Cycles of investment

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***Cycles of Investment:
Bicycle Infrastructure, Gentrification and the
Restructuring of the San Francisco Bay Area***

Abstract

Bicycling for transportation in American cities has grown dramatically in the past 20 years, symbolizing the return of capital investment and commercial vitality to formerly disinvested urban cores. Pucher *et al.* (2011) note the cycling “renaissance” taking place to the greatest extent in gentrifying neighborhoods, but the processes relating cycling and gentrification have gone largely unexplored. This article examines the early role that bicycle advocacy organizations in San Francisco played in articulating the specifically *economic* value of bicycle infrastructure investment. This narrative is now commonplace, and widely applied both to neighborhood revitalization and urban competition for “talent.” This alliance of bicycle advocacy with the “livable” turn of gentrification raises serious questions for those who would pursue a more democratic and socially just politics of the bicycle.

Keywords: cycling; gentrification; livability; infrastructure; San Francisco

Introduction

In recent years the bicycle has become an important symbol of the revitalization and “greening” of American cities. San Francisco, birthplace of Critical Mass, enjoys a leadership role in this movement. While cycling in San Francisco remains in no sense dominant, 3.5% of residents commute to work by bike, and the city is steadily expanding and integrating its bicycle network in a push to reach a goal of 20% of all trips (work and non-work) by bicycle by 2020. In conditions of fiscal austerity, investment in bicycle infrastructure has emerged as a viable development strategy; for SF Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) director Ed Reiskin, “[t]he most cost-effective investment we can make in moving people is in bicycle infrastructure” (Simons 2012). Culturally, the bicycle is ascendant as well, encoding the cycling body with the signifiers of an ecologically responsible and cosmopolitan lifestyle, and increasingly as a selling point for urban space, with arguments for the economic value of bicycle infrastructure now commonplace in advocacy circles (Snyder 2013a). Yet the region is also beset by a profound housing affordability crisis (Metcalf 2013; Barton 2011), driven by a new wave of growth in the information technology sector. San Francisco is experiencing its most extreme effects; its meteoric real estate boom threatens to expel the last remaining holdouts of the city’s poor, and squeezes even its middle class, which is increasingly decamping to more affordable environs in Oakland.

The tentative integration of bicycles into the official urban agenda signals the arrival of an infrastructure-focused form of bicycle advocacy pursued by the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (SFBC) and its allies. Since the late 1990s the SFBC has taken on a growing role in the planning of key spatial transformations in support of “livability,”

forging close ties to rising power blocs in San Francisco and focusing on infrastructural innovation as critical to increasing ridership. These institutional connections now place bicycle advocates in central roles in planning infrastructural changes to a long-disinvested section of Market Street, the city's central corridor, the epicenter of a new technology-driven real estate boom with livability as its developmental logic.

This article argues two points. First, claims of the economic benefits of bicycle infrastructure, initially made for contingent and strategic reasons, are now essential components of livability discourse. Second, the current urbanization of the high-technology sector, characterized by concentrated networks of firms employing high-skill, high-wage labor-power in flexible work relations, has created a fertile political opening for bicycle advocates to claim a role for bicycle infrastructure in this densely interlinked spatial economy. In these processes, the bicycle acts as a “dense transfer point” (Foucault 1978, p.103) for discourses of urban development, as advocates are articulated (Laclau 1977) into, and decisively shape, the contemporary logic of capital accumulation, writing themselves into narratives of urban livability in a moment of hypergentrification.

Gentrification and the Bicycle

A growing cohort of scholars has taken up the question of the bicycle's new role in shaping urban space and social life. The most systematic treatment appears in the work of Pucher and Buehler, who make a statistical case that bicycle infrastructure investment increases mode share (Buehler & Pucher 2012; Pucher et al. 2011; see also Dill & Voros 2007), briefly noting the fact that the highest rates of cycling and infrastructure provision are in gentrified areas of urban cores and college towns but not pursuing the underlying

forces at work. Horton (2006) and Furness (2010) explore the performance of countercultural identity through the bicycle, equally operative in Critical Mass as in the community bicycle workshop, but largely do not link bicycling culture to broader shifts of capital, labor and cultural production to urban cores. While the more journalistic accounts of Mapes (2009) and Wray (2008) take this question up, they tend to frame the “revitalization” driven by bike culture as largely positive.

This paper argues, in keeping with Lugo (2013b; 2013a), that to make any sense of the rise of urban cycling in the United States its relation to gentrification must be properly understood. Specifically, at a moment when the changing political economy of many cities makes more localized patterns of mobility viable for highly educated, flexibly employed segments of the labor market, and livability serves as a capitalizable municipal asset, bicycling plays a key role in the social production of ecologically responsible and politically progressive gentrifying subjects. A new wave of cyclists rooted in environmentalist and social justice-based critiques of automobility (Horton 2006), often marginal to the gentrification process (Rose 1984, p.58), are drawn to and shape “authentic” urban places to minimize their car dependence. Indeed, with automobility seemingly in decline among the young and highly educated (Davis & Baxandall 2013), the bicycle represents the creativity and economic dynamism of urban newcomers and their high-value labor-power, putting livability on the municipal economic growth agenda (Florida, 2011). In short, the bicycle conveys *value* not reducible to capital but increasingly essential to the narrative of its “return to the city” (Smith 1979).

Critical to the production of these new subjects of gentrification (Rose 1984) is the longer history of 20th century US housing policy, which both promoted ecologically and socially destructive extensive suburbanization and created low-cost centrally-located

urban places through racialized disinvestment (Jackson 1987). Given this history, the car-free identity both acts as an embodied critique of decades of sprawl (Horton 2006) and takes shape in the low-cost centrally-located spaces disinvestment created. While the environmentalist and progressive ideologies of gentrifiers are well recognized (Danyluk & Ley 2007), equally important is their participation in shaping urban form itself in pursuit of spatial solutions to social problems (Rose 1984, pp.65–6). This represents an important shift. In the millennial wave of gentrification, recognizable parcel-level changes associated with the “gentrification aesthetic” (Ley 2003), such as new cafes, art galleries, bars and restaurants, as well as investments in housing, are buttressed by equally visible transformations to public space—the “consumption fund” (Harvey 2007)—like bicycle infrastructure, sidewalk improvements, park upgrades, and so on. In contemporary San Francisco, key among these are improvements that both enable and engender new mobilities among certain users of urban space. If the neighborhood scale decisively shapes the “rent gap” (Hammel 1999), these “extra-economic” factors enter the circulation of capital through the built environment by rendering certain valued residents *visible* through municipal investment in infrastructure.

The upshot, for bicycle advocates, is a finely grained dialectical tension between complicity and cooptation.¹ As Harvey argues, the construction of place, as an important dimension of urban entrepreneurialism, enrolls disparate actors with contradictory interests and attachments to place into the process of capital accumulation (1989, p. 11; see also Hardt & Negri, 2011). Recalling Rose (1984), however, these revitalization efforts also in part reflect the produced desires for a certain form and appearance of urban space

¹ I am grateful for my anonymous referees for calling my attention to the need to address this question.

(Ley 1994), in this case corresponding to the discourse of livability and environmentalist critiques of sprawl. Gentrification thus becomes a mechanism to act through individuals toward the goal of a more ecologically responsible and culturally cosmopolitan space (Checker 2011), with the bicycle both its vector and symbol. This speaks to a shift in the cyclist identity itself, from insurgent citizen in the car-dominated urban fabric, exemplified by Critical Mass, to appropriate subject of the contemporary de-sprawling and reconcentrating “smart growth” boom city.

Mobility and Spatial Restructuring in the San Francisco Bay Area

These dynamics must be understood in the context of the massive reorganization of wealth and poverty over the past decade in the San Francisco Bay Area. Employment deconcentration, rising urban core rents, and new-build exurban growth driven by the housing bubble combined to propel the “suburbanization of poverty” (Berube & Kneebone 2013) a key feature of the current boom. Meanwhile, the bursting of the housing bubble in 2008 briefly suppressed but had no long-term dampening effect on housing costs in cores, particularly San Francisco, while foreclosures devastated eastern Contra Costa County, where the exurban building boom was most pronounced (Soursourian 2012). Schafran has correctly referred to this dynamic as an “urban crisis,” refusing the standard narrative of sprawl as a distinctly “suburban” phenomenon (2012).

The upshot is that the transportation system now skews toward the ability of the affluent to avoid car dependence. Given that much of the Bay Area’s postwar development was predicated on cheap oil, subsidized road-building and car dependence, mass transit coverage is low, and existing mass transit systems were designed primarily to

serve white-collar job centers (Hartman 2002). Bike-friendly CalTrain, a higher-cost commuter railroad line, provides access to the wealthy cities of the Peninsula and Silicon Valley, while certain swaths of Alameda and Contra Costa counties are served by the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) subway system, which runs at full capacity. These comprise the only realistic transit options for inter-county commuting paired with a bicycle. For residents living beyond the catchments of these systems, non-car commuting must be done by infrequent bus or by bike on unsafe roads. Few options therefore exist for the suburban working class other than car dependence, since even planned transit extensions already lag far behind the actual patterns of housing production and migration (Schafran 2012).

Moreover, since the 1980s office outsourcing boom “job sprawl” is uneven across sectors and occupations, with retail trade, construction and manufacturing employment most decentralized and finance/insurance, information, educational services and utilities least so (Kneebone 2009; Cervero & Landis 1992; Bardhan & Kroll 2003; Walker & The Bay Area Study Group 1990). This both exacerbates car dependence in outer areas by discouraging solid public transit links between disparate job and residential centers (Terplan et al. 2009) and unevenly distributes benefits based on the division of labor even in areas with public transit coverage. With less access to secure jobs, many working class residents of the region face a public transportation system unlikely to work in their favor.

Thus, the real gains in bicycle space in select areas of core cities must be seen in the context of a vast, intensely car-dependent region in which the *possibility* of replacing car trips by bicycle or mass transit is supremely uneven in distribution. Moreover, in-migrants to emerging job-rich areas reap the benefits of the density of services and transit links that in earlier decades offset the economic disadvantages of living in the

underinvested core, because their occupations have spatially concentrated. During the 1960s the construction of BART stations in poor neighborhoods caused massive disruptions and residential devaluation; now these same stations serve as key selling points for gentrification. Meanwhile, decreases in car commuting of up to 4% in transit-rich areas nearer to cores (Davis & Baxandall 2013) have not been matched in increasingly African-American exurban cities in eastern Contra Costa County like Antioch, Brentwood and Oakley (US Census Bureau 2012). Smart growth densification strategies such as Plan Bay Area, part of California's climate change mitigation plans under Senate Bill 375, are likely to exacerbate this problem by steering capitalist land development toward intensive, transit-oriented growth predicated on rising land prices and relatively weak affordable housing controls (Soursourian 2012).

The spatial contradiction is as follows. A crisis in the logic of extensive exurban development, provoked by the implosion of a housing bubble dependent on the issuance of unsound mortgages (Bardhan & Walker 2011; Newman 2009), has stranded working class populations, many first-time homebuyers among them (Newman & Schafran 2013), in the “drive ‘til you qualify [for a mortgage]” fringes that impose high transportation burdens. Moreover, these areas are politically and organizationally difficult to retrofit for walking and cycling as long as regional governance pursues densification strategies that depend on developer incentives. In response, the linked set of practices characterizing livability planning, initiated by bicycle, pedestrian and transit advocates in the interest of social and ecological justice (Jonas et al. 2011), are now strategically useful to overcome the crisis and initiate a new wave of accumulation. Influential urbanists like Christopher Leinberger now proclaim the “death of the fringe suburb,” urging cities to prioritize

livability on purely economic grounds, and livability advocates nod in approval (Leinberger 2011; T. Snyder 2012).

While bicycle advocates increasingly recognize the need to reach beyond their traditional base of white, highly educated professionals, and have made important strides in this regard (League of American Bicyclists 2012), the spatiality of the current cycling boom works against them. Moreover, a focus on commuting, the only bicycle use measured by the American Community Survey, obscures the vast scope of cycling practices not related to work, while the political value of showcasing valued populations astride bicycles is enormous given the uncertainty of bicycle and pedestrian funding at the federal level (Snyder 2013b). Thus, despite its clear benefits, when treated as a value-added amenity in a sharply class- and race-divided society, livability operates as a mode of exclusionary development (Soursourian 2012; Henderson 2013).

The Valencia Street Road Diet

With these broader regional dynamics generating a political economy in which the bicycle is now a viable transportation mode for shorter urban core trips, bicycle infrastructure has become intertwined with real estate-driven capital accumulation through very contingent, localized political struggles. These moments have synchronized with furious bouts of gentrification. From 1996 to 2001, amid the torrid first dot-com boom, a key material, ideological and practical linkage between bicycle infrastructure, cosmopolitan urbanity and economic growth was made, as SFBC members turned to Valencia Street, a main corridor of the majority-Latino working class Mission District into a proving ground for the bicycle's integration into the capitalist city. This initial foray

into the official planning process by the then volunteer-led SFBC helped form new institutional relationships in closer alignment with economic growth objectives, and generated powerful policy discourses that continue to circulate (Peck J. & Theodore N. 2010).

In 1996, the San Francisco Department of Parking and Traffic (DPT) released a draft of what would be the city's first bicycle-specific transportation plan. But even before the plan was finalized, it was criticized for omitting bike lanes on four-lane Valencia Street, a popular cycling route and commercial strip already seeing early hints of gentrification. The Mission District at the time was main node in a growing bike culture, politicized by the countercultural ferment of Critical Mass, which began in 1992. Volunteers from these networks, led by Mary Brown, a part-time SFBC staff member, began conducting outreach among businesses and community groups for a "road diet" to remove a car travel lane and add bike lanes in either direction.

When Mayor Willie Brown staged an ill-advised crackdown on Critical Mass in July 1997 that descended into a police riot, SFBC director Dave Snyder reluctantly took the opportunity to frame the ensuing controversy as stemming from San Francisco's failure to implement the bike plan (D. Snyder 2012a). In conjunction with SFBC efforts, Supervisor José Medina brought a resolution authorizing a trial road diet before the Board of Supervisors in 1998, it passed during a meeting packed with bike activists and Critical Massers. The DPT's mandated one-year evaluation focused on the road diet's effects on traffic safety, and identified a 144% increase in rates of cycling (Sallaberry 2000). But more important for how the project was subsequently interpreted was a public policy thesis circulated in 2003 by Emily Drennen of San Francisco State University. Based on interviews with business owners, managers and employees on Valencia,

conducted four years after the road diet, Drennen argued that not only had it not harmed the business climate, but businesses actually felt it stimulated commercial activity (2003). While the claim that bicycling is good for business—now an article of faith of the bike movement (Snyder 2013a)—was thus made some time after the first burst of gentrification of the corridor it speaks to the conceptual identification of cycling and the road diet with the profound social transformation of the corridor.

Thus, while the bicycle would be critical to the new identity of the corridor in the 2000s, Dave Snyder recalled that few involved in planning the road diet in 1997 anticipated the role of bicycling in gentrification to come, seeing the economic argument for infrastructure as a convenience (D. Snyder 2012b). To others like Mary Brown, who described the changes brewing as a feeling that “the horses were loose,” the bicycle seemed involved but not a decisive factor. She recalled an outsider, alternative, largely white bike subculture, full of “environmentally-tinged,” intermediately employed young people reminiscent of Godfrey’s “shock troops” of gentrification (1997). Many worked for local non-profits, which would later be squeezed out by commercial turnover during the dot-com boom. These “scrappy and non-professional” (Brown 2013) advocates seem a far cry from the current explosion of downtown professional-class bike commuters, but their engagement with space as “marginal gentrifiers” (Rose 1984) laid the groundwork for future change.

The boom of 1996-2000, which drove rents in San Francisco up 225% and median home prices to three times the national average by 2002 (Walker 2006), set the stage for a continued round of reinvestment on Valencia Street through the 2000s. The corridor went from a working-class district with a primarily Latino character to one of the most rapidly gentrifying areas in San Francisco, festooned with chic cafes, restaurants and

bars, proudly at the center of the transformation of the Mission into the “hottest neighborhood for residential real estate” (Marie 2013). Formerly low Mission rents have risen nearly to the astonishing citywide median of \$3200 per month (Kuchar 2014). The population of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher in the six Census tracts that form the Valencia corridor more than doubled to over 50% between 1990 and 2012, as did the percentage holding business, finance, management and professional occupations. But despite the boom, median household incomes in these tracts have stagnated for all but non-Hispanic whites, who are now the plurality at 45%, while the percentage of households earning over \$200,000 (in 2013 inflation-adjusted dollars) more than doubled to 13% since 2000 (US Census Bureau 1990; 2000; 2012).

In addition to its role as a metonym for San Francisco’s gentrification, Valencia Street is now at the center of the city’s bicycle culture (see Figure 1). The number of cyclists passing 17th and Valencia at peak time nearly doubled from 2006 to 2011, compared to an estimated 71% in the city as a whole over the same period (San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency 2012). Over 120 new bike parking racks have been installed on Valencia since 2000, including ten in-street corrals since 2010, and eleven new bike shops have located on Valencia or within 5 blocks since 1999.² A “green wave” of traffic signals, installed in 2011 times roadway flow to bicycle speeds of 13 miles per hour. At peak times bike volumes approach traffic jam levels. If San Francisco, with the Mission its centerpiece, has earned a consistent place near the top of the shifting hierarchy of bicycle-friendly American cities, this has coincided with a nearly recession-

² Data retrieved from <http://data.sf.gov>.

proof property market that has cemented its reputation as one of the most expensive.

Planning for Gentrification: The “Valencia Epiphany”

Successes in transforming Valencia Street consolidated the SFBC’s role representing cyclist interests and empowered it to collaborate with other organizations to plan a new wave of spatial innovation in San Francisco. A key collaboration was the Great Streets Project, between the SFBC, Livable Streets and San Francisco Planning and Urban Research (SPUR), which sought to “test, analyze and institutionalize placemaking” (San Francisco Department of Public Works 2007). The project also brought in superstar planners Gil Peñalosa from Bogotá and Janette Sadik-Khan from New York, famed experts in the global circuits of progressive urbanism. Their message was, as Tom Radulovich of Livable City put it to me, “We’re your people [practitioners, not unrealistic advocates], and we’ll tell you how to do it” (Radulovich 2012). Realism in planning practice, in this framing, comes neither from hierarchical mandates nor political ferment from below, but horizontally from elsewhere. Moreover, the Great Streets Project worked in the context of a spurious injunction, won in 2006 by political gadfly Rob Anderson, which halted implementation of the bicycle plan until it was overturned in Superior Court in 2010. This forced advocates to focus on innovation and work to build broader political support for livability planning.

From 2005 to 2009, the Great Streets Project developed streetscape plans for major corridors in San Francisco’s core, including Market, Valencia and Divisadero

Streets. Improvements implemented between 2009 and 2011 primarily focused on beautification, lighting, traffic calming “bulb-outs” and sidewalk improvements (San Francisco Department of Public Works 2007), adopting a “complete streets” narrative to signal a break with the logic of maximum car efficiency (San Francisco Department of Public Works 2010). The project concluded in 2012, after completing changes to roughly a dozen corridors and creating lasting links between the organizations involved, particularly pro-growth SPUR and rising star SFBC (Henderson 2013).

The momentum for similar projects on other key streets like Polk, adjacent to the notorious Tenderloin area and Divisadero, a gentrifying strip in the formerly African-American Western Addition, came from the conceptual shift that Tom Radulovich called the “Valencia Epiphany”:

[T]he prediction [for the Valencia “road diet”] was this was going to be terrible for businesses, right? Even though no parking was lost, they were going to lose roadway capacity putting in bike lanes, somehow it was going to be bad for the street, and it was going to be these horrible traffic nightmares... and nothing happened! It slowly became a better street to bike on, you know, all the businesses were doing fine if not better, and everything just chugged along. So that created this understanding within the MTA that road diet works, and again road diet's a really cheap thing to do... (Radulovich 2012)

Moreover, the temporary character of the Great Streets Project, which treated these corridors as laboratories of practice, should not obscure its more durable contribution: the reconfiguration of expertise, formation of new institutional connections and production of new spaces of planning. As Radulovich noted, “[S]omewhere between 2006 and 2008 it just tipped... It's kind of funny, at some point you realize, 'Oh wow, we won.' You won in the sense that you won the argument” (ibid. 2012). The Great Streets Project was thus a mode of “winning the argument,” by drawing on the global network of urban innovation and “mobile policy” (McCann 2011; Peck J. & Theodore N. 2010), bicycle advocacy in

particular, to loosen the grip of core normative practices still in place from the era of high modernism and auto-centricity. Key among these new connections was the alignment of the SFBC with SPUR, which sutured cycling advocacy to market-oriented growth while serving a spectacular role in a Gavin Newsom mayoral administration loath to pursue irreversible change.

Moreover, these gains refracted through other institutions. For Dave Snyder, the 2011 appointment of pro-bike Ed Reiskin as head of the MTA—whose commissioner once declared Valencia would have bike lanes “over my dead body”—was a major turning point (D. Snyder 2012b). Cheryl Brinkman, former director of Livable City and involved in the SFBC, was appointed to the MTA board in 2010 and elected Vice-Chairman in 2012. Radulovich, who also serves on the BART board of directors, noted:

[There is] certainly a group of people with a similar sensibility ... that are now in positions of authority here and there, and you're like, "Wow, that's sort of odd, that we're kind of infiltrating the organizations." And we're now, not the establishment... but at least we're in institutions ... and can kind of advocate those points of view from a position of authority (2012).

These gains had also initiated a shift within the SFBC. Previously a ragtag organization of three staffers, in the span of just over a decade the SFBC has become a professionalized institution dependent as well on foundation grants and corporate sponsorship, a change that Henderson calls its “progressive-neoliberal hybridization” (2013). Its ranks of over 12,000 dues-paying members are heavily concentrated in gentrified and gentrifying areas of the Mission, Dogpatch, Hayes Valley and Potrero Hill, and very low numbers in the less affluent, less centrally located outer neighborhoods. Meanwhile, pent-up by the injunction and the glacial speed of the planning process, city’s burst of cycling energy has synchronized with a new stage of explosive economic growth, now with a municipal leadership that recognizes the value of bicycle infrastructure for leveraging accumulation.

A Better Market Street for Whom?: Participatory Gentrification and the Aesthetics of Livability

By the end of the 2000s, the momentum of this growing institutional network placed the SFBC in a position to participate in sweeping changes to San Francisco's central thoroughfare, Market Street, a key but unsafe bicycle corridor advocates had long sought to reconfigure and the most prized target of the reinvestment ambitions of the city's development machine (Hartman 2002). This convergence of interests between development-oriented actors and progressive organizations, whose memberships reflect the increasingly urban orientation of the young professional class, may be succeeding where prior moves led by the Mayor's office have fallen short, by building the spatial forms most desired by progressive activists into the agenda of downtown development.

The area to receive the most intensive investment is known as "Mid-Market," once a thriving theater district, where Market passes southwest through a zone of discount retail stores, derelict storefronts and theaters, single room occupancy (SRO) hotels, and a large homeless population. The area, bearing a dismal reputation as a crime-ridden zone of social disorder, is one of the last refuges of the poor forever relocated by development projects (Hartman 2002; Godfrey 1997), and presents a classic rent gap on a dramatic scale (Central Market Partnership 2011). Its transformation holds the key to the permanent *embourgeoisement* of central San Francisco, and for nearly half a century San Francisco's power structure has sought to spur its recapitalization.

The newest attempt to transform the neighborhood is the Better Market Street Project, a collaboration between the Department of Public Works, the Planning Department, the MTA, the San Francisco County Transportation Authority, and the Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development. The Better Market Street Project continues the efforts of earlier initiatives like the Great Streets Project and the Market Street Study Action Plan, in which the SFBC was a key participant since as early as 1998, to produce a space adequate to the current conditions of accumulation in San Francisco. Planners hope to create:

[a] renewed Market Street [that] will anchor neighborhoods, link public open spaces and connect the City's Civic Center with cultural, social, convention, tourism, and retail destinations, as well as with the regional transit hub that will be centered at the planned Transbay Terminal. The vision is to create Market Street as a place to stop and spend time, meet friends, watch people while sitting in a café, or just stroll and take in the scene (City and County of San Francisco n.d.).

The plan, timed to coincide with repaving in 2017, integrates the thoroughly gentrified Mission and Hayes Valley and the gentrifying Western Addition with the financial district and the Embarcadero and Powell Street tourist zones, with Market Street as the backbone.

Organized around the main themes of "Place," "Mobility" and "Economic Development," the symbolic economy of the plan reveals a tension lodged in the core of livability planning practice, between generating open-ended spaces of possibility and exerting the "conduct of conduct" of bodies in and through space (Foucault et al. 1991). At the second Better Market Street Project workshop in July 2012, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority presented design concepts to a group of about 75 participants, most of them white San Franciscans involved in the planning world. Design concepts

were divided into themes, with groups of us rotating through an array of stations, debating designs with facilitators and each other.

At the “Placemaking” station, the facilitator emphasized designs to accentuate the corridor’s “one-street” character as a holistic space with “new opportunities for synergy.” “Streetlife Zones,” displayed at another station, would be “places for new experiences” that would celebrate the area’s diversity and “invite activities” rather than exclude. These zones would “activate” underutilized space, “inviting people to behave in a more open manner,” a framing responding to the perceptions of danger and disorder that are often amplified in revanchist discourse regarding Market Street (Biddle 2013; c.f. Smith 2007). During a discussion at another station about limiting car traffic, one attendee argued that the area was “gonna be scary” because fewer drivers might see and discourage illicit activity. A cyclist responded, “Cars don’t make the street safer,” to which the respondent angrily replied, “Bikes don’t make the street safer.” At the “Public Space” station, when pressed about “criminal elements” a facilitator stressed that the goal was “not to take away invitations to those people but invite more people”—implicitly well-behaved, middle-class subjects—“and those uses will go away.” The pervasive trope of invitation, rather than exclusion, frames a governmental role for (certain) cyclists and pedestrians as “eyes on the street” (Jacobs 1992), regulating the behavior of fellow street users by example and surveillance rather than force and discipline

Clearly, in the context of a sudden surge of property investment, the need to “activate” Mid-Market requires deactivating, sidelining and rendering unwelcome other uses to which the street is currently put by the city’s poor, vividly recalling Engels’ comments regarding the housing question (Harvey 2000). If the livable street is one where cosmopolitan citizens are encouraged to “hang out,” using these activities as frontline

efforts to gentrify Mid-Market raises the question of how to exclude certain practices of the poor without formally excluding any users. But, remarkably, ordinary progressive organizations, not financiers and modern robber barons, are those seeking to invest the Market Street landscape with the spatial referents of a gracious, cosmopolitan and bourgeois form of livability.

In 2010 the striping of buffered green bike lanes on portions of the street and several mandatory right-turn lanes for cars fulfilled some advocates' hopes for the corridor as a whole. According to the SFBC, Market now boasts the heaviest bicycle traffic west of the Mississippi, with bicycle counts nearly doubling during peak hours between 2006 and 2011 and cyclists often outnumbering private cars during rush hour (San Francisco Bicycle Coalition 2013). Moreover, unlike the quaintly gentrified strip of Valencia, Market is a commuter trunk line with streetcars and a subway beneath; the inclusion of bicycles, however tenuous, in the centerpiece of the city symbolizes their arrival as a respectable commute mode.

Hi-tech, High Rent and the Mid-Market Boom

These efforts to remake Market as more livable, begun at a time when the area seemed ungentrifiable, have reached the final planning stages at the precise moment of a torrid second tech boom. The current discourse explaining the shift of tech "back to the city" focuses on San Francisco's character and "authenticity," in keeping with the cultural valorization of urban grit (Zukin 2011). In this frame, the city generates innovation and attracts valued labor-power in ways Silicon Valley's suburban cocoons can't (Florida

2013). Key to this is the operationalization of livability through the transformation of the streetscape itself.

As in the 1990s, the current boom is concentrated in the former warehouse district stretching from the South of Market area (SOMA) southward to the edges of the Mission and Potrero Hill (Temple 2013; Florida 2013). Recently, however, larger companies are eschewing Silicon Valley and staking a claim to Mid-Market, where their financial weight and workforce mass is driving a more intensive round of reinvestment and placing unprecedented pressure on the office market. Since 2009, tech firms in San Francisco have added more than 23,000 jobs and leased 22% of city office space, 40% more than during the previous boom (Temple 2013), while financial and legal services have shrunk (Dineen 2012).

To steer growth toward Mid-Market, in April 2011 the Board of Supervisors, led enthusiastically by Mayor Ed Lee, approved a six-year payroll tax exemption on new hires specifically for tech firms relocating to the Mid-Market and Tenderloin areas (Wohlsen 2011), a move former Supervisor Chris Daly called a “land grab” (Daly 2011). The public discourse surrounding the policy focuses on Twitter, which had reportedly explored expansion outside of the city, but the exemption creates a much more thorough framework for reinvestment in the corridor, with targeted zones of anticipated investment that map onto the few remaining affordable areas.

From an employer location perspective, the deal was a success, with 17 companies adding nearly 8,000 jobs between 2011 and 2013. Twitter offices now dominate 10th and Market streets, joining One Kings Lane, Yelp and Square, and soon Yahoo, Spotify and Dolby Laboratories. But, by some estimates, the foregone revenue from the six-year payroll tax exclusion deal with Twitter alone will top \$20 million (Bowe 2013).

Meanwhile, the community benefits agreements signed by six firms, including Twitter, consist mostly of donated labor for human capital-building outreach, has delivered negligible results for longtime residents (Ha 2013).

A residential building boom at a massive scale has followed these firms, with more than 5,500 new, primarily luxury, housing units across 40 developments, slated for or under construction. One early example of the trend was NEMA (NEw Market), a 750-unit, 37-story luxury condominium tower that opened at 10th and Market in July 2013, whose brochure boasts:

A pioneer in a city that loves to be a cultural pioneer, NEMA joins many high-profile technology companies making transformative investments along Market Street in Mid-Market, as well as upscale retail stores, hip restaurants, boutique hotels, and arts organizations that are establishing new locations in the neighborhood. Here, NEMA's residents will find themselves at the heart of the excitement in a trend-setting community that truly is "Made in San Francisco." (NEMA 2013)

An omnipresent element in NEMA's imagery of the neighborhood, though notably not the building itself, is the bicycle. Huckleberry Bicycles, opened at 7th and Market in 2011 by the treasurer of the Central Market Community Benefits District, figures prominently in an online NEMA ad, which emphasizes the ability to bike or walk to any nearby destination from one's stylish condo. Other developments have adopted this branding strategy as well; the website for a 36-unit condo development at 14th and Valencia portrays a row of cyclists on its main page, boasting locally owned bike shops nearby. Vara, close by at 15th and Mission, features high-design racks and even a bicycle repair station behind its imposing gates. Livability in this case literally adds value to spatial investments. As Henderson puts it, "bicycling is not just hip but also sells real estate" (2013), a lesson San Francisco capitalists are rapidly learning (Sheridan 2013).

At one level, this is simply classic place-marketing. But at another, it shows the alignment of cycling culture with the discursive and material branding of changing urban space (Greenberg 2008). As flexible, individualized transportation option characteristic of urban life, cycling references the innovative entrepreneur (Florida 2011; Russell 2012; Bernstein & Ryssdal 2012). On a call-in radio program analyzing the tech boom in 2012, a caller argued, “[Tech] employees come here to choose this lifestyle. They want to bike to work, they want to go to cafes... they’re inherently progressive... San Francisco is winning the global battle for talent” (Campbell 2012). The new face of cycling, the relaxed, savvy urbanite astride a Dutch-style bicycle, signals the inclusion of bicycles into city space as a legitimate commute mode, and the valuation of the bodies they carry.

This valuation was made concrete in 2012 with the Bicycle Access Bill, written in quasi-partnership between the SFBC, progressive councilman (and avid cyclist) John Avalos and the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA). The bill mandates bicycle access and secure parking in all downtown office buildings of 75 feet or more, signaling the acceptance by a major fraction of San Francisco’s capitalist class that professional employers need to provide secure indoor bike parking in order to attract “talent.” At the SFBC’s 2012 annual Golden Wheel Awards, attended by all major players in San Francisco’s power elite, Executive Director Leah Shahum honored BOMA for its participation: “Thank you BOMA for building bridges and partnering with the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition for a stronger economy and a healthier workforce” (San Francisco Bicycle Coalition 2012).

John Bozeman, BOMA’s public affairs manager, insisted when we spoke that the bill was driven by the tenants BOMA represents, who were “follow[ing] the market trend” of younger companies improving access for cyclists as a perk to attract a talented

workforce. “Ten years ago,” Bozeman told me, “BOMA wouldn’t have supported the legislation. It’s a confluence of safer city riding and the need for secure bike parking.” Indeed, BOMA opposed a similar measure in 2002 (Jones 2012). Bozeman took no position on the transformation of Market Street, but offered a more general comment that any street design should be guided by the question: “Is it good for the city?”—understood here as downtown firms. The Bicycle Access Bill, of course, only affects an already privileged sector of San Francisco’s working class, who work in downtown office buildings and commute by bicycle from nearby gentrified areas or by CalTrain and BART. While salutary, it shows no broad commitment to the bicycle beyond its conveyance of the emerging elite.

The deleterious effects of San Francisco’s dizzying boom are now widely recognized. Discourse decrying the deep social gulf between the tech elite and the neglected poor abounds; *Salon.com* founder David Talbot called the new San Francisco a “*Blade Runner* kind of society,” arguing on KQED’s *Forum* that “everything that attracted these young digital workers to the city is in peril” (Talbot 2012; Campbell 2012). Some warn that San Francisco is losing its “cool” edge, and its middle class, as artists and other creative workers pour into Oakland across the bay (Jones & Chanoff 2012). Evictions under the Ellis Act, which permits landlords to remove properties from the rental market and sell them as condominiums, are on the rise (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2014). Even *TechCrunch* has made the effort to educate its often politics-averse tech readership on the complexities of housing in San Francisco (Cutler 2014). Meanwhile, SPUR head Gabriel Metcalf has taken a soft neoliberal position, supporting affordable housing but arguing for a relaxation of land use regulations to encourage development and increase supply (Metcalf, 2013). We find in contemporary San Francisco not the nasty revanchism

of Giuliani's New York (Smith 2007), but a complex politics of the production of space, saturated with class and racial tensions, in which self-understood progressives work tirelessly to make the city more livable just as "livability" becomes a prime source of value added to the spatial commodity of urban living.

Conclusion

In this piece I have tried to place the dynamic growth of bike culture in San Francisco, and its institutionalization in urban policy, into the regional context of economic restructuring and a dramatic demographic shift. The political gains and institutional linkages pursued by the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition in its ascent from "scrappy" to respectable must be understood in the context of a strong cultural and economic shift back to the city by young professionals and the firms that employ them.

By the same token, the rising importance of the qualities of place for the supply and characteristics of labor-power sought by high-tech firms has meant that bicycle infrastructure and bicycling culture play a dialectically related role in producing demand for centrally located urban space. Thus, the efforts of progressives to produce more livable urban space have synchronized with successive waves of gentrification that imperil the overall livability—in a larger sense—of the city itself.

Infrastructural and political successes do not simply mean smooth sailing for bicycle advocacy; instead, the bike movement is increasingly compressed between a right-wing backlash and credible claims to its tacit involvement in gentrification. A particularly

bitter fight emerged in 2013 between a group of Polk Street merchants fearing parking loss and newer forces, the SFBC among them, pushing for a road diet on the corridor. Opponents of the bike lane vocally cast the MTA as an extension of the SFBC. Moreover, by mid-2013, it became clear that the Market Street plan could not support a protected cycle-track, the global standard for bicycle facilities, for which the SFBC had fiercely pushed (Patel 2012). An alternative offered by the MTA, placing a cycle-track on parallel Mission Street, could rob the infrastructure of its spectacular value. Meanwhile, while advocates at a national level now prioritize a more inclusive cycling culture (League of American Bicyclists 2012), gentrification is rapidly pushing these populations from the spaces where bicycle advocates have concentrated their efforts, in the Bay Area and elsewhere. In Portland, bicycle infrastructure became a flash point for simmering tensions over race, class and urban change in 2009; since then, planners have been hard at work repairing the damage, but gentrification has not demonstrably slowed. In Washington, D.C., rhetoric asserting Mayor Adrian Fenty's support for "dog parks and bike lanes" contributed to his unseating in 2010 (Schwartzman & Jenkins 2010). These dynamics have imbued the bicycle with "surplus antagonism" (Ortner 2006, p.20), a metonymic condensation of racialized and classed processes of change.

Nevertheless, three potential countervailing dynamics are worth addressing. First are the important new efforts to bridge the gap between bicycle advocacy and groups focused on the issues affecting people of color in San Francisco and Oakland, among them the SFBC's collaboration with economic justice organization People Organizing to Win Employment Rights (POWER) and the East Bay Bicycle Coalition's connections with Red, Bike and Green, Rich City Rides and Oakland Spokes, all groups engaging African-American cyclists. Second, new funding priorities and geographical focus to

infrastructure and housing investments under Plan Bay Area, could, with political pressure, help transform the streetscapes of poorer, more car-dominated suburban cities while preserving housing access. Lastly, “super-gentrification” (Lees 2000) now threatens even San Francisco's middle class, which composes the primary base of the SFBC, and could force the issue of housing onto the bicycle advocacy agenda.

At stake is the broader issue of whether livability is a transformative use-value akin to the “right to the city” (Lefebvre et al. 1996) or an amenity that adds to exchange-value in space. As advocates win a legitimate role in planning, in part through the convenience of the economic argument for infrastructure, the Lefebvrian demand embedded in bicycle politics to “change life” has evolved into a politics of *planning* for “quality of life” (in Gottdiener, 1985, p. 153); thus does livability become useful to the capitalist production of space. As I have shown above, this articulation between bicycle advocacy and capitalist accumulation through designing for livability is not given but historically contingent and *produced*. This does not mean it is easily reversible, however. As a rising political backlash against gentrification in San Francisco forces issues of affordability and inclusion, it remains to be seen whether new trajectories can be found for bicycle advocacy as a tool of spatial justice.

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