back on driving (the rate was even higher in other cities in California). With hikes in gas prices, most Californians (59%) report "cutting back significantly on driving, a change that is far more common among lower-income Californians (68%) than among upper-income residents (47%); 61 percent of Californians think that the effects of global warming have already begun," and nationwide 49 percent of people hold the same view. The percentage of Californians who think the state should take action on global warming right away (instead of waiting for the economy to get better) increased from 48 percent in 2009 to 58 percent in 2011.

Streets are collectively the largest public spaces in cities. However, most of the streetscape is devoted to automobiles. Eliminating different publics' ability to use streets for a variety of activities also means taking away people's right to choose alternative transportation, engage in physical activity and casual and spontaneous social interactions, and have access to green space (thus both to clean environments and more public space). Given these potential alternative uses of streets, streets are both the venue and the object of urban social tensions, spatial justice, and the right to the city during carfree-streets events.

### b. Theoretical framework

#### i. *Marginalized publics' role in the production of urban space*

Carfree-streets events are marginalized populations' attempts to gain and demand better access to urban streets. Even the ancient Greek city, a place in which democracy was conceptualized and practiced, wasn't exempt from social injustice and the marginalization of parts of its population, such as women and slaves. The carfree-streets events demonstrate that there are multiple publics making demands on transforming streets to more livable, green, walkable, and bikeable places. Despite the differences among these publics, their demands on the street are similar—they basically all want better access to the streets for a greater variety of publics and activities. When there is already an existing infrastructure of streets, restricting its availability to a single public—motorists—and to a single use is not different from the ways that African Americans, women, and the homeless have been discriminated against and isolated from the public and public space.

Urban space, social justice, and marginalized populations' right to the city have been concepts occupying scholars from philosophy, sociology, geography, and urban studies. Carfree-streets events are situated at the intersection of these theories. I will review theoretical literature on the different ways in which scholars theorized the production of space and marginalized populations' role in the social and spatial processes that shape urban form.

Henri Lefebvre (1991) conceptualizes space outside of its geographical meaning. He argues that space is a social entity; it is socially produced and reproduces the society. He outlines three distinct kinds of spaces: (1) spatial practice (perceived spaces, locations); (2) representations of space (conceived space such as architects' and planners' drawings, plans); and (3) representational space (lived space, characterized by symbolic spaces and culture).

Social tensions and power relations exist between these three spaces. Lefebvre (1991, 26) states, "space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action: that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power." However,

the power dynamics are not always fixed. Distinguishing contingencies of three kinds of spaces also opens up possibilities for insurgency and means to subvert hegemony. Lefebvre (1991, 349) argues that space contains potentialities for its counterspaces:

> [space] contains potentialities—of works and of reappropriation—existing to begin within the artistic sphere but responding above all to the demands of a body 'transported' outside itself in space, a body which by putting up resistance inaugurates the project of a different space (either the space of a counter-culture, or a counter-space in the sense of an initially utopian alternative to actually existing 'real' space).

Several scholars, most notably Henri Lefebvre, Michel De Certeau, David Harvey, and Don Mitchell talk about power dynamics that exist in and are mediated through urban space. Thus, the call for "the right to the city" that was first proposed by Lefebvre is a recurring argument by many who write about social and spatial justice.

Harvey's approach to "the right to the city" is that it is a right that can be obtained only under the condition of overturning the political and economic system of capitalist production and "gaining greater control over the uses of the surplus" (2008). Harvey defines processes of urbanization as accumulation of surplus that is constantly absorbed in urban regeneration as "fixed capital." He (2008, 15) adds that "The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies, and aesthetic values we desire." Harvey refers to "production of surplus" and "processes of urbanization" almost as interchangeable notions and argues that urbanism is an instrument of producing surplus and maintaining the status quo of powerful groups. Harvey (2006) notes that current implications of capitalism have resulted in socially uneven geographies globally, while displacing the poor and even the middle class and taking their right to the city away from them.

The core of the social inequalities, according to Harvey, is the undemocratic nature of economic and political systems. Harvey argues (2006, 64-68) that activist social and political movements (such as anti-IMF, WTO, neoliberalism, etc.) are still class struggles (though different than proletariat struggles). Only fighting against the inequalities created by the current political and economic system and its undemocratic nature, he argues, would open the doors to democratic control of production of surplus and eventually give people back their right to the city. According to Harvey, the solution to social inequalities lies in replacing capitalist production, which can be achieved by anti-capitalist class struggles.

Lefebvre (2003, 15) conceptualizes the processes of industrial urbanization as being above any economic structure, while still referring to them as a mode of production. Lefebvre too argues for democratizing the processes of production of urban space as a means of gaining the right to the city. However, he (2003, 147) adds in the need for creation of *oeuvre,* a concept that incorporates art, creativity, play, and social praxis. He (1970, 167) states that both capitalist and socialist societies faced the same problem of reducing urban development to growth. According to Lefebvre, pre-industrial cities were characterized by *oeuvre* (use values), as opposed to urban *products* (exchange values) that characterized the industrial cities.

Lefebvre argues that the transformation from pre-industrial to industrialized society created apolitical urban dwellers, and, as a result, urban consciousness that once was present in the medieval cities was lost. Lefebvre, in search of an all-encompassing solution to different kinds of production and governance systems, argues that revolution essentially lies in regaining urban consciousness and becoming political members of urban space. Lefebvre (1996, 76) explains urban consciousness by referring to differences between *habit* and *inhabit*: *to inhabit* is "to take part in a social life, a community, village, or city." It is an urban quality, and it is about the social and political nature of being an urban citizen. Following Lefebvre's line of thinking, those who produce urban space and those who have access are the same. He argues for a different kind of urbanization, social practice, and urban society—an urban democracy (2003).

According to Lefebvre, urbanity was lost as the ruling class expelled the proletariat from the urban center because urban democracy risked the privileges of the ruling class (1996, 76). He (1996, 77) adds that suburbanization, just like the rhetoric about a return to nature (garden cities are an example), was a class strategy of decentering the city, thereby destroying urban life and eradicating urban consciousness (one that focuses on ideological and political problems surrounding production). Lefebvre's conception of the right to the city' thus explains right to participate in the political, social, and physical matters of the city, and only urban concentrations can provide the necessary synergy for the creation of political citizens, oeuvre, art, social praxis, and play—elements that capitalist cities ignore.

Mitchell (2003) specifically situates "cry and demand to the right to the city" in taking control of public space by exercising one's right to gather, speak, protest, and sleep in public spaces. It is the only way that "a space for representation" can be created, according to him (2003, 33). He (2003, 50) states that the right to the city "is dependent upon public space;" and it should be gained through practice and actively taking that right (2003, 6-11). He argues that public spaces are venues of constant struggle for the right to the city in order to achieve social justice. However, although these are very important rights, by focusing on gaining control of public space for mundane needs (eat, sleep, urinate) and the right to assembly and protest (both as means of political representation), Mitchell undermines other possibilities for participating in the production of urban space.

De Certeau (1984) also informs arguments around the right to the city by turning attention to everyday practices. He argues that despite the hegemony, discipline, and spatial control exercised by the powerful, subordinated users are in fact not passive. He (1984, xv) states that they regularly engage in everyday practices that allow them to operate in the disciplined environment and "compose the network of an antidiscipline." He (1984) conceptualizes everyday practices as interplay between strategies (in the military sense of the word) of the powerful and tactics of the subordinated. Thus, according to him, urban spaces are outcomes of strategies of institutions and the state, as well as places in which tactics take place.

De Certeau (1984, 97) states that "the act of walking is to the urban system as what the speech act is to language or to statements uttered." Walking in the city allows reinvention of the city in a new and different way than it was envisioned, similar to how speech is used to appropriate language. However, even though de Certeau gives agency to users to manipulate spaces, he (1984, 29) adds that tactics "remain dependent upon the possibilities offered by circumstances." Strategies have mastery over time because they are place-based actions; however, tactics are

limited to times in which opportunities exist. Thus, tactics do not have not long-term effects on subverting the hegemony of the powerful. For instance, stenciling "driving" below traffic signs that read "stop," thus making the signs read "stop driving," may be considered as a tactic and expression of cultural identity; however, a movement like Critical Mass—one that rather than waiting for opportunities, creates opportunities for appropriation—offers more than what tactics can offer to marginalized populations in their participation in the production of urban space. Having said that, tactical reappropriations of everyday life that serve as a means of negotiating the meaning of urban space have nonverbal communication qualities, just like carfree-streets events, which contribute to the effectiveness of appropriations in the realm of constituting the public sphere.

Lefebvre argues that inhabiting citizens who democratically participate in producing cities and societies as *oeuvres* provide an antithesis to industrial, consumerist urban spaces and societies. According to Crawford (2011, 34), Lefevbre emphasizes "the need to freely project alternative possibilities." Harvey argues that anti-capitalist struggles are the solution to the production of socially unjust landscapes. Mitchell focuses on access to public space as a problem of the right to the city but does not enter into discussion of broader issues related to the production of urban spaces. So far, the theories reviewed above explain ways of responding to urban problems and demanding the right to the city within the spatial framework. Democracy and participation in decision-making cannot exist without a component of communication between opposing and dominating actors (mainstream and counter), authorities (state and local governments), and experts (planners, architects, and designers). Thus, employing a theoretical framework that addresses the formation of the public sphere is necessary in order to explain the communicative aspect of spatial reappropriations.

Theories on the public sphere introduce a different realm to where social resistance happens, the realm of discursive interactions: "political participation is enacted through medium of talk" (Fraser 1992, 110). The notion of the public sphere refers to an idealized democratic model in which a civil society produces and circulates public discourses that are outside of market relations and "can in principle be critical of the state" (Fraser 1992, 111). The public sphere is thus distinct both from economic relations and state affairs and stands in between the two. Habermas's (1989) articulation outlines the 18th century public sphere, one that was dominated by the bourgeoisie men who discussed public matters in public spaces such as coffee shops and libraries. Fraser notes (1992) that such an approach to the theory of the public sphere undermines the multiplicity of opinions, and she points out that women and blacks, as marginalized members of society, were excluded from this conception of the public sphere.

According to Fraser (1992), the public sphere needs to be understood as comprised of multiple and competing publics, with different interests that shape the public sphere. Fraser (1992) identifies these marginalized groups as *counterpublics* and states that *subaltern counterpublics*, such as women, people of color, and gays and lesbians, circulate alternative discourses in order to strengthen their collective identities and formulate their interests and needs. Fraser (1992) argues that open communication among dominant and subordinated publics is essential in creating an understanding of an ideal public sphere and democratic politics. Young (1990, 240), similarly argues that "social justice in the city requires the realization of a politics of difference" and the representation of differences, as opposed to conceptualizing the general public as homogenous.

Bicyclists on Critical Mass (CM) rides and participants of carfree-streets events such as Sunday Streets and Park(ing) Day, by showing, appropriating, and demanding alternative urban possibilities, formulate their discourses on the lack of access to streets within the public sphere. These grassroots counterpositions on the use and design of streets and automobile-dependent urban form make them a counterpublic in the public sphere on urban form and production.

Fraser's approach to the theory of the public sphere helps explain the ways in which these counterpublics' spatial appropriations communicate their needs for alternative uses of streets and the right to the city demands to the mainstream publics and local governments. I would like to note that as much as the public sphere defines a public discourse vis a vis the state, I think discourse formations that take place between mainstream publics and subordinated counterpublics are equally important especially for the purposes of this research.

Moreover, the division between mainstream and marginalized does not always reflect a difference along the lines of gender, income, class, or race. Automobility was to a certain extent inserted into people's daily lives from the top down, but buying an automobile has also been an independent choice that many people have exercised. Both lower and middle income groups may be dependent on driving because of lack of access to good public transportation, and again, people from both groups may prefer driving over other modes because of convenience or prestige. Similarly, those who prefer to save money on gas, and even on the cost of public transportation when possible, or choose alternative modes of transportation for lifestyle-based reasons may be students, as well as middle class. (The issue of the identification of mainstream and marginalized publics gets even more complicated in the case of bicyclists, since in the US they are mostly part of the male middle class. I discuss these issues further in Chapter 4.1 in the context of San Francisco bicyclists. Organizers of Park(ing) Day and Sunday Streets events are not typically considered a marginalized section of society either) Thus, carfree-streets events demonstrate a situation where more of a gap exists between mainstream and subordinated counterpublics separated along their lifestyle choices and their access to streets. Rather than seeing demands for the right to have access to streets as a conflict between a homogeneous public and the state, one also needs to acknowledge the differences that exist between mainstream and marginalized publics.

While text-based (visual or audio) discourses are common, grassroots carfree-streets events distribute their counterdiscourses in public spaces mainly through reappropriation and showcasing an alternative use of the streets. Lifestyle politics, a term coined by Bennett (1998), refers to individuals who participate in everyday politics through their consumption choices. Pro-environmentalism and critiques of capitalism and modernity define the lifestyle choices of bicyclists, pedestrians, and other participants of CFS events. Despite the fact that most cities today discourage people from being independent of automobiles, collective appropriations of urban streets indicate people's desire of making a political statement.


### ii.    Appropriation of urban space

Do-it-yourself (DIY), tactical, insurgent, and guerilla urbanisms are some of the terms used in order to refer to a variety of urban interventions found in cities all around the world. Not all of

them are carried out by marginalized publics; artists and architects lead some of such interventions, as well as non-trained citizens. However, the do-it-yourself mentality that underlies these projects stands for valorizing community/individual knowledge over expert knowledge, rejection of the capitalist economy, and democratization of design. To what extent such projects democratize the production of urban space and under what circumstances is a question worth investigating.

Such citizen-led production of urban space can cover a range of categorically different interventions: community participation projects, such as community gardens; projects done by citizen participation through community-based non-profit organizations (Hayashi, 2010); individual appropriations in urban space, such as yarn bombing (fig. 2.2); appropriations of urban space through the help of an infrastructure provided by architects, such as the ECObox (Petcou and Petrescu, 2011); and Chinese fan dancers' appropriation of public spaces (Chen, 2010). All of these demonstrate the variety that urban interventions can take.



Figure 2.2 Yarn bombing in Montreal Canada (photograph by author).

Crawford (1995, 6) argues that everyday public spaces reclaimed by marginal publics (such as the homeless and street vendors) are sites in which the "meaning of democracy, the nature of economic participation, and the public assertion of identity are acted out on a daily basis." Rios (2010, 100) argues that when identity groups claim public space, cultural imaginations of public space lead to "empowerment, and, ultimately, political efficacy."

Arguably, not all types of interventions recreate the city in the sense of providing long-term and permanent solutions make cities aesthetically look better, or address urban inequalities brought by political and economic systems. However, urban interventions do disrupt the "spectacular operations of capital," as Begg argues (2011, 63), and constitute different imaginations of the city (Begg 2011; Petcou and Petrescu 2011). However, individual interventions such as painting

electricity boxes, knitting around poles, and other acts may result in 'chaotic urbanism' instead of providing art, or *oeuvre*, to the city, given that anybody can recreate the city as he or she wishes, and the individual's sense of aesthetics may not serve everybody.

Rojas's 2010 account of Latino immigrants in Los Angeles who transform the city into pedestrian-oriented places, from ones that are auto-oriented, exemplifies everyday appropriations. Appropriations of everyday space, such as commercial streets, sidewalks, and curbs in New York's China Town and the urban streets of Sri Lanka, by shopkeepers, vendors, and shoppers, require spaces that are not tightly controlled, as Fernando (2007) argues. Alternatively, Stevens (2007) argues that playful behavior can create liminal spaces, and allow informal (outside of design intensions) uses, despite the boundaries posed by the built environment. However, as Stevens acknowledges, there are even limits to that, given the fact that street performers may choose to perform near entertainment venues where people are already "outside their serious work role," and skaters appropriate wide stair cases, and they do it more so during evening hours in order "to avoid conflict with practical users" (2007, 76-78). Such appropriations are opportunistic, in the sense of taking advantage of "loose" space as Frank and Stevens (2007) define it. People appropriate spaces for the limited time they need to use those spaces differently. Besides, such appropriations do not involve opposing users who negotiate use of the same space.

What happens when opposing groups are negotiating for different uses of the same space every day? Frank and Stevens (2007, 94) argue that "control by state, civil institutions or big businesses does not put an end to looseness: it merely requires that agents adapt." However, examples of such appropriations often come from developing countries where bribery and informal markets (Jimenez-Dominguez 2007) and illegal parking (Dovey and Polakit 2007) are tolerated. Such examples illustrate individuals' resistance to control; however, these responses "are not necessarily uniform, focused and organized" (Frank and Stevens 2007, 94).

The Chinese dancers analyzed by Chen (2010, 33) exemplify collective appropriations of urban space and collective demands on public spaces that are lost to modern urban planning. She argues that elderly populations remake the city as they "find" public spaces, such as those that are under freeway overpasses, where they can practice their traditional dance and exercise routines.

Goal-oriented, focused, and locally-organized appropriations by grassroots masses communicate a shared imagination, and such actions hold the potential of being implemented and making the imaginings real. They indicate rights demands. Such appropriations are overt dialogues between marginalized communities and powerful groups over the uses of public spaces and access to the public spaces of the city. Carfree-streets events are examples of such appropriations.

Carfree-streets events, although different from festivals in many respects, embody some of the qualities of many different kinds of cultural performances. Public performances—parades, festivals, rituals, carnivals, and flash mobs—are cultural, political, and spatial products. Cultural performances explicitly or implicitly carry messages to a wide audience, while critiquing everyday realities in a dramatic fashion, and reflect social order and power relations within the society (Cohen 1993; Davis 1986; Guss 2000). Through cultural performances, publics strengthen their collective identity, challenge dominant practices, and reproduce new meanings

(Cohen 1993). Some festivals are commodified events, increasingly controlled by global forces, geared towards attracting tourists and promoting passive consumers (Addo 2009; Hernandez-Ehrisman 2008; Gotham 2005). While there are examples of commercialized parades (such as Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York and the San Francisco Street Food Festival), Halloween parade, for example, "momentarily recovers the city from its corporate owners" and fights against commercialization and globalization, as Kugelmass (1993, 150) argues. O'Reilly and Crutcher's (2006) study on labor and gay pride parades shows that some parades function as instruments to make territorial claims over parts of the city.

Territorial claims in the carfree-streets events and the ways in which new urban identities are being reproduced differ compared to many other cultural performances. Participants in the car-free street events make claims not to a particular street in a particular neighborhood but to all streets of the city. The very act of taking over the streets and on-street car parking spaces are performances that go beyond symbolically making a territorial claim on public space. Participants of these events momentarily enact their main goal, namely, having equal access to the streets as motorists. These events subvert the capitalist urban spectacle as they replace some of its main production and consumption engine (automobiles and oil) with people. Without having to pay a fee, people have fun on the streets.

Dork and Monteyne (2011, 3) argue that "instead of asking for gradual improvements, activists engage in subversive and artistic practices … urban hackers are willing to engage in civil disobedience to express their disregard of the status quo and reach out to the general public to re-imagine different versions of the future." The authors (2011, 1) describe the end result of many appropriations as "urban co-creation: co-creation strives for a mosaic of transformations requiring loosening control and spreading power." Paralleling this idea of co-creation are scholars who emphasize that DIY interventions are born out of economic necessities and mobilize individuals for taking care of their urban spaces (Zeiger 2011; Parillon 2011). Based on the examples of CM and Sunday Streets, Golub and Henderson (2011, 130) argue that

> The grassroots efforts pushed the envelope for residents and for the city. Incrementally, and not without pushback, many of the ingredients of a vision for urban sustainable transport are becoming institutionalized in San Francisco, and the city is at the leading edge of a national transformation promoting bicycling and car-sharing.

However, Lavine (2012) makes the critique that events and projects such as parklets are "green urban spectacles" and "greenwashing" examples developed under the forces of neoliberalism. He (147) argues that "at the macro level, these spectacles reflect the influence of intercity competition for highly mobile pools of capital and labor."

Carfree-streets events are cases in which subordinated groups of people deliberately, in a uniform, focused, and organized manner, with a goal of long-term transformation of a specific portion of urban space and of communicating that will, take over public space occupied by others and appropriate it. Such appropriations entail tension between opposing uses and opposing publics. Lefebvre uses the terms *counterspaces* and *counterprojects* in *The Production of Space* a handful of times, to describe grassroots actions that challenge and subvert existing spaces and power relations. He states (1991, 381-382) "When a community fights the construction of urban

motorways or housing-developments, when it demands 'amenities' or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a counter-space can insert itself into spatial reality." The term *counterspaces* implies acts of resistance against the existing spaces and attempts to replace them with alternative spaces of counterpublics. *Counterprojects* are an indication of political citizens and their desire to collectively recreate the city. Even though these counterpublics' resistance is spatial in its essence, another component of this resistance is to overtly disseminate their counterdiscourses in the public sphere and in public space. Hence, I employ notions of counterspaces and frameworks of the right to the city and the public sphere in order to analyze CFS events' role and political efficacy in democratizing urban production. Carfree-streets events add another component to such appropriations.

I argue that understanding the ways in which marginalized groups appropriate public space as an act of inhabiting requires juxtaposing discursive and spatial ways of participating in producing urban space. Grassroots events, by providing transitional experiences and creating a forum between mainstream groups and counterpublics, help ease opposition against the transformation of the city into a more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environment. Grassroots urbanism is an act of democratization of urban processes, and as much as it is a reaction to the state's role in creating these spaces, it is also a reaction to mainstream societal values.

## 2.2    Data Collection Techniques

Studying publics who are stripped of access to streets is a challenging research endeavor, since their lack of presence is the very focus of the research. The carfree-streets movements bring out a variety of activities and publics that streets could accommodate if they were not dominated by cars. The contrast created through the events provides opportunities to analyze people's opinions about streets and their access to them. Charmaz (2005) in *Grounded Theory Methods in Social Justice Research* argues that representing the opinions of the majority does not help achieve social justice, since the goal of social justice research is to eliminate injustice towards marginalized minorities. Therefore, this study emphasizes carfree-streets event participants' opinions qualitatively, rather than the number of people who make arguments about access to streets in a quantitative way.

I chose the San Francisco Bay Area as a research site because this region has a history of activism, from issues of civil rights to environmental protection. Increasing the quality of life by being actively engaged in the city's development plans has been a defining characteristic of San Francisco's residents. Walker (2007), for instance, lists numerous conservation and environmental protection movements that have physically shaped the Bay Area and protected its nature. Freeway revolts are one of the examples of historic preservation movements. Both the CM and Park(ing) Day events were born in San Francisco into this social and activist background, and they quickly became global movements. However, despite its progressiveness in many areas, San Francisco was not the most bicycle-friendly city for many years, compared to cities like Portland, Oregon. Only in recent years has the city made a leap towards becoming more bicycle-friendly. Yet, making streets more bicyclist- and pedestrian-friendly is an ongoing struggle in many cities around the world. Moreover, each carfree-streets event in the city

employs a unique tactic in order to make streets accessible to multiple users and uses. All these reasons make San Francisco an interesting research site.

The research uses mixed methods in order to collect data in this two-part study. In part 1, the events are analyzed with an ethnographic perspective because this part of the research aims to obtain details on the culture of the carfree-streets public and specific street events. Because each event is unique in terms of the ways in which access to streets is provided to participants, and because two of them are recently-started events, and hence not many previous studies about them exist, I aimed at getting participants' point of view about the events without relying on preconceived categories in my mind. I started the research with "a grand tour question," (asking informants to explain any aspect of the events that they find worth telling) and continued with open-ended semi-structured interview questions. I asked interviewees about the following issues:

- What brings them to the event,
- Why they care and what the event means for them,
- What their experiences have been,
- What the event symbolizes for them.

I collected the interview data, transcribed and coded it, and created categories based on participants' point of view. In order to understand people's motivations to participate, I interviewed people as they were waiting for the CM ride to start and as they were hanging out at Sunday Streets events and on Park(ing) Day. I made a conscious effort to choose a variety of informants based on gender, ethnicity, age, and specific activity in which they were engaged. I identified a number of categories that explain people's interests in the events and on the streets, as well as categories that demonstrate a sense of counterpublic. Pseudonyms are used to identify interviewees, instead of their real names.

Because discourses about alternative cities and transportation are often represented also through visual media, I examined the symbolic dimension of counterdiscourses of carfree-streets grassroots movements by analyzing iconic illustrations, flyers, posters, and signs that bicyclists carry on their bikes. I also examined historical accounts of carfree-streets events by going through San Francisco Public Library archives, and newspaper archives of San Francisco Chronicle and San Francisco Call.

Content analysis on several organizations website was another source of information both for examining the events and social and physical transformations. Some of them are websites of San Francisco Critical Mass, Park(ing) Day, Sunday Streets, San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, Rebar, Livable City, California Outdoor Rollersports Association and San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, San Francisco Pavements to Parks, and other City and Country of San Francisco's agency's websites.

As an observer, I bicycled in Critical Mass rides in San Francisco and Berkeley, California between May and September of 2010 and in Tel Aviv, Israel in 2011. I recorded formal

interviews with 35 bicyclists involved in CM and had innumerable casual conversations. I approached people at the beginning of the rides and interviewed some bicyclists on the spot. I also interviewed some of the bicyclists on the phone by recruiting them with flyers during CM rides and on San Francisco's Bike-to-Work Day.[5] I also conducted an online survey about the demographics of CM bicyclists and their transportation choices. The information about the online survey at www.surveymonkey.com was distributed during the January 2012 CM ride through flyers, through the San Francisco Critical Mass Facebook page at www.sfcriticalmass.org, and through my personal Facebook network.[6] Sixty-nine people responded to the survey.

I participated in eight Sunday Streets events in San Francisco in 2010: Embarcadero (March 14), Bayview (April 18), Mission (June 20 and July 11), Ocean Highway (April 11 and August 22), North Panhandle/Western Addition (September 19), and Civic Center/Tenderloin (October 24), and one in Oakland called Oaklavia (June 27). I recorded 74 interviews (39 female and 35 male) during Sunday Streets events and had innumerable casual conversations. Six of those were organizations. I also interviewed Susan King, organizer of Sunday Streets, and interviewed and corresponded through emails with David Miles, director of California Outdoor Rollersports Association (CORA).

I participated in Park(ing) Day on September 17, 2010 and received assistance from four researchers to conduct interviews since Park(ing) Day takes place only once a year. Two of those researchers were previous undergraduate students, one was a graduate with an M.Sc. in Urban and Regional Planning, and the other one was a PhD candidate in the Department of Architecture; all were from the University of California Berkeley. All were trained in conducting observation and interviews in a course titled Social and Cultural Factors in Architecture and Urban Planning.[7] The five of us visited different areas in San Francisco that I identified beforehand based on online maps where park(ing) spots were marked. Altogether, a total of 60 people were interviewed (15 of those were interviewed by me).

Researching the carfree-streets events offered some methodological challenges. One is that some people know what to expect from the event, and some recounted the exact copy of the discourses that are published in the media, with somewhat cliché statements of how bicycling is good for the environment during the CM ride, for example. Thus, despite my expectations of finding individual, unique experiences and motivations about the event, I very often heard a common discourse that is popularized by the organizers of the events. Hence, finding people who were willing to talk about their subjective experiences required an extensive number of interviews.

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[5] "Bike-to-Work Day" is a once-a-year event organized by the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition in order to promote commuting by bicycle.

[6] The January ride was one of the least-populated rides due to cold weather. Still, the ride attracted a mixture of both old and new CM riders: 2.1% of the participants were riding for the first time, and 30.9% said that they participate in every ride or every other ride. As to longevity, 59.7% of them have been participating for five years or less, 20.9% between five and 10 years, 11.9% for 10-20 years, and 7.5% for the last 20 years. However, not all people who completed the survey were present at the ride, given that the survey was also distributed online.

[7] The graduate students were graduate student instructors (GSI) of the course, and the undergraduates were students of the course whom I knew through their work, as I too was a GSI of the course.

The second challenge I found was that though I chose the San Francisco Bay Area as my research site, these events happen all over the world. Some differences exist in the ways in which local governments limit or allow the events to happen and in the ways in which grassroots organizations choose to organize the events. Thus, some characteristics of the events are unique to San Francisco. Nevertheless, the anti-automobile standpoint does not change by geographic or cultural differences. Thus, even though my physical fieldwork was conducted mainly in San Francisco, my experience in other cities perhaps influenced my point of view.[8]

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[8] I attended a CM ride in Tel Aviv, Israel, where I conducted two interviews, and observed one CM ride in Chicago.

# PART 1 CARFREE-STREETS EVENTS: COUNTERPUBLICS AND TEMPORARY COUNTERSPACES

This part presents an ethnographic analysis of Critical Mass, Sunday Streets and Park(ing) Day events that take place in San Francisco Bay Area, California. I define these movements as car-free street movements. Each event makes streets available to people who walk, bicycle, or sit, while discouraging automobiles either parked or moving. The chapters about each event outline temporary counterspaces created during the events and counterdiscourses of people who participate in the events with empirical evidence, providing a basis for why these publics make a counterpublic.

Critical Mass is a monthly event in which many bikers ride their bicycles on the streets of a city. The movement first started in San Francisco in 1992 and has now spread worldwide. Critical Mass defines itself to be a self-organized social event with no leaders. The "unofficial" website of Berkeley Critical Mass describes the movement as a global non-authoritarian movement of celebration, street reclamation, and demonstration. Bicyclists in CM rides emphasize creating an undivided flow of bicycle traffic so that the collective power of bicyclists allows each individual bicyclist to ride safely on the street. En masse CM bicyclists do not obey other traffic rules, such as stop signs or red lights. Bicyclists purposely cut in front of automobiles, what they call *corking,* in order to force drivers to give way to bicycle traffic. They do not let even pedestrian traffic interrupt their flow. These anarchist and political facets of CM separate it from the other two events.

Sunday Streets is San Francisco version of a global movement of organized traffic closures intended to open streets to various activities. The original idea for *Sunday Streets* came from Cyclovia in Bogota, Colombia. Sunday Streets is a collaboration between a non-profit organization and governmental sectors, and it gets support from private institutions. The City of San Francisco, Municipal Transportation Agency, and Livable City collaborate to organize Sunday Streets since the first one in 2008. During Sunday Streets a main traffic artery is closed to automobile traffic in different parts of the city and people are encouraged to walk, bicycle and engage in other physical activities from doing yoga to rock climbing, all on the streets. Elderly, skaters, bicyclists, tourists, families, kids, all meet on the streets in a festival like atmosphere where they can visit neighborhood or city organizations' booths, and watch ethnic groups' dance performances.

Park(ing) Day is organized by Rebar, a San Francisco-based art collective. During Park(ing) Day people occupy on-street car parking spots ideally by paying the meters and use those spaces as public spaces instead for parking cars. People lay rolls of grass, place their lounge chairs, and sit there. The first park(ing) installation was in November 2005, and since then Park(ing) Day has become an annual global event celebrated in 13 cities in 2006 and in 162 cities and in 35 countries in 2011. According to Park(ing) Day website, Rebar's mission is "to rethink the way streets are used, call attention to the need for urban parks, and improve the quality of urban human habitat."

The three car-free streets events stand out because they present similar characteristics to festivals, protests, and Situationists International (SI) type of appropriations, yet none of them fit into any of these categories perfectly. Inherent in their ways of dealing with the street space, they involve passers-by and make streets more livable. This way they create their ideal spaces. I referred to the spatial experiences created in these events as *counterspaces* because they underline residents' alternative discourses –*counterdiscourses*- about streets. These events also demonstrate many residents' demand to their right to cities. Thinking that residents might permanently want to give up the freedom of driving their automobiles or parking on city streets would be naïve. However, the popularity of the events demonstrate that livable city principles are a welcomed and desired alternative to current urban planning and design practices. Not only many residents, but also local governments share this impulse to create new planning approaches. In this chapter, I describe the events and motivations of its participants in transforming streets in order to understand social potentials embedded in decreasing prioritization of motor vehicle traffic and increasing social use of streets and alternative transportation.

# CHAPTER 3 CARFREE-STREETS EVENTS IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

## 3.1 Great San Francisco Bicycle Protest of 1896

Not long ago people on the streets outnumbered automobiles. Comparison of three photographs from the downtown of San Francisco taken in 1883, 1905, 1910s and in 1937, respectively, demonstrate how pedestrians gradually became a minority on the streets. First horse- drawn carriages, later street cars and finally automobiles all started to compete with pedestrians for the same street space. Thus, for pedestrians' safety and vehicles' ease of movement street regulations pushed pedestrians to sidewalks. While in early 1900s pedestrians walked on the road, not only on the sidewalks, as the image portrays, by the end of 1930s police strictly regulated where the automobiles and where the pedestrians ought to be (fig. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4).

Automobiles were not the first vehicles to serve people's desire of independent mobility and traveling longer distances. By the 1890s, the innovation of *safety bicycle,* thanks to pneumatic tires, expanded the number of bicyclists and the bicycle market to seven million of bicycles (Jackson 2008). At the time roads in San Francisco were still covered with mud, cobble stones and horse manure. All of which made bicycling hard, and streetcar rails on the roads presented additional danger (Chapot, 2002). Primarily led by a strong nationwide bicyclist organization, *League of American Wheelmen (LAW)*, the *Good Roads* campaign mobilized bicyclists and lobbied politicians for improvement of the roads.
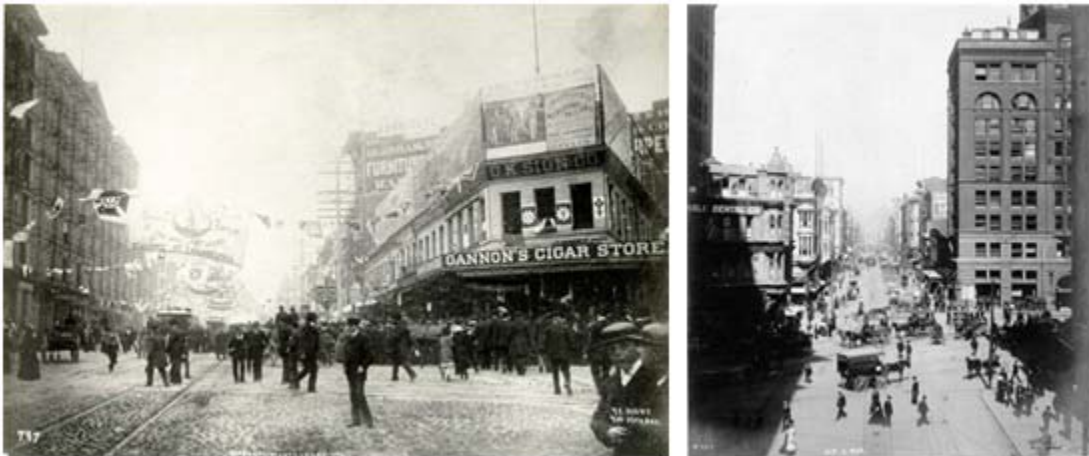


Figure 3.1 Crowd of people at Market and Montgomery streets, 1883 (San Francisco Public Library).

Figure 3.2 Kearny north from Market and Third street, 1905 (San Francisco Public Library).

Figure 3.3 Kearny Street, north from Market Street, 1910s (San Francisco Public Library).

Figure 3.4 Police officer directing traffic at Fourth and Market streets, 1937 (San Francisco Public Library).



Figure 3.5 The Great San Francisco Bicycle Protest of July 25, 1896 (The San Francisco Call Archives).

The *Great San Francisco Bicycle Protest of 1896* was a product of the *Good Roads* campaign. It took place on July 25, ironically the same day that the first biggest CM ride happened a century later in 1997 (Chapot 2002). Bicyclists in San Francisco rode down the Folsom Street to demand improvement of city streets in general and especially Market Street (Chapot 2002). During the ride, the *San Francisco Call* newspaper estimated participation of at least 100,000 spectators and

at least 5000 bicyclists. *The San Francisco Call* (1896) journalists commented that "It was easily apparent that a new moment had come into local politics" and bicyclists' "vote would be a potent factor in determining future municipal administration." The article added, "The demand — with which last night's great demonstration will do much to secure compliance — will probably be but the initial one of a series for street improvement reform." The media's portrayal of the event as bicyclists' vote on local politics proved to be true. Two years later the Market Street was paved (Chapot 2002).

With collaborations of city officials, citizens of San Francisco were united to bring public improvements to their city. San Francisco bicyclists became a symbol of progress because of their pushing San Francisco's modernization. By the next decade, bicycles lost popularity to automobiles, and road improvements benefited automobile drivers more than bicyclists (Chapot 2002). "Literally and figuratively, the bicycle paved the way for the automobile (Herlihy 2004)." Despite automobiles' domination of modern life and streets after World War II, this early history indicates that there has always been a public in San Francisco that kept an interest in the streets as social spaces, and another public has returned back to streets to reclaim their rights to the streets.

### 3.2     Skaters in San Francisco, CA and Friday Night Skaters

The skaters are one of the publics that demand better access to the streets. Their presence in the city's public spaces has repeatedly been controlled, both spatially and temporally. City ordinances that ban skaters from the streets, the lack of infrastructure, and stigmas attached to skating and skateboarding have prevented skating become an alternative form of transportation. Osberg et. al. (2000) claim that if infrastructure, among other factors, in cities were apt with skaters' needs, more people could have used skating as an alternative mode of transportation. According to *National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) Data Highlights* 1998, 250,000 skating and skateboarding injuries required emergency department care in 1997 (Osberg, et. al. 2000). Bike paths do not fully serve skaters' needs.  Skaters need smoother and less steep surfaces than bicyclists (Osberg 2000). Lack of proper and dedicated infrastructure for skating endangers the lives of both the skaters' and others who share the same roads. Skating thus remained a recreational sport and did not advance as an alternative transportation. Even as a recreational sport, skaters faced many challenges regarding their rights to the streets.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s skating was a highly popular recreational sport, thanks to Sunday traffic closures on John F. Kennedy (JFK) drive in the G.G. Park and the road's smooth surface (Butler, 1980). Approximately 15,000-20,000 skaters used to meet at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, According to *California Outdoor Rollersports Association* (CORA). However, starting from May, 1979 areas where skaters skated started to shrink. Skaters were first banned from "The Conservatory of Flowers, the Music Concourse, Stow Lake and Children's Playground" because of these areas being heavy pedestrian arteries (CORA, 2011).  There used to be "over 35 skate vendor trucks that rented skates alongside the park border, each truck containing between 200 and 500 pairs of skates" (CORA, 2011). But, soon enough pedestrians' complaints about growing numbers of skaters resulted in the *Recreation and Parks Commission* limiting the areas where skaters could skate, and eventually the City banned vendors that rented

skates to park visitors (CORA, 2011). Soon after in the early 1980s, skating started to decline in San Francisco. The only available place for everyday use for the remaining skaters was a limited area on the bridge between 8th and 10th Avenue on JFK Drive; and, on Sundays the JFK Drive was open to everybody, even though that's where skaters also wanted to be. Later on, CORA convinced park planner Deborah Lerner to preserve the asphalt on the 6th Street and JFK Drive (Skatin' Place) for skating.



Figure 3.6 Vendors used to rent skates around the Golden Gate Park 1978 (photograph by Gary Fong, San Francisco Chronicle Archives).

Even though skaters were able to skate only in limited areas in the Golden Gate Park, they were granted these areas thanks to their grassroots efforts. David Miles–a.k.a. the Godfather of skating- has been a major influence in keeping a skating community intact. He is the founder and executive director of California Outdoor Rollersports Association (CORA). The organization promotes skating and works toward making it a viable alternative transportation method. Legalizing skating and demanding dedicated skating paths—just as bicyclists have throughout California—is one of CORA's ongoing projects.

CORA covers the institutional ground. Skaters also manifest their claims to rights in the city at the grassroots level. S*kate patrol,* volunteer skaters who control other skaters to stay in permitted areas in Golden Gate Park, is one of their grassroots initiatives. Patrols were formed to keep skating going in several places in the park. Even though rental trucks were eventually banned, and skaters were prohibited from many areas in the park skate patrol has stayed together (CORA, 2012).
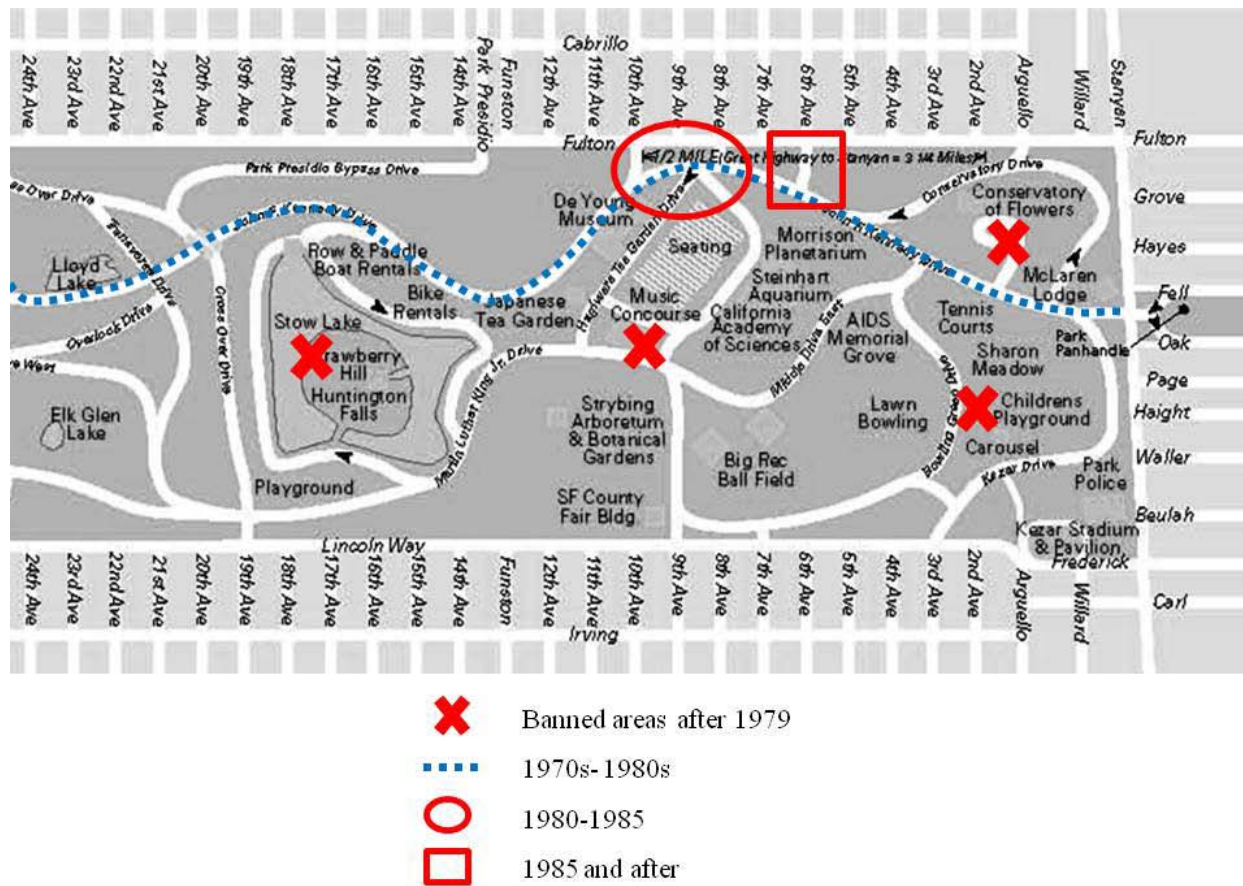
Figure 3.7 Map of skaters' geographic trajectory between late 1970s until 1985-today in The Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, CA (map by author).

Skating in the city, outside of the limits of the park, and on any day, is also something that interests many skaters. *Friday Night Skaters* is a grassroots effort that makes this still possible in San Francisco today. Skaters go out on the streets weekly and traverse the city streets. Their numbers used to reach 600 people, according to a 1996 report in *New York Times*. Also in San Francisco, an alternative event for advanced skaters, meet on Monday nights, called *Monday Night Skaters*. Such events take place in other cities too, such as in Paris, Zurich, Basel, Santa Monica/Venice, New York and Chicago. According to *Forbes Magazine* (2000), 20,000-30,000 people skate in Paris *Friday Night Fever*.

The first gathering of San Francisco *Friday Night Skaters* dates back to 1989 Loma-Prieta earthquake. Twelve skaters seize the opportunity at the elevated Embarcadero freeway that was closed to traffic because of having been structurally damaged (Eisele, 1995). The skaters today still gather on Embarcadero after the removal of the structure.

While many factors play role in skaters' struggle to be accepted on the streets, having fun is a prevailing reason that comes up repeatedly. As Cranz (1982) notes, historically, parks were built as mechanism of social control. Pleasure, fun and recreation have been orchestrated functions and they have been limited within the pleasure grounds, reform parks, recreational facilities, and open space system. These activities were placed in designated locations, decided by authorities,

33

philanthropists and social workers. Despite the fact that almost 20,000 people skated on the weekends, this large group of people were not allowed on the streets, after a ban that became active in 1976. Skaters' struggle in the city raises questions about why the city cannot be perceived as a place for fun, and why fun needs to be limited to the parks. Even within the boundaries of the park, skaters were constrained.  If skating became such a popular recreational activity enjoyed by many, why did it need to be confined to a single space in the park? Even if skaters and pedestrian got into conflict, why was the first step to geographically limit what has become a major user group in the park? Why could not the rest of the city accommodate recreation and fun in other public spaces, not just parks? Streets are collectively the largest public spaces in the cities, but they are only devoted to traffic.

For skaters meaning of the city is far from economic. Dorothy, one of the skaters I interviewed, says that the city is their "urban playground". Fun is an overriding theme for skaters and locations they choose for having fun set this public apart. Skaters, just as bicyclists and pedestrians in the other carfree-streets events, enjoy being on the streets. They even call it *therapeutic*. Many skaters' and events' accounts emphasize the *fun* aspect, more than demanding to be part of the traffic on the vehicle lane in a regular day. They claim their right to enjoy the city and use the streets for what they consider to be a fun activity shared by many. In common with skaters, the three bicycle advocacy groups in this study--CM bicyclists, Sunday Streetsand Park(ing) Day participants—claim that their ability to enjoy the city is thwarted by automobile traffic.



Figure 3.8 Skaters gathering under the Palace of Fine Arts on February 23, 1996 (photograph by Peter de Silvia for the New York Times).

According to Eisele's (1995) article in *San Francisco Independent* newspaper, skaters follow a predetermined route: "[a] quick zip to Fisherman's Wharf via Pier 39, leads on to the Marina, and the Palace of Fine Arts. Weaving back along Fillmore and Union streets, the skaters head through the Broadway Tunnel into Chinatown, and to Union Square, by way of the Stockton Tunnel. A tour through the South of Market area takes the troupe back up the city's eastern shore to its starting point." This area covers industrial and touristic parts of the city and the downtown area (fig. 3.9). All of which are important sources of economic production in the city. Skaters, at night, make use of these spaces for play –an activity that is diametrically opposed to work. The contrast resonates with Guy Debord's (1994) concepts of work and play (refusal of productive activity/ not inactivity/ not leisure/) time in Society of Spectacle. Especially true for downtown and industrial sections, skaters' presence there at night contrasts sharply with the daytime use of the same spaces. Busy centers of commerce and production during the day, at night, they become money-free spaces for fun. Many parts of the city are deserted at night and are considered unsafe and so being together provides safety to enjoy parts of the city that they would not be able to enjoy alone.
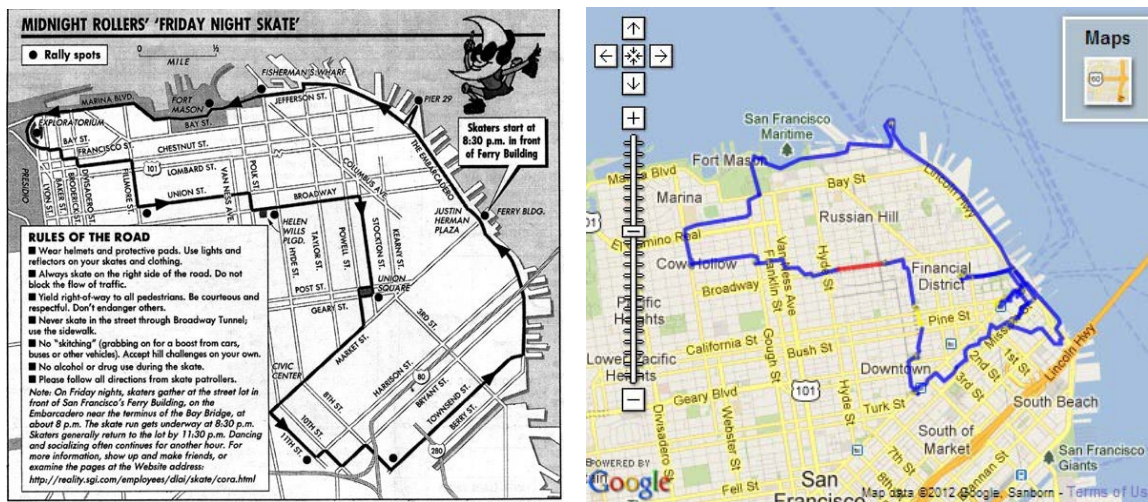


Figure 3.9 Friday Night Skaters' route in 1996 (by San Francisco Chronicle) and in 2011 (maps by CORA).

David Miles in an interview for *Inline* magazine, and another skater, Ross, in an interview in *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1990s, echoes a CM bicyclist whom I interviewed in 2010. (Lowden 1995; Whiting 1993). All three mention that skating or bicycling is their preferred fun activity compared to going to a bar at night. Miles says this as a father, the other two from the perspective women in their 20s and 30s concerning feeling safer regarding the kinds of people they are likely to meet. Thus, skating in the city is also important because of the community it is created during the rides.

Skaters demanded their share of the streets from the automobiles and eventually expanded their rights to the city. Skaters gained greater access to the city by getting out on the streets. They also worked though institutional ways. As an example of the power of grassroots efforts, skaters set an example to modern day CM riders.

Skaters' perception of the city—as an infrastructure to have fun—shakes many mainstream meanings attached to cities. skaters bring 'fun function' into the streets of the city, instead of only having fun in designated and limited areas in the city such as parks. Skaters unveil multiple potentials that the city offers: circling around the Palace of Fine Arts, a historic architectural structure, at night when it is abandoned is an example. Skaters make use of an already existing urban infrastructure for a new purpose in other ways than staring at it. Bicyclists crossing through the Broadway Tunnel during the CM ride—a structure built solely for functional purposes to shorten motor vehicles' travel distance—is another example. Skaters make use of the existing infrastructures and experience unique sensation that they only can in urban spaces (see Chapter 62. for the ways in which other publics appropriate urban space as their *playground*). Thus, skaters greater access to the city indicate new and nuanced meanings of public space, that are revisited by the events explained in the following chapters.

# CHAPTER 4 CRITICAL MASS: URBAN STREETS AS PLAYGROUND

Bicycling is the most viable option for those who don't drive in order to travel in 'automobile scale' cities. Lengthy blocks, low-density, zoning, lack of attractions on the streets, and, sometimes, even lack of sidewalks makes walking unpleasant and inefficient in many US cities. Bicyclists have many other reasons to choose bicycling other than walking not being efficient; however, bicyclists need to demand their rights to the city. Critical Mass is partly a celebration, partly a bicyclists' protest of lack of alternative transportation, and partly a reclamation of the right to public space. Many consider it a matter of the right to assemble, freedom of speech, and the first amendment. Over 500 bicyclists attend San Francisco CM on a warm day, making it hard to identify one common goal and motivation that define all participants. Hence, my purpose is not to make a generalization regarding the opinions of all CM bicyclists or claim that CM represents all bicyclists who bicycle for multiple reasons. Yet, a closer look at the movement's past and present demonstrate a public that demand their rights to the city. The analysis also demonstrates the ways in which CM rides foster and strengthens this counterpublic.



Figure 4.1 San Francisco CM on Market Street, 2010 (photograph by author).

## 4.1 Right to the City and Lifestyle Politics

In most U.S. cities, bicyclists are marginalized users of the streets compared to motorists in terms of their access to streets. American cities were not originally planned to meet bicyclists' needs however, bicycling is a reviving trend in the U.S. Yet, many people are discouraged from bicycling because they feel in unsafe bicycling in the city next to the automobile traffic. Even though, according to California Vehicle Law 212012, bicyclists are allowed to use of full lane, little awareness on the part of drivers and relatively inferior size and speed of bicycles put the bicyclists in unequal position. Bicyclists need to negotiate their rights on the streets every day.

Spatial justice is often discussed in terms of gender, race or income; however, in the case of bicyclists, automobile's hegemony on the street marginalizes publics that do not fit into commonly recognized categories of disadvantaged populations. Bicyclists comprise a counterpublic with shared lifestyles and values (further elaborated on section 4.3) that define their claims on urban space. Regardless of the demographic characteristics, the lack of infrastructure marginalizes bicyclists on the basis of freedom to chose an alternative transportation mode, and access to streets. Claims of right to cleaner environments and healthier lifestyles and urban spaces that will accommodate such lifestyle comprise a significant spatial justice problem. The bicyclists' case demonstrates how planning practices marginalize publics, in a complex relationship to categories of race, gender and class.

Lifestyle politics, a term coined by Bennett (1998), refers to individuals who participate in everyday politics through their consumption choices. Pro-environmentalism, and critiques of capitalism and modernity define lifestyle choices of bicyclists and pedestrians. In a 2001 survey among Critical Mass bicyclist in San Francisco, a total of two-thirds of 149 respondents selected broader issues, including: transportation policy (25%); the use of public spaces (17%); global environmental issues (13%); and a critique of capitalism (9%) as the issue they currently most closely associate with Critical Mass (Blickstein and Hanson, 2001). Despite the fact that most cities today discourage people from being independent of automobiles, collectively riding on the streets indicates people's desire of making a political statement.

The bicyclists' struggle is inherently a struggle over land use and the form of the city. Figure 4.2, a photograph from a nude bike ride protest in Peru in 2012 portrays a naked bicyclist wearing a gas mask. Activists argue that nudeness of these bicyclists demonstrates their bodies' vulnerability against the dangers posed by automobiles. Event organizer Octavio Zegarra explained to *Huffington Post* (2012) why it was a nude ride by saying: "This is our body. With this we go out in the streets. We don't have a car to protect us." Andy Singer's illustration (fig. 4.3) represents bicyclists' needs by depicting two contrasting streets: One street is occupied with automobiles. It is noisy and smoggy because of traffic, and there are no people on the streets. The other one, in contrast, is full of trees; the air is clean; and the street is used for sitting, walking and bicycling. The text on top of the image explicitly draws parallels between non-drivers and non-smokers. Just as laws now separate and confine indoor or outdoor smoking places from non-smoking ones—because it is not fair to those who do not smoke, this image calls for separating cities into two sections, one with emission and one without emission. It implies that, if smoking is banned from public places because it is not fair to those who don't smoke and care about their health, the same idea should be true in the context of driving automobile on the streets. However, bicyclists' access to streets is denied in practice in most urban places. Hence, bicyclists are a marginalized urban population in regards to their access to the streets.

Figure 4.2 A naked bicyclist wearing a gas mask (photograph by AFP/Getty Images, http://www.huffingtonpost.com).
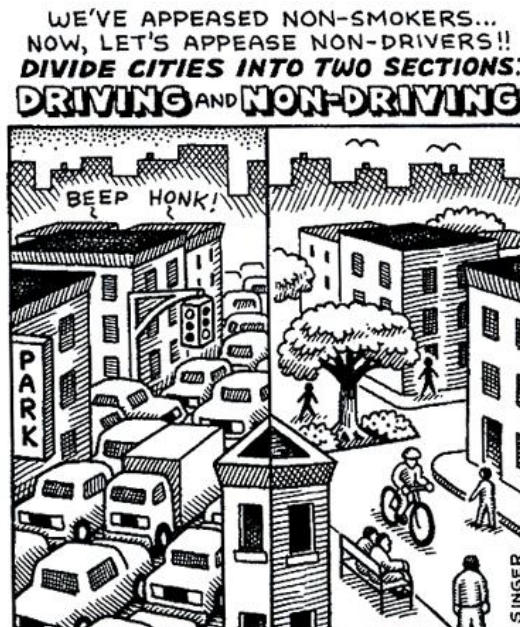


Figure 4.3 Driving / Non-driving: Divide Cities: comparision of bike-friendly and automobile-oriented cities (illustration by Andy Singer).

Even though bicyclists are marginalized users of the streets, they are not always part of a marginalized population based on ethnicity, gender, or income. The average bicycle commuter in the US is a 39-year-old male whose annual income is over $45,000 (Moritz 1997). According to the 2012 online survey about San Francisco CM, 85.3% of the CM bicyclists are Caucasian, 79.7% of them are male, and 33.8% are between 26 and 35 years of age. These demographics are

close to the demographics of frequent bicyclists in San Francisco.[9] Neither group is a minority or marginalized in respect to common justice arguments. Moreover, according to the same survey, 55% of the participants are working full time, and only 10% are unemployed. Only 20.6% of the participants reported that they earn (annual household income) less than $30,000; 25.4% earn between $30,000 and $50,000, 12.7% earn between $50,000 and $70,000, and the remaining 40.3% earn more than $70,000. In terms of education level, 49.3% have a bachelor's degree, and 21.79% have graduate degrees. San Francisco County's 2006-2010 median household income level is $71,304, and 51.2% of the population have a bachelor's degree or higher according to the U.S. Census Bureau. According to the 2012 CM survey, 53.7% of the CM participants own an automobile, though 45.6% of them reported that bicycling is the transportation mode they use most often when they commute. That was followed by a combination of bicycling and other modes at 23.5%. Given the data above, nearly, and in some cases over, half of CM bicyclists are from the middle to high income brackets of society, and they are well educated. Considering Pucher and Buehler's (2010) argument of elderly and women needing safer conditions to ride, it is not surprising that men and younger populations make the majority of bicyclists. Of the respondents, 49.3% strongly agreed, and 29% agreed, with the following statement: "I want to make a statement regarding the lack of bicycling infrastructure." Additionally, 47.8% of the respondents strongly agreed and 30.4% of them agreed that they "want to show the automobile drivers that bicyclists are traffic too." These survey results demonstrate that for most of these bicyclists bicycling is a choice rather than an economic necessity.

Participating in CM rides is an indication of an explicit demand for their rights to the city, because this is their lifestyle. David Harvey (2008, 23) defines right to the city as "the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves" and adds that "the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire." Don Mitchell (2003) argues, in practice, the extent to which citizens have rights to the city is defined by the social production of and control over public spaces. Taking over the streets during the CM rides is an attempt to remake cities apt with bicyclist's values and lifestyles and to take control of public spaces, even if it is for a limited time. Automobility is so well entrenched in everyday life and spaces it leaves little room for any other transportation mode. As bicycles appropriate the space that motor vehicles usually occupy on the streets, bicyclists negotiate their everyday access to streets, critique automobile-dominant economic systems and urban planning, and challenge the automobile status quo on the roads.

Spatial justice often brings to mind injustices based on gender, race, ethnicity, and income, yet this paper addresses the concepts of spatial justice and the right to the city in the context of the freedom to choose alternative transportation. Marginalized position of bicyclists stands in a complex relationship to issues of gender, race and income. The right to choose alternative and less costly transportation, the right to clean air, or simply the opportunity to practice one's chosen lifestyle and collectively enjoy being on the streets, receives very little attention in the

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[9] While amongst bicyclists people from all ages, races and genders are found, the majority of frequent bicyclists in San Francisco are men (72%), Caucasian (70%), and between the ages of 26 and 35; and, only 23 percent of frequent cyclists are women (San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency -SFMTA, 2008).

current literature, yet these issues are central to most bicyclists. As interview data further elaborates, such demand for right to the city is based on multiple arguments: unwillingness to support an economy that degrades the environment and causes wars; desire to live in an urban environment in which one can be physically active; not having to depend on automobiles; ability to experience the streets as social and fun places, and, the right to clean air and a healthy environment.

## 4.2    Critical Mass Ride in 1997

In San Francisco, on the last Friday of every month since 1992, in rain or shine, bicyclists gather in Justin Herman Plaza starting at around 6pm.  When the bicyclists' numbers grow large enough for them to negotiate their right of way safely, one of the bicyclists starts the ride. One by one, all of the bicyclists pour into Market Street. At the very time when motorists are anxious to return home, hundreds of bicyclists circle the plaza, blocking traffic on Embarcadero in both directions. The ride's meeting place on Embarcadero is symbolic of San Francisco residents' success regarding the freeway revolts.[10] Bicyclists ride in between the cars, play music via speakers that they carry on their bikes, and cheer. After completing several trips around the plaza, the CM ride, at times stretching more than a mile, moves on to other parts of the city.

Critical Mass got its name from a scene in a movie titled *Return of the Scorcher*, directed by Ted White in 1992. The scene shows that in China "the bikes come up to an intersection and wait till they have enough numbers to push through the cars and make them stop, and vice versa" (White, 2002). Today, over 500 people may participate in the San Francisco CM rides in good weather, making it hard to identify one common goal or motivation that represents all of the participants. However, it is evident from CM's transformation from a15-20 people ride called the "commute clot" in 1992 to a ride of 5000[11] people in 1997 that CM represents bicyclists' demand for their right to the streets.

I met Veronica, a woman in her early 20s, when I was waiting for the CM ride to begin. I was drawn to her because of her recognizable outfit: a shiny silver cable around her helmet and metallic blue tights. She told me that her outfit implies that she doesn't care what motorists think about her. In an interview, Veronica summed up the standpoint of many CM riders who appreciate the protest aspect of the rides:

> No one asked us if it should be organized that way, basically. People who were coming from a petroleum-centric mentality organized the city … to move people as if they were goods to create money, basically. There are so many lines of buses going into the financial district … but there is only one MUNI[12] to get to Golden Gate Park. It's really [about] where the city is

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[10] see http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=The_Freeway_Revolt.
[11] According to San Francisco Chronicle on July 26, 1997, by Glen et.al.
[12] MUNI is the municipal public transit system for the city and county of San Francisco, California.

placing its resources and what it's emphasizing. So, we are saying that, like, we don't need to participate in that necessarily, like, although it's the built environment and the built reality, we can, like, forge our own path through that and, like, we don't need to listen to your signals and to your stop signs and to your one-way traffic.

Bicyclists started to form a counterpublic based on such a critical outlook on the form and governance of the city. CM steadily evolved into something between a parade and a public protest, providing the opportunity for both those who want to enjoy riding in the city safely by bicycling with others and for conflict-driven bicyclists, eager to block the very motorists who block them. As more people joined in the rides, tensions between CM bicyclists and motorists, Mayor Willie Brown, and the city police rose. The attitudes of the police towards CM riders, combined with the mayor's lack of interest in improving public transportation, catalyzed the biggest ride ever in July 1997 (Epstein 1997). Deborah Underwood's letter to the editor of San Francisco Chronicle indicates bicyclists' frustration during those times (Underwood 1997):

> So now Mayor Brown wants to crack down on Critical Mass. Although I haven't participated in one yet, I'm sure tempted, because I'd love to see what it's like to actually feel safe riding on the city streets. I feel like I'm taking my life in my hands every time I ride to work … I find the lack of official support for cycling appalling … When I bought my bike, I phoned the city-sponsored bicycle hotline for commute route assistance, and no one ever returned my call … I can't imagine why the city doesn't do everything it can to encourage more people to bike to work … Tell the mayor that if he provides me with a safe way to bike to work every day, I'll stay away from Critical Mass.

After the June ride in 1997, the mayor took a radical stance against CM and commented about terminating the rides (King 1997). The San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) announced that it would no longer facilitate the ride or block intersections. The department also threatened to issue tickets and make arrests if needed. On July 20, 1997, the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (SFBC) board members became frustrated with the mayor who wanted to discuss how to control CM but ignored the bicyclists' need for safety and public transit. The board members pulled out of a meeting with the mayor and sent letters to the SFBC's 1,200 members, urging them to support the coming July 1997 CM ride (Matier 1977).

Even though CM continuously claimed not to have an official representative, after talking with some bicyclists, the City and the SFPD announced to the media that they had a deal with CM representatives for a pre-designated route for the July 1997 ride and added that no tolerance would be shown to those who did not stick to the route. However, the basic premise that underlies CM is built upon is organized in a democratic manner, without any authority or representative. "Xerocracy," a combination of two words, *democracy* and *Xerox*[13], refers to the

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[13] Xerocracy is not actively practiced in San Francisco anymore. During my field research, usually whoever was at the front would lead the ride. However, in some cities, such as Chicago, bicyclists do follow routes that are printed on maps (see Chicago Critical Mass Route Archive, http://bedno.com/ccm).

democratic way of deciding the route at the beginning of each CM ride. Whoever prepares more Xeroxes of the route and convinces the most people gets to influence the route (Carlsson 1992). Therefore, this announcement demonstrated the City's misrecognition of CM and reinforced their suppression.

As a response to Mayor Brown's attempt to control CM, 5,000 bicyclists went out on the streets on the July 25, 1997 ride. The mayor's attempt to stop the rides proved futile. Far from following a predetermined route, the 5,000 bicyclists started to flow in several directions, blocking traffic all around the city. Bicyclists figuratively demonstrated the sheer number of frustrated citizens and the size of the demand for the improvement of alternative transportation. Arrests were made, and charges brought against CM riders included assault, battery, resisting arrest, vandalism, unlawful assembly, impeding traffic, and failure to disperse (Epstein 1997). However, in the following days, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that out of 110 arrests, "just eight people arrested at Critical Mass could face jail sentences" (Lee 1997; Epstein 1997).

The controversy and simply the critical mass created at the event attracted attention of national and international media. Working in various scales of communication, such as face-to-face, local, and global, CM both galvanized local political action and set an example for bicyclists around the world (Blickstein and Hanson 2001). At the very first ride, a group of 15 to 20 bicyclists started commuting together and invited other bicyclists to join them through the distribution of flyers. In its second year, the number of riders in the San Francisco CM reached 800 to 1,000 (White 1999). Later on with the help of the Internet, CM has spread rapidly to other cities. Commute Clot transformed to an effective local counterpublic. CM rides have been taking place in 465 cities around the world today as a web search demonstrates. Its worldwide spread has demonstrated that marginalization of alternative transportation and particularly of bicycling and need to reshape cities is a worldwide concern.

The counterpublic wasn't only about bicycling. They demanded better access to streets that are largely occupied by automobiles. Letters to the editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* from June-July 1997 not only spoke on behalf of bicyclists, but also critiqued the money spent on highways instead of public transit (Melville 1997; Wilcott 1997).

The conditions that created this counterpublic in San Francisco were unique. Both local governance of the time and the environmental activism history of San Francisco contributed to its creation. The movement's strength also came from the inherently fun nature of this gathering; riding in urban streets is not simply a method of commuting, it is also enjoyable. Streets as public gathering spaces served bicyclists well in communicating their demands to the local government and motorists. Not finding much worth in or effect from participating in other outlets of public expression, such as attending City Hall meetings, bicyclists find that using streets for direct political action is more effective in getting their message across. Bicyclists have also demonstrated that once safety is no longer an issue, there are many people who will want to ride on the streets. As discussed in Mitchell's (2003) definition of right to the city, public spaces may be spaces of democratic politics only if they are accessible. Not having safe access to the streets therefore hadn't allowed bicyclists to voice their opinion in the public sphere, until CM brought them together. With the help of media the ride become globally known and   What is particularly significant is that this counterpublic is still active today after 20 years of existence.

## 4.3    Community of Like-minded People

A wide variety of people join the CM rides. Some enjoy the rides' insurgent aspects, some like the safety provided by bicycling with many people, and some participate in order to restate CM's infamous statement, "we are not blocking traffic, we are the traffic." As the history of the ride demonstrates, CM has become known worldwide for being a venue for those who want to make a statement regarding bicyclists' rights in the city.

James Swanson, in C*ritical Mass: Bicycling's Defiant Celebration*, illustrates bicyclists' frustrations with globally dominating automobile culture by representing a single bicycle as powerful enough to encircle and squeeze the automobile lobbies and oil companies headquartered in their downtown high-rise offices (fig. 4.4). The ride meets on Embarcadero, a symbolic place of Freeway Revolts as protest took place there. Timing of the ride, too, reflect anti-capitalist and anti consumerist sentiments, by challenging what Debord (1994) noted as interconnected notions of work and non-work. The ride corresponds with the commute hour and replaces it with time for fun. The efficiency of the automobile, a symbol of modernity, becomes greatly reduced during the rides.

Figure 4.4 James Swanson's illustration of bicyclists' power over oil and automobile corporations (source: Wilson 1992).

Bicyclists are primarily defined on the basis of their transportation mode. Riding a bicycle, whether for leisure, commuting, or running errands, is a choice, to say the least. But, for many bicyclists, it is an extension of their identity, beliefs, and core values. Their shared identity is significant in that it unites them as a counterpublic in their demand for rights to the city. Interviews with and surveys of CM bicyclists further explain these shared values.

Regarding her first time participating in CM, Veronica said "a friend of mine held my hand and said: *welcome to church,*" thereby comparing the large body of bicyclists to a religious congregation united through shared beliefs. Instead of being based on ethnic identities or religion, the bicyclist community forms itself around environmental and social values. Many of the interviewees assume that most people who bicycle do so because they care about environmental sustainability, just as they themselves do. For instance, when asked why she participates in CM, Caroline (30s) stated,

> I like to be surrounded by like-minded people … I really like being part of a bike community. It has been one of the best communities that I have been part of in my life. I feel like a lot of them are working on advocacy that is important. I would love to not ever have to buy a car. If there are other people out there who are working to make cities more bikeable, then I like to be around them, and I like to feel like I am working with them.

[What do you mean by "like-minded"?]

> Caring about the environment, caring about cities being more bike- and pedestrian-friendly ... It seems like urban commute cycling tends to go along with a lot of environmental ideas. People are concerned about pollution and not wasting resources, not using gas if they don't have to make those trips. Biking is a total good for me … When I hear about things like the recent oil spill14 it strengthens my resolve to not want to contribute to anything it has to do with that … I just want to remain in the bike community and bike around town with people.

For Caroline, bicycling and being around like-minded people affirms her identity. Even if she is currently not contributing in another way, by participating in the rides she feels she shows her support to the community. Randall (50s), who participates both in San Francisco Bike to Work Day and CM, adds the following:

> Bikers are really part of a community. It is just like politics, you are part of a party. To me, it is the way that we act in like-minded community and it is important to me. I think a lot of people are into the environment, they really are proud of the fact that bicycle has a zero carbon imprint and they get exercise on their bike … I think those are certainly some of the real benefits of riding a bike … They tend to be some way very political too, supporting various measures good for bikes ... political part of it for me is keeping the breath of the progress, keeping the breath of instructions that we still deal with and also looking forward for those improvements [once the bike injunction is removed] … [These events] somehow, I think, unconsciously and consciously, bring people together in the same structure, in the same belief,

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14 British Petroleum's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.

"Hey biking is good, let's get more people to do it." I think that is the real, strong, simple message and strong impact.

Years after the 1997 ride, participants of CM continue to acknowledge the political benefits of the meeting each month during the rides. One of the obstructions that Randall referred to was the San Francisco bike injunction that delayed the city's implementation of a bike plan from 2006 to 2010.[15] Meeting regularly every month keeps the ties strong between the members of the group. The bicycle communities' political influence extends beyond immediate bicycling matters. "Stop Texas Oil. No on Prop 23" organizers' visit to CM to collect signatures for their campaign—a campaign that eventually stopped oil companies from suspending California's efforts to create green jobs—is a case in point. CM gatherings are places numerous other events are announced too, such as a talk series on the San Francisco Bay Area's history of ecological activism. The series flyer appeals to many bicyclists through its portrayal of a utopian city in which concrete blocks in the background are a matter of past times, and prioritization of ecology in the foreground is a thing of the present and future (fig. 4.5). The choice of a dark-skinned woman instead of a white male is also noteworthy as a reference to the opinions of the marginalized.
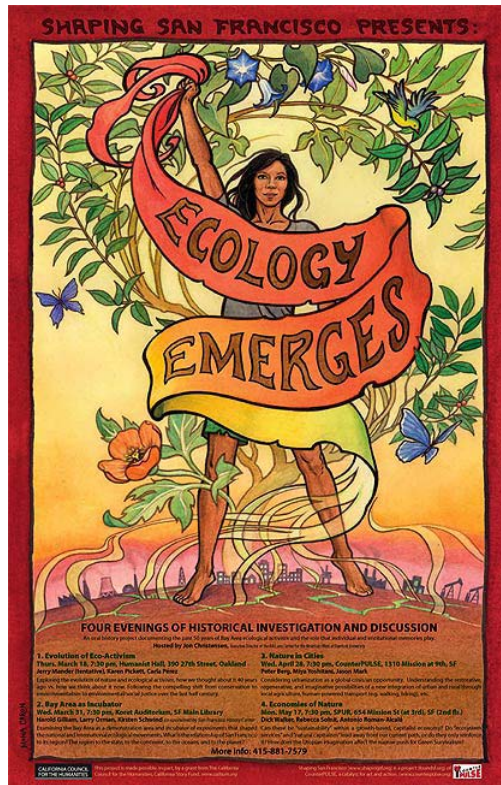


Figure 4.5 A flyer distributed at the rides that announces a series of talks (illustration by Mona Caron).

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[15] The bike injunction started in 2006 because of a court trial that claimed that the city's bike plan was not in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act. The injunction was fully removed in 2010 after the city released a 1,353-page environmental impact report.

Several interviewees stated that they strive for a lifestyle that allows them to have the smallest possible ecological footprint. Bicycling is one of the ways of doing this, and CM is a venue for them to show their need for safer access to the streets. Bubblegirl, a San Francisco CM bicyclist who regularly participates in CM and similar bicycling and pedestrian events, is memorable for a small bubble-blowing device attached to the back of her bike. Through this device she says she metaphorically demonstrates the difference between an automobile's and a bicycle's impact on the environment. She says,

> [T]o me the bubbles are a metaphor for cars' exhaust. Here I have bubbles coming out of … my bike. You can see where they go, and if you are biking behind a stinky truck … you can see … where these bubbles go is exactly where cars' exhaust goes. It absolutely covers the entire area behind me. My windows, … I have to wash them several times a year because they get covered with the cars' exhaust … Exhaust goes everywhere and no one is safe from its … toxicity … I know that I am breathing that … I've often suffered moments of asphyxiation … because of the nauseating exhaust of buses and drivers who are immoral in their disregard for my right to clean air.



Figure 4.6 Signs carried by bicyclists critiquing automobile induced oil dependency and its contribution to global warming and oil wars (photograph by author).

Other bicyclists demonstrate their views on environmental and political issues surrounding automobile dependency with signs they carry on their bicycles (fig. 4.6). In the 2012 survey, a total of 76.8% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that they participate because they do not want to contribute to oil consumption. 81.2%, in total, agreed and strongly agreed that they participate because they do not want to contribute to environmental pollution.

Dorothy (40s) refers to the practical benefits of joining the rides:

> Actually, Critical Mass kind of changed my life… [P]robably most people think CM as a demonstration … they disturb traffic, it causes problems … For me, it was from the very beginning, it was kind of a support group. I didn't know to get around the city on my bike. I didn't know if I could. I didn't feel safe riding in traffic. I didn't feel safe riding on the street. What CM provided me was a group of peers that were better bikers than I was, and I learnt a lot. I

mean, first of all there is safety in numbers. A lot of these bikers know better ways around the city than I ever did. And its comradeship … it is being in a group that has similar interests … I got [to] know my way around the city a lot ... I realized that I could get all the way out to Ocean Beach on my three-speed. And, back home, and I can take care of myself.

Bicycling in the city requires adaptation, such as finding paths with lighter traffic and smaller slopes, and negotiating the right-of-way with automobiles requires time to learn. Learning from peers eases these adaptations. CM fosters a community of bicyclists and a support network in which bicyclists can meet with others who have similar lifestyles and values. McDonald-Walker (2000) observes a similar sense of community among motorcycle riders, as they too are united based on shared lifestyles, even though their lifestyle, identity, and values greatly differ from bicyclists'. McDonald-Walker (2000) describes the sense of community of such lifestyle-based groups as both physical (they meet in the same locations) and symbolic (based on affinity and comradeship).

Dorothy also equates people being in their automobiles with being closed in apartments; both spaces are different forms of isolation that lead to limited social interaction. In contrast, no physical barrier exists between people on a bicycle. Dorothy notes,

> Living in an apartment in a city of a million plus people versus a small, close-knit community is isolating and often lonely. In San Francisco you have to go out and find your community. Because everybody is living in their own apartments, [that are] like little boxes … we are kind of closed off from each other. Biking community is huge … our community doesn't have an exact address. It's on the road with other like-minded people … you can't talk in a bar … When you are on a bike you can have a conversation, you can get to know people. You are outside, enjoying yourself, getting exercise ... It's more social … You don't have walls around you, like in car or apartment…

The modern city has indeed been known for creating such a sense of anonymity and isolation. CM combats such social isolation by providing a community of like-minded individuals. CM creates a unique venue in which one can easily socialize with others due to the absence of physical barriers around each person. Some riders stated that they want to make friends, not only to socialize with, but also with whom they can ride to the places where they socialize. Moreover, CM rides are safe spaces, especially for women. Dorothy adds,

> I lived here for 10 years before I really got active in biking. I felt isolated a lot of times, and I didn't know how to meet people … It's really difficult to meet people at bars. Because the music is loud, and you think that they just want one thing and you just want to have a deeper conversation with somebody and not to have to worry about, umm, being hit on. So, bicycling is a good way to be social but still to keep some boundaries … I mean especially more for women …. then, umm, as far as security … I think most of the guys out there have a really difficult time keeping up with me. [*Laughing*] [If] somebody is coming on to me, and I am not interested, I can just bike away, and [*laughing*] it's very empowering.  I know I can handle myself on a bike. I know I can

> take care of myself in the city…and, I know if somebody is bothering me, I cruise quickly to get away from them. It's given me confidence in all areas of my life.

Such examples of sense of empowerment derived from bicycling for women bicyclist is not unusual. Veronica, too, talked about sense of empowerment she feels as she bicycles. Her sense of empowerment is very much associated with connection established with one's surroundings; besides, it being about confidence and independence bicycling provided her:

> It is like a deeper connection with you, your body and landscape. The best way to get to know of a landscape, or a people land or a geography is to feel the contours. And like when you are pumping on a hill you are really feeling the contour where is if you have to like you know rotate your ankles to press harder on the gas pedal , you are not feeling that. There is a lot of muscle memory that's involved in it. If you have to go up a huge hill every day, your body knows that hill, and like it rides on all of your emotions at the same time. Every time you get on that hill you fell powerful you fell strong. It is sense of accomplishment it gives you a sense of power and like you are participating in your physical environment.

Such examples of sense of empowerment can be traced back till the end of the 19th century, when bicycling had become a significant factor in women's emancipation (Herlihy, 2004). Individual mobility helped women independently move from the private sphere to what used to be a male-dominated public sphere. Veronica, too, says that her bicycle allows her to be self-dependent day and night in that she does not have to work her schedule around public transportation's time and location limitations. She claims that because of bicycling she feels empowered, as she is able to travel farther on her own time and rely on her body alone:

> I have never really worried about my safety when I am on a bicycle...  Mostly at night … you ride in the middle of the street so that no one can jump at you from the sides of the street ... It totally revolutionizes where you can go at night. Because you don't have to walk, and taking the bus at night is sketchy by yourself, like bus stops, and then you still have to walk from the bus stop to your house … Biking completely revolutionizes, like, where you can and cannot go. I think that is pretty significant.  At least, it has been for me ... I feel really safe on my bike. I think that, like, is a special type of empowerment that women can get from a bicycle for sure.

Other than the motivations reported above, the two highest strongly agreed statements in the 2012 online survey were "It is simply fun to ride together with other bicyclists" (78.3%) and "I enjoy the city in a way I cannot enjoy otherwise" (65.2%). In the interviews too, people overwhelmingly used the word "fun," and stated the same question, where else they can enjoy the city this way?  One informant said, "streets are our playground." Bicycling is not chosen over driving only for functional or political reasons; people also enjoy feeling the fresh air and being in direct contact with the people around them and their surroundings. However, the streets are only enjoyable in these ways if one can ride in a dedicated path without the danger of automobile traffic.

The whole range of motivations explains why people care about being able to bicycle not only during CM events, but also in everyday life. These various social, ideological, and practical reasons unite bicyclists in their claims on streets. Bicyclists' counterdiscourse challenges automobiles' dominance in urban planning and raises questions about how urban planning can better serve a society with plural publics. But, most importantly existence of this counterpublic and development of their discourses depend on uninterrupted access to streets.

## 4.4    Alternative Bicycle Rides

CM was a precursor to many rides and other similar car-free street events, though the rides are not attracting 5,000 people anymore. For many people, CM has done its good, but its time is over now. This is mainly because of the confrontational bicyclists that participate in the rides, bang on cars or corner automobiles, and don't respect right of way of neither other bicyclists nor pedestrians during the rides, in a mob mentality. Not dividing the ride, as CM argues is their strategy to be able to drive safely. Bicyclists provide safety for themselves through their numbers. To make rides possible, bicyclists move through the streets without allowing the group to be divided because of automobiles, pedestrians, traffic lights, or stop signs. Riding together gives bicyclists the power they need to co-exist on the road with the automobiles. However, the same motive also results in CM rides becoming known as being anarchist rides, because people who are simply interested in causing trouble join the rides too, get into conflicts with motorists and receive tickets from police officers.

Many people I interviewed including those who have been part of CM since its early years, avid bicyclists, SFBC members, and volunteers in other bicycling events, think that the ride does more bad than good for bicyclists' causes. Some argue that the ride is not even as political as it used to be, and since the city has paid more attention to bicyclists' needs over the last 10 years, the need for CM is not as urgent. Thus, some people see CM as a social event more than a political one, and some see it as a disturbance. The goal of this dissertation is not to judge CM's goodness, badness, or usefulness, it is to stress that even though CM has received negative publicity in recent years, the interest on the street as spaces of fun and play has not disappeared. On the Contrary, those who dislike some aspects of CM have created different kinds of and less confrontational grassroots rides. Today, even though the San Francisco CM ride does not attract 5,000 people anymore, bicyclists' interest on access to streets for collective rides is growing and taking different forms. Those who do not associate themselves with the anarchist aspects of CM have created different kinds of and less confrontational grassroots rides. The East Bay Bike Party (a ride that started in San Jose and attracts thousands of people), Berkeley moonlight bike ride, community rides in Richmond, A girl and her bike (a woman cyclist group in San Francisco) San Francisco Midnight Mystery Ride, and Butterlap Ride are some examples.

The Bike Party, for instance, is a seemingly similar ride to CM but in fact is very different. It was started in San Jose, CA in 2007. A few thousands of people join the rides every month according to a Bay Area Guardian article by Jones and Donohue (2011). I participated in the July 2010 East Bay Bike Party in the Bay Area. The Bike Party rides emphasize taking back the night and obeying traffic rules and not disrupting automobile traffic, as their flyer states (fig. 4.7). The Bike Party denounces what CM rides find essential. It has an organized and non-confrontational

feel, and compared to CM, participants do not feel like they are ruling the streets. In contrast to bicyclists in CM who cut in front of automobiles and force them to give way to bicyclists, Bike Party volunteers make sure that bicyclists do not occupy more lanes than they need, obey traffic rules, and stop at red lights and stop signs. The ride thus gets divided, but the predetermined route comes in handy and allows bicyclists to know where they are going without having to follow others. There are also volunteers who keep an eye on the bicyclists at the back of the ride.



Figure 4.7 East Bay Bike Party Flyer (East Bay Bike Party, 2012, http://eastbaybikeparty.wordpress.com/).
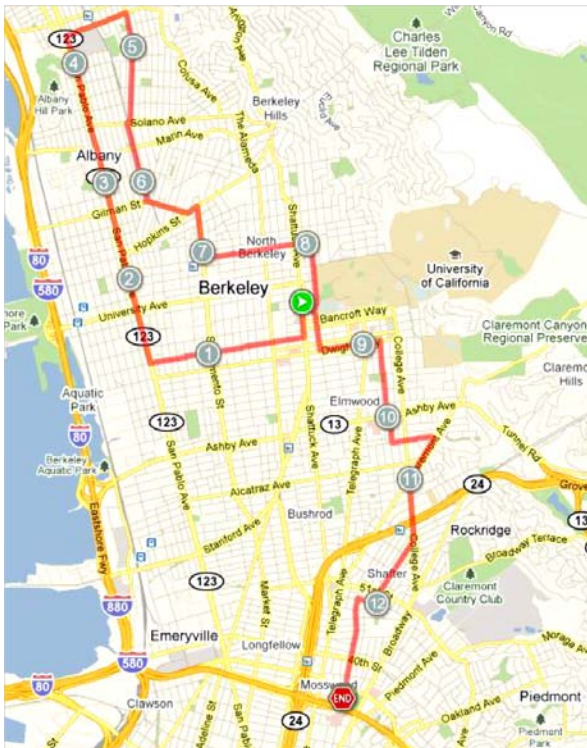
Figure 4.8 Route map of July 9th, 2010 Space Party (East Bay Bike Party, 2012, http://eastbaybikeparty.wordpress.com/).

Music is a significant asset to all of the car-free street events. A large speaker carried on the back of a bicycle cheers up other bicyclists and makes the ride more like a carnival. This is also true of the Bike Party rides. Moreover, the Bike Party combines the ride with several 15-20 minute stops in large open spaces such as parking lots of shopping malls and neighborhood parks along the predetermined and preannounced route. During the stops, bicyclists gather to take a break and mingle with each other. The rides start at about 7:30 pm, and when the crowd hits the road, usually it is already dark. Stopover places in the evening hours are deserted, unused parts of the city, and they are usually unsafe. As the hundreds of bicyclists fill those spaces with their music and with their bodies, they bring social life into the deserted nighttime environment of the city. Taking back the night is not a new movement, but the idea is revived with this bicycle event, and it is combined with better access to the streets. Thus, in different forms, adapted to local and contemporary needs, grassroots bicyclists continue to reclaim the streets in order to enhance social life in the streets.

# CHAPTER 5 PARK(ING) DAY: FIXING THE CITY

The modern urban planning required clean streets with fewer sights of people, and more automobiles carrying people from one place to another. Today, still, relying on private transportation is the norm for many and having parking space readily available is an obvious right for the urban driver. However, an abundance of parking space is a problem for various publics who coexist in the same urban space. Despite the fact that not everybody who lives in the city drives or needs the automobile infrastructure, together with drivers, non-drivers too live in public spaces that are utilized as on-street parking spaces.

During Park(ing) Day, an event that has now become annual and worldwide on the third Friday of September, people are encouraged to "hijack" on-street parking spots and turn them into temporary public spaces. Adding a green element to these parks is strongly encouraged. Organizers also emphasize the need to create spaces for social interaction that do not have a commercial component.

Just as with CM, Park(ing) Day also started in San Francisco with one park(ing) spot in 2005, and but it quickly spread to the world. There were 975 parks in 162 cities in 35 countries in 2011.[16] The event is a tourist attraction s like a touristic attraction (even for locals) as people print out routes that will allow them to visit as many park(ing) spaces possible. Park(ing) Day is another event that makes San Franciscans feel great pride in their city, just as Sunday Streets does. Throughout the remaining chapter I will refer to on-street parking spots appropriated and modified by people as "park(ing) spots."
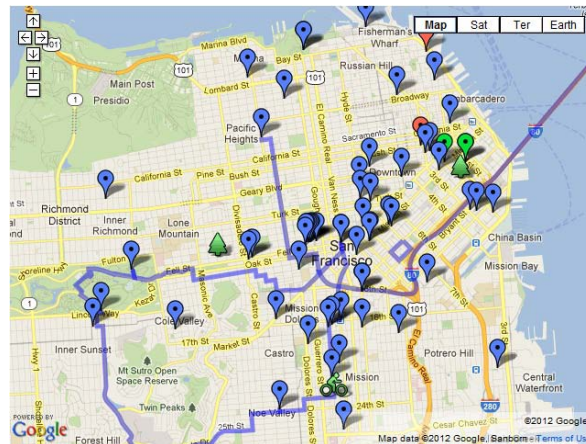


Figure 5.1 San Francisco Park(ing) Day Google map featuring 57 park(ing) spots in 2010 (map by Rebar Group Inc.).

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[16] Number of parks increased steadily each year. There were 47 in 3 countries in 2006, 200 in 9 countries in 2007, 600 in 13 countries in 2008, 700 in 21 countries in 2009, and 800 in 30 countries in 2010, according to Rebar Group Inc. website (www.parkingday.org, 2012).

Rebar created the first park(ing) spot by paying the parking meter for two hours (fig. 5.2). Rebar is "an interdisciplinary studio, operating at the intersection of art, design, and ecology" according to their definition. The studio is comprised of artists, designers, architects, and engineers. The three principles and founders of the studio are professionals who have degrees in arts, biochemistry, landscape architecture, and law.

The studio, in addition to its fee-based projects, creates various artistic urban reclamation projects. Through its work the studio aims to engage the civic society with ecological ideas while pushing the limits of conventional use of public spaces. Their work includes transforming public spaces into edible gardens (Victory gardens at the Civic Center in San Francisco); reprogramming privately-owned public spaces, for instance creating public sleeping areas in high-rise offices' lobbies or flying kites on the rooftops of high-rise offices (Commonspace project); and creating a human-powered mobile park covered with grass that is equal to the size of a on-street parking space (the Parkcycle) (fig. 5.3).



Figure 5.2 The first park(ing) installation on 1st and Mission Streets in San Francisco, on November 16, 2005 (photograph by Rebar Group Inc.).



Figure 5.3 The parkcycle in front of San Francisco City Hall (photograph by Rebar Group Inc.)

The Park(ing) Day manual, prepared by Rebar and provided on the event's website, suggests a few essential elements to create a park(ing) spot: ground cover, seating, greenery, shading elements, and barriers to put between automobile traffic and the park(ing) spot. The manual also gives tips on how to keep the event green and fun.

On-street park(ing) spots that people create during the annual Park(ing) Day feature all sorts of arrangements: mini golf parks, sod-covered green parks, beach-like parks filled with sand, and simple seating areas or lunch-break places with a couple of lawn chairs, a table, and sometimes a couple of beer bottles to share (fig. 5.4). Some of the spaces are just for fun; some are used to make an overt statement. Businesses, non-profits, other organizations and design firms benefit from Park(ing) Day because it allows them to come out into the daylight, into the public eye in public space. The city turns inside-out; behind-closed-doors culture and activities become more accessible to everybody. In addition, because the event is about sustainability and being green, many organizations and businesses that are aligned with this worldview want to show to their client base, community, and supporters their green vision. Zen Temple, a music club that claims to manage its business in sustainable ways (installing energy efficient bulbs, offering their space for community events, etc.), was the creator of one such park(ing) spot. Another similar park(ing) spot organizer was the Neighborhood Park Council, a community organization. During the event they reached out to residents of San Francisco who are interested in using the council's know-how to demand the city build additional parks in their neighborhoods.



Figure 5.4 Hayes Valley park(ing) spots in 2010 (photographs by author).

The event takes up a space that is devoted to parking a car by renting the space through paying the parking meter. In cities in which parking regulations do not explicitly prohibit the use of parking spaces for purposes other than parking cars, authorities are caught off-guard most of the time. Parking and traffic law enforcement personnel cannot give tickets since there is no vehicle and no license plate involved. It is a grassroots event, nevertheless, whether Park(ing) Day can happen freely and peacefully or not in a given locale is in the hands of the city and police and traffic controllers. In San Francisco, the event happens peacefully because of the city government's tolerant and even supportive attitude.[17] Rebar states in an interview to San Francisco Bay Guardian's November 2009 issue that the Rebar's first parking spot installation received immediate support from the mayor of San Francisco's administration. A nationwide non-profit that focuses on developing parks for public use, *Trust for Public Land,* is another logistic and financial contributor that makes Park(ing) Day possible (Trust for Public Land, 2008). Thus, even though the event sets up an occasion for any resident to appropriate public space, powerful actors play a role in the organization of the event. Collaboration between the City and Rebar even led to the integration of the Park(ing) Day idea into the City's *Pavement to Parks Program* and the construction of "parklets," which are extentions of sidewalks onto on-street car parking spaces.

Park(ing) Day serves residents as an outlet and allows them to express themselves regarding the kinds of spaces the community needs more of in the city. Thus, this analysis is not about the variety of urban design solutions to replace on-street parking places; rather, it seeks to expose various publics' claims on public space. The event encourages do-it-yourself urbanism and claiming ownership of public space. For a limited time, various publics simultaneously juxtapose their interpretations of better urban space into the existing street infrastructure.

The popularity of Park(ing) Day confirms highly contested nature of parking space, as it allows anybody to recreate that portion of public space as they wish. Spatial appropriations demonstrate the various urban needs of multiple counterpublics. In my analysis I found that opportunities for casual interactions created by spontaneous public spaces were significant for residents. Residents did not only simply enjoy chatting with each other, but also got to know various publics and subcultures that normally reside behind the closed doors in the city. Park(ing) Day also stands out because of its political nature. The event exhibits multiple publics' desires to repurpose parking spaces.

### 5.1    Social Interactions

Street areas are often designed to accommodate roads for motor vehicle travel, sidewalks for pedestrian travel, and parking space for parking automobiles. Adequate space for greenery and

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[17] The only incident I could find in a web search was one organizer in Miami Florida getting arrested because the set-up stayed in place until the next day (http://streetsblog.net/2011/09/19/parking-day-organizer-arrested-in-miami/, 2011)

other uses such as relaxation, outdoor dining, sitting, and social interaction are not incorporated into calculations of sidewalk width in most cases. Opportunities for casual interactions are limited on narrow streets. People who participate in Park(ing) Day installations seem to genuinely care about taking a break, slowing down, having a face-to-face conversation with neighbors, and getting to know others. As Putnam (2000) outlines that even though informal social connections do not necessarily lead to formal participation in civic life, they still play a significant role in sustaining social capital.

As analysis of CM and Sunday Streets events demonstrate, people who live in the city report that they do not know their neighbors. Earlier I outlined that research shows that, independent of cultural differences, the more space devoted to motor vehicle traffic, the weaker the relations between neighbors get (Appleyard et. al., 1981; Hart, n.d.; Transportation Alternatives, 2006). Parking spaces occupy space that could have been extra public space for casual meetings. The elimination of parking space adds extra square footage to the sidewalk and opens up possibilities for a variety of functions to take place in addition to walking. Park(ing) Day provides exposure for those publics who are interested in more square footage being devoted to a variety of uses.

An image search for "Parking Day" in Google demonstrates the extent to which people creatively repurpose the parking spaces: examples from around the world include a grand piano recital space, a beach-like setting with sand, hay stacks to sit on, outdoor cafes with couches, lawns with hammocks, and play and exercise areas such as a mini soccer field and table tennis and yoga areas. Park(ing) spaces attract people in various ways, arts, play, and green space to name a few. However, the opportunities they create for social interactions are the highlight of the event for passersby.

A simple "greening" of the parking spot is what makes it inviting, people say. In San Francisco, three adjacent parking spaces were converted by a team from a coffee shop to a single park(ing) spot that was called Ritual State Park. The ground was covered with grass, and the space exhibited a camping tent, a picnic table for four, and two people in bear costumes (one grizzly bear and one panda). Ritual State Park was inviting enough that people got their coffee from the shop and sat outside even though it was cloudy. Regarding connecting experiences of an extra patch of grass on the street, Kevin, who was sitting in this park(ing) spot, said,

> There is grass instead of cars. It helps to connect a little bit more. Without grass I wouldn't stay more. It is life, it grows, it has color, adds a lot … Nothing disconnects you from air, grass, asphalt, rain drop, smell. Being connected is a pretty awesome thing ... concrete is hard, nothing there … Here in park(ing) I am stationary. I am connected to the people, the elements of nature, to energies.

Green space on a street provides a spot to take a break. It transforms a street to a space where one can hang out, rather than just pass by. A green space on a street, different from a single larger park for each neighborhood, would be more accessible and serve as a meeting point to connect people who live in close proximity.

Figure 5.5 Ritual State Park (photograph by Aditi Rao).

Many park(ing) spots go beyond simply greening a stretch of concrete—they become works of art. Everyday streets are anonymous, like a book without an author; however, creators of park(ing) spaces usually attend their spot. A regular parking spot suddenly becomes more personal and human scale; they are no longer dull places. Many of them are places into which people put a lot of effort, thinking, and creativity. Park(ing) spots are also spontaneous spaces, enabling passersby to come across a portion of public space that is different from the standard, everyday public space. for instance, one park(ing) spot was designed by an architecture firm and consisted of furniture made of cardboard tubes attached to each other with paper clips (fig. 5.6). Bryan, at another park(ing) spot, regarding seeing art in public space said "where you would otherwise just bike by, drive by, something as powerful as that not only made me stop, but stop, lock my bike up, and engage the artist and have a conversation… that sort of door to human interaction is impressive." The out-of-ordinary quality and uniqueness of art in public spaces, and similarly, park(ing) spaces encourage people to engage with one another.

At another park(ing) spot, created by a medical marihuana dispensary, its organizer, Mark, said:

> It's changed my view of the city … every time that I go to something like this … art installation or people in the community are coming together to do anything. [Whether I know them or not] it always makes me enjoy the city a little bit more because it is such a distant city. Everybody in the city are disconnected from each other … I absolutely adore the city but it gets difficult sometimes to deal with the city.

57

Figure 5.6 Cardboard tube seating on a park(ing) spot designed by an architecture firm (photograph by Iris Espiritu).

At a park(ing) spot in front of a record store, a group of friends (including some who worked at the shop) expressed views that paralleled the previous interviewee. Bryan said people stop by and they have a conversation, "that human interaction happens nearly as easily in an automobile if at all." At another park(ing) spot, California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), one of the organizers, said "people seem to be open to talk to strangers … we just pulled an old fuse, a rug … really simple … What made it fun is the community of people who came and drum …. Wherever there is people there is interesting stuff. For me it shows how structures can be very simple. If there is people that can make a difference." A couple of people who were hanging out at the CIIS park(ing) spot agreed that  they would not otherwise have spent that much time in this particular location, especially because it does not usually feel comfortable there (south of Market) because of the homeless traffic. They added that the park(ing) spot successfully transformed the place into a safe one at which they wanted to hang out.



Figure 5.7 Park(ing) spot of California Institute of Integral Studies (source: Arts at CIIS Facebook albums).

A personalized touch in the renewed public spaces was another source of attraction. An organizer of the CIIS parking spot said that the institution's goal was to represent their culture, especially the vision of their "greening committee." He added that they just have this main building and no outdoor spaces. By occupying the public space in front of their school and appropriating it in a manner apropos with their sub-culture and taste, the organizers from CIIS got a chance to exhibit their identity to the public. CIIS is a community that strives indoors, normally. However, the event allowed them to expand their culture into public space and connected with the community. Against the background noise of bus and car traffic, the organizer of the park(ing) spot added that for him the moment of greatest happiness was that even though it was drizzling a bit, people were still dancing and drumming in a very small space. That "exemplified some of the spirit of CIIS, in terms of people expressing themselves, and here, in a quite busy street and yet it feels pretty calm ... it is almost revolutionary but in a very gentle, fun kind of way." A prospective CIIS student, Susan, sitting in the park(ing) spot said,

> It has been so fun. I have got new friends. I have got a whole new community, because of this place ... I was gonna come check out the school and then leave; but, because of this space I stayed around and met more people and we just had a little jam and sang and drank tea ... A lot of things happened just now… [in] an hour and a half …

[What does this event mean to you, why do you care?]

> To me this has just provided a space: This is my first impression of the school. This was like, wow! I was about to leave and there is tea, and music, and a space to sit down, which wouldn't have been here … so it's a pretty big deal for me.

Susan added that it was an opportunity "to connect with people with similar interests." She had an instant glimpse at the culture of the school and even became part of it. Evident from Susan's appreciation, Park(ing) Day allowed CIIS's culture and identity—which is more often than not closed off behind the walls—to be visible to the public. Similarly to the ways in which people who participated in Sunday Streets did, people participating in Park(ing) Day transformed public spaces into semi-private spaces. Like a front yard, such spaces allow casual interactions with passers-by.

Combating a sense of isolation and the lack of a sense of community came up repeatedly in discussions with Park(ing) Day participants, just like those categories were prevalent at CM and Sunday Streets events. During Park(ing) Day any group or individual can use public space to make themselves visible and express themselves. Communities that grow indoors come outdoors and become accessible to others. Thus, park(ing) spots are not only taken simply as a fun idea fused with activism, environmentalism, and art; they are an experience that catalyzes casual interaction between people, even between those who have lived or worked physically close but have not interacted with one another, making Park(ing) Day a deeply significant experience.

**5.2    From Hyde Park to Sidewalk Parks: Political aspects of Park(ing) Day**

Speaker's Corner in London's Hyde Park is an infamous public space. From the worker riots and demonstrations in the mid-19th century, Speaker's Corner became a center of free speech. The park served as a location for large crowds to gather and fight for their civil rights, including their right to assemble, and democratization of their society, just as numerous other public spaces in other cities have also served to make the masses visible and enable them speak their opinions in public. CM similarly used public spaces, but instead of gathering in one large public space, bicyclists spread out throughout the streets; which is fitting since streets are the space for which they make rights claims. People participating in Park(ing) Day and Sunday Streets also appropriated streets for their desired uses, though employing tactics that were less protest-like.

Places like Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park are designated spots. Those who want to be heard are heard only by those who want to hear and who go to the Speakers' corner. Riots, demonstrations, and upheavals take place in large public spaces for masses to gather so that entire counterpublic can communicate their discourses verbally. However, less volatile everyday issues, such as increasing the quality of life in publics spaces through livable transformations of streets can be communicated by taking direct action on the exact street for which claims are made. People can demonstrate their preferred design by re-building part of a street.

During Park(ing) Day, instead of meeting in a single "free speech corner" in the city and exchanging opinions, people put their opinions into practice in multiple areas of the city. Thus, the ideas about remaking streets are communicated throughout the city. Consequently, the exchange of ideas incorporates actual places and people who live nearby and use those spaces. The remaking of parking spots allows people to experience the difference, rather than just discuss it.

Michel de Certeau (1984) defines walking in the city as an act of appropriation and spatial resistance to the totalitarian logic of urban. Park(ing) Day expands such appropriation to an act of transforming the shape of the built environment. Walking does not have a physical influence on the shape of the built environment and is momentary, but installing park(ing) spots is a public performance that lasts for hours. Reshaping a portion of urban space is a significant power statement that a community of residents can make. Reclaiming, redesigning, and reprogramming public space, even if only temporarily, and engaging the public in this act of reappropriation gives control of public space deliberately and visibly to the public. Swarming public spaces with park(ing) spots and bodies of individuals who occupy these spots peacefully and pay the meter makes the appropriations regulation-proof to a certain extent. This tactic has proved itself not only in a tolerant city like San Francisco, but in 161 other cities as well.

The event is fun for many people; however, for many grassroots organizers, Park(ing) Day is also a valuable opportunity to create a public forum about current public issues. Many organizers' concerns directly involve urban land use matters. Fun, relaxing, and socially-engaging qualities of park(ing) spaces attract even those who are not political about urban space. However, by simply attending the space with their bodies, passersby become active agents in the appropriation of the park(ing) spot. Various publics reclaim and demand their access to the streets for uncommon functions, such as spaces devoted to play and fun, growing food, providing

bug habitats, and more. The remainder of this chapter articulates the ways in which the various publics make claims on streets by setting up their park(ing) spots.


### a. Play, and fun

*Skateboarders' park(ing) spot.* Skaters are one of the publics that demand more access to the city. A group of skaters turned three parking spots into a skate park. A skating ramp was placed in one spot, a van to grill and distribute food stood on one, and a couple benches stood on the other. The ramp was brought from the backyard of one of the skaters. At one of the busiest times, the park(ing) spot attracted 10-15 skaters (fig. 5.8).

The skate park was strategically located in front of San Francisco's City Hall, like it is every year, as Jason, one of the organizers, said. In reaction to facing tickets from police any other time of the year, the skaters took full advantage of the Par(ing) Day—being able to occupy downtown parking spots freely—and put their skate park right in front of the city offices as an attempt to demonstrate the ways in which they demand city streets be transformed so that they can be part of the public.



Figure 5.8 Skateboarders' park(ing) spot at the Civic Center in front of the City Hall. (photograph by Yael Perez).


The skater's park(ing) spot is endorsed by a skateboarding company and the San Francisco Skateboarders Association, according to the company, according to California Bonzing's website. Jensen (2007) in his article in *The San Francisco Chronicle* states that San Francisco was a skater's Mecca in the 1980s and 1990s. 200 people from all over the world would easily

fill the Justin Herman Plaza at Embarcadero (known as EMB) on any given weekend (Jensen, 2007). However, by 2003, due to pressures from downtown businesses, "all but a few of the city's well-known spots were skate-proofed, resulting in a skateboarder exodus from San Francisco" (Jensen, 2007). San Francisco has few skate parks (only three official skate parks exist) compared to, for instance, Portland, Oregon, a city with a smaller population but 19 skate parks. However, more skate parks are not a comprehensive solution for skaters. A skater in San Francisco claims that even with more skate parks built, "we'll always continue to skate the streets. I mean, that's where skating came from, you know?" (Jensen, 2007).

Today, skateboarding is not allowed on any street or on any sidewalk in a business district. The City of San Francisco traffic code (section 100, amended in 2008) prohibits all non-motorized user-propelled-vehicles (NUV) on streets and sidewalks in any business district at any time and on any sidewalks at night (between the period commencing 30 minutes after sunset and 30 minutes before sunrise.) Skateboarders' access to the city is limited to daytime hours and to residential streets. Those who practice skateboarding as a sport, professionals or not, are not allowed to use just any place in the city they deem appropriate for skating. Choosing to commute on a skateboard to a workplace located in a business district is not a legal option because skating is stigmatized and not promoted as an alternative transportation mode.



Figure 5.9 Skateboarding on a street in the outskirts of the city (photograph by California Bonzing Co.).

Because skaters are marginalized and excluded from public spaces of the city, they continue to reclaim the streets in insurgent ways. Jason states that on regular days they try Market Street and parking garages until they get kicked out of these places. Skateboarding is thus either done in places and times that it is not permitted, such as in impromptu secluded skate parks, or skateboarders are pushed to edges of the city (fig. 5.9). During Park(ing) Day, though, it is different. Since the City of San Francisco supports Park(ing) Day, and all appropriations of parking spaces are tolerated, skaters' can be part of a legitimate public and in front of the public

eye in public space without fear of being ticketed. As Jason says, "this is kind of making our scene."

### b. Green space

Green space is good for people in many ways. Besides them providing cleaner air, simply looking at green space is found to increase well-being. In his famous study, Ulrich (1984) observed that post-surgical recovery times were faster for patients in the same hospital whose rooms were facing a natural outdoor view as compared to those whose rooms were facing a brick wall. Hanging natural images on the walls of patient rooms is encouraged in healthcare settings to increase the well-being of the patients. Having more green spaces in the city thus likely to improve the well-being of all members of a society— children, adults, and the elderly, men and women alike.

According to The Trust for Public Land 2011 report, the city of San Francisco is ranked 11th nationally (survey involved 100 most populous US cities) in regards to total park acres per 1,000 residents, but 67th in regards to the number of park playgrounds per 10,000 residents. Total park land makes up 18% of the geographic area of the city of San Francisco, giving it the third highest park land percentage according to the same report. However, several participants in the Sunday Streets events and in Park(ing) Day claimed that the available green space in the city is not always easily accessible or nearby. Others argue that large parks, even if they are nearby, are not accessible all the time because of safety concerns, even during the day. Kevin, who was hanging out at the Ritual park(ing) spot, said that green space added to park(ing) spaces "makes you aware of how much concrete there is," regularly.

Increasing the amount of green space in the city is among Park(ing) Day's main arguments. Bay Natives, organizers of one of the park(ing) spots is very much aligned with the need for more green in the city. "Bay Area Native Plants," a nursery; "Mission Greenbelt," a non-profit group that organizes communities in the city to increase the amount of green space in their neighborhoods; and "Urban Hedgerow," a coalition of artists who create ecological installations in the city, partnered up to create this park(ing) spot. They decorated their park with native plants that attract bugs and butterflies, sculptures, and seating furniture made of natural materials such as wood and plants.

A representative from Bay Natives, Derek, from a standpoint of someone who relies on an automobile both for his work and leisure time (although, he told, if he had a chance he would have preferred to ride a bicycle more,) said, "we participated in this event precisely because of our negative impression about streets." He would prefer to see more people in the streets than automobiles, "because, people make the city not cars," he added.

However, Bay Natives' arguments go beyond making streets more accessible to people; they also contend that the city of San Francisco has been stripped of its native flora and fauna. Derek claimed that by providing room for more native plants in urban space, "we are essentially providing a rest pit for both people and critters and various denizens of the urban jungle, a place for them to rest before they continue their journey, wherever that may be." He continued,

I don't think I am going to change the world by building a one-day park. It is more about the statement that we are making … and the movement that we are trying to encourage people's thinking that perhaps we have allocated too much square footage in our cities to cars, and we have given them priority to the detriment of pedestrians and birds and bees and butterflies and other bugs … At least for this one day of the year we are gonna take back some of that real estate that we have given over to the car and we are going to assert the pedestrians' rightful place in the urban public.

Bay Natives argued that the space taken away by and for cars is not only a loss for pedestrians and plants, but it is also a loss of bug habitat in the city. Derek is not alone in his thinking; his point of view is a large part of contemporary theoretical debate over the environment. In order to cleanse the 19th century city from dirt and smell and sounds of animals, we segregated ourselves and created hygienic concrete cities where the location of where plants grow is up to people to decide rather than to nature. In LA School of Urbanism webpage, in her article titled *Zoöpolis: The view of nature from Los Angeles,* Jennifer Wolch (n.d.) argues "that current considerations of animals and people in the capitalist city (based on U.S. experience) are strictly limited, and suggest[s] that a transspecies urban theory must be grounded in contemporary theoretical debates regarding urbanization, nature and culture, ecology, and urban environmental action." Such an approach in urban planning would parallel Carolyn Merchant's (2010) ethical and philosophical arguments on the idea that there is a need for a partnership model between humans and non-human beings, instead of the traditional concept of human domination over nature and animals. Through popular support and direct action, masses collectively legitimize appropriation of parking spaces according to their needs and make such recent urban theories applicable in everyday spaces.

There are varying points of views in regard to what kinds of green space the city needs. Urban agriculture—taking advantage of public land to grow edible produce—is another take on the discussion around the kind of green space that cities need. One of the passersby who did not drive or own a car argued that not only concrete but even grass is wasted space, since one could grow food instead in the same space. Community gardens for growing food, like the "Victory Gardens" built after World War II, are a sensible way of using urban public space to provide food to those who cannot afford it. When Cuba faced embargos and was not able to afford the expenses of large-scale industrial agriculture in the 1990s, it demonstrated that using urban green space can be an effective and affordable way to provide sustainably-grown produce for the entire population of the country. In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis in which millions of people lost their jobs, homes and lacked food, using public land to produce food is an alternative worth considering.[18] The interviewee who talked about urban agriculture was interviewed in a park(ing) spot only covered with grass turf, not edible plants, though the occurrence is a telling example of the ways in which Park(ing) Day can fosters alternative envisions for the city.

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[18]The US was at a 14-year high in hunger statistics in 2009 and "the number of Americans who lived in households that lacked consistent access to adequate food soared … to 49 million" according to Deparle's article in The New York Times (2009).

People also advocated for green space outside of the city on Park(ing) Day. During the 2009 Park(ing) Day, I encountered a park(ing) spot of an artist who extended his marble painting studio to the parking space in front of his shop and gave out painted papers to passersby. He told me about his plan for the adjacent parking spot he was going to set up when his friend arrived to help him. He wanted to set up a park(ing) spot representing the future of California state parks after the state government announced severe budget cuts that would result in the closing of 220 state parks in California. The artist planned his State Park(ing) spot to include a pond amidst a collection of greenery, a dead fish in the pond, and a length of yellow tape reading "crime scene do not cross" surrounding the park(ing) space. Unfortunately, the park(ing) spot was not actually installed in the end, but if it had been, it would have been a telling statement of many Californians' opinion on debates surrounding the state park closures. [19]

These examples about various approaches to green space advocacy demonstrate possibilities that appropriation of space provides for creating and demonstrating alternative uses of public spaces and establishing forums. Despite the differences in the kinds of spaces that people advocate, the event demonstrates that in total several publics place a priority on green and public spaces over space devoted for automobile use. As Derek exemplifies, one does not have to be a non-driver to expect cities to provide more space for pedestrians and nature. However, de-prioritizing automobiles is obviously stronger among non-drivers such as bicyclists. Bicyclists are another group that is interested in alternative uses of parking spaces, whether for green space or space for social interaction.

### 5.3    Park(ing) Day and the Bicycling Community: Fixing the city

#### a.   Heterotopias of bicycling

The talk about sense of community that often came up in Park(ing) Day interviews paralleled the views of many bicyclists I talked to during the Sunday Streets and CM events. Those bicyclists stressed that being part of a strong community is a major aspect of bicycling and helps eliminate the lack of social interactions. Given how the culture of bicycling and other alternative forms of transportation are picking up in the city (and the fact that only 43.9% of workers commuted to work by driving and carpooling and compared to previous years these numbers were lower [SFMTA 2011]), it is not a coincidence that several people who hung out and engaged with one another in park(ing) spots were not in favor of automobiles taking up public spaces on other days.

According to Bryan, bicyclists are very supportive of Park(ing) Day, and there was a synergy between bicyclists and those sitting in park(ing) spots: they rang their bells and offered encouraging words to each other. The event appeals to the bicycling community largely since

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[19] At the end of the day I went back to visit his park(ing) installation, and it was not built because his friend did not arrive to help him.

pushing automobiles away from the street by appropriating their parking spaces for alternative uses is an obvious statement of the event. Even though it was not initiated by a group that primarily identifies itself as bicyclists, the event is spatial manifestation of bicyclists' counterdiscourses in an alternative way. Angela, who identified herself as a bicycle advocate, was interviewed at Rebar's park(ing) spot, which was decorated with inflatable cushions and a wall made of recycled milk crates with potted plant pots inside that separated the spot from the traffic. She stated the following:

> Community groups are saying we want to use the space for something other than cars … We wanna go against how these spaces are taken for granted … it doesn't have to be car dominated. Cities don't have to be just designed around cars. It was a design choice, and we can make other choices … I really think the urban realm should be open to pedestrians, to people … we as tax payers and citizens should be able to use the spaces that we pay for… Normally as a cyclist and as a pedestrian you are literally pushed off…

Like Angela outlines, bicyclists' counterdiscourses about urban planning go beyond having adequate bike paths and lanes. Most often, bicyclists' counterdiscourses encompass the overall ways in which automobile culture dominates urban form. Devoting more of the existing public space to people and social spaces, and less to automobiles, is among the criteria that define many bicyclists' ideal urban form. Such spaces, also, parallel their opinions about not having barriers between people or between people and the environment that surrounds them. Kevin—who says he is not an automobile hater, but thinks there are too many cars—made immediate associations between the connecting experience of bicycling, as opposed to driving, and having more green urban public spaces to sit. After he talked about how sitting on grass in the park(ing) spot in the middle of the city makes one feel more connected with people and the environment(quoted above,) he stated that driving can be a very negative experience, whereas on a bicycle, "I can really have a sense of openness … there is definitely a camaraderie amongst people on bikes … when inside the car you are separated from this." Neil, interviewed at another park(ing) spot, had a similar take about the event: "it makes you stop and pause." The difference in the experience of the street during Park(ing) Day is a feeling of "openness, people are less closed off and just trusting," he said, adding, "this is definitely outside of the norm … public parks got a similar vibe … except obviously parks are sort of on their own, isolated … separate from the city … this is a lot more integrated into the fabric [of the city]." Kevin's and Neil's opinions relate to many bicyclists' opinions I interviewed outside the context of Park(ing) Day. The sense of openness they are enjoying is not about being connected to nature only, but also about being more connected to the people and the urban surroundings. As opposed to a desire to escape the chaos of the city (such as in the Pleasure ground era in the park history,)[20] interviewees talked about a yearning to be more connected with one another in the urban setting, and, this way enjoying the city more.

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[20] see Cranz, 1982.

Such events are heterotopias of various publics and obviously of alternative transportation advocates. Bryan, also a bicycling advocate, thinks that "events like this, having a collective sense of streets being used differently … plays into these larger ideas of how we want to operate as a community, how we want our streets to look, and how we want to behave in these streets." Susan, a 34-year-old who does not drive a vehicle or have a driver's license, was interviewed at the CIIS park(ing) spot and said,

> I have a fantasy of living somewhere where vehicles are not allowed, especially the downtown core. Just it would be walking and a lot more lanes for bicycles … we pay to have roads built but have we actually chosen to have roads built? Is that what we would choose to have where our tax money spent on? … To me it is more valuable to have space for bicycle parking and more emphasis on pedestrian traffic … being out and being able to have a place to sit down where you can comfortably … rest or eat lunch … Reclaiming space is all about remembering that it is our city and our space.

Park(ing) Day is more than a festival and fun event. For like-minded people like environmentalists and bicyclists, the event is a statement of their need and desire to rebuild the city in a way that will better reflect their values and fit into their lifestyles. Park(ing) Day make their ideal city come to life during the event, and even have furthermore influences on physical transformation of the city which I will elaborate on the concluding chapter.

### b. DIY culture: fixing the city

There are other parallels between the bicycling counterpublic and Park(ing) Day: a "do-it-yourself" (DIY) culture. Bicyclists I interviewed for the CM rides stated that they enjoyed the sense of freedom, liberation, and empowerment one feels when bicycling. Furness argues that such senses of autonomous mobility are part of the DIY culture found within the bicycling community (2010). By calling it DIY, Furness (2010, 142) refers both to "a process of fixing/building/altering bicycles and an expression of self-reliance." The anti-capitalist tone embodied in the DIY culture is an unarguable aspect of bicycling. According to Furness (2010, 143), DIY culture is an extension of the punk culture—a culture also characterized as "cultural resistance rooted in the rejection of dominant norms and consumerist values … [and] a collective desire for more participatory technologies and more democratic modes of technological production." For example, customizing multiple-gear bicycles into single-gear ones is an expression of rejecting dependency on "expert" knowledge and technologies that bicycle companies impose on them to make consumers dependent on their services and bicycle parts (Furness 2010).

Bicyclists' standpoint against rejecting dependency on expert knowledge and their resistance to dominant norms is not limited to bicycle technologies and a desire to modify their bicycles. They extend their DIY culture to the urban space and actively try to fix the city the same way they fix their bicycles, through institutional channels as well as in anarchical ways.

The Park(ing) spots on Fell Street were a telling example of bicyclists' desire to fix the city. The banner, reading "Fix Fell," (which is name of one of the neighborhood organization that organized the park(ing) spots) does not hide that fact. Located on six on-street parking spots (one after another) along Fell Street (between Scott and Divisadero), the park(ing) space was organized by two neighborhood communities that are both comprised of bicyclists and residents. The Park(ing) spots depicted a solution to bicyclists' safety concerns on the exact block where they feel most unsafe.
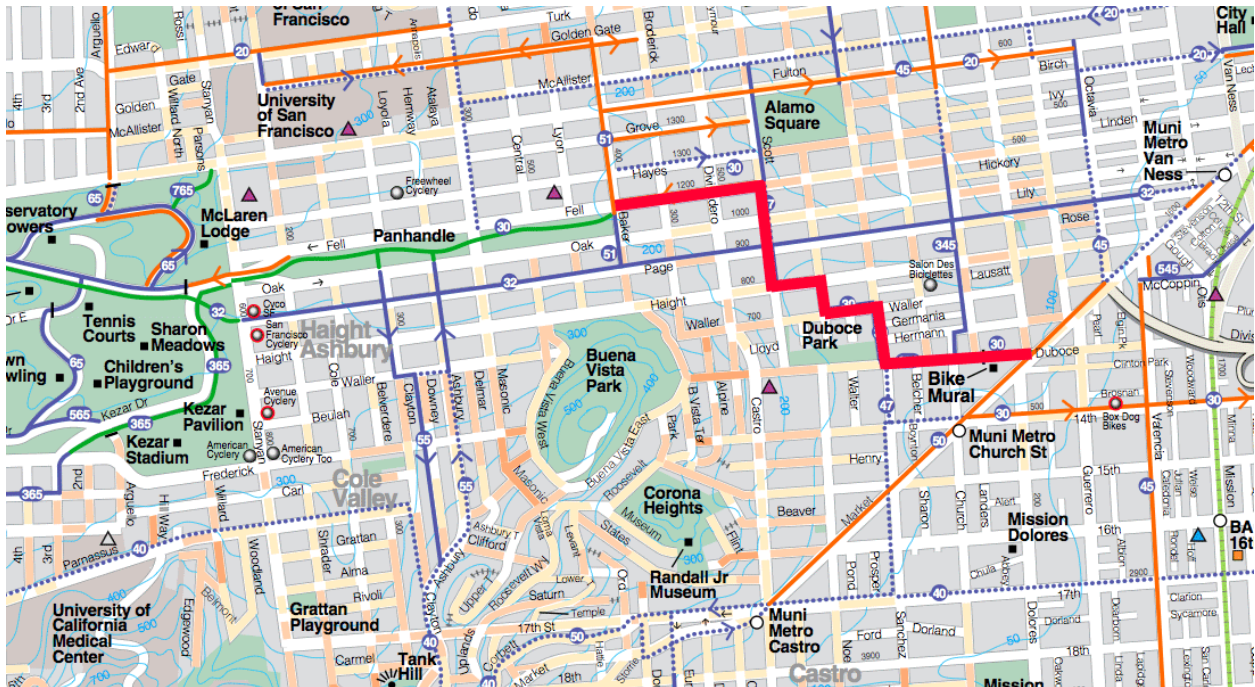


Figure 5.10 The Wiggle (map by Tom Ferguson).

Fell Street is a major bike route for bicyclists. It is part of the least hilly route—the Wiggle—to travel from Market Street to the Panhandle area and Golden Gate Park (fig. 5.10). At the same time, even though it is a residential street, it is like a major highway. A dedicated bicycle path is located on the left side of the street between this heavy motor vehicle traffic on the right and parking spaces on the left. Moreover, automobiles making left turns to enter the gas station located at the corner of Fell and Divisadero cut through the bicycle path, increasing the already existing safety concerns of bicyclists. Because of these conditions, a neighborhood group comprised of residents and bicycle activists called Fix Fell have been demanding the city make Fell Street a better and safer place for pedestrians and bicyclists by separating the bike lane, adding physical barriers, and removing parking spots.

In Chapter 4.1, I mentioned that bicyclists are a public that express their political stance through their everyday lifestyle practices (Bennett 1998). The ways the streets are designed dictate how much access bicyclists and pedestrians who identify themselves as environmentalists have to the city and whether the city is inclusive of them. After the British Petroleum (BP) oil spill in April 2010, the gas station on Fell Street, which sells BP gasoline, became some of Fell Street

68

residents' and bicycle activists' focus of activism. Fix Fell organizers announced in their blog (fixfell.wordpress.com, 2010) that they are "standing up to a system that prioritizes the movement of machines over human health and safety, and corporate profit over the health of the environment." The deaths of a pedestrian on Fell Street in 2009 and a bicyclist at another dangerous intersection in August 2010 brought the ever-present tension between motorists and bicyclists in San Francisco to a head (Rhodes 2009 and Goebel 2010).

In order to demand the reengineering of Fell Street, Fix Fell started weekly protests on June 11, 2010 in front of the gas station and they continued for at least 14 more weeks according to their blog.  Protests in front of the gas station included a "bicycle spill:" In resemblance of the BP oil spill, bicyclists chained themselves to several junk bicycle pieces they laid down at the entrance of the gas station in order to block its entrance. In a video of the protest published in Fix Fell's blog, one of the activists, Drake Logan, said "Now it is the time to break the city laws when city laws aren't protecting us against injury or death on city sidewalks. And when the government is not making BP or any other oil companies clean up what they have done in the Gulf of Mexico." Two of the protestors were arrested and citations given out totaled over $1,000. The protest emphasized the immediate connection between global environmental problems caused by oil dependency and everyday health and safety risks that people face on the streets because of planning that prioritizes oil-dependent lifestyles over creating safer and more livable streets.

Park(ing) Day provided a different kind of opportunity for neighborhood organizations on Fell Street—Fix Fell and Wigg Party—to demonstrate their vision for the Fell Street: on-street parking removed and sidewalks extended and used as social spaces rather than travel-only spaces (fig. 5.11). Wigg Party's is another neighborhood bicyclist's organization, whose goal is betterment of the overall Wiggle route. Their park(ing) spots echoed the already ongoing discussion about removal of parking spots on the street to make the bike lane safer.

Not all residents' ideals are in perfect alignment, however. The park(ing) spots became an agora for residents with differing opinions, as activists reconfigured the street to accommodate their needs and lifestyles. As I was observing, a couple of confrontations happened between the neighbors and those who were setting up the park(ing) spots. One resident expressed her discontent regarding the bicyclist community being powerful and aggressive. She was worried that eventually bicyclists will take her parking space away, despite the fact that she has been a home owner in the city for many years, whereas the bicyclists are primarily young people who are renters. Her point of view implied that owning land/property makes a person more eligible to decide for the city, but being a renter does not, despite the fact that both groups of people reside in the same city. A confrontation happened between another homeowner. As she was passing by the park(ing) spots on Fell Street, she deliberately stopped to express her disapproval about the nature and ideology of the installations. She said she is residing in the neighborhoods and needs to be able to park both her two vehicles, so that availability of parking space is important for her. She told that she finds the event ridiculous and not having enough parking spaces is unimaginable. After a few minutes of discussion with the organizers and those who sit on park(ing) spots she left. One of the organizers of the Wigg Party stated that he wanted more of such interactions to happen and "anything that comes out of it for the most part would be good," he said. In that sense, the park(ing) spots they organized met both goals of creating a different space and fostering a debate about such physical transformation of the streets.

The events like Park(ing) Day are exactly about such contestation about urban space and about whose right to the city claims are accountable and whose are not. The most extreme example of this discussion is about homeless people. Borrowing from Mitchell (2003, 15), some people argue that housed residents' right to **not** encounter "any sights that may trouble them outweighs the right of a homeless persons to urinate in a park or alley when there are no public toilets." This viewpoint is equal to denying homeless peoples' existence. While the homeless issue is the most extreme case of the right to the city debates, nevertheless, thinking that homeowners should have more voice in deciding for the city compared to those who live in the city but do not own a home is denying those people their right to the city as well. Moreover, the rights arguments about more livable spaces also cross boundaries between right to clean air, physical activity and better social life.



Figure 5.11 Fix Fell Park(ing) setting up their park(ing) spots as cars were leaving the on-street parking spaces (photographs by author).

Figure 5.12 Park(ing) spots on Fell Street in the afternoon (photographs by author).

There is constant tension between multiple groups demanding their access to the city, such as those discussed throughout the paper—bicyclists, advocates of green space and spaces for sports and fun, and casual interactions. The carfree-streets events are power struggles between counter and mainstream publics, for instance businesses versus skateboarders in the downtown area and automobiles versus bicyclists. In skaters' and bicyclists' cases, the tension over right to urban space is marked by devaluation and marginalization of fun and play in public spaces. These various publics take advantage of Park(ing) Day in order to enact their ideal spaces, in a street-theater manner. The festival-like qualities of Park(ing) Day attract even those who are apolitical about urban space. However, by simply attending the space with their bodies, passersby too become active agents in the appropriation of on-street parking spots.

Park(ing) Day, by providing a safe, peaceful, non-anarchical, festival-like space legitimizes counterpublics' appropriations. As opposed to a top-down approach found throughout most urban space, during the event counterspaces are created bottom-up by residents of the city. In regards to design and policy, Park(ing) Day provides an open canvas to the residents of the city to share their urban needs and recreate part of a public street to respond to their needs. Appropriation of space creates a public forum and fosters discussion in the public sphere. Park(ing) spots are free-speech platforms, just like Hyde Park, except they are distributed in each neighborhood in exchange of less on-street parking spots. The park(ing) spots foster spatial communication of right to the city claims and urban design ideas, and enable everybody to demonstrate their opinion. As park(ing) spaces are in a place not isolated from everyday life and can be distributed throughout the city, along everyday routes of residents, they are publicly visible and accessible and thus are great forums for carrying issues of urban space into the public sphere.

# CHAPTER 6 SUNDAY STREETS: CITY CRACKED-OPEN

Sunday Streets, a public event organized through collaborative efforts of NGOs, the private sector, the City and County of San Francisco, and the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA), closes down motor vehicle traffic and opens up boulevards and streets in different parts of the city to residents. Livable City, a nonprofit membership organization whose goals include making the city pedestrian- and bicyclist-friendly and providing affordable housing, is the main coordinator of the event as well as one of the financial sponsors, according to the Sunday Streets website. Livable City is comprised of several city and transportation planners and architects who have work experience in governmental and private sectors. Livable City arranges traffic closures with the SFMTA and works with business and neighborhood associations to organize the events. San Francisco Bicycle Coalition is another significant contributor of the event. The coalition organizes and recruits volunteers. Volunteers are an essential part, too. They make the event possible because they help control the traffic, guide visitors, do outreach, post no-parking signs before the events, help set up and clean up. There are many other regular sponsors, Bank of America, Kaiser Permanente Thrive, City Car Share, San Francisco Examiner, to name a few.

Sunday Streets is a lively event, filling streets with all kinds of people. Sunday Streets started with two events per year in 2008. Nine Sunday Streets were held in six locations by 2010: Embarcadero, Bayview, Mission, Great Ocean Highway, Western Addition, and Tenderloin. Traffic closures in the events extended up to six miles. In addition to several bicyclists, many pedestrians, who make up a diverse public attend the Sunday Streets events.

Montes et. al. (2012) estimated an average of 25,000 people at each event, and of those, 60% were adults. SFMTA (2012) estimates 50.000 people for one of the busiest routes, Mission. Montes et. al. (2012) also estimated that 42% of the participants were bicyclists, 35% were pedestrians, and 18% were skaters and other types of users on wheels. About 20% of the bicyclists, 15% of the pedestrians, and 7.9% of the skaters were people who were regularly physically active. This means many people who are not physically active in their everyday life were, too, attracted to Sunday Streets events.

The significance of the event is countless. Sunday Streets demonstrates the city's acknowledgement of pedestrians' and bicyclists' needs and their willingness to modify automobiles dominance in urban life. The event is an experiment for businesses who think availability of parking and automobile traffic is essential to get more costumers. Temporary traffic closures demonstrate to business owners that foot traffic can also bring a lot of costumer base. Examples from other countries, such as Sweden, show that business that at first oppose vehicular traffic closures later on even initiate permanent street closures (Robertson 1991). Similarly, Fisherman Wharf and Pier39 Merchants Associations were strongly against the first Sunday Streets in 2008 that happened on their backyard—Embarcadero, fearing that their

business would be negatively affected because people wouldn't have access without being able to park and drive. After the first pilot event, the Fisherman merchants embraced Sunday Streets and now advertise it on their websites.[21] Susan King, organizer of Sunday Streets events, in an interview stated that even merchant associations in other neighborhoods demanded them to organize Sunday Streets in their neighborhoods. Thus, the events serve as test grounds to get people used to the idea that parking and driving are not absolute necessities.

Temporary traffic closures are economically beneficial from the social perspective as well. Analyzing temporary traffic closures in four cities (Bogota, Guadalajara, Medellin, San Francisco), Montes et. al. (2010) found that, in all four cases, total direct health benefit derived from each program was higher than the total costs of each program. This calculation only took into account health benefits of being physically active, but not the benefits such as reduction in air pollution, exposure to information about healthy lifestyles, etc.

Sunday Streets events showcase possibilities for pedestrian-oriented uses of streets and create an increased sense of community by making local organizations and their causes visible, and by allowing residents create their own spaces in the middle of public spaces, which in turn promotes increased social interactions between residents and neighbors who are most often disconnected from one another.

## 6.1   Local Organizations

Critical Mass may suggest that only bicyclists are demanding their fair share of the streets, but Sunday Streets events demonstrate that bicyclists are only a small section of a larger public that wants increased access to streets. Several local organizations participate to gain public visibility in the neighborhoods in which Sunday Streets events are held. Some of the groups set up tables because they advocate for car-free streets events, even if such events are not the organizations' central focus.

By allocating space along the route for booths, Sunday Streets events bring many local and citywide organizations out (some of which are official sponsors of the event, while others are only participants) and make them visible to the residents of San Francisco. The types of organizations that set up tables encompass a wide variety of agencies and businesses. While organizations such as The San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, Kaiser Permanente, Walk SF, and San Francisco Department of the Environment are always present, different local organizations are found in different Sunday Streets events. For instance, Friends of the San Francisco Public Library set up a table at the Bayview Sunday Streets event in order to inform residents about the demolition and rebuilding of the neighborhood library and update the residents about their fundraising initiative. Similarly, the San Francisco Ocean Edge organization attended the Great Highway Sunday Streets event in order to reach residents of San Francisco and inform them

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[21] See Vega's article in The San Francisco Chronicle, published in July 2008.

about the Beach Chalet Athletic Fields (soccer complex) development plans for the western edge of Golden Gate Park—a plan that proposes to replace natural grass with more than seven acres of artificial turf and lights and will impact the local ecosystem. Thus, Sunday Streets is a venue to connect community organizations with the residents throughout the city on pressing issues related to land use.

Some of these organizations demonstrate the variety of publics that are interested in greater access to the streets. Bay Access is one such organization that set up an information table in the April Bayview event. It represents those who are interested in the use of human and wind-powered boats (sails, windsurfs, etc.) in the waters of the San Francisco Bay Area. In an interview, Paul Nixon, one of the board members of the non-profit, explains why Bay Access is interested in participating in Sunday Streets. As he locks the doors of the storage unit where the kayaks are stored that belong to the non-profit, Nixon states that he wishes he could be car-free during the whole day, at least on days that he is out kayaking. He says if the car-free mentality were more accommodated in the city, he would not need that storage space, which can only accommodate a small amount of kayaking equipment anyway. Instead, he says, he would like to carry his kayak on his bike or take a foldable kayak on public transportation, and this way he could spend his whole day without having to rely on personal automobile transportation.

Organizations such as Bay Access are defined groups with a shared interest who make clear statements about their demand for better access to the streets by their participation in Sunday Streets. Organizations are a small sector of the people that make up the participants of Sunday Streets. They are concentrated in one, or at most two, central hubs alongside the information tables; however, the whole event is built upon an estimated 25,000 people who fill the streets. The events have a festival feel, even though they do not have any commercial, national, ethnic, or cultural emphasis like most festivals do. Unlike CM bicyclists, people in Sunday Streets do not constitute a shared interest community; yet, what first and foremost was uttered about Sunday Streets was the sense of community the participants feel during the event.


## 6.2    Sense of Minority vs. Sense of Community

Sunday Streets take residents of San Francisco out of their homes and gather them in one neighborhood at a time. The event attracts a variety of participants including but not limited to skaters, runners, bicyclists, pedestrians, the elderly, and children with their families, and those who are special characters of the city. It allows large amounts of fellow residents in a concentrated public space and concentrated time period.

In the case studies bicyclists talked about feeling socially isolated because of living in the city, and how being part of bicycling community remedies isolation with the sense of community. Sense of community has been a repeated category also in Sunday Streets even though the event serve to a large and diverse public with no specific common interest other than enjoying being on car-free streets. However, for many enjoying each others' company by being on the streets without interruption of automobile traffic –having streets solely for social use- stood out.

The sense of community was contrasted to the sense of feeling like a "minority" as a pedestrian or bicyclist in everyday life. In fact, the sense of community and minority on the streets are two opposite sides of the same coin. Many pedestrians and bicyclists feel like a minority on the street in the midst of automobile traffic in everyday urban life. Sunday Streets provides a counter experience as streets are devoted to people, not to automobiles. Uninterrupted presence of people on the streets heightens people's perceptions of other people and makes social interactions more possible.

Most of the time, people are on the streets to travel from one place to another; but, rarely stop and engage with each other. Because, there is no space provided for socialization on the streets or there is no time. Gathering in public spaces and socializing is not part of the norm, even sometimes it is not acceptable. Sunday Streets creates opportunities for socialization by bringing two important factors together, time and space.

Images taken during and right after the event exhibit the striking difference that Sunday Streets creates regarding social life on the streets (fig. 6.1). People usually start to arrive for Sunday Streets events at about 10 in the morning. Surprisingly, most of the people hesitate to occupy the roads and stick to the sidewalks until the event starts to get more crowded. Later on, people bicycling, walking or just hanging out fill both the roads and sidewalks. Each Sunday Streets event has a different feel because of the qualities of the location it takes place. Most Sunday Streets but especially those are planned on long and wide stretches of roads, such as Embarcadero and Great Ocean Highway Sunday Streets, get occupied mostly with bicyclists, then with runners, skaters and with those who stroll.



Figure 6.1 Photographs taken during Sunday Streets, right after the end of street closure (at 3pm) (Corner of Harrison Street and 24th Street, during Mission Sunday Streets on June 20, 2010 (photographs by author).

During the events, everyday separation between the roads and sidewalks blurs, and the whole area becomes one space. This is true even when there is a flow of runners, bicyclist, skaters, or strollers, as traffic flows in every direction --back, forth, sideways-- and those who are part of the traffic need to navigate around those who are in the middle of the streets, like children, or those who extend their seating to the sidewalks and streets (fig. 6.2). Sunday Streets events such as

those located in residential neighborhoods exhibit even more varied uses of the streets. People walk, bicycle, sit, give a live concert, or throw a block party in the streets (fig. 6.2 and 6.3). After the events, the crowd disappears, automobiles return to the roads and to the on-street parking spots, and the streets go back to their previous state with few people on the sidewalks and more automobiles on the roads. I asked participants about this change in their experience of the street and their motivations to participate in the event.



Figure 6.2 Western Addition Sunday Streets, 2010, San Francisco, CA (photograph by author).



Figure 6.3 Neighbors face painting and making soap bubbles on the streets in Western addition Sunday Streets, 2010, San Francisco, CA (photographs by author).

Sarah was parking her bicycle and waiting for her friend as I approached her for an interview. She is in her 30s, does not own a car, and rides everywhere. She says the following about *Sunday Streets*:

> I think, on a normal day, there is this attitude, maybe it's even some of the same people who are walking around here today: "I am in my car, you are in my way," you know? This is **my** street. [Every day] it belongs to cars, and **today** it belongs to **me, and to all other walkers and bicyclists.** And it's a very empowering feeling. It just feels, I don't know how to say it, but, hmm, [her tone and pace goes down]: it just feels very right to me. Like, this is how I love it to be everyday, or some, maybe not quite like this, but you know, I love the amount of space that opened up …
>
> It feels like instead of being in a minority, you know. And, sometimes cars will yell at me or you know, it's like, ahhh, I just can relax. I love how relaxed it is. And, … I love being somewhere where it is safe enough for kids to wobble around on their bikes and scooters, and I love the sense of community. I just feel like I am with my people.

Sarah indicates that she is not only passionate about having greater access to the street and feeling an equal owner of the street, but she also expresses her frustration regarding the lack of access to streets in everyday life. Sarah's statement of "I am with my people" is also something that came up during the CM interviews. One of the important issues she raises is feeling like a minority on a regular day. The other one is that if streets were safer, more people would be out in the streets enjoying themselves and each other. Sunday Streets events bring out a diverse group of people engaged in a variety of activities, and many informants I talked to confirmed Sarah's viewpoint that the presence of automobiles prevents more people from being on the streets.

Families with children are a particular "minority" affected by automobiles' domination of the streets. Their extensive participation in the Sunday Streets events is an indication of their inability to be out on the streets on a regular day. Several people were fascinated with having children in the streets and told me things like "I love being somewhere where it is safe enough for kids to be wobbling around on their bikes and scooters." For some people, the event is so unique simply because of the children's presence:

> With the weather so warm and all these nice little water fountains in this one little area of 24th street all the kids started taking their clothes off … they started bathing … and running and getting all wet in the water … You couldn't see that happen anywhere else …. To me that was a discovery ... that's what makes this city so unique is people's way of expressing themselves. I can't think of a more original way to do that … I just thought that it was a very unique experience.

Figure 6.4 Children are perhaps one of the most under-recognized user of streets (photographs by author).

Many parents complained that on a regular day, the traffic on the streets makes them feel unsafe when out with their children. Even those parents who regularly commute on their bicycles stated that they feel uncomfortable teaching their children how to bicycle on the streets. Riding a bicycle can be taught in parks, but in order to learn how to bicycle on the street, one needs to practice on the street. For children, most streets are not safe places to learn bicycling or to engage in other activities. Forty two percent of children in 1969 used bicycle to schools and that ratio decreased to thirteen percent in 2001 (Active Living Research 2009). Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) reported that "Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. The percentage of children aged 6–11 years in the United States who were obese increased from 7% in 1980 to nearly 20% in 2008. Similarly, the percentage of adolescents aged 12–19 years who were obese increased from 5% to 18% over the same period." Creating spaces to allow children to be physically active daily play an important role in their health and development.

Weekend traffic closures in Golden Gate Park provide residents their only option for a long and safe walk or bicycling in a car-free setting. However, many families, especially those who prefer

to go to parks in order to escape traffic, need to first navigate through traffic in order to reach their traffic-free destination. Not every neighborhood has easy access to a neighborhood park, and this is especially true of low-income neighborhoods. According to the San Francisco Neighborhood Parks Council (2007),

> There is an extreme inequality in the accessibility, type, and distribution of open spaces across the City. This is most apparent in the lower-income neighborhoods in the eastern sector. The Districts in the eastern part of San Francisco are the most lacking in open space, and they are also the neighborhoods that need these spaces most. The residents in these neighborhoods rely more on parks for recreation and open space, as they often do not have funds to join private clubs for exercise, or might not own a car to escape to natural areas outside of the city.

As streets get closed to vehicular traffic, families do not need to travel to parks. Streets become safe spaces to hang out and socialize—at the comfort of right outside of their houses and apartments; in fact, many families took advantage of the streets as if they were in a park or treated them as their semi-private front yards. Many people encouraged their kids to ride their bicycles in the street. A handful of children and families set up lemonade stands at the events. The set-ups resemble the lemonade stands in front of single-family houses in suburbs. One parent said this is a great opportunity for them to teach their kids to earn money, and since they are not living in a suburb, and only through an event like Sunday Streets can they do this more traditional/nostalgic activity. One of those families said, "We don't have a back yard; we live in the apartments far from the ground. There is no immediate place to take your kids out or socialize with the neighbors. Thanks to the traffic closure, this [street] is our backyard." Such comparisons with living in the city versus out of it were not uncommon. Another family said, "There is some things make it difficult for a family to stay in the city but ... it feels like this is one of the things that makes it worth living here in San Francisco … the kind of thing to make it worth for the sacrifices that you make."

As research by Appleyard et.al. (1981), Hart (n.d.), and Transportation Alternatives (2006) demonstrates, automobile traffic plays an important factor in a person's separation from his/her surroundings. Absence of traffic allows the transformation of the street into a social space; it allows residents to take advantage of public spaces that are primarily occupied with transportation for multiple purposes. The transformations are not simply reinstating public qualities of the streets. With the kind of activities people carry out in the streets, streets are also becoming communal spaces or "third places" as Oldenburg (1989) describes.

"Third places" are places outside of home and work that foster communication and community, and perception of such spaces results in the perception of a higher quality of life (Jeffres et.al. 2009). According to research by Jeffres et.al. (2009), "those living in central city neighborhoods, in the country, or in fair-sized non-metrocities are more likely to claim there are no 'third places' in their communities relative to respondents living in suburbs and small towns." Same authors state that the "metropolitan population was correlated with three kinds of third places: clubs and organizations, the city area itself, and neighborhood parties, block parties, cookouts, barbecues." Sunday Streets events allow residents to create their own clusters of third spaces on long stretches of streets, which only becomes possible with vehicular traffic closures.

Once interruption and safety concerns due to vehicular traffic are eliminated, people are allowed to be on the streets, hanging out and socializing. During the interviews, people overwhelmingly talked about getting a chance to see different neighborhoods of the city and their people in a different light because of being able to slow down and be less distracted by automobile traffic. The desire to not have to go far from their own homes for recreation was not particular to families with children; it was a desire felt by everybody and an experience all participants enjoyed. People often stated in a regretting manner that they did not know their neighbors. During the Western Addition Sunday Streets event, I interviewed two women who were sitting on the stairs of their apartment and watching other people on the street. They expressed discontent about losing sense of community and finding human connection more through social media and less through face-to-face connections, and added, "I just think it's nice to have people out and about, you know you don't have to go far, you can just sit outside of your house, and this thing is going on. And, it's fun."

Joe, an interviewee I came across at the Embarcadero Sunday Streets event, says, "if everyone is a stranger, then you have no reason to care about them … If you come to a lot of these events and start meeting people and to see that pretty much everyone is the same and you can really connect with them, therefore you build that community where there is a public willingness and public spirit…" Even though Joe describes the event as public, the sense of public is different than that in everyday public spaces where people are anonymous and pass by each other with no interaction happening. Joe and his friend are a case in point. One with a gramophone and the other with a typewriter, they were sitting on the side a large flower pot and were interacting with passers-by. Children and adults alike were eager to look at what they were doing and try the typewriter and gramophone out and have short conversations with them. Joe said that his incentive was simply to "take something from the house, bring it out on the street, and share with your neighbors."

These two were not exceptional in bringing something personal, or perhaps activities that mostly take place in private space, out into public space. Private realms came out into the public realm to be shared with others. Thus, the public space was experienced as collection of shared private spaces in public space. A communal feel, rather than simply a public feel, was prevalent throughout the gatherings. Other examples that contributed to this communal experience were people who brought out to the streets their decorated bicycles, and their backyard or living room furniture, and music bands that performed on the streets (fig. 6.5 and 6.6).

San Francisco has many bike enthusiasts who put substantial effort into decorating their bikes. For many cyclists, their personalized bicycles are an extension of their identity. Critical Mass is not an event that every bicyclist participates in, let alone appreciates; thus, at Sunday Streets events, those people find a space to show off and ride their personalized bikes and many other unusual non-motorized vehicles, such as a bicycle-mounted compost bin and a piano bike (fig. 6.7 and 6.8). At times, Sunday Streets looks not like a place to ride a bicycle but really to take it out and show it to the neighbors and rest of the residents.

Figure 6.5 Backyard furniture provided seating areas for residents extending their private realm into the public street (photographs by author).

Figure 6.6 Music bands taking advantage of the event to connect with the locals and gain visibility (photographs by author).





Figure 6.7 A rotating compost bin attached to a bicycle in Mission Sunday Streets, 2010 (photographs by author).

Figure 6.8 Piano bicycle and other personalized bicycles, drawing both kids' and adults' attention, in Mission Sunday Streets, 2010 (photographs by author).



Figure 6.9 Gary, the pianist on the bicycle provides an audio-visual experience, a performance unique to a Sunday Streets kind of festival (photograph by author).

Gary is one of the unique characters of Sunday Streets. He plays music on a piano that is built onto his bicycle (fig. 6.9). He bikes and plays the piano at the same time while cruising the streets with other strollers and bicyclists who accompany him to enjoy his music. Gary said that he did not build his piano particularly for Sunday Streets, he enjoys whatever opportunities he

can find to be on the streets safely and to play his music to fellow residents. He says he wants to create a different experience for his audience and for himself, by playing his music not indoors but in the unique outdoor settings of the city—in places like underneath the foot of the bridge on the Embarcadero.

People's desire to enjoy public spaces and outdoor structures in the city is not unique to Gary. Bicyclists in the CM rides did not miss out on crossing through the Broadway Tunnel, each time I participated in the ride. As approximately 500 bicyclists passed under the tunnel together, their cheerful screams and music echoed and created a unique audio-spatial public experience that could only be lived in this urban setting and nowhere else. Size of the ride was at its peak usually at around Broadway Tunnel. The bicyclists made sure not to miss that part of the ride, and sometimes circled the tunnel several times (A video that I recorded during a similar tunnel ride that took place in Berkeley, CA CM in June 2010 can be found on the following URL, http://tinyurl.com/BerkeleyCMtunnelride2010). Similarly, skaters wanted to enjoy the Palace of Fine Arts at night by skating around it, and Bike Party brings life and music to deserted parks and parking lots in the city during their rides. These publics demonstrate that there is a desire to connect better with different parts of the city, day and night. Bubble girl, a CM bicyclist who also skates in Friday Night Skaters and participates on other bicycling rides, stated that city is their "urban playground." In addition, enjoying the city in urban public spaces together with fellow residents plays an important role.

Like Joe and Gary, many residents brought something that belongs to their personal life/domestic space and carried it into the public space to share with other residents of San Francisco. On Sunday Streets days, many come out to the streets for this kind of exchange between people who live in the same city but who do not know one another. This kind of experience can only take place in public spaces. Sunday Streets redefines the meaning of public spaces. Definitions of private and public space do not suffice to describe the spatial experiences during these events. Streets are not semi-public or semi-private either, because unlike sitting in the front yard but not having any interaction, these events foster engagement and interaction among residents.
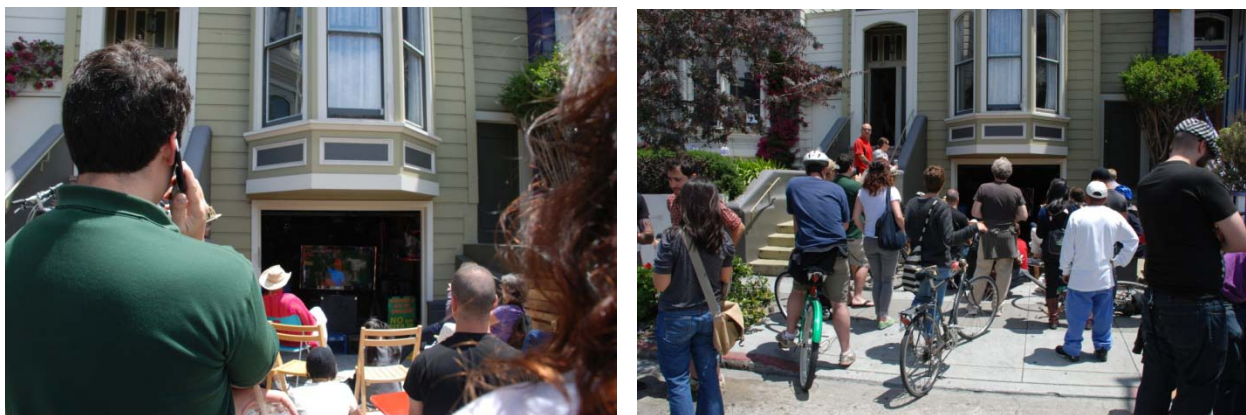


Figure 6.10 A bicycle activists who frequently bicycles in and through Sunday Streets and other festivals and is usually followed by several bicyclists because of the music he plays from a sound system he carries on his bike is also a Mission resident, and this time, instead of bicycling he is screening World Cup 2010 games from his garage during the Sunday Streets event (photographs by author).

Other people extended their private spaces to the streets as a way to enjoy public spaces. Streets became part of one's living rooms, and another's front yard. An epic example comes from the Mission Sunday Streets event, when one of the residents took chairs out and opened his garage to the public to watch the World Cup together (fig. 6.10). Likewise, cafes and stores extended their space to the streets. The indoors and outdoors merged, and the barriers between private and public space disappeared during the event.





Figure 6.11 Photographs of a block party that neighbors created in both Mission Sunday Streets, 2010 (photographs by author).

A group of neighbors threw a block party by bringing out food and tables in front of their apartment. One of the neighbors from the block party who was giving out waffles to passers by stated,

> Well I think it's just kind of an obvious thing that came out of the feeling of Sunday Streets. Everybody is sort of out—it feels like … there is less barriers between people when there is more pedestrian traffic, and you are able to make eye contact with people … It feels like we are sharing the space together, we are sharing the streets together, when Sunday Streets closes off our block. So I think that's one of the things that just kind of made me think of "oh! let's do something." You know, invite my friends over as well to share that experience, and people in the street will be mingling with us as well, and so, yeah it's sort of a party that forms spontaneously because people are already on the streets having fun.

Sarah adds,

> I never spend a ton of time on 24th Street or not in more recent years, but when I am on 24th Street during Sunday Streets it feels, like I am in an old European city, because the trees are shaded, everyone is strolling and eating out on the sidewalks, and it just feels like so civilized to me. I mean, I love the Mission anyway, I love the bustle of it, just everything about the Mission. But this just feels like—it's like the Mission cracked open … … there is everybody, you can really see people instead of squeezing by someone on this tiny little sidewalk … I get to see everybody's flavor ... the pace is really different ... And, this is really about being, you know. There are activities, but that's not why I go. I go here so I can **be** in a different place in a different way, and just enjoy being with everybody else, and that's very refreshing to me to have something like that.

Sarah expresses that it is the same streets but with more people and no cars; but, the experience of the streets is completely different and more civilized. All in all, how to make sense of civilization if there are no people at sight. What she and other informants referred to when they said "community" was that Sunday Streets allows them to meet the people who make San Francisco a unique place. "Mission cracked open" summarizes her feelings. All the unique characters of the city that are behind closed doors in everyday life meet on the streets through this festival and become revealed, displaying the essence of the city simultaneously.

Through this bare-minimum of free access to streets, Sunday Streets events become an opportunity for residents to introduce a variety of activities into streets. Like a street theater, the activities and overall goings-on demonstrate possible scenarios that could result if automobiles did not interfere with the social life of the city. These possible scenarios that people created collectively transform the streets into informal public gathering places, described as "third place" by Oldenburg. Streets became an extension of private space into space of community.

However, the success of these events depends on how much the local communities are integrated into the organization of the event. For instance, Sunday Streets in 2010 was quite unwelcomed

by the Western Addition neighborhood residents. Many of them, mostly African American residents, stated that they did not know about the event and were frustrated because of the difficulty of finding parking spots when they wanted to go to Sunday services at their local churches. On the other hand, one resident in Mission stated that his street is full of gangs, crime is prevalent in the neighborhood, and people are sometimes afraid of being on the streets. However, he said that with the crowd that Sunday Streets attracts to the neighborhood, it feels safer and being on the street becomes enjoyable.

Sunday Streets produces new meanings regarding the use of public spaces. There are several pedestrian streets around the world, mostly in commercial ones in cities like Copenhagen, Istanbul, and Barcelona, for example, and such streets do not exhibit the characteristics of Sunday Streets events in San Francisco. The fact that the event happens only a handful of times in a given year and in different parts of the city (some of which cross residential areas) most probably plays an important role in creating the unique third-place qualities that this event embodies. Because the event concentrates all the participants spatially and temporally, crowding might be another factor in the increased sense of community. The event is very different from other street festivals that are organized around one theme or one cultural group (such as Samba Festival, San Francisco Pride, Folsom Street Fair, Chinese New Year, Japanese Cherry Festival, etc.). On the contrary, the event is open to everybody to express themselves in the eyes of the public, allowing residents to get to know each other and the make-up of the city, including its different geographical areas. People get to connect with their city both in the physical sense and the social.



Figure 6.12 A resident's lemonade stands and seating furniture placed on the streets by local business during Mission Sunday Streets, 2010, San Francisco, CA (photographs by author).

Analysis of Sunday Streets does not directly lead to conclusions about everyday life. Sunday Streets may not provide evidence regarding how the same residents would feel if traffic were lighter or eliminated entirely every day. However, through the opportunities created during the

events, residents spatially and verbally express the way they feel about dominance of automobiles on the streets, and its limitations on social interactions and on quality of urban life. Even though streets are opened up primarily for physical activity, "third spaces" created by residents indicate this counterpublic's unmet needs in current urban space.

The event largely differs from CM, and Park(ing) Day too, because it is structured as a collaboration between non-profit membership organizations and government agencies. Thus, the event is very much top-down, even though civic sector non-profit organizations that represent counterpublic ideas are co-creators of the event. The ideas embedded in the event still represent a counterdicourse and target a mainstream public who value travelling in automobiles (such as merchants who demand the availability of parking spaces based on the belief that people will not be willing to travel without their cars).

The popularity of Sunday Streets events demonstrates that many residents appreciate "third places" and the use of urban streets as their backyards. In addition, we know that the perception of the availability of third places increases the perceived quality of life (Jeffres et. al. 2009). Thus, even though a permanent solution to remedy the lack of sense of community may lie in redesigning streets to increase their social use rather than prioritizing private automobile transportation, local governments and policymakers should encourage such temporary relief from automobile traffic until such permanent adaptations of the built environment take place.

In conclusion, the analysis of Sunday Streets events contributes to the literature on the relationship between automobile traffic and the social life of cities, and to the meaning of pubic space. Temporary vehicular traffic closures reveal a counterdiscourse about the lack of a sense of community in urban spaces. The analysis of the event also reveals a different way in which counterdiscourses are introduced in the public sphere.

# PART 2 TOWARDS REAL COUNTERSPACES

This part focuses on the physical and social changes that correspond with the carfree-streets counterpublics' demands for livable cities. Carfree-streets events create spatial experiences of alternative spaces. Those are temporary counterspaces. Ideas about counterspaces are also apparent in online and print illustrations produced by advocates of livable and carfree-streets. These counterdiscourses together contribute to the production of real counterspaces. Permanent physical transformations in the city, such as increasing bicycle paths and recent local government programs, are some of the indicators of the change.

Mona Caron's illustration on the cover of the book *Critical Mass: Bicycling's Defiant Celebration*, published for the 10th anniversary of Critical Mass (CM) rides, dramatically depicts the counterspaces of CM bicyclists (fig. part 2.1). Rather than adding an infrastructure for alternative transportation to existing streets, the image displays streets upside down and thus subverting the order of power in the streets. Automobiles and the air pollution and congestion they create are trapped by the road that is folded over them in order to accommodate bicyclists who then can have access to clean air. Such a dramatic portrayal of urban transformation indicates the intensity of the reaction to the global hegemony of automobility and its ability to dominate urban physical landscapes. Given how challenging it is to physically reshape urban space in an instant, CM rides serves as a relief from the limitations that current urban form imposes on the lifestyles of bicyclists.
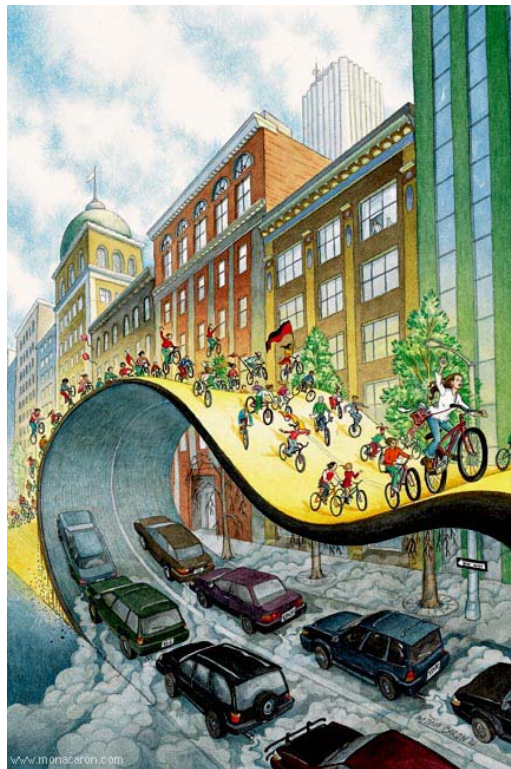


Figure part 2.1 Illustration depicting bicyclists' counterspaces (by Mona Caron, 2002)

The iconography used in a Park(ing) Day poster is similar to Mona Caron's book cover design. Here instead of turning streets upside down to open up space for bicyclists, a car is turned upside down and hence made unusable. The space it occupies is utilized as a park to accommodate numerous live plants (fig. part 2.2), and the poster reads "shifting the paradigm." Park(ing) Day, as its name and poster indicate, is about replacing not just any public space but especially spaces devoted to automobiles with green space.[22]



Figure part 2.2 Park(ing) Day's iconography is called "Shifting the Paradigm" (illustration by Maki Kawaguchi).

These counterspaces depicted in the illustrations and exemplified during the events are becoming real spaces, step by step, as the counterpublics of carfree-streets events demonstrate their demands and distribute their counterdiscourses. From the earliest days of counterpublics' efforts to create counterspaces to contemporary days of collective rides and events, change in the Bay Area at both social and physical levels is evident.

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[22] Despite the fact that the poster emphasizes adding more green to urban space, this discourse does not necessarily dictate a design to people in their own parking creations. Most of the park(ing) installations that people create are simply opportunities to get together, sit with strangers, and chat. This can be by sitting on the ground, on grass or sand, or by placing out tables, chairs, and an umbrella. Most people's immediate reaction is that the spaces create a sense of community. This observance perpetuates the fact that Park(ing) Day, just like Sunday Streets, is later interpreted by their participants. Yet, increasing green public space is still a very recognized symbol of the event.

## CHAPTER 7 SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION OF SAN FRANCISCO

The city of San Francisco is more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly today than it was 20 years ago. The first signs of transformation came right after the chaotic July 1997 CM ride. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Parking and Traffic Commission member Sharon Bretz came up with a number of proposals to ease the conflict between bicyclists and motorists (Martin and Epstein 1997). One of these proposals was to ban privately-owned vehicles on Market Street, from Van Ness to the Embarcadero. Other proposals were issuing a license and registration for each bicyclist, banning cyclists from wearing audio headphones because they inhibit riders' hearing, and asking the California Department of Motor Vehicles to include more bicycle-related questions on motor vehicle driver licensing tests. Thus, issues raised by the CM rides were received at the local governmental level to a certain extent. Dave Snyder, "head of SFBC from 1991 to 2002, regular participant in Critical Mass since ride 1," in an interview posted on the San Francisco Critical Mass website in 2010, claimed that the 1997 CM ride increased the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition's (SFBC) membership by 50 percent and helped the SFBC to get approval for some of the bicycle path projects they demanded from the city that they would not have gotten approval for otherwise (D'Andrade, 2010). Mayor Brown's successor, Gavin Newsom, did not follow in Brown's footsteps and presented a friendlier attitude toward CM and similar movements that challenged the automobile's hegemony. The city's collaboration with Park(ing) Day and Sunday Streets organizers is an example.

Particularly, bike advocacy has grown visibly since the early 1990s. The San Francisco Bicycle Coalition's membership increased from the hundreds to over 11,000 between 1992 and 2011 (SFBC 2011). The city today accommodates over 129 bike lanes and shared roads, according to the 2012 SFMTA report, and over 201 miles of total bicycle network, according to a 2008 SFBC report. SFMTA (2012) reports that 75,000 trips are completed on bicycles each day out of over two million total trips by various transportation modes. The coalition, through its members' support, has provided bicycle access to mass transit, helped extend the bicycle network, and organized communities to close Golden Gate Park to automobile traffic on Saturdays, in addition to car-free Sundays, according to their reports. According to an interview with SFBC executive director Leah Shahum: there are 71 percent more bicyclists compared to 2007; in 2012 San Francisco passed legislation to provide secure bicycle parking for employees; in August 2012 Bay Area Rapid Transportation (BART) started a pilot program for allowing bicycles on trains during commute hours in addition to regular hours; and since 2010 the city has added 25 more miles of dedicated bike lanes. According to Bicycling and Walking in the United States 2012 Benchmarking Report, San Francisco is now the 4th-highest-ranked city in the country for biking commute share and the 6th safest city in which to bike.

The transformation is not limited to improving alternative transportation options. San Francisco is in the process of transforming its streets into multi-modal public spaces and making the city more *livable*, through both redesign projects and event organizing. Some of these changes are not unique to San Francisco. Cyclovia, the event that Sunday Streets was modeled upon, and similar traffic closures happened in some cities as early as the late 1970s (however, most cities in the US started their versions of Sunday Streets events after the 2000s.) The City of San Francisco also

collaborated with Park(ing) Day organizer Rebar, and Park(ing) Day became an annual event celebrated globally the year after it started. In addition to these events, there are several projects involving redesigning major streets to transform them into livable public spaces. Market Street, Fell Street, Masonic Avenue, and Embarcadero (the location of the first Sunday Streets event), along with various parklets and the Pavement to Parks program are some of the examples.

## 7.1 Better Market Street

Market Street with its chaotic traffic the street is not one of the attractive places on which to walk and linger for pedestrians. It lacks proper street furniture, such as park benches, and landscaping for the most of its length. Transit, pedestrians, private automobiles, and bicyclists, all together make for about a quarter of a million people who use Market Street on an average weekday. Streetcar rails present a danger for bicyclists (bicycle wheels get stuck in the rails), and the bicycle path moves between right and left lanes in order to accommodate the automobiles' right turns.



Figure 7.1 Photographs taken at Market street showing two contrasting street life scenes (source: Better Market Street, Integrated findings and design drivers, http://www.bettermarketstreetsf.org).

Proposals to ease the traffic problems and balance automobile, mass transit, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic on Market Street are part of a debate that dates back to 1990, according to Bretz (Martin and Epstein 1997). When banning privately-owned vehicles was proposed in 1997, merchants were the main obstacle in preventing implementation of the proposal (Martin and Epstein 1997). According to the *San Francisco Chronicle* banning traffic on Market Street, except for mass transit, was brought up again in 2008 by one of the city's supervisors, Chris Daly (Cote 2008). The street has in fact undergone some transformation, such as separation of the bike lanes and the addition of green boxes to make them more visible. Most recently, in 2010 the Better Market Street project was launched. The project has included analysis of the current situation on the street, proposals and citizen advisory meetings, and public workshops in 2011 and 2012. Figure 7.2 represents ideas to make Market Street more livable. The transformation of Market Street is still in process with efforts to build community support for changes that the city has been proposing for the last 30 years.

Figure 7.2 Vision sketches for Better Market Street project (source:  Better Market Street Workshop exhibits, July 2012 at http://www.bettermarketstreetsf.org/about-reports-docs.html)

## 7.2    Pavement to Parks Program and Parklets

The San Francisco Planning Department, Department of Public Works, Municipal Transportation Agency, and mayor's office collaborated together to start the Pavement to Parks Program in 2009 in order to increase the amount of public space in the city by rebuilding underutilized roadways. Times Square's transformation into a public plaza by a New York City Department of Transportation initiative inspired San Francisco. As part of this project, until 2012, five new projects have been constructed in San Francisco: Castro Commons, Guerreo Park, Naples Green, Powell Street Promenade, and Showplace Triangle. After Rebar's first park(ing) spot installation, the city was inspired by the idea and collaborated with Rebar on "parklets"—extended sidewalks built by taking away on-street car parking spaces—which were integrated as a separate program under the Pavement to Parks Program in 2010. As of October 2012, 31 parklets have been constructed, three projects are under construction, six mobile parklets have been constructed; and a couple dozen parklet projects are in review, according to map of the parklets published on the program's website.

What is unique about these projects is that even though they are initiated by the collaboration between different departments of the city, what the city has described as a "community partnership model" characterizes the implementation processes of these projects. The Pavement to Parks program started as a temporary project to test the performance of the design elements before they are considered permanent. This temporary status allowed faster permit processes, thereby allowing the construction to start faster too. The implementation of these projects was made possible by a number of actors' contributions, such as local neighborhood/community organizations' facilitation efforts, volunteers' labor, and designer and construction companies' pro bono or reduced-price services. Even the maintenance of these parks is conducted by one or more of these actors. The city argues that its strategy of letting communities facilitate and fund the creation of these temporary parks allows the addition of extra public square footage to urban space in a speedy way, especially given the economic downturn that the state is facing. *The New York Times* reports that the collision rate for the 11 blocks around Guerreo Park has been reduced by 53 percent since 2004 (Arief 2009). Thus, these community-paid-for developments serve as traffic calming strategies as well as public spaces—a service that would traditionally be provided by the city.

Following the Park(ing) Day initiative, the city started allowing construction of parklets in the city. The first parklet on Divisadero Street was constructed as a six-month long pilot project in 2010 and has been followed by 30 more parklets to this day. According to the San Francisco Great Streets Project survey on the Divisadero Parklet, the average number of weekday visitors doubled, and pedestrian activity (people per hour) increased by 37 percent on weekday evenings.

Creating parklets has been similar to the process of creating other "pavement to parks" projects. The Great Streets Project (a campaign initiated by SFBC, San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association, and the Project for Public Spaces), volunteers, Mojo Bicycle Café (a café and bicycle shop located across the parklet) all participated in the creation of the first parklet. The rest of the funds came from an office which works under the direction of the mayor's office: Office of Economic and Workforce Development's Neighborhood Marketplace Initiative, whose focus is to attract businesses to the city. Design services were provided by an architecture office free of charge, and materials (some of which are "green") were donated by various companies or provided at a reduced price. The parklet on Divisadero is not an exception. In fact, only "the first few parklets were sponsored by the City as demonstrations" according to the Pavement to Parks' website. The cost of several parklets has been covered by business and private donations, volunteer labor, and services from non-profit membership organizations such as SFBC, and, businesses are expected to provide maintenance after the completion of the parklets. There is one residential parklet on Valencia Street in San Francisco—a rare example that was created by city resident Amandeep Jawa, a prominent carfree-streets activist and a member of the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition Board of Directors.

Figure 7.3 The first parklet on Divisadero Street in San Francisco, built in 2010  (photography by socketsite).

Permit applications start at approximately $1,500. The total cost for the design and building of a parklet can range from $5,000 to $15,000, according to a *San Francisco Examiner* report (Seltenrich 2011). However, parklets are still considered temporary upgrades of the streetscape. They are considered testing grounds, and such places are intended to prepare residents for later permanent improvements of the streets.

Public spaces and public buildings, such as libraries and courthouses, are conventionally constructed using government funds. Parklets are public spaces in terms of their use, yet they are privately constructed and maintained. The San Francisco Planning Department requires parklets to place signs that will make it obvious that they are open to public (without a need to buy anything in order to sit), not only to customers of the businesses that established the parklets. Demonstrated neighborhood/community support is another precondition for getting a permit. Although extra usable public space is added, the city does not always spend public money in order to bring the projects to life and even requires maintenance to be provided by businesses that sponsor the parklets. The City's role in the construction of parklets is reduced to one of manager and permit provider, and in the case of objections during the public notice period, the City holds public hearings.

These public spaces are much more *public* than many other public spaces in the city in some ways. They are built directly by the combined efforts of volunteers, neighborhood groups, and design and construction companies. This process of different actors collectively constructing parts of the city's public spaces, though not exactly paralleling, resonates with Lefebvre's idea of *oeuvre*—collectively building the city as art. The projects come to life through processes in which experts, non-experts, and businesses all act like *inhabitants* of the city and build the city

94

together. To some extent, this is a step ahead in planning practices. The residents and other actors are rather substantial co-creators in the processes by which Parklets are built, compared to a participatory planning model wherein users and residents are only involved in a planning process that is in fact lead by the experts. The projects are also "green," and in many ways, these renewal projects reflect San Franciscans' interest in making the city more environmentally friendly. When possible, reclaimed and recycled materials are used in the construction of the parks (such as with the fallen trees used in Guerreo Park), and green landscaping is added. Thus, the projects are acts of remaking the city that are in tune with the many residents' contemporary culture, values, and lifestyles.

While there are positive aspects of such "community partnership" processes, there are also negative ones. The appearance of new parklets depends on demands from nearby businesses or neighborhood groups' ability to organize and collect funds. Thus, the future of extra public spaces holds the potential for unequal development throughout the city because the decision regarding where the parklet should be located is not made by a central organization or the government. Abad Ocubillo (2012) argues that because the success of the parklets depends on pedestrian activity, and thus local merchants, and because of the parklets' local-scale focus, perhaps parklets reinforce inequities. Lavine (2012) argues streets with parklets may become less accessible to low-income earners. Developments led by the joint private/community/public partnership may potentially take place more so in already economically vital neighborhoods, or in neighborhoods with already strong community/neighborhood social capital. This would create even greater differences between upper and lower class neighborhoods in the city. Thus, such partnership-based development processes that make parklets possible hold the potential for unequal spatial development among different neighborhoods in the city.

Shifting responsibility for public space from the city to individuals, businesses, and community organizations is a strategy that goes beyond the Pavement to Parks Program. Under the Better Streets project (www.sfbetterstreets.org), since 2012 the City has guided its citizens to "become active in creating Better Streets" in their neighborhoods by providing "a comprehensive 'how-to' guide on installing elements" that will make streets more livable/better (SFMTA 2012). Under this program various actors in the city apply for permits to sponsor and improve the streets. Property owners, residents, or business owners can improve sidewalk landscaping, street trees, special sidewalk paving, outdoor café seating, sidewalk merchandise displays, bicycle racks, and parklets. Community organizations such as neighborhood groups, merchant associations, or community benefit districts can improve larger projects such as neighborhood-wide traffic calming measures, corridor-wide improvements along a neighborhood business district, and stormwater management strategies. Any parties who apply to conduct changes on their streets are also expected to be responsible for the maintenance of the altered area. In cases in which the City sponsors the changes (from small landscaping actions to the redesign of an entire street), the City is responsible for the maintenance. Expecting various patrons in the city to take on a number of responsibilities—such as to determine the need for improvements in the public space, apply for a permit, generate and provide funds, carry out construction, and even later on provide maintenance—transcends boundaries between traditional public and private notions of space regarding use, maintenance and responsibility of providing the public spaces. Even through parklets are public spaces in terms of use, businesses are responsible for their maintenance. In addition, despite the fact that new spaces are strictly public spaces (meaning that people can use them without engaging in any commercial activity such as buying a coffee), for now, this is not

obvious to any passerby unless someone is careful enough to read the signs in the parklets. However, given the increasing number of parklets, perhaps in time this public quality of parklets will be more widely known.

The Pavement to Parks program is described in the 2012 internship announcement in the following way: "The Pavement to Parks program was conceived to help San Franciscans imagine portions of the public right-of-way reconfigured as public space to be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. The Pavement to Parks program was established to explore low-cost, quick, easily implementable public space improvements with the goal of energizing the public realm." Similar to latent intentions behind Sunday Streets events, the City programs mentioned above are ways of gradually introducing physical changes to residents of the city, in order to decrease resistance to losing automobile space.

## 7.3    Fell and Oak Street

Multiple neighborhood groups have been advocating for making Fell Street safer for bicyclists and pedestrians since 1994, according to Connecting the City's website (2011). Park(ing) spots created during Park(ing) Day in 2010 reflected only a small, recent portion of these demands.

As Chapter 5.3.b explained earlier, Fell Street, just like Oak Street, is a major bike route because they are part of the Wiggle route. Both streets also accommodate high levels of automobile traffic. Connecting the City (2011) provides a historical account of the advocacy efforts on Fell and Oak Streets through today: Members of the Alamo Square, Haight/Divisadero, Oak/Fillmore, Western Addition PAC, North of the Panhandle, and Duboce Park Neighborhood Associations; some merchants; the Senior Action Network; San Francisco Bicycle Coalition; and Walk SF have all been part of the advocacy efforts. As early as 1996 there were discussions about the removal of on-street parking spaces in order to open up space for bicyclists. 250 people attended to a public hearing in 1998 (6th and the most attended public hearing till that date). However, it was not until 2004 that a bike path was added for a trial period and later on retained.



Figure 7.4 Automobiles that make a left turn into the Arco station take over the bicycle lane on Fell Street (photograph by Bryan Goebel, http://sf.streetsblog.org/2009/09/17/nopa-neighborhood-fights-to-calm-its-residential-freeway/).

As encounters between residents during Park(ing) Day 2010 indicated, the bike path alone did provide the improvements to the street that some of the residents and bicyclists were expecting. Motorists' left turns into the Arco gas station created another round of advocacy around the bicyclists' safety (fig. 7.4). A clash between bicyclists' safety needs vs. motorists' need to reach the gas station to fill up their tanks was symbolic of the bigger tensions relating to land uses between these publics. Eventually, ongoing protests and advocacy efforts resulted in further improvements. In August 2010 the city added green boxes to the bike lane in order to call for drivers' attention (Helquist 2010).

The account of the transformation of Fell Street shows that the process is long and tedious, necessitating many different kind of advocacy (day-to-day as well as formal), yet it is possible. After another series of public meetings and community workshops that started in September 2011, additional new plans for Oak and Fell Streets that incorporate the separation of bikeways and removal of on-street parking on those streets have been unanimously approved by the SFMTA Board of Directors, as of October 16 (SFMTA 2012).



Figure 7.5 Latest proposal for Fell Street, prepared by SFMTA, demonstrating the separated bike lane and removal of parking (source: http://www.sfmta.com/cms/bproj/OakandFellBikeways.htm).

CFS events' grassroots publics create temporary, conceived, and real counterspaces. The spatial experiences created during the events comprise temporary counterspaces. Conceived counterspaces exist in illustrations, drawings, and texts. Real counterspaces are evident in the transformation of San Francisco into a more inclusive city with more bicycling and walking infrastructure and more public spaces. Lefebvre (1991, 381-382) argues that "When a community fights the construction of urban motorways or housing-developments, when it demands 'amenities' or empty spaces for play and encounter, we can see how a counter-space can insert itself into spatial reality." CFS counterpublics, rather than merely demanding, first produce the temporary counterspaces they envision as a way to demand them. Eventually, like Lefebvre argues, those demands can help foster the production of real spaces.

The years in which the advocacy efforts started on Fell Street and reached their peak parallel the birth of CM and the 1997 CM crackdown, demonstrating that the advocacy for better streets was happening throughout the whole city. A combination of the willingness of local government agencies, strong civil sector advocacy, and grassroots appropriations together made changes possible over the years.

The changes in San Francisco indicate a social transformation as much as a physical one. The role of the grassroots events in this transformation cannot be ignored. The several thousands of CM bicyclists who resisted mayoral and police control over bicyclists' access to streets in 1997 attracted local and global media attention, disseminated the debates over access to streets into the public sphere, and helped bicyclists in other cities to raise their voices and unite bicyclists globally as a counterpublic. This way, no longer were the debates limited to community meetings and those who attended them. The event transformed neighborhood-scale bicycling debates to a problem that concerned the entire city, in the same way that Park(ing) Day and Sunday Streets also work at the level of the public sphere. Perhaps each carfree-streets event has paved the road for another in making the issues about access to streets a public debate.

# CHAPTER 8 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## 8.1 CFS Counterpublics' Shared Interests in Streets

Organizers and participants of CFS events depict a shared vision for an alternative urban space, despite the differences between the events. Several interviewees used the terms "sense of community" and "like-minded" to refer to these counterpublics. This shared vision for an alternative urban space not only refers to physical changes in urban form, but also challenges the influence of automobility in urban space from a broader perspective, such as our relationship to nature, public health, the amount of green space in cities, and environmental health.

A "sense of community and camaraderie" is found particularly amongst bicyclists, since bicycling is in most cases (see the CM 2012 online survey results) an overt choice representing a specific set of values and lifestyles in the *everyday* lives of bicyclists, not only during the events. The CM rides' anarchistic qualities, too, demonstrate those bicyclists' political stance regarding the need for infrastructure for bicycling. The feeling of being in the minority unites them, and given that bicyclists travel with no physical barrier around them, the sense of community is reproduced every day as bicyclists pass each other during the day and make eye contact, wave at each other, or say hello to one another. Being able to feel this sense of community very much depends on having access to the street without feeling endangered by the automobile traffic.

The events provide access to the city and enable bicyclists, skaters, and pedestrians to enjoy urban public space in a different way, that is, for "play and fun." CM bicyclists crossing through the Broadway Tunnel in San Francisco, skaters circling around the Palace of Fine Arts, and Bike Party using empty parking lots for dance/bicycling parties are other examples of how these counterpublics obtain access to public spaces to claim urban structures as their "urban playground." Skaters, skateboarders, bicyclists and pedestrians do also enjoy urban space outside of CFS events individually (whether acting in an insurgent manner or not), but the events allow them to form a counterpublic in a deliberate way. In non-institutional events, grouping bodies of people together to occupy public spaces is the only way for them to use urban space differently from their everyday use of streets.

There are several other examples of enjoying urban space differently, such as feeling the contours and topography of the landscape, feeling the wind, and seeing the architectural details while bicycling; the concept of "urban hiking" that some of the interviewees mentioned during Bay View Sunday Streets; and taking in the different smells and observing the ocean and plants during the Great Ocean Highway Sunday Streets. Through these experiences, participants connect with people around them with no physical barriers, which adds to the positive experiences that the events produce.

The events also transform the urban "nightscapes." During these events people make use of parts of the city that are often abandoned at night. Critical Mass, Bike Party, Friday Night Skaters, San Francisco Mystery ride, and Berkeley Full Moon bike rides are some of the events that bring people out on the streets at night. Usually, urban streets at night are not perceived as safe because of the cover of darkness and the fact that there are not many people around to provide assistance. However, these events change urban nightscapes. The CM rides that I participated in started at about 7 pm in the dark and continued without losing many of the participants until we arrived at

the Presidio/Golden Gate Bridge around 10 pm, when there are not many people on the streets in most of the city. Bike Party (a movement that is, unlike CM, explicit about not disturbing the motor vehicle traffic) is particularly interested in having fun on the streets at night. Bike Party attracts hundreds of people on bicycles who turn a shopping mall parking lot into an outdoor dance party site for 15 minutes before moving to another location in the city that is deserted at night.

As much as the events are an opportunity for such like-minded people to meet, they are also opportunities simply for "casual interactions" for anybody. Both Park(ing) Day and Sunday Streets create spaces to socialize on the streets. All three CFS events travel around different neighborhoods allowing people living in different parts of the city to come out to the streets and to interact with each other. One of the bicyclists from CM (a female in her late 20s) stated, "It wasn't until I really started biking through it, seeing different demographic areas, I really appreciated what the city was and all the different parts of it." Others say that certain parts of the city that are known as unsafe areas (such as Tenderloin and Bayview) become accessible through events like Sunday Streets. Carrying private realms out into public spaces and using streets as "backyards" and "living rooms" are examples of opportunities for casual interactions. Small free-speech parks during Park(ing) Day that provided opportunities for exchange of opinions between publics with opposing points of view are another example. The events create spaces similar to what Oldenburg (1989) defined as the "third space"—neither public nor private, but something in between, a community space.

Bicyclists, pedestrians, and those who do not drive frequently feel like minorities except at such events. Statements such as "making our scene" and "remembering that it is our city and our space" are indications of their counterposition on urban space. This counterpublic is defined on the basis of its interest in gaining more access to streets, rather than on the basis of class, gender, or race. Yet, the marginalization (in regards to access to streets) of these publics still creates social injustice because streets are public spaces and common resources, no matter what reasons underlie these multiple publics' rights demands to streets or what social background they are from.

## 8.2   Comparison of the CFS Events

### a.   Characteristics of temporary counterspaces

As much as each carfee-street event analyzed in this research is similar in terms of taking up space occupied by automobiles and making that space accessible for non-driving-related activities, there are also differences between the events. Participants in each event occupy a different section of a street—vehicle lanes, sidewalks, on-street parking spaces, or the whole street. CM stands out for bicycling, Park(ing) Day for alternative programming of on-street car parking spaces, and Sunday Streets for community and many kinds of physical activity. The CFS events are social movements that fall between protests, festivals, and appropriations.

The events blend free play, new ways to imagine the city, appropriations, and demands for right to the city. This blend resonates with Lefebvre's conceptualization of the right to the city and

*oeuvre*, because urban space is transformed both temporarily and permanently through the combined efforts of individuals and organized groups as well as government agencies, and because resistance to mainstream ideas defines the core of the transformation process from vehicle-oriented to people-oriented urban form. Various patrons living in the city participate in the transformation as inhabitants of the city. Participants enact their imagined counterpsaces during the events. Unlike many protest movements or festivals, during CFS events, streets serve as more than just a stage that provides visibility to multiple publics. Streets themselves and equal access to streets are the very matter that is being contested. Besides gaining visibility, counterpublics temporarily enact their goal of becoming the dominant user of the streets—as motorists are every day.

Urban spaces and experiences created through the events are temporary *counterspaces* because they reflect counterpublics' alternative vision for urban space. The subverted experience of the streets is counter to what modern urban space typically offers. During CM, a mass of bicyclists fills the roads and blocks motor vehicle traffic (unfortunately, the ride blocks pedestrian traffic, too, as a byproduct). During the ride, motorists, rather than bicyclists, feel subordinated. Park(ing) Day replaces automobiles with people interacting with each other on expanded sidewalks. CM and Park(ing) Day choose work-related times (during commute hours and Friday work hours) for the events, and that creates even a stronger contrast with everyday life, especially for those who rely on their automobiles. As Sunday Streets opens up streets to people, streets are filled with a variety of activities other than automobile traffic (before and after images taken at the Sunday Streets events [Figure 6.3 Photographs taken during Sunday Streets, right after the end of street closure (at 3pm) (Corner of Harrison Street and 24th Street, during Mission Sunday Streets on June 20, 2010 (photograph by author).] demonstrate the difference). The streetscape changes from one occupied with automobiles parked on the streets and with people in automobiles, busy traveling from one point to another, to one free of cars and with people of all ages (from toddlers to the elderly) interacting with each other, not only travelling, but also stopping, sitting, spending time, and using streets as public spaces.

Temporary counterspaces of Park(ing) Day and Sunday Streets allow residents to utilize the spaces that are primarily occupied for transportation for multiple uses, instead of maintaining private use by individuals in automobiles. Despite the fact that part of the message of CM is to make streets more accessible to individual bicyclists, which is still similar to private use of the roads by automobile users, bicycling takes much less space on the street and thus allows more people to travel. In addition, CM as an event opens streets for public use and fun.

The success of carfree-streets events is partially due to the festival-like atmosphere that is created on the street—a place to have fun and socialize. These are spaces of play. Bicyclists and pedestrians talk to one another, and bicyclists play music on speakers they carry on trailers attached to their bicycles or exhibit their customized and decorated bicycles. During the CM rides, passersby wave to the bicyclists, and even some motorists show their support. During the Sunday Streets events, people move in every direction on the street, or do not move at all,. Park(ing) Day makes people stay in public spaces and engage with each other. Like street theater, the events dramatically demonstrate what the streets could be like with fewer automobiles and more people on foot and on bicycle, or even just lounging on the sidewalks. Participants occupy streets and negotiate their claims to rights by modeling them. Different from street theater and parades, the playful quality of the event attracts passersby to participate, and

the audience becomes part of the appropriation, and thereby strengthens the counterpublics' occupation of the streets. The events allow their participants to communicate their ideas in the public sphere by enacting them, rather than by talking about them. With this theatrical experience, counterpublics introduce new cultural codes and challenge existing ones, actions that culminate in social and cultural change. The events are not unique to San Francisco either— different iterations of Sunday Streets have been taking place in many cities since the 1970s, and CM and Park(ing) Day quickly spread to the rest of the world after their first occurrences in San Francisco.

Collectively subverting everyday use of streets communicates people's deliberate choices regarding how they want streets to be used: for walking and bicycling and as public gathering places, instead of driving. The spatial appropriations of CM and Parking Day are not hidden from the sight of motorists, police, or the mayor of the City of San Francisco. On the contrary, the events are meant to be visible and to foster a public conversation about alternative uses of streets. By taking their issues to public spaces, people demonstrate their numbers, and size of their demand and power to local governments, to the mainstream public in San Francisco, and to the world through the media and the internet. All this catalyzes change on the local and global scale, just as Blickstein and Hanson (2001) argue in regards to CM's ways of operating. Producing alternative spatial experiences, instead of simply talking about them is a strong statement that demands ever more access to streets. It demonstrates that people need the change to happen now and that they are not willing to wait until regulations get changed and implemented.

Many festivals and parades block traffic as CFS events do; however, for those events, streets serve only as a public venue, a means to an end, in most cases. San Francisco hosts many festivals and parades, and some have a commercial component (San Francisco Street Food Festival), while others aim to represent a cultural community and make territorial claims about a neighborhood (Chinese New Year Parade, Folsom Street Festival, Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival, etc.). There is also the 100-year-old "Bay to Breakers Race," a runners' race that other residents have appropriated into a costume parade/carfree-street festival. This indicates that for many residents, streets without automobile traffic are a welcome opportunity to enjoy being out in public—even if it requires appropriation of another event. During festivals, vehicle-traffic closures are not the goal, but the means, so that streets can be made available for the event. Several parade-type events do not even welcome the audience on the streets and require them to be behind barricades or fences on the sidewalks.

However, carfree-streets events are formed specifically because of demands for alternative uses of streets. Participants of carfree-streets events occupy what is at stake for them: streets. Access to the streets is not a means, but an end in its own right. Many people during Sunday Streets events stated that they appreciated the convenience of having a carfree environment nearby, just outside of their homes, rather than having to drive to Golden Gate Park on the weekends in order to reach a carfree environment. Moreover, carfree-streets events are not associated with a certain neighborhood; carfree-streets counterpublics make territorial claims to all streets in the city. The events are periodic and move to different parts of the city. Participants especially claim to enjoy having access to different neighborhoods of San Francisco. To some, Park(ing) Day becomes a tourist attraction with online maps of park(ing) spots that allow one to create a route and encourage a tour of the park(ing) spots.

### b. Tactics: Insurgent vs. institutional

Critical Mass, Park(ing) Day and Sunday Streets stand at different points on the insurgent-to-institutional continuum. Critical Mass in San Francisco started as an anarchical, insurgent movement and has continued to maintain this profile by not announcing its route and not accepting a leader or representative. Its anarchistic character reflects the resistance the bicyclists faced in the early 1990s; the route of the ride in San Francisco is still not predetermined, and decisions are made along the way. The ride is escorted by the City's police department as a measure of controlling the length of the ride and conflicts between bicyclists and motorists. The bicyclists receive tickets for some actions such as playing music too loud or drinking alcohol in public. Despite these constraints, CM in San Francisco and in many cities demonstrates that the simple tactic of gathering en masse (plus the fun and playful quality of the event) can transgress existing power structures between mainstream publics (automobile dominant city advocates) and counterpublics (livable city advocates) in public space.

Compared to blocking one another's right of way in traffic during CM rides, creating extra public spaces during Park(ing) Day may at first look less confrontational. However, Park(ing) Day also takes advantage of loopholes and re-appropriates public space for a different use than intended. Some people rather casually take advantage of the event, and others (such as the skateboarder groups and Wigg Party on Fell Street) utilize it to make a political statement. Parking ticket officers who patrol on-street parking spaces need an automobile with a license plate in order to issue a ticket; they cannot issue parking tickets to people who occupy the parking spots without a car. Park(ing) Day's official stance regarding the legality of the event, as published on their website, is "In San Francisco it *appears* to be legal to do other things in a parking spot besides park a vehicle," and they state that "in some municipalities (New York City, for example) alternative activities are expressly prohibited." Park(ing) Day, despite the semi-insurgent and witty tactics that make the event possible, has a rather casual and relaxed feel. Even though the first park(ing) spot that Rebar created was an insurgent act, the idea of converting parking spaces into park(ing) spots has been supported by the City since then. Even though the event is a grassroots intervention, and not publicized as collaboration with the City (unlike Sunday Streets), the conflict-free (between authorities and organizers) nature of the event and the rising number of "parklets" is an indication of the City's support of Park(ing) Day. Moreover, San Francisco's Department of Environment is one of the regular organizers of park(ing) spots during the annual Park(ing) Day. Parking officers do not give tickets to any park(ing) spot organizers, even when they fail to pay the parking meters. Thus, Park(ing) Day may be considered as semi-institutional compared to CM and Sunday Streets.

Sunday Streets events transform streets to a blank canvas, allowing anybody to re-appropriate the streets for alternative uses. Despite this subversive quality, it is a product of open cooperation with the City of San Francisco, private donors, and nonprofit membership organizations. It is an institutional event and not insurgent in its organizational nature. However, even though the City of San Francisco is one of the official sponsors, the event is largely organized by the combined efforts of Livable City, volunteers, and the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (the group that recruits the volunteers). The San Francisco Municipal Transportation agency also takes part in organizing the events by arranging the traffic routes and detours. Volunteers work before, during, and after the events and help with tasks such as setting up, distributing information, guiding traffic, and cleaning up. Thus, although Sunday Streets is an institutionalized event, it is still

largely run by grassroots groups and civic sector efforts, in order to provide the infrastructure for residents of San Francisco to re-appropriate the streets.

Moreover, there are several similarities and differences between the events' tactics and strategies and how participants appropriate streets. De Certeau (1984) states that in the same way speech appropriates language, the act of walking is an act of appropriation of everyday urban space. He (1984) argues that the "subordinated" users employ tactics in order to operate in everyday life as an act of resisting the hegemony of the powerful. Automobility can be considered one of the institutionalized systems that De Certeau (1984, 36) talks about, one that "postulates its power" in urban form. Pedestrians and bicyclists create their own paths in urban space every day. However, everyday "tactics" do not communicate "cries and demands" in an overt manner. Like de Certeau, I define *tactics* as taking advantage of opportunities to re-appropriate urban space; however, I add that they are not only a way to operate in everyday life (and wait to take advantage of opportunities that might arise), but also a means of deliberately transforming urban space in the short and long term by actively creating opportunities  and making  demands in the public sphere.

The insurgent events like Critical Mass and Park(ing) Day are made possible by employing such unique tactics. Park(ing) Day takes advantage of a loophole in parking regulations in San Francisco. However, the event, led by Rebar, overtly, yet in a non-confrontational manner, encourages many people to transform on-street car parking spaces into public spaces, in conjunction with the supportive attitude of the local government agencies. Critical Mass, in a more obvious manner, actively and through the power of collective action, makes appropriation of streets possible. Counterpublics in both Critical Mass and Park(ing) Day publicly occupy streets with their bodies with the mindset of a swarm: the more people join, the more effective the movement becomes. Sunday Streets is organized as a formal institutional event that does not require any level of insurgency in order to happen. However, Sunday Streets events also target the mainstream public and aim to challenge standard behavior. The event creates opportunities to get the mainstream public out into the streets and ease them into the transition to urban planning ideas that are less automobile dominated.

One can also observe that the marginalized (in regards to access to streets) position of non-motorists is perhaps turned into an advantage and used as a particular strategy by organizers/initiators of the events who are generally considered powerful actors in the society. They are considered powerful actors because they include established non-profit organizations, male middle-class professionals, professionals trained in law and environmental design fields, and the local government.  They use their skills and the esteem in which they are held to make these various carfree-streets events and permanent changes possible.

The events serve as demonstration projects and provide testing grounds for permanent change by encouraging city-dwellers to experience change in a hands-on way. Fisherman's Wharf merchants' initially resisted the first Sunday Streets event, but now they display a supportive attitude. Supervisor Chris Daly initiated a proposal to ban private cars on Market Street in 2008, commenting that Sunday Streets events created an opportunity to propose such permanent changes (Cote 2008). Signs that read "why not every Sunday" (regarding Sunday Streets) carried by The Wigg Party to demand permanent closures are the third example of how these events are conceived as instruments of permanent change.

### 8.3    Outsourcing the Processes of Transformation: Institutionalized DIY

The built environment is a material form of culture, one that is hard to transform. Automobility is a strongly established dimension of modern urban culture, especially in the US. As Furness (2010, 7) states, driving "resides at the core of the post-World War II American dream … [and] is a key practice in defining what it means to be American, or more accurately, what it means to *do* like an American." Thus, decreasing the role of automobiles in everyday life requires social and cultural changes in addition to physical changes.

Both Furness (2010) and Urry (2004) argue that technological changes and environmental limits will bring an end to automobile dependency. It is hard to image such change happening without the adequate provision of built infrastructure to support walking, bicycling, and mass transportation. Powerful actors are at work, too, such as multinational oil and automobile companies, to keep the system of automobility in place. Governments need to face up to the opposition from both such powerful economic and political forces and the mainstream public, if they want to transform urban space radically and instantly. In San Francisco, between 2006 and 2010, bicycle infrastructure improvements were put on hold until the city released a 1,353-page environmental impact report, because a single person (Rob Anderson, who is  publicly negative about bike improvements on his blog where he also writes on other issues about San Francisco) was motivated enough to carry the city's long-awaited bike plans into court in the name of environmental protection, claiming that the city's bike plan was not in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act. This bike plan injunction was an obvious indicator of the magnitude of mainstream resistance to diminishing the automobiles' position in urban life and urban space.

The need to improve streets to be more livable places has been recently acknowledged by a majority of local governments in the US. According to a recent survey, "seventy-five percent of the [US] mayors indicate support to increase the federal gas tax if a greater share of the funding were invested in bicycle and pedestrian projects" (The United States Conference of Mayors, 2011). In this neoliberal age, cities are competing for attractiveness, and today being green is a strong step up for intercity competitions. However, with opposition from mainstream motorists and merchants, and those who demand more parking in the city, what is the best way for local governments to introduce change without getting into conflict with the mainstream public and powerful actors? Could local governments be leaving the work of dealing with opposition to counterpublics to solve by their own means?

Spatial appropriations created by carfree-streets movements provide transitional spaces and temporal occasions for such change to happen, as the events provide an embodied experience of livable streets in (for most people) inviting, fun, festive settings. The case of Fell Street during Park(ing) Day illustrates how streets serve as public forums for opposing publics to exchange opinions face-to-face. The variety of the events increases the likelihood of participation by a variety of publics, makes the events even more popular, and helps strengthen the sense of community among the counterpublics. The events are counterpublics' demands to streets, but more importantly, what they do is confront the mainstream resistance to bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly improvements.

Have grassroots events become the city's unspoken, unofficial (what sociologists call "latent") strategies for dealing with mainstream opposition? When analyzed all together, the movements demonstrate a change in the City of San Francisco's approach to urban streets and to grassroots appropriations. The City did try to halt the first carfree-streets event (CM), but over time its attitude slowly changed. The City went from first overseeing CM events with a police escort, to letting Park(ing) Day happen and not ticketing park(ing) installations, to collaborating with its ideas, and finally to co-organizing Sunday Streets and arranging traffic closures. The City now facilitates grassroots mobilizations and provides the improvements they demand, while also accommodating opposing mainstream publics' demands (such as by escorting CM so that the length of the ride will be limited as much as possible).

By providing this minimal support to marginalized (in the context of access to streets) grassroots groups, the City may actually be outsourcing its work of having to deal with mainstream opposition to reconstructing the city. The City does in fact outsource a cost that incurs in providing a cultural transition away from automobile dependency. Instead of the City spending public resources to build communities for such changes, or invest in pilot designs, the CFS events serve as testing grounds. Even with Sunday Streets, an institutional event that is promoted by the City, much work is done by non-profits and volunteers who are recruited by non-profits. The City's role is reduced to endorsing the event, organizing traffic closures and detours, and allowing the event happen. As for the controversial physical transformations (such as the Oak and Fell Street projects described in Chapter 7), in addition to public meetings held by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency and neighborhood organizations, the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition collects feedback and holds additional meetings together with neighborhood associations (Connecting the City, 2011). Parklets are largely built with private donations and volunteer and pro bono help. All this indicates that the City is outsourcing work and costs associated with social and cultural transformation (towards less-automobile-dominated urban form) to grassroots, non-profits, and the private sector. The City even uses the terminology "tactical interventions" in describing their Pavement to Parks Program to its potential interns on the program's website. The City's use of the term *tactical* indicates the relative power of mainstream cultural forces and values that demand automobile-dominant cities.

Even though the civic sector's involvement in transforming the city appears to be a step towards democratic production of urban space for certain populations and making the streets more inclusive of non-motorists, it may reproduce already existing social and spatial inequalities for others. For instance, Joassart-Marcell, Wolch, and Salim (2011) note that if nonprofits start to overtake the responsibility of providing resources for recreation from the governments, the absence of nonprofits "from low-income and minority neighborhoods reinforces inequities in the distribution of park and recreation resources." A rather centralized control over resources is needed to ensure equal development throughout the city.

The City of San Francisco, through its Pavement to Parks and Better Streets programs, has recently started to shift responsibility of upgrading and improving public spaces of the city to grassroots groups, individuals, and businesses. The City seems to be institutionalizing the DIY attitude. This at first may seem like democratization of urban decision-making processes, giving greater agency to the public to have a greater role in shaping their city and encouraging the public to be "inhabitants." However, for instance, restaurants and coffee shops, as it stands now, most often initiate the construction of parklets, since those establishments can  directly benefit

from the improvements on their streets. Under these circumstances, a lower income residential neighborhood is unlikely to get improvements, due to the fact that coffee shops and funds from the private and civic sector might be less available. Such decentralized distribution of improvements holds the potential for resulting in spatial inequalities within the city. Furthermore, such processes of reshaping the city blur the distinctions between public and private notions of space in regards to use, maintenance, and responsibility for providing the public spaces in the first place.

It is hard to come up with concrete conclusions about the effects of these recent transformations, because they are quite new. However, as they stand now, these examples indicate an extreme case of neoliberalism, in which DIY urbanism is institutionalized. The local government is shrinking its role and shifting its responsibility (of providing physical environmental improvements) to grassroots movements, non-profit organizations, and businesses. Moreover, at the cultural level, the local government is letting the grassroots movements deal with oppositional mainstream opinions and is even cooperating with grassroots and civic sector organizers.

This dissertation demonstrates that various publics, such as bicyclists, pedestrians, livable city advocates, and environmentalists, comprise a counterpublic that is marginalized in respect to its access to streets. In contrast, in all three events actors who are not marginalized in other respects (such as education, gender, and class) initiate the events to a certain extent, in conjunction with the masses that comprise the events. They use pedestrians' and bicyclists' marginalized position in regards to access to streets to make a case to mainstream motorists about the need to transform urban space. In a sense, these events are powerful actors' strategies to overturn the marginalized position of non-motorists. The counterpublics appropriate streets through carfree-streets events as a way to demand their right to the city (and, more specifically, to "livable" streets) in the public sphere, while at the same time they temporarily enact the counterspaces they envision.

The carfree-streets events challenge conceptions of legal/illegal, public/private, everyday/ imagined, and powerful/powerless. Despite their differences, the number of CFS events and their variety indicate the magnitude of marginalized (in terms of access to streets) publics' demands to reclaim streets for various uses other than driving motor vehicles. Mitchell (2003, 231) states that "In each case, taking to the streets and overthrowing the normative order the streets represent— an order marked by racism, by sexism, and by homophobia—have been crucial to advancing the cause of justice." Similarly, carfree-streets counterpublics change the order on the streets, literally and figuratively, as a means of addressing spatial injustice against those who are not willing to depend on driving.

Categories of class, race, and gender dominate the spatial justice and right to the city literature. The predominantly young, white, male bicyclists do not qualify to be conceived as a marginalized public in most contexts; but, in the context of automobile-oriented cities, non-motorists, including pedestrians, are marginalized users of streets. Greater spatial justice depends on expanding the understanding of the right to the city to include publics such as bicyclists,

pedestrians, and livable city advocates, who are marginalized based on their lack of access to streets, even though the demographics of these groups do not always parallel the demographics of populations traditionally thought of as disadvantaged.

Even though appropriations of streets during the carfree-streets events are temporary in nature, they are more than means of operating in everyday life (such as in de Certeau's way of referring to tactics). The analysis of carfree-streets events indicates that various actors deliberately instrumentalize these events in order to transform urban space and society. The events provide testing grounds for experiencing livable streets, and together with other grassroots movements, stir community groups, individual residents, and City departments to collaborate in reshaping the city to be more environmentally and pedestrian friendly.

Carfree-streets events demonstrate a special form of social movement, one that occupies public space, appropriates it, and changes public behavior. Those who organize or set up the events are not necessarily from a weaker strata of society, even though non-motorists' marginalized status defines the events' importance and strength of their argument. These events are situated in the historical context of a city with successful freeway revolts in which, through local governments' veto power, residents proved to be powerful actors in shaping the city. The carfree-streets events, too, shape the city in multiple ways. On one hand, these grassroots appropriations and the cultural and physical implications of the CFS events resonate with Lefebvre's notions of reenacting "urban consciousness," producing the city as "oeuvre" and "inhabiting" it because the counterpublics make demands, resist hegemony, and actively and collectively transform urban space, using tactics from insurgency to volunteering. Even though the events are not revolutionary in the sense of addressing the problems associated with the "processes of urbanization" (as a structure superordinate to the economic system [Lefebvre 2003, 15]) or overturning the capitalist system (as Harvey [2008] argues), the events do challenge certain targeted aspects of "urbanization." They do so by subverting everyday spaces and reclaiming spaces occupied by automobiles and by opening room in urban space for play, fun, and casual interactions. The events also disseminate alternative meanings of urban space and foster collaborations between different urban actors. They reproduce streets that reflect alternative lifestyles and values. Thus, from this perspective, CFS events seem to democratize the production of urban space and its decision-making processes.

On the other hand, the City's increasing support of grassroots events in recent years and decreasing role (both as an organizer and financial supporter) in the implementation and planning of several public space and street improvement projects indicates that the City is outsourcing its responsibilities and institutionalizing a Do-It-Yourself mentality citywide. Given that cities are competing to attract business and tourists, and being "green" is a strength in that respect, such grassroots efforts serve the cities' capitalist goals. However, an urban redevelopment that depends on individuals, business and community funds, and willingness is a recipe for unequal development throughout the city, and thus, in a broader perspective, counteracts the social justice goal that is embedded in the carfree-streets events' nature.

Overall, this study points to the fact that production of urban space is a process in which various publics continuously negotiate their values, identities, and claim their right to the city.

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# APPENDIX: DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

**Flyers distributed in San Francisco Bike to Work Day Critical Mass and 2010, in order to recruit informants**

Dear Bike to Work Day/Critical Mass participant,

I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Architecture at University of California, Berkeley. In my dissertation, I am exploring political, social and spatial aspects of car-free streets advocacy. I am interested in your opinions and experiences as casual and everyday bicyclists or activists, in order to conduct a social and cultural study about streets. Your opinions will potentially contribute to designing more inclusive public spaces by uncovering bicyclists' point of view

This is an anonymous research, no identifying information about research subjects will be used in the dissertation. Interviews will be conducted through phone or in-person meetings in a public place, and will last about 15-20 minutes.

If you are willing to participate and help me conduct my research, please e-mail me at, **streetsreconsidered@berkeley.edu**.

Thank you in advance for considering participating in this research!

Best regards,

Lusi Morhayim
PhD Candidate
Social and Cultural Processes in
Department of Architecture
University of California Berkeley

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## https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sfcriticalmass

Please participate in a short survey about SF Critical Mass that is part of a PhD research in Architecture at the University of California Berkeley. This research analyses several grassroots car-free street events and multiple public groups' interests and claims on urban streets.

The survey contains 14 short questions and takes less than 5 minutes to complete. No identifying information is asked; i.e., the survey is completely anonymous.

Thank you in advance for participating!

**Prompt interview questions to the primary open-ended questions, to be asked to the participants of the carfree-streets events**

What motivates you to be here today?

Can you tell me about your experience so far in this event?

      What activities did you take part?

      Did you learn anything new about the city or community that you did not know?

To what extent this is a successful event for the city and for you personally?

Have you had any interesting/memorable encounters?

Why do you care about this event?

What is special about this experience compared to a regular day?

How does this event influence your experience of this part of the city?

What other similar events or activities you have participated?

      In what way they are similar or different?

What this event symbolizes to you?

**Additional Bicycling/CM/Bike Party related questions**

What motivates you to bicycle?

(if related):

      What made you start using bicycle as your main transportation mode?

      Why would you choose bicycling over other transportation modes?

      When and how biking became a conscious choice?

What are the benefits of bicycling to you (at personal level, at social level, anything in relation to your surroundings)?

What parts of the city do you prefer to bicycle? Why?

How do you perceive your environment when biking?

Do you consider yourself a bicycle advocate? How?

What does bicycling mean to you?

**Park(ing) Day Research Observation Sheet, September 17, 2010**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Address:** | |
| **Name of the Park(ing):** | | **Name of the organization:** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Description:** | |
| **Notes:** | |
| Other parks seen by the informants: | |
| Contact info (organizer): | for follow up/ interview another time |

Contact info (participants)

The number of the parking spot
as marked on the map #

**San Francisco Critical Mass Online Survey, 2011.**


This survey is part of a PhD research in Architecture that studies several grassroots car-free street events and multiple public groups' interests and claims on urban streets.

The survey contains 14 short questions and takes less than 5 minutes to complete. No identifying information is asked; i.e., the survey is completely anonymous.

Thank you for participating in the survey!
Lusi Morhayim

1. What transportation mode do you most often use to commute?

- ☐ Walking
- ☐ Bicycling
- ☐ Carpool
- ☐ Driving
- ☐ Public transportation
- ☐ Combination of bicycling and other modes

Other (please specify)☐ _____

2. How often do you participate in Critical Mass rides?

- ☐ I participated only once
- ☐ Once every couple of years
- ☐ Once every year
- ☐ 2-5 times per year
- ☐ 6-12 times per year

3. For how many years have you been participating in Critical Mass, in San Francisco or elsewhere?

- ☐ Last 20 years
- ☐ 10-20 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ 0-5 years


4. Please rate how strongly you agree/disagree in the following statements in regards to your participation in Critical Mass rides?

(I participate in CM rides because...)

| | I strongly disagree | I disagree | I feel neutral | I agree | I strongly agree | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I want to make a statement regarding lack of bicycling infrastructure | | | | | | |
| I like insurgent aspects of CM rides | | | | | | |
| It is simply fun to ride together with other bicyclists | | | | | | |
| I enjoy the city in a way i cannot enjoy otherwise | | | | | | |
| I don't like driving automobiles | | | | | | |
| I don't want to contribute to oil consumption | | | | | | |
| I don't want to contribute to environmental pollution | | | | | | |
| I like exercising by participating in the rides | | | | | | |
| I enjoy being with and meeting with like-minded people during the rides | | | | | | |
| I learn new ways to get around the city with my bicycle | | | | | | |
| I get a chance to bicycle in neighborhoods I don't go otherwise | | | | | | |
| I feel less threatened by automobiles when I bicycle with others | | | | | | |
| I want to show automobile drivers that bicycles are traffic too | | | | | | |

Other (please specify)

5. How many bicycles do you own?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- more than 3

6. Do you own an automobile?

☐  Yes

☐  No

7. Which category below includes your age?

☐  17 or younger

☐  18-25

☐  26-35

☐  36-45

☐  46-55

☐  56-65

☐  65 or older

8. How do you identify your gender?

☐  Male

☐  Female

☐  Other

9. How do you identify your ethnic background?

☐  Caucasian

☐  African-American

☐  American Indian or Alaskan Native

☐  Asian-American

☐  Hispanic

☐  Multiple ethnic backgrounds
Some other race (please specify)

[                                                                    ]

10. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

☐  Less than high school degree

☐  High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)

☐  Some college but no degree

☐  Bachelor degree

11. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

☐  Student

☐  Employed, working part time

☐  Employed, working full time

☐  Not employed

☐  Retired

12. What is your annual household income?

☐  Less than 30.000

☐  30.000-50.000

☐  50.000-70.000

☐  70.000-100.000

☐  100.000 and above

13. In what ZIP code is your home located? (enter 5-digit ZIP code; for example, 00544 or 94305)

☐

14. In what ZIP code is your work located? (enter 5-digit ZIP code; for example, 00544 or 94305)