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Regulating Inclusion:
Spatial Form, Social Process and the
Normalization of Cycling Practice in the United States

John Stehlin
Department of Geography
507 McCone Hall
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720 USA
johnstehlin@berkeley.edu

Abstract: In recent years, bicycle infrastructure has emerged as a valued part of urban development policy in many American cities, a process that depends on the normalization of cycling practice in three respects. First, the various “less confrontational” mutations of Critical Mass have redefined the politics of cycling in cultural and consumerist terms. Second, this “bike culture” is mediated through Internet networks that generate concepts of proper cycling practice. Third, both spatial models and standards of “correct” ridership circulate through these networks, linking “bike culture” to institutional networks of implementation. While positive from the standpoint of increased ridership, this may reinscribe the exclusions that are constitutive of the contemporary American city and may limit cycling’s egalitarian potential.

KEYWORDS: Cycling, Critical Mass, Urban Development, Neoliberalism, Gentrification, Infrastructure, Subjectivity

The bicycle has become a cultural signifier that begins to unite people across economic and racial strata. It signals a sensibility that stands against oil wars and the environmental devastation wrought by the oil and chemical industries, the urban decay imposed by cars and highways, the endless monocultural sprawl spreading outward across exurban zones. This new bicycling subculture stands for localism, a more human pace, more face-to-face interaction, hands-on technological self-sufficiency, reuse and recycling, and a healthy urban environment that is friendly to self-propulsion, pleasant smells and signs, and human conviviality.

—Chris Carlsson 2008

Introduction

Bicycles have begun to change American urbanism. Cities large and small throughout the United States have made bicycles and bicycle infrastructure part of plans for more “livable” urban environments in the interest of fostering the cosmopolitan ethos they connote (Wray, 2008; Mapes, 2009). Advocates point to the freedom, sociability and “green” virtues of commuting by bike; with walkability and bikeability, it is said, come invigorated

commercial districts and a return to the authenticity of the *agora* befitting a post-suburban era of urban vitality. Cycling has also entered Richard Florida's influential but analytically suspect "creative class" thesis, which celebrates gentrification and advises cities to invest in amenities that attract knowledge workers, artists and musicians as valuable economic agents (Florida, 2002, 2011; Peck, 2010).

The main goal of bicycle advocacy in the current moment is, in the words of one advocate, to "make cycling as *normal* as possible." Of course, by becoming "normal," cyclists may become less injurable and less excluded from the public space of the street—or of *some* streets. But the idea of "normal" also directs our attention to the way that this process has occurred through the production and circulation of *norms*. This entails running cycling practice through the prevailing "grid of intelligibility" (Foucault, 2003) of capitalist urbanism, in which space is produced to facilitate efficiency and profit, the primary metrics by which social life is judged. Livability thus only becomes intelligible and actualizable in the context of an urban growth politics dependent on the commodification of space. Therefore, the uneven integration of bicycles into what remains a broadly car-centric American urbanism often privileges areas undergoing gentrification and thus potentially limits the extent to which more subaltern cyclists benefit from new developments.

This piece explores how emergent experiments in livable, bicycle-friendly urban space, including ideas and practices that define who belongs there, circulate through nodes that connect the symbolic economy of "bike culture" to circuits of capital accumulation in American cities, and the paradoxes attending the real cracks that have opened in institutionalized automobility. Three dimensions are key to understanding these processes. First, the cultural outgrowths of Critical Mass have begun to frame its intervention not as a politicized disruption of car-centrism, but a social world of "bike culture" with a symbolic

economy of enjoyment. Second, this “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991) of “bike culture” acts as a conduit through which models, images and ideas of bike-friendly urban space circulate via advocacy groups and Internet sites. Third, these models travel through planning agencies and consulting firms as increasingly standardized techniques that shape actual practices of cycling while depending on unacknowledged exclusions. The selective inclusion of the bicycle into contemporary profit-driven cities, however may produce spaces that technically satisfy advocates’ hopes without fundamentally challenging the systemic dominance of the car (Cupples and Ridley, 2008; Horton, 2006, p. 51; Horton 2010), and at the cost of reinscribing extant lines of social division in urban life. Taking cycling seriously as a potentially egalitarian practice that goes beyond simple transit choice also means that attendant reorganizations of urban space cannot go unexamined.

1. Livability, Gentrification and the Urban Process

The fitful incorporation of bicycles into the fabric of American cities is inseparable from—but not simply an effect of—the neoliberal framework within which municipal governments must operate. From the mid-1970s onward, cities hemorrhaging revenue due to industrial relocation and cuts to federal urban spending have depended more and more on consumption- and real estate-led place competition in partnership with highly mobile private capital (Harvey, 1989, 2000; Peck and Tickell, 2002). This form of development evaluates places and livelihoods, particularly at the sub-municipal level, primarily by their contribution to the city’s competitive edge, however construed (Logan and Molotch, 2007). Favored growth techniques focus on stimulating commercial areas for tourism and middle-class consumption, with the production of spectacle standing in for the fortunes of the city more broadly (Hannigan, 1998; Harvey, 2000).

Thus, spaces at the sub-municipal level have become key sites in which to translate claims to improve city life into built environments; this also entails a translation into the *language* of competitiveness. Targeted reworkings of space that give a greater share of the street to cyclists and pedestrians, like the “road diet” of Valencia Street in San Francisco, rely substantially, though not exclusively, on emphasizing how business owners and commercial districts as a whole benefit from the convivial atmosphere created (Flusche, 2009; Florida, 2011; Folbre, 2011; Blue 2011a). Many such developments rely on federal funding for pedestrian- and bicycle-oriented projects,ⁱ which has increased from just \$6 million prior to the passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991 to nearly \$1 billion today (including \$400 million in stimulus funds from the Obama administration) (Pucher and Beuhler 2011). Like much federal funding, however, these funds are directed toward locally defined goals, often more in keeping with the needs of profit and interurban competition (Harvey, 1989; Hackworth, 2007). This may be why, while frequently under ideological attack at the federal level (Schmitt, 2011c), funding for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure enjoys wide support among municipal governments, as the localist scale valorized by bicycle advocates dovetails with that of the reurbanization of capital investment. As Lefebvre (2003) has argued, the city has become a primary site of capital accumulation, more so than in previous epochs, rendering it the “shop floor” of a production process whose main product is space itself, and a critical arena of social struggle.

One such “shop floor” can be found in the process of gentrification, in which the influx of middle- and upper-class in-migrants displaces working class residents from an undercapitalized area of the city (Lees et al., 2008, pp. 3-5). In Neil Smith’s classic Marxist analysis, the “rent gap” that sparks a wave of gentrification occurs at the point when the difference between existing and potential ground rent grows large enough to make

recapitalization profitable (Smith, 1996; Lees et al. 2008, pp. 52-5). But Damaris Rose (1984) counters this, arguing for an account of the social *production* of the desires of gentrifiers themselves, to which settlement patterns are tied. In Rose's terms, cyclists could be considered "marginal gentrifiers," unevenly endowed with social power, for whom a central urban location confers social, economic and cultural advantages, but who cannot simply be collapsed into the role of agents of capital. For example, the density appropriate to bicycle travel draws cyclists to centrally-located, disinvested neighborhoods, but they remain minor actors in the process of recapitalization. Without condemnation, Rose emphasizes the unavoidable complicity in applying of such an "*environmental solution* [better site-specific bicycle infrastructure, for instance] to a set of problems that are inherently *social problems* [the broader political economy of automobility]" (*ibid*, pp. 56, 66; emphasis in original).

Moreover, cities can thus facilitate growth by leveraging the cultural capital of this "dominated fraction of the dominant class" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 232; see also Zukin, 1982) through the commodification of space. It becomes clear that the various actors involved interpret opportunities to act on rent gaps not through bloodless economic data but heuristics such as art galleries, cafes, community gardens and bike shops. All of these are "neighborhood use values" (Logan and Molotch, 2007, pp. 103-8) not themselves directly under the command of capital but acting as cues that a particular neighborhood may be "up and coming." As John Pucher and Ralph Buehler (2011, p. vii) note in their synoptic study of the state of cycling in North America, the bulk of bicycle ridership in American cities occurs in gentrifying areas, where many of the "livable" developments have recently clustered. Taken at face value, the density of such areas and their proximity to commercial and certain employment sectors render cycling a convenient and practical transit option.

Such features, however, are not statically given by the landscape, but are products of patterns of economic growth and power struggles over urban space, and have been identified as “livable” through the produced desires of gentrifiers and other agents involved in the process. Livable space thus works as an accumulation strategy through the profitable appropriation of the “neighborhood use values” embedded in meaningful social life. Despite this paradox, livability, in the fuller sense of collective flourishing, is obviously desirable, and bicycles, given their low cost, negligible ecological impact, and ease of repair, would seem to be an integral part of any such project.ⁱⁱ

2. *Critical Mass, Bike Party and the Culturalization of Bicycle Protest*

The bicycle has had a long life both as a form of urban transport and a political statement, but only since the 1960s and 1970s has it been framed in environmentalist and localist terms as the car's “Other” (Lowe, 1989; Horton, 2006; Carlsson, 2008). The bicycle, for Ivan Illich, represented the pace and scale of action to which human societies should aspire, against the obsession with speed and range (Horton, 2006, p. 45). This notion of the “proper” scale, moreover, is crucial to contemporary claims of cyclists to belonging in more compact urban core areas. Cycling, in this framing, facilitates place-based relations, eliciting a more human scale of urban life, commensurate with a more cosmopolitan, more densely connected urbanism.

After ebbing in the 1980s, the political character of the bicycle rebounded most visibly in the 1990s with the emergence of Critical Mass in 1992, a monthly (extra-legal) seizure of the streets by cyclists taking control of their collective safety (Carlsson, 2008; Furness, 2005). Critical Mass can be seen as a collective enactment of a *primary* political act: moving through the city by bicycle (Carlsson, 2008, p. 140). In this respect, Critical Mass renders the daily ride

visible as “a shared act” (Carlsson, 2002, p. 78), *already* a kind of social infrastructure, circulating knowledge, know-how and meaning through collaborative practice. Many authors have extensively documented Critical Mass (Furness, 2005, 2010; Carlsson, et al., 2002; Carlsson 2008; Cupples and Ridley, 2008); rather than reiterate their comments, the following identifies emergent trends and mutations in how the bicycle is imagined, both within Critical Mass and operating on the political terrain it has cleared.

As Critical Mass, considered as a technique rather than an organization, has circulated and proliferated, its encounters with police, city governments, motorists and other cyclists have varied dramatically. By the early 2000s, the political rapprochement reached between participants in Critical Mass and many city governments meant steady participation (with the major exception of Portland), but with a growing critique of its “confrontational” content. Mutations like “Courteous Mass” in San Francisco, “RideCivil” in Seattle and “Critical Manners” in Portland (Rubinstein, 2007; Maus, 2007b) highlight the way that Critical Mass is both an inescapable referent for bicycle politics and a “recombinant” (Peck and Theodore, 2010) practice.

These concerns have refracted back through Critical Mass itself. In 2009, something akin to “best practices” began to emerge when a group of Critical Mass founders started *SFCriticalMass.org*, this “organized coincidence” its first “official” mouthpiece. In a list of “Dos and Don'ts” for interactions with motorists and police during rides, they exhort, “[Don't] imagine that you are morally superior just cuz you're on a bicycle,” “[Don't] hesitate to tell other Massers what you think of their behavior, whether good or bad,” and, “[Don't] forget—we are all responsible to make Critical Mass what we want it to be” (SF Critical Mass, 2009). As early founder Chris Carlsson, a consistent critic of aggressive elements in Critical Mass, writes on the site's blog, “You may not care if you're winning hearts and

minds, but overall, the point of Critical Mass is not a fraudulent 'class war' between cars and bikes. We started Critical Mass to be a new kind of public space, and to help promote a different way of being together in city streets” (Carlsson, 2009).

The kinds of questions that animate discussions within Critical Mass about the “right” kind of participation have also fueled its most successful Bay Area spin-off, Bike Party. Originally conceived in order to evade the controversy of Critical Mass while attracting many of the same participants and creating a similar space, Bike Party has now positioned itself in direct contrast to Critical Mass, while formalizing many of its precursor’s more ad-hoc aspects. Meeting at 8:00 PM on an alternate Friday, Bike Party routes are planned and mapped in advance by a committee and guided by volunteers who police the ride with significantly more vigilance than the “leaders” of Critical Mass. At set locations during the ride—always parks or other off-street areas—the Bike Party stops for an hour or more, while bikes carrying trailers with sound systems provide the sonic accompaniment to a dance party. The shouted refrain is not the “Whose streets? Our streets!” of Critical Mass, but a simple “Bike Party!”

Like *SFCriticalMass.org*, the Bike Party blog emphasizes rules for riding, but the organizers demand that riders observe all traffic laws, rather than “corking,” the Critical Mass practice of blocking cross traffic at red lights to keep the ride together. As they argue, “The number one complaint from the community against group rides is that we often run red lights. Don’t give the city, angry residents, or anyone a reason to hate such a joyous celebration” (*San Francisco Bike Party*, 2011). More tellingly, the “How We Ride” section of the blog claims: “As bicycle riders, we need drivers to respect our rights to share the road. However, in order to get respect, we must also give respect. As such a large visible group, we need to show drivers and fellow riders how to share the road by stopping at red

lights” (*San Francisco Bike Party*, 2011). This makes explicit what is implicit in Critical Mass’ more recent claim to be *part* of traffic: the group ride is not a disruption of urban order, but a claim to inclusion within it. The “give respect, get respect” trope, coincidentally, also appears in recent law enforcement campaigns in Philadelphia (Kerstetter, 2011), and, in fact, elides the vast differences in injurability and mobility between bikes and cars.

Following Arjun Appadurai (2002), we might refer to these kinds of appeals as “governmentality from below,” in which activists appropriate techniques of government (Foucault, 2007) towards insurgent ends.ⁱⁱⁱ This offers a tempting frame for thinking about such a conspicuously horizontal “organized coincidences,” which despite outwardly spontaneous appearances do “a much better job at self-policing than any group depending on outside forces to keep them in line” (Kessel, 2002, pp. 106, 111). These overtures to the role of Critical Mass as an *orderly* presence touch on traditions of self-organization in anarchism (Kropotkin, 1989; Scott, 1998), as well as recent scholarship on the ecologies of informality in the global South (Roy and Alsayyad, 2004).

However, recalling Ananya Roy’s (2009) critique of Appadurai, simply celebrating the “deep democracy” of Critical Mass and its mutations mischaracterizes them. The slippage between “anarchic” Critical Mass and more formalized Bike Party in fact reveals a desire to become unproblematic that is present within some currents of *why* cyclists participate in Critical Mass. This renders Critical Mass as much a part of securing urban order as disrupting it. If initially the nature of Critical Mass enabled mainstream advocacy groups like the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (SFBC) to position themselves against it, substantiating their claims to represent law-abiding cyclists (Kessel, 2002, p. 110; Snyder, 2002, p. 115), now both political gains and advances in infrastructure may be dragging Critical Mass and its allies away from the openly political stance with which they began.

The concern with abiding by the law has now inflected the practice of riding extra-legally itself, which began with Critical Mass and of which Bike Party is an emerging example, carrying on the conviviality without the confrontation. As a *San Francisco Bay Guardian* article put it, “While the venerable Critical Mass ride — which marks its 20th anniversary next year — seizes space on the roads, ignores red lights, and often sparks confrontations with motorists, Bike Party is a celebration that seeks to share space, avoid conflict, and just have fun” (Jones and Donohue, 2011). This framing allows city governments to understand cyclists as an orderly political constituency whose needs matter. In San Francisco today, Critical Mass and Bike Party, along with events put on by mainstream advocacy groups, are part of a single social calendar of bike-related events and have even helped brand the city as a bike culture hotspot.

Doubtless, few advocate a return to the days of physical battles, irate drivers mowing down sections of the ride, and mass arrests. But such acceptance also subtly frames Critical Mass’s “confrontational” aspects as no longer valid at this point in an implicit progressive teleology. It is worth noting that when asked about the total absence of Critical Mass in their city, many Portlanders reply that it would be unnecessary because “every day is one.”^{iv} Similar claims are routinely made about Amsterdam and Copenhagen, neither of which hosts a Critical Mass ride. If one of the most venerable forms of bicycle politics has no place in cities where cyclists are famously empowered, the agonistic transgression, both cultural and political-economic, that initially animated Critical Mass gives way to—potentially—being read as a particularly colorful form of lobbying.^v Critical Mass and its mutations might, somewhat ironically, be seen as a demand for cyclists’ regularization. Cities can resolve this *political* demand through *spatial* means, with targeted—and inexpensive—infrastructural investment in key downtown areas, which fails to bring about the lasting urban change that

Carlsson advocates with his invocation of “a new kind of public space.”

Moreover, with regularization comes closer attention paid by both cycling advocates and municipal authorities to the *kind* of cycling behaviors present in urban space and how they can be more effectively regulated. The exhortation to police oneself as a ride participant frames the problem of the bicycle’s integration into urban space as one of practicing proper norms of conduct; the narratives of proper riding, “modeling” bicycle community, and “give respect, get respect,” all serve to domesticate the irreducible diversity of cycling practice. If Critical Mass intends to create a “new kind of public space,” we find that the normalization of the collective ride occurs in the form of an exception, and an ephemeral rather than durable public space. This analysis does not advocate the absence of norms, or outright antagonism with motorists, but rather argues for a more nuanced understanding of the dialectical relation between political disruption and “orderly” advocacy in their common work of making the bicycle *normal*—as well how certain practices come to be understood as outside of this normality as a result.

3. Civic Order and the Spaces of Livability

Bicycle users have importantly begun to be shaped into self-understood cyclists, by participating in their own representation. Advocacy institutions and Internet communities mediate widely circulating understandings of bicycle culture, translating them into concrete local initiatives—such as the “green wave” on gentrified Valencia Street in San Francisco, modeled after bike-speed traffic signal timing in Copenhagen and Amsterdam. The radical demand for a more durable sense of belonging for cyclists is therefore translated through an cultural and institutional processes that, as above, renders the bicycle’s emergence into urban space perhaps more standardized but no less exceptional. Furthermore, new methods of

tracking where infrastructure is “required” locate the cyclist within a choice-based understanding of movement through urban space and tend to capture the movements of already valorized urban users. Recalling again Roy’s comments on Appadurai, this is not a cooptation story, but a sociospatial dialectic in which the “conduct of conduct” (Foucault, 2007, p. 193) of cyclists becomes embedded in statistical enumeration and spatial administration.

Founded in 1971, the SFBC has grown to over 11,000 dues-paying members, with much of that growth occurring over the past seven years, as ridership in San Francisco between 2006 and 2012 saw a 71% increase (San Francisco Office of the Mayor, 2012). During this time, the SFBC has gone from having to elbow its way into a seat at the urban planning table to being actually sought out to consult on planning projects.^{vi} Part of this increased political power has come from the SFBC’s ability to turn ideas about bicycle-friendliness that have traveled through Internet networks of “bike culture” into concrete policy by working with non-profits and city agencies.

In November 2009, the SFBC forged connections with organizations arrayed around the question of urban livability. One initiative lasting from 2008 to 2011, the Great Streets Project (GSP), brought together experts from New York and Bogotá, famous for weekly street closures called “*ciclovías*,” the SFBC, the Livable Streets Initiative and the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR) to generate testable, repeatable, and mobile models of livable public space, or what Timothy Mitchell has called “formatting functions” (in Peck and Theodore, 2010, p. 171). As the website makes clear, GSP seeks the “return of our city’s streets to their rightful place as the center of civic life in this wonderful city by working with government, business, and neighborhood leaders to test, analyze and institutionalize placemaking” (San Francisco Great Streets Project, 2009). These groups

joined with the Sierra Club, the Green Party, the Market Street Merchants Association and the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce to create the Better Market Street Project, the most conspicuous result of which has been buffered cycle lanes and redirected auto traffic (San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, 2010). The GSP's mission was to test spatial arrangements that urban designers could standardize, rather than implement "livability" as an iterative social relation.

Moreover, livability is the new organizing principle for the long-standing urban renewal project of the city elite to upgrade the "blighted" Mid-Market area, one of the last areas of the city with significant numbers of single room occupancy (SRO) residential hotels and other inexpensive lodging. While many working class bicycle users and pedestrians might stand to benefit from such a transformation, no amount of "livable design" or "visioning" can intervene in one of the most primary antagonisms in contemporary San Francisco: the landlord-tenant relation (Hartman and Carnochan, 2002). Thus, despite a stated emphasis on aiding vulnerable users, the mandate of economic revitalization prioritizes producing a more pleasant area to traverse by bike or on foot, linking the tourism and shopping area of the Embarcadero and Powell Street to rapidly gentrifying Valencia Street in the Mission, over maintaining the area's remnants of low-income housing.

Such place-based iterations of livable space have begun to be run through a web of institutional knowledge within which the SFBC plays a major role. The California Bike Summit of November 2011, spearheaded by former SFBC director Dave Snyder, demonstrated the degree of formalization of many of the more ad-hoc relationships that have grown in momentum, bringing together advocates, planners and policymakers from various local and statewide bicycle and pedestrian coalitions, design firms and government organizations. Various breakout sessions ranged from mayor outreach to issues of social

justice, but in each case the focus remained on perfecting the standardization and branding both of spatial designs and the *idea* of bicycling. As the recap proclaims, “The California Bike Summit... strengthened our capacity as advocates through workshops devoted to sharing best practices, successes, failures and lessons learned” (California Bicycle Coalition, 2011). Many of these formal links may be rather tenuous. But they highlight the way that the making of norms and standards has come to be a key area of focus for bicycle advocates, and how the search for models to emulate is now a main area of interest.

The currency of the various spatial forms of bicycle planning comes from the way certain cities, particularly in Scandinavia, are framed as desirable models of “real” cycling urbanism. While the Summit demonstrated that American cities are increasingly learning from each other, idealized versions of cities like Copenhagen still capture the interest of participants in these communities. And while there is a growing recognition that Copenhagen in particular achieved its success in bike-friendliness through a political assault on the car-oriented street, the focus on spatial designs implies that urban cyclists-to-come can be conjured without a direct confrontation with extant land use patterns and transport networks, nor the public funding for bicycle infrastructure it made available.

What is important about this is not the looking to Scandinavia *per se* but the way in which Scandinavian forms gain legitimacy. Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore’s (2010) work on “policy mobilities,” and how they achieve salience through ideological anointment, is pertinent here. They refer to official sanctioning of workfare-related social programs, while we see in the emergence of the livability discourse not a top-down imposition but a subtler anointment process that builds an audience for models of how urban space should look comprised of people who have the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to be heard and seen.

With the picturesque and efficient bicycle infrastructure of key European cities as a referent, trial projects in American cities act as nodes in a circuit through which these hybrid aesthetic-technical models travel, in particular via blogs like *Streetsblog*. Each node's relative success in implementation is ranked both formally by groups such as the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) or independent researchers (League of American Bicyclists, 2008; Pucher and Buehler 2011) and informally in the learning networks of planners and advocates. In the imagined hierarchy of bike-friendly cities, rankings shuffle according to which cities others most look. According to one SFBC staff, the leading edge of urban bicycle design has recently shifted from Portland to New York, which is "bringing in the Euro style" through importing, testing and innovating simple layouts like colored and fully separated bike lanes. More recently, Minneapolis was named the most bike-friendly city in the US by the LAB, ousting Portland and provoking a scramble to define the lessons of its success. Even the groundswell of cyclists in post-industrial Detroit (Schmitt, 2011) has generated interest within these circuits. Thus, while models do not neatly line up along an imagined urban hierarchy, the designs that provoke the most excitement among Internet communities are those that recreate recognizably European space, particularly the pedestrian plaza and separated cycletrack.^{vii}

Learning among cities also takes the form of policy visits and conferences, which in recent years have been increasing along with the institutional density of the field of bicycle planning. In 2010, SFBC director Leah Shahum announced an eight-month sabbatical in Amsterdam, writing:

I'm excited to have the chance to spend time and learn best practices in a city that has successfully prioritized smart transportation and livable streets... I think there are a lot of similarities between Amsterdam and San Francisco, and I'm eager to figure out how we can emulate the best of their successes back home. (Goebel 2010)

Upon her return, she gave a series of talks in which she conveyed a nuanced account of how Copenhagen, where she also visited, went from a car-choked city to a cyclist's paradise, and argued that San Francisco couldn't and shouldn't simply "become" Copenhagen. But the persistent emphasis on adapting its smart designs—such as cycle tracks, bike counters and massive parking facilities—overshadowed her historical and political account. Similarly, North American visitors to the Velo-City 2010 conference in Copenhagen brought back policy strategies whose persuasiveness rested in large part on the imagery of Copenhagen itself. As Andy Clarke, president of the League of American Bicyclists (LAB), explains in a short film produced about the conference:

One of the things we've lacked in the US is the real belief that this stuff actually works that we've been sort of making it up and saying 'Copenhagen is like this,' but until you really see it and touch it and feel it for yourself and you ride the streets of Copenhagen during rush hour, it's really hard to believe. (Eckerson 2010)

How experts learn through embodied experience on policy trips thus allows them to more authoritatively convey what they have learned: bicycle planning is a self-evident, universal good.

Such expeditions to source sites are integral to mobile policy networks, but one cannot simply go anywhere to learn. As Peck and Theodore argue, "[M]odels that emanate from the 'right' places invoke positive associations of (preferred forms of) best practice" (2010, 171). While such travels may build solidarity, modeling the spatial aesthetics of Scandinavian urbanism in isolation may obscure equally determinate *political* aspects of those cities, which enjoy robust infrastructure spending, a more coordinated planning process and a high social wage. Specifically, due to the unique institutional position of the American city, federal revenue dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian projects is often paired at the municipal level with accumulation strategies that better position a city within the competitive interurban

framework. Furthermore, the vast amounts still spent on highways in the United States dwarf allocations to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Only Portland's regional Bicycle Master Plan for 2030 approaches the kind of "spatial Keynesianism" (Brenner, 2004) seen in European cities, but in many ways even Portland's mode of growth displaces contradictions by pushing residents into outer neighborhoods through gentrification. And in Portland, as shown below, the spatial concentration of investment has led to sharp conflicts over infrastructural expansion.

With the kind of centrally orchestrated development seen in Copenhagen not in the offing, expanding bicycle infrastructure is inseparable from the return of capital to urban cores, which has reorganized spatial segregation along race and class (Brookings Institution, 2010). But through the circulation of referential models, new cycling publics come to understand what counts as a model worth adopting more through its spatial form than the process by which it may come into being. As Pucher and Buehler note, outer neighborhoods in all cities they survey see a far lower cycling mode share than areas near central business districts (CBDs) and other amenities (2011, p. 56), but such outer areas are also frequently zones of disinvestment, with high rates of un- and under-employment and poor transit access. When, or rather if, bicycle infrastructure makes it to outer neighborhoods, it may be more likely to follow, or even lead, gentrification. North Portland's hemorrhaging of African American residents, for instance, has come along with the influx of both (mostly) white bicyclists and better infrastructure.

Similarly, with its "road diet," Valencia Street in San Francisco's Mission District is the scene of some of the city's best livable infrastructure. For the mile between 16th and 25th streets, stoplights are timed to 13 miles per hour in a "Green Wave," slowing cars down and allowing cyclists unhindered travel, with many car parking spaces reclaimed for in-street bike

parking, “parklets,” and wide sidewalks. But it is also a space synonymous with racialized gentrification, as largely white “hipsters” displace working class Latino residences and businesses. Mission Street, running parallel one block to the east, has congested bus traffic, none of the same infrastructure, and far more shops catering to low-income residents and the Latino working class. On Cesar Chavez Avenue, at the southern edge of the wave of gentrification, laborers congregate on the sidewalk seeking work; many ride bicycles, but the high-speed traffic is unmitigated by a bike lane, despite its identification as a corridor in need as far back as the 1996 Bicycle Plan, which did not even include enhancements to Valencia Street.

In this context, wherein urban cyclists have become identified as valued users of urban space, techniques of gauging increases in ridership, and thus demand for infrastructure, become central activities of bicycle advocacy, especially given the shortcomings of the American Community Survey (ACS), which does not capture multi-modal and non-commute travel. This tends to undercount subaltern cycling practice, which may consist more of navigating social service providers, clinics and flexible or informal work, and often combines modes to reach these things across a more dispersed urban geography.

To get a finer grain of analysis, the San Francisco Metropolitan Transit Authority (SFMTA) now conducts yearly ride counts at 33 intersections throughout the city, focusing on the downtown core. Data collected included direction of travel, rider gender, helmet use, and sidewalk and wrong-way riding. Data from the 2010 count, however, indicate that the greatest growth in ridership from previous counts occurred in non-downtown locations (San Francisco Metropolitan Transit Authority, 2010, p. 3). Helmet use and rider gender remained relatively unchanged; roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ of riders counted were male, and an equal proportion wore helmets. The three locations with the highest percentage of riders using the sidewalk—a raced and

classed practice according to commonsense narratives that circulate in bike culture—all connect lower income areas with high percentages of residents of color to more central corridors via large, hazardous streets. The difficulty here lies in the fact that while these neighborhoods may in this way be identified as needing better infrastructure (San Francisco Metropolitan Transit Authority, 2010, p. 12), they are also places where “marginal gentrifiers” pushed from the Mission District are beginning to congregate.

Another emerging method of obtaining rider data is Cycle-Tracks, an application introduced in November 2009 for smartphones by the San Francisco County Transit Authority (SFCTA), which allows users to geographically track their bicycle trips and upload the data for use by city transportation planners (San Francisco County Transportation Authority, 2010). Leaving aside the obvious “digital divide” critique, provision of infrastructure based on visible demand frames cycling as a consumer choice, immediately calling into question what kinds of practices make cyclists visible, and which cyclists are therefore made visible, by identifying spaces and practices requiring modification. This inadvertently maps a race and class geography of urban space.

Thus, without a redistributive element, the important steps being made towards improving bicycle infrastructure and increasing ridership may become another visible sign of the exclusionary dynamics of the gentrifying city. Of course, all users of bicycles, from well-heeled, commuting professionals to the urban poor, stand to benefit from the increases in safety and mobility that bicycle infrastructure facilitates. The question remains, however, whether the incorporation of cycling into the growth mandate of urban politics driven by gentrification can sustain the democratic and egalitarian aspirations of its advocates.

4. Regulating Inclusion Across Difference

If cyclists have begun to be visible as consumers of urban space through enacting norms of proper use, those who do not enact these norms have become potentially more—and negatively—visible. A growing discourse, coming both from within and from outside of bike culture, has fixed blame for frictions between cars and bicycles not on the social world of automobility (Norton, 2008) but on the figure of the “scofflaw cyclist” (James, 2009; Blue, 2011d). Even sympathetic accounts argue for the need for education on proper riding technique as part of the mainstreaming of bicycling. But many new strategies to expand bike culture to include under-represented social groups presuppose a fully formed set of norms of conduct to which individual behavior must adjust—norms precisely forged in the aforementioned circuits of bike culture and advocacy.

In the interest of growing ridership and expanding diversity, classes on bicycle repair, safety lessons and “earn-a-bike” programs have begun to proliferate, often beginning with youth and framed as keeping kids “off the streets.” Other programs directed at adults range from LA’s City of Lights, which provides safety lights to Latino cyclists not ordinarily considered part of “bike culture” (Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, 2011) to Detroit’s Back Alley Bikes, whose “ally” program enables any cyclist who volunteers a certain amount of labor toward the upkeep of the space to obtain free bicycle parts and repair advice. Concern for the “diversity” of bike culture, however, is both relatively new and rooted in the spatial contradictions that divide bicycle users like immigrants, low income residents, people of color and women, from the emerging hegemonic understanding of urban cyclists as white, affluent, socially motivated progressives (de Place, 2011). But how did these “invisible cyclists” (Schmidt, 2011), many of whom have used bicycles long before their renaissance, come to be framed as outside of bike culture in the first place? And how is this status actually maintained through certain techniques of outreach?

While holding classes on cycling safety is a common activity of many advocacy groups, a noteworthy recent development has been a more targeted capacity-building approach of the “Create a Commuter” program run by Portland's Community Cycling Center (CCC).^{viii} Operating under the motto that “the bicycle is a tool for empowerment and a vehicle for change,” Create a Commuter connects qualifying low-income residents of Portland with donated bicycles, safety accessories, and skill training (Community Cycling Center 2009). Since 2001, it has provided bicycles and bicycle education to more than 1,500 low-income adults.

Two criteria for participation in Create a Commuter stand out. First, it is tightly integrated with official social services in a circuit of referring agencies such as community development corporations (CDCs), workforce development programs, educational institutions and the Housing Authority of Portland (HAP), each of which constructs its subjects through their “lack” of some capacity. This renders the bicycle a frame through which this lack is addressed and a mechanism by which subjects can recuperate themselves by acting as “entrepreneurs of the self” (Foucault, 2008, pp. 223-7). Second, the program mandates that participants be employed or enrolled in a workfare program, a familiar condition imposed on programs in post-welfare America, and that participants “have an expressed need and interest in using a bicycle as a regular form of transportation” (Community Cycling Center, 2009). While the Community Cycling Center’s activities do build solidarity across difference, the implication that bicycling needs to be taught to under-represented communities reinforces the dominant perception, especially in Portland, of cyclists as overwhelmingly white, middle-class, socially-motivated environmentalists who *choose* their responsible mode of transport. Moreover, framing the bicycle as a transportation mode that participants must choose implies that the poor must be *shown* how to make such a rational choice.

The various programs in cities throughout the U.S. conducting such outreach, however, do not uniformly reinscribe these norms. Detroit's Back Alley Bikes, for instance, did not begin with the principle of inclusion but of community self-support, emerging in the 1990s with Detroit Summer, a youth art program, and has always been a mix of young, socially motivated white activists, African American fathers and sons, and itinerant tinkerers. Participation in its "Ally Program" requires no demonstration of need akin to Create a Commuter, and the self-consciously anarchist collective that runs it takes care to emphasize the diversity of Detroit's bicycle community. As such, it is a convivial space at the intersection of multiple dynamics at work in Detroit's bike scene, where the African American bike crew East Side Riders volunteer time and work on elaborate bike projects, Wayne State University students learn to repair their college beaters, and youth apprentices not only gain shop experience but can also graduate to full-time work. while Back Alley Bikes may contrast with Create a Commuter, their differences are restricted to the degrees of integration into the networks of poverty assistance, whose contemporary logic is to produce autonomous, capacious individuals rather than mutually supportive publics.

The intervention into the cycling subject has also begun to intertwine with the design of infrastructure. A key actor in the latter is Portland's Alta Planning + Design, the leading bicycle infrastructure design consulting firm in the US, formed by former Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) bicycle planning director Mia Birk and therefore bearing the Portland stamp of legitimacy. Alta's main body of work consists of synthesizing and "branding" best practices for various spatial forms: from Berkeley, California's traffic-calmed "bicycle boulevards" paralleling major arteries to Montreal and Copenhagen's "cycletracks" separated from car traffic by a curb and often a parking lane (Walker, Tressider and Birk 2009, p. 12). In September 2011, New York City hired Alta Bike Share, an offshoot of Alta

Planning + Design, to engineer a bicycle sharing system with 10,000 bikes and 600 stations, building on the firm's previous efforts in Washington, D.C. The "brand recognition" that accompanies Alta binds together both the abstract models that they circulate and the concrete authority of hailing from Portland.

But in addition to site-specific spatial analyses, Alta has begun to include *social* obstacles to increased ridership in its feasibility criteria—beginning, fittingly, with Portland. In 2008, Alta and the Community Cycling Center undertook "Understanding Barriers to Bicycling," a regional government-funded three-year study (Mirk, 2009), asking why, in the words of the CCC, "despite the cost savings and health benefits of bicycling, many people cannot or do not choose bicycles to get around—particularly among [sic] communities of color" (Community Cycling Center, 2009). Here again, bicycle use is framed as a rational choice, especially given the wealth of cycling infrastructure Portland offers. The study takes into account cultural and safety barriers, in particular the perception of heightened scrutiny by law enforcement on immigrant cyclists. But by mainly conducting interviews among immigrant communities at the housing projects of Hacienda Community Development Corporation and New Columbia, the study may in fact contribute to the effacement of a distinct, historically rich, and predominantly *African American* notion of North Portland and its place in the concept of "diversity," eliding the ways that bicycles have come to symbolize this effacement.

A November 2009 article in the *Portland Mercury* weekly newspaper, entitled "Bicycle Race: Nonprofit Investigates the Portland Bike Scene's Racial Gap" (Mirk, 2009), discussed the Alta study and highlighted how the public face of cycling in Portland is a profoundly white one. But very specific spatial dynamics pertaining to the rapidly gentrifying North Williams Avenue corridor, a 2.5 mile thoroughfare historically located along North Portland's

main commercial strip and “zone of emergence” (Kennedy and Woods, 1969), have catalyzed this sentiment, as black North Portlanders have been pushed eastward and often out of the city entirely (Fitzpatrick, 2010). A road safety improvement plan to reduce automobile lanes from two to one, to widen the bicycle lane, and to remove some street parking, was met with resistance at a June 2011 community meeting. Activists referred to “white lanes” acting as conduits for gentrifiers and visible symbols of racialized injustice for residents who have long clamored for safety improvements without any response from the city (Maus, 2011a). The turnover of black-owned businesses as part of this dynamic was another point of concern, along with congestion and lack of parking (Oregon Public Radio, 2011). At another community meeting in November, 2011, black residents reported feeling unwelcome in the rapidly proliferating white establishments—cafes, boutiques and the like—in the corridor. One African-American woman who spoke had left North Portland in the 1980s at the height of the crack epidemic and neo-Nazi gang attacks; upon returning, she called the gentrification of the North Williams corridor “worse” (North Williams Project Community Meeting, 2011).

The fact that these conflicts are not simple expressions of different “cultural attitudes” but are fundamentally about racialized patterns of spatial investment has been rendered all but invisible, swept under the success of the Portland model. The implicit progressive coding of the practice of bicycling may be partially complicit in this silence, which conceptually separates the question of bicycle safety, framed as neutrally positive, from the involvement of bicycle infrastructure in what George Lipsitz has called “the spatialization of race and the racialization of space” (2007). This might explain why in debates over the North Williams traffic calming project, those supporting it in the interest of *safety* simply cannot see it relates to the issue of race—because for them, it doesn’t. But for some black residents of North

Portland, bike lanes become the tangible evidence of the city's complicity in an orchestrated attack on an embattled community.

This aspect is largely omitted from the image of Portland that captivates so many planners and advocates. At a 2009 city council meeting, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation's Senior Bicycle Coordinator, Michelle Mowery, sparked an Internet uproar by glibly comparing her city to Portland. Mowery responded to a question about the perceived failure of her office's outreach for the bicycle master plan, conducted in partnership with Alta, by saying, "With all due respect, the City of Portland is 450,000 people. It's a homogeneous community that is very white, and very progressive with respect to transportation" (Newton, 2009). This implied to many that having an integrated bicycle infrastructure was not an option for diverse metropolitan areas, and implicitly best left to white and progressive locales. In fact, Los Angeles has a vibrant cycling culture, oriented around grassroots organizations like BiciDigna, CicLAvíá, Midnite Ridazzz, and plentiful Latino-owned bike shops. But this dynamic cycling urbanism, a product of a wide variety of efforts rather than a presupposed homogeneity, reads as messy from an infrastructural perspective conditioned by looking to Portland.

The ways LA's failure to measure up was debated on blogs such as *StreetsBlog*, *BikePortland* and *LAist*, and entirely outside of traditional media outlets, reveal discomfiting truths about the possibility of an inclusive bicycle urbanism. On *BikePortland*, which hosted the most robust exchange, many commenters argued that since race so closely tracks income in the United States, lower-income people who are more concerned with making ends meet than sustainability are also more likely to be of color. Others distinguished Latino populations as potential allies, as against the recalcitrance of the black community. Most mainly accepted the narrative that cycling is culturally elitist (whether framed in race or class terms), and that

better, more sensitive outreach is needed, without recognizing the spatial underpinnings of this perception (Maus, 2009a).^{ix} If anything, Mowery's comment refracted both the narrative of Portland's whiteness and the pervasive anxieties about it; nevertheless, Portland remains the ideal of bike-friendliness and livability to which other cities aspire, even if they cannot replicate it (Renn, 2011).

If bicycling is in the process of being framed as elitist,^x it may be in part what Paul Willis, drawing on Raymond Williams' unfortunate phrasing, refers to as "penetration" (1982, p. 128), whereby critiques of bicycle infrastructure from an anti-gentrification perspective capture the workings of a racialized system of capitalist development through the motif of the bicycle. While Furness's critique of the elitism discourse about cycling (2010, p. 135) is undoubtedly correct, it does not necessarily capture *how* bicycle infrastructure has often been instantiated in space in exclusionary ways, endowing it with a "surplus antagonism" (Ortner, 2006, p. 20) that symbolically refracts less nameable lines of conflict. This is not to say that Portland has not made admirable strides in making real space for bicycles in the city, and continues to do so. But thinking clearly about the unacknowledged implications of such successes involves what Iain Boal has called "putting the bicycle back on the ground" (2002): avoiding the temptation to fetishize the machine itself, explain away contradictions as the costs of progress, and allow space to hide consequences from us (Berger, 1974, p. 40). When bicycle advocates are able to say, even in the anonymity of the comments section of a blog, "Full speed ahead on bicycling infrastructure. If the African-American community doesn't want to ride along, that's their problem" (Schmitt, 2011b), it indicates that some have adopted an understanding of a "historic mission" that may intensify already deep inequalities in American life. This is not mere ideology, but is invested in the material geographies of how the cyclescape comes into being.

Conclusions and Prospects

This piece has schematically attempted to trace how bike culture has become intertwined with accumulation strategies that capitalize on the framing of cycling as one commodity among many which make up the lifestyle of livability. While Critical Mass constitutes a very real, radical and valuable intervention into car-based daily life, “whatever it wins, it does not keep” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix); Bike Party extends this, displacing its actions from the realm of disruption to that of a less politicized culture of fun. This implicit demand for inclusion can be fulfilled in spatial form rather than enacted in the social process of laying claim to urban space as a right (Harvey, 2000). To this end, bicycle advocacy groups have directly engage in generating spatial models and framing their memberships as an orderly political constituency. Lastly, the models that circulate due to these efforts construct the normal cyclist as a white, middle-class male commuter (Blue 2011b) through the spatialized inequality of urban development, even as they also reflect a grassroots attempt at engagement with democratizing transportation.

This should not imply that advocates should abandon normative claims about the need for more bike lanes and infrastructure, a more inclusive cycling public, and a more responsive planning process. But excitement over the bicycle’s renaissance should not disable a critique of the *way* bicycles are being worked into the city through gentrification. Nor should it blind us to rampant reductive understandings of what facilitates a vibrant urban cycling culture, symptomatic of unresolved problems in how cycling is framed within bicycle advocacy itself: as an individual, rational choice of responsible consumption. To imply that the car is simply a *worse* choice than the bicycle ignores the sociotechnical complex of automobility that has produced deep spatial inequalities, the legacies of which remain

inscribed in the geography of American urban life (Paterson, 2007). We can detect some of the same ideology of freedom of choice in how the bicycle is considered as well.

It is not the intent of this piece to present a Weberian iron cage into which bicycle advocacy has blundered. In Detroit, for instance, Back Alley Bikes, as noted above, makes no effort to organizationally or conceptually separate bicyclists of need from hobbyists and lifestyle-oriented youth, in contrast to the Create a Commuter program. Similarly, the expansion of bike lanes in largely Latino Southwest Detroit has been led by the Southwest Detroit Business Association (SDBA), which actually fills a role not dissimilar from that of a community development corporation (CDC), and has few ties to the larger and more politically powerful groups of downtown capitalists. SDBA has explicitly framed bike lanes as making travel safer for the many low-income residents of the neighborhood who already use bicycles. Furthermore, a plan of bicycle arterials proposed by the Michigan Greenways and Trails Alliance (MGTA) connect all Detroit neighborhoods, not just those currently experiencing the beginnings of a renaissance. At the same time, more visually enticing streetscaping proposals for the Woodward Avenue downtown corridor may soon command more attention and more access to capital, in the process becoming more tightly bundled with nascent gentrification. This is not to historicize Detroit at an earlier stage of formalization, nor to idealize its potential, but to argue that it reveals certain possibilities for the bicycle that are less visible in more “advanced,” “bike-friendly” cities.

If they continue in their current trajectory of integration into extant modes of capitalist growth, the real strides many cities have made towards bicycle-friendly space seem unlikely to exceed their service to downtown development strategies. Cycling may indeed become a regularized spatial practice, entering the circuits of capital that produce urban space as a commodity. If so, the new social pressures placed on cyclists to be politically “non-

confrontational,” the growth of an economistic discourse on the benefits of cycling (as part of livability) to business, and the shaming of “scofflaw cyclists” while attempting to include the proper kinds of Others, are not simply evidence of the progress of advocacy but perhaps symptoms of the closure of other possibilities for the social role of the bicycle.

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Notes

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- i These data are lumped together at the federal level.
 - ii These are debatable assertions: some bicycles are quite expensive, the vast majority of all bikes are produced in East Asia and thus are anything but “local,” and they are often not as straightforward to repair as they appear. Compared to the car, however, the cost savings are staggering.
 - iii Indeed, in a paper prepared for the RAND Corporation, Ronfeldt and Arquilla (2001) argue that governments must study the practices of Critical Mass, among other leaderless groups, in order to better understand the future of military engagement.
 - iv Missing from this commonplace claim is the fierce police repression Critical Mass experienced in Portland in the early 2000s (Furness, 2010, p. 98; Nemo, 2002, p. 206).
 - v This does not mean Critical Mass as a tactic of engagement has become fully depoliticized. During the Oakland general strike of November 2011, a call for a Critical Mass to lead the seizure of the Port of Oakland elicited many participants. Similarly, “Bike Swarm,” which began when Portland cyclists defended the Occupy Portland encampment from police, was involved in the December 12, 2011 West Coast port shutdown called for by Occupy activists.
 - vi These strides were all made despite a spurious injunction against new bicycle infrastructure filed by a parking activist in 2006 and lifted in 2010, allowing 35 already-approved bike lanes to go forward (San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, 2010).
 - vii It may be worth recalling, however, that the kinds of exclusions that underpin the classic image of the European city itself, where the central district receives disproportionate investment in cultural and economic life, while poor suburbs warehouse a structurally unemployable industrial reserve army (Ross 1995; Balibar 2007), are in the process of forming in the San Francisco Bay Area with the effects of the housing crisis and the collapse of the working class exurb (Bardhan and Walker, 2010).

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- viii Create a Commuter operates in partnership with the Federal Transit Administration's Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program (Federal Transit Administration, 2009).
 - ix I am extremely hesitant to place any kind of weight on a discourse analysis based on blog comments, given that a space hardly exists with less accountability, more anonymity and more acute response bias. Nonetheless, the conversation this self-selecting group was having is simply the only such conversation on record.
 - x A recent exemplar on the *Salon* site asks, "Are urban bicyclists just elite snobs?" (Doig, 2011).

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