Planning for Diverse Use/rs: Ethnographic Research on Bikes, Bodies, and Public Space in LA

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Introduction

In September 2009, I took a seat at a café at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Hyperion Avenue in the Silver Lake neighborhood of central Los Angeles. I arrived at 3:40 p.m., prepared to watch the intersection for two and a half hours. I had been given several sheets of paper that were divided into sections for each quarter hour that I would be sitting there. Each section had a diagram of the intersection, with a box on each corner. I was to make a hash mark to indicate each bicyclist and pedestrian who passed from one corner to another. In a different box, I was to indicate numbers of riders wearing helmets, and numbers of women on bikes. I had volunteered to do this for the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC), who wanted to remedy the fact that the city had not conducted such a count in recent history.

Usually when I watched city life I made notes about what I saw, rather than counting people. In the spirit of *flânerie*, or privileged urban observation, my ethnographic research from September 2008 until February 2011 involved riding my bike around the city, often in conversation with another person on a bike. Sitting on a corner and marking down bodies on a sheet of paper gave me an opportunity to think about another kind of research, one that makes each person into a number and then uses these aggregated numbers to suggest designs for urban space.

In the case of this bike/ped count, LACBC wanted to quantify the numbers of people traveling outside of motor vehicles in order to lobby for more infrastructure that served them since the City of LA had not "actively prioritized 'people powered' transportation options" (LACBC 2010:3). An urban planning student organized the count using a technology developed by the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project, a group working to promote data gathering on non-motorized transport. They use standardized methods for counts, and coordinate them to take place on the same dates. They are trying to build a case for better infrastructure for non-motorized transport.

In studying cities, one finds constant tensions between structure and behavior, movement and convention. Cities accommodate flux. The city is a space of resistance (Sennett 1994) because infrastructure gets used in creative ways according to life's unpredictability (Cresswell 1996). Inherently flexible, the city provides openings to different ways of life, even if only temporarily (Castells 1977, Harvey 1985a).

Urban cyclists offer numerous examples of these creative uses of space in American cities, yet the bike movement as I have known it through three years of fieldwork is obsessed with building bike infrastructure. Whether they champion fully separated bike facilities or bike signage on major arterials, advocates and enthusiasts argue that improved infrastructure will reduce the conflicts on our streets; that more people will use bicycling as a mode of transport because they will feel less harassed by motorists. Infrastructure that privileges driving over other modes got us into this mess, they argue, and infrastructure that creates space for multimodal transport will get us out of it.

Infrastructure projects, however, develop in particular political contexts. Historically, cities have been infrastructured according to the project of modern urban planning, wherein human behavior gets disciplined through interaction with a structured urban environment (Graham and Marvin 2001). Since the mid–19th century, the starting question for modern urban designers has been how space should be planned to interpellate individual citizens through an orderly city (Le Corbusier 1987, Harvey 1985a, Holston 1989, Rabinow 1989, Ghannam 2002). Recognizing that city life stems from people as much as structures, progressive urban planning leaves room for diverse uses and users, or use/rs. A key figure in the development of this vision, Jane Jacobs, wrote that "the main responsibility of city planning and design should be to develop—insofar as public policy and action can do so—cities that are congenial places for this great range of unofficial plans, ideas and opportunities to flourish, along with the flourishing of the public enterprises" (Jacobs 1961:243). Experiencing how flexible Los Angeles could be from a bike seat, I started to wonder what permanent infrastructure would afford, and for whom.

During my years of ethnographic flânerie, I found that enthusiasm for bike infrastructure often left certain groups out of the picture. Bicycle advocates all over the U.S. are lobbying for street designs that accommodate a range of transport modes, and urban planners and policymakers increasingly recognize bicycling as a key component of efforts to retrofit American cities at a human scale. Though a growing number of people choose car-light lifestyles in LA, they are vastly outnumbered by the low-income people of color who have relied on public transportation and bicycles for decades out of economic necessity. The terms "car-free" and "transit-dependent" have very different connotations, with the former implying a celebration of sustainable transport and the latter referring to poverty and its associated pressures.

While some have argued that social justice should be included in transportation planning, calling for "transport justice," this work has focused on public transportation rather than bicycling as urban transport (Bullard and Johnson 1997, Cresswell 2006). Extending transport justice to the bike movement means searching for ways to support cycling in diverse communities. It means recognizing that the tension between structure and behavior that characterizes urban transport involves race and class politics (users) as well as spatio-temporal politics (uses). Viewing physical infrastructure as a necessary starting point for behavior change may leave social justice out of the picture. Describing urban space as a laboratory for studying intersubjective space-time, I will suggest *human infrastructure* as the key to designing bike infrastructure that supports

the practice of bicycling in diverse communities.

The Politics of Mobility

In March 2010, I attended the keynote address of the LA StreetSummit, a conference of activists and professionals organized by Occidental College's Urban and Environmental Policy Institute. The speaker, Janette Sadik-Khan, Transportation Commissioner of New York City, had shut down Times Square to automotive traffic, spreading beach chairs so that pedestrians could enjoy the space. Her actions as commissioner demonstrated what many urban planners and activists believe: streets made welcoming to all modes of transport make better public spaces.

She showed us slides demonstrating the efficiency of using bikes and feet to get around crowded cities. During the Q&A, Sadik-Khan took a question from the balcony above the main hall, and I looked up to see a young black man rise. He spoke nervously, as people often do in front of large crowds, about the changes in his neighborhood that seemed to come along with new bike lanes. He made a connection between bicycle infrastructure on public streets (our supposed goal as advocates for urban transport cycling) and gentrification. Sadik-Khan barely missed a beat and launched into a comparison of the high costs of transportation with high housing costs. Lowering transportation costs by making it possible for people to get around on bikes would make their incomes more available for housing costs. She then moved on to other questions, seemingly satisfied that she had explained away concerns about gentrification.

As I sat there trying to parse what in the young man's words had made my heart beat faster, and what her pat answer lacked, I heard her mention a curious fact: after her department made improvements to Bryant Park in Manhattan, property values in the area went up 225%. Clearly, the message seemed to be, there was no contradiction between investing in public space and a robust real estate market. She did not seem to notice that her words confirmed the concern brought up a few minutes before.

The development of Los Angeles in the twentieth century shows the impact racism can have on the built environment. Transportation infrastructure such as highways and five lane streets through residential neighborhoods inscribed contempt for the bodies of others into the urban landscape. In Los Angeles streets have been used to keep people apart, to keep certain bodies in certain neighborhoods and out of others. As bike advocates, we would not overcome the racial order of the city with our bike lanes and brightly colored bicycles alone. Even as we believed that making our urban neighborhoods more bike-friendly would benefit all residents, we might be seen as unwelcome symbols of gentrification and change.

Bike advocates tend to seem defensive because bicycling is a marginalized activity in American cities. The experience of urban transport cycling feels embattled, as though each cyclist must fight to ensure she or he is visible to other road users or risk disaster. All cyclists must face hostile motorists in order to ride in Los Angeles. When I decided to study bicycling there for my dissertation project, LA's car culture lurked in the back of my mind. Automobility, the near-complete dominance ceded to

the automobile in American public space (Jain 2006a, Featherstone et al. 2005, Sheller and Urry 2006), structures this framing of bicycling as an unusual transport choice.

Automobility rationalizes driving over all other modes of transport through infrastructure, such as the many freeways that have been constructed since the mid-century, wide surface streets, and ample free parking. Any analysis of urban transport should recognize the politics of mobility taking place in streetscapes shared by motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians, buses, at-grade trains, delivery trucks, skateboarders, the wheelchair-bound, and any other users. Increasingly, those unable to drive have been seen as disabled (Jain 2006b).

From an anthropological perspective, the physical infrastructure enabling driving is an important component of the ongoing practice, but so is the ongoing practice itself. Automobility involves the production of a structured tendency, or habitus (Bourdieu 1977), toward driving by the investment of capital in the built environment in the form of highways and road designs that marginalize other forms of mobility. A view that privileges physical infrastructure for biking relies on a belief that urban planning must produce infrastructure designed specifically for bicycling before people will consider biking for transport. Activists hope that with a separated path to use, even those who currently fear riding in traffic will start bike commuting.

Looking to physical infrastructure to eliminate barriers to bicycling limits the politics of mobility to being about disciplined *uses* of streets when the discipline experienced by *users* should also be taken into account. Simply put, bicycling has no singular meaning, and some bicyclists are more marginal than others. In the United States bicycling was long the practice of eccentric enthusiasts, a status sport, or a mode of transport for those too poor or too young to drive cars. Most work on bicycling has focused on users who self-identify as cyclists and who organize themselves into subcultural groups (Carlsson 2002, Spinney 2007, Mapes 2009, Hurst 2009). These tend to be people whose race (white), class (middle to upper), and gender (masculine) have exempted them from structural marginalization. Feeling harassed by motorists while bicycling may be their first experience of discrimination.

While these activist cyclists have done tremendous work to support bicycling in Los Angeles, they also tend to overlook another type of bicyclist. These "invisible riders" (Koeppel 2005) are often low-income, usually Latino or African American men who bike out of economic necessity. They may not be seen as participating in bicycling "communities of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991). As bodies on bicycles, they would be included in data gathering such as the 2009 bike/ped count. However, turning each cycling body into a number leaves out crucial context. Reducing bicyclists to the same measurable quantity ignores the fact that we ride through a built environment shaped by capital, and that perceptions of race and class are not absent on roadways.

Each bicyclist should be seen as an assemblage of a particular body, a particular urban setting, and the particular bicycle he or she rides. As Furness puts it, "the bicycle, like the automobile, is an object that becomes meaningful through its relationship to an entire field of cultural practices, discourses, and social forces" (Furness 2010:9). Bicycling assemblages can signify many things. In some cases these assemblages

should be seen as emerging from the tournaments of value associated with cultural production, and seem to contribute to rising property values in transitional urban neighborhoods.

While the image of the assemblages of certain bodies, certain bikes, and certain places can be translated into economic value, other assemblages are seen as undesirable. When I heard that young man ask about gentrification, he talked about the bike lane itself as a problem because it brought different people into his neighborhood. I have also heard white homeowners in an upscale neighborhood talk about bike infrastructure as a threat, but with a different imagined population. Bike infrastructure is seen as doing more than enabling biking; it raises or lowers property values.

The city's built environment is produced by the "power/knowledge" of planning and architecture (Low 1996). Letting this ordering appear to be the result of scientific rationalism of urban planning and other forms of urban expertise mystifies the role capital plays in determining public spending. The scientific rationalization of space through expert knowledge has enabled the modern project that asserts the rights of capital and the state to commodify space through development and urban renewal.

Marxist understandings of urban space show how powerful interests impact social welfare projects (Harvey 1985a, Rabinow 1989). Real estate speculation consists of purchasing land or buildings cheaply, thus gaining a "property right over some future revenue" (Harvey 1985b:95). Public investments in infrastructure tend to follow private development priorities (Zukin 1982). Neoliberalism's interdependence of private capital and rationalized state infrastructure has been well documented (Elyachar 2005, Ong 2006, Miraftab 2009). Private property values may draw on public goods such as parks, bike lanes, and public transit lines. In my fieldwork, I heard people talk about bike infrastructure as an enhancement to or burden on property values. Because distinctions between public rationalism and private interest do not remain stable, but shift according to the agendas of power (Flyvbjerg 1998), the bike lane that the 2008 homeowner believed would drag down property values may enhance them in 2012.

People who own property have a reason to lobby for or against bike infrastructure that has little to do with the practice of bicycling. Commodifying lived space reduces neighborhoods to mere backdrop for lifestyles, as window dressing that shifts according to the aesthetic preferences of some group as anticipated by developers. People with stable incomes may come to view the suburbs as undesirable for ecological and social reasons, and to this population, a bike lane may be seen as a reason to pay higher housing prices. Focusing on building material infrastructure as the solution to the problem of automobility does not address how bike infrastructure can be used to gentrify urban neighborhoods.

Thinking about infrastructure differently can contribute to our understandings of how cities work, and how we can make them work better for a diverse range of use/rs. People experience cities as intersubjective space-time, not just as a series of fixed structures. Habitus and practice must be taken into account; that is, driving in LA reproduces driving in LA. Focusing on individual action shows how "discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both

as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (Foucault 1977:170). The city happens through individual bodies, so they should be taken into account in a robust definition of infrastructure.

Infrastructure and Intersubjective Space-time

An approach that uses both production and phenomenology to define infrastructure can challenge the divide between material structures and immaterial practices in the context of urban mobility. For Marx, "a popular conviction often [had] the same energy as a material force or something of the kind" (Gramsci 1999:200). On a city street, where we are constantly at the effect of not only the built environment but also how others are moving through it, the distinction between material and immaterial infrastructures blurs as bodies become barriers. The forces that interpellate our movements into meaningful acts take infrastructural and superstructural form. Our everyday lives get shaped by human infrastructures that have material force, but can be apprehended only through a focus on individual practices.

According to Munn, "an intersubjective space-time is a multidimensional, symbolic order and process—a space-time of self-other relations constituted in terms of and by means of specific types of practice" (Munn 1992:10). In urban mobility, individual trajectories do not happen in a vacuum; they negotiate existing built forms, habitus, and the ongoing movements of others. This phenomenological perspective on urban movement includes bodies, practices, and technologies.

As Sennett argues, "urban spaces take form largely from the ways people experience their own bodies" (Sennett 1994:370). Returning to the idea that bicyclists should be seen as assemblages of body, city, and machine, not only does the bicycling assemblage blend individual with environments and tools, but it also leaves traces on the city that suggest future engagements for other individuals. The fear of injury or death associated with urban cycling (Horton 2007), for example, leads many to believe that bicycling is an irrational choice. The accumulation of so many individual choices to drive instead of choosing a mode of transport that seems more exposed reproduces an environment in which biking seems scary. Pre-existing ideas about what is appropriate in a given situation get expressed through bodily practices, as Ghannam has argued in the case of state-developed housing projects in Cairo (Ghannam 2002). The body is a site of compliance with or resistance to infrastructures, both physical and human. Even the lines between self and infrastructure can shift, as in characterizations of infrastructure that see it as relational (Star 1999, Dourish and Bell 2007).

All bicycling assemblages engage in "wayfinding," what Passini called the "spatial problem solving" that happens as we travel (Passini 1992:53–54). Like de Certeau, who emphasized the affective differences between walking through a city and passing through in other ways (de Certeau 1991), writers have focused recently on movement as a meaningful act (Ingold 2000, Horton et al. 2007, Thrift 2008). Ingold and Vergunst posit that, "knowledge and footprints are not…opposed as mental to material" because "knowing is doing, doing is carrying out tasks, and carrying out tasks

is remembering the way they are done" (Ingold and Vergunst 2008:7). Spinney looks to the bicycle as a way of understanding placemaking (Spinney 2007). Bicyclists must pay close attention to the streets around them because traffic conditions are always changing. The assemblages constructed through their praxis impact others, even if they are in motion rather than geographically fixed.

People do not engage with urban landscapes in an unmediated fashion; people participate in larger and smaller communities of practice through their travel behavior. The immigrant cyclists I worked with during my fieldwork usually rode on sidewalks on commercial streets, while my bike activist interlocutors tended to ride in the street through residential neighborhoods. A Guatemalan day laborer riding a too-small mountain bike on the sidewalk of Sunset Boulevard may never attend the same social events as a white woman riding a road bike in heels in the bike lane. This suggests that bicyclists' perceptions of where it is appropriate to ride are influenced not just by infrastructure, but also by participation in particular communities of practice.

Riding in a bike lane could be seen as using a "technology of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991:101), and I argue that using any part of a street involves what Lave and Wenger term "legitimate peripheral participation." From this perspective, all visible road users are part of one's community practice, while one also participates more directly in smaller communities based on personal interest. Legitimate peripheral participation affords this because it "provides a framework for bringing together theories of situated activity and theories about the production and reproduction of the social order... in which the production, transformation, and change in the identities of persons, knowledgeable skill in practice, and communities of practice are realized in the lived-in world of engagement in everyday activity" (1991:47). Viewing practice as productive through phenomenological engagement shows that the divisions between different bicycling assemblages emerge from gaps in human infrastructure rather than gaps in street design.

The space-time of bicycling differs from that of driving, as seen in conflicts between road users. Motorists who honk at bicyclists for occupying road space are communicating that they do not accept a shared space-time with the bicyclists, instead arguing that bicyclists should move out of the way in order to accommodate the motorist's ability to travel faster. Despite their shared experience of harassment, empowered bicyclists may fail to recognize other bicycling assemblages as part of a shared community of practice. Bike campaigns to "share the road" and to develop bike lanes, bike paths, and other forms of infrastructure attempt to resolve the politics of mobility by restructuring how people using different transport modes interact, but often ignore the diverse range of users currently riding bikes.

Analyzing the politics of mobility in the context of intersubjective space-time shows that both phenomenology and production help explain infrastructure. Proponents of bike infrastructure expect it to equalize time and space among modes of transport that operate on different vectors, without considering the way their own actions support or ignore bicycling's social worlds. Because human infrastructure is relational, it can build networks across the community-defined lines that physical infrastructure might

reproduce. Examples of human infrastructure in bicycling include group rides that create temporary spaces where bicycling becomes normal, online communities where riders share knowledge, shared understandings of road use, and bike repair cooperatives. Instead of requiring official sanction, human infrastructure grows through community-based projects. This gives it the flexibility to adapt according to use/rs in flux.

City as Laboratory, Bicycling as Flânerie

What methods for urban ethnography can incorporate participant-observation in this ongoing becoming of human infrastructure? I needed to find a method that suited conducting participant-observation with different communities who engaged in the same practice, while not imagining themselves to be a unitary community of practice. Passing between different groups of bicyclists made me into a kind of human infrastructure. Using the city as my laboratory, I worked with LACBC to develop two projects that bring together diverse cycling assemblages, while also formulating a method that explained these projects in theoretical terms.

I found a common ground between community-based participatory research, which takes a community's needs as its starting point for inquiry, and flânerie, which revels in urban creativity. In addition to observing how people used city streets, I worked to create spaces where they could reflect on these uses. The agency of urban dwellers to transform their surroundings shows how malleable the city is, and phenomenological engagement that uses the city as a laboratory can document and encourage this. In short, I tried to develop a method that made my interlocutors into participant-observers.

My reading of the *flâneur* or *flâneuse* (privileged urban observer) comes from the work of Walter Benjamin, who criticized and embraced the nineteenth century concept. Writers such as Charles Baudelaire and Thomas de Quincey chronicled the emotional experience of rambling through their cities just as these cities came to be seen as manipulable on a grand scale through the new expertise of urban planning. In 1821, de Quincey noted that the street where he once bade farewell to his beloved no longer existed by the time he wrote about it (de Quincey 1995). Writing in 1863, Baudelaire grappled with the transformation of Paris through Georges Haussmann's all-encompassing urban plan that forever changed the look of that city (Baudelaire 1970).

Benjamin critiqued the flâneur for not understanding his relation to the market, even calling him a spy for capitalists (Benjamin 1999). Benjamin did recognize, however, the flâneur's ability to embody the city as a passionate participant-observer. The flâneuse lives in a body, as do her subjects. In *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), Virginia Woolf describes the thrill that a young woman feels wandering around amidst crowds of purposeful people on a blustery day. She feels exhilarated, unbound from time and space by wandering freely in a neighborhood of which her mother disapproves (Woolf 1996). On a bicycle, one similarly experiences the openness of the city, which can feel liberating. At the same time, the freedom to explore urban space, and the time to drift, should be recognized as privileges of ethnographic research. Wayfinding on a bicycle

can feel urgent, while the flâneur does not experience the stress of traffic. If I wanted to observe my bicycling interlocutors engaging in flânerie, I needed to find a way to free them from traffic.

In the 1950s, the Situationist International artist collective in Paris again embraced the concept of flânerie with explicitly political ends. They wished to expose the capitalist spectacle sanitizing cities in the name of modernity by illustrating their passage through parts of the city considered ready for redevelopment (Sadler 1998). The situationists' flânerie recalled de Quincey, who rejected what he saw as the cruelty of polite society.

The situationists resisted the modern project of urban revitalization, state-sanctioned demolition of urban neighborhoods, by documenting the *quartiers* they saw vanishing. They took long walks, called psychogeographic drifts, sending people, usually men, into unfamiliar parts of the city, where they made mental notes, and later created experimental maps and other representations of those places. The situationists turned to the drift because, according to Sadler, "one only appreciated the desperate need to take action over the city once one had seen through the veil of refinement draped over it by planning and capital… [in drifting] one discovered the authentic life of the city teeming underneath" (Sadler 1998:15).

The privileged drifting of flânerie shows the role of place in social life. Like their contemporary Henri Lefebvre, the situationists worked to illustrate the ways in which space gets produced through everyday life (Lefebvre 1991). They proposed interventions in public space, called "happenings," that would create experimental spaces where people could re-imagine the city. To me, an ethnographer of urban phenomenology, this type of event sounded like it could take the metaphor of city as laboratory further. In 2008, I encountered an event that seemed to bring together the openness of the happening with the politics of mobility. The *ciclovía* (bikeway) has been opening streets to bicyclists and pedestrians in Bogotá, Colombia since 1974. They now close around 75 miles of streets to motorized traffic every Sunday. When I visited Bogotá and spoke with Jaime Ortíz Mariño, the founder of the event, he credited the ciclovía with making public space more inviting and welcoming. LA could benefit from a ciclovía, we agreed.

Using the bicycle to conduct ethnography made sense in light of its utility as a tool for urban observation, and it was in keeping with a phenomenological project to engage with interlocutors in practice. Flânerie gave me a method and a metaphor for marginalized urban cycling, and taking a practice associated with male elites and ascribing it to marginal groups further exemplified the political position I chose for my project. Like ethnography and flânerie, the practice of bicycling complicates the division between leisure and labor.

Ethnographic Happenings

At the same time that I formulated this method theoretically, I worked on two experiments in ethnographic flânerie while also living in central LA at the Los Angeles

Eco-Village, a historic center of the local bike movement. These projects connect bicycling assemblages who may not imagine themselves to be part of the same community of practice. I collaborated on these experiments as a secretary and as an organizer, in addition to recording my own ethnographic observations.

In October 2008, I started collaborating with Allison Mannos, then an intern at LACBC, on a campaign to connect the low-income, Spanish-speaking cyclists we saw riding on sidewalks with the bike movement through LACBC. For me, it was a cultural experiment: could bicyclists riding for different reasons come together around their shared practice? By designing a volunteer-based outreach campaign, we would be sending out visible cyclists to talk to invisible cyclists. For Allison, it was a means to include an overlooked population in urban planning for bicycling. By reaching out to invisible cyclists, LACBC could better represent their needs to city officials and planners.

Allison chose the name "City of Lights/Ciudad de Luces." We started with a donation of 100 bike lights from accessories company Planet Bike, LA Department of Transportation (LADOT) pamphlets about cyclists' rights to the road, and a small card in Spanish explaining LACBC's mission. With the help of bilingual community organizer Andy Rodriguez, we started handing out these bundles to cyclists we saw riding without lights near transit stations. We recruited volunteers through LACBC to distribute our first batch of lights, but we quickly realized that we had little hope of forging lasting links with the men we interacted with in passing. Many immigrant cyclists received services from organizations focused on supporting workers and the Latino community, but these organizations had no ties to bike groups. If we used a pre-existing organization as a distribution point, we could benefit from their networks and they could offer a new service.

In April 2009, Allison and I met with staff at a day laborer center run by the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), an immigrants' rights organization. They invited us to use their worker center near MacArthur Park in Central Los Angeles as a staging ground for light distribution, safety workshops, and general bike education and community building activities. We started spending a few hours there every Friday, installing bike lights and chatting with day laborer cyclists.

There I learned why so many of these cyclists chose to ride on sidewalks rather than in traffic. For some, the sidewalks of LA represented a vast improvement over biking on streets with no sidewalks at all. One man told me that biking here was much better than biking in Guatemala City. Other people wished to avoid attracting attention from police, who sometimes wrote tickets to certain cyclists for not wearing helmets, even though LA does not have a mandatory helmet law for adults. In some cases, we could see why they avoided riding in traffic as soon as we looked at their bikes. One person had been riding without his seatpost locked into place, others rode on tires without tubes inside them, and many had bikes that did not fit them comfortably. Riding slowly on sidewalks made commuting on these broken machines possible.

To address the repair needs of our program participants and continuing to make connections between different types of organizations, we invited the Bicycle Kitchen,

a bike repair cooperative in East Hollywood, to hold bicycle maintenance workshops at CARECEN. In September 2009, the Bicycle Kitchen, City of Lights, and the Instituto de Educación Popular del Sur de California (IDEPSCA) started BiciDigna, a bike repair cooperative at IDEPSCA's Downtown Community Job Center.

City of Lights has used a non-hierarchical organizational model to incorporate participants into decision-making processes within the program. This made it possible for not only Allison and I to achieve our goals, but kept the campaign open to meet the needs of participants by opening a bike repair center. Participants have been included in urban planning trainings where they brainstormed about needed bike infrastructure in the MacArthur Park neighborhood, and, as the Urban Strategy Director at LACBC, Allison has been instrumental in fusing their concerns with LACBC's policy recommendations. I got to witness the development of a bike community that reflects the diversity of people riding in LA; at BiciDigna, Chicanas who ride road bikes, Guatemaltecos (Guatemalans) who ride mountain bikes, and white guys who ride "fixies" (fixed gear bicycles) all work alongside each other.

While developing City of Lights, I also came together with a group of community members to strategize making a ciclovía happen in LA. Our "ciclovía committee" initially included a prominent environmental activist, a traffic engineer, a graphic designer, and other people excited about ciclovías. We started meeting on a monthly basis in October 2008. I took minutes at meetings and attended public events such as neighborhood council meetings to promote the event. We chose the name "CicLAvia" after much deliberation. It references the origin of the event, while contextualizing it for LA. Additionally, using a Spanish word highlighted LA's Latina/o communities.

The committee was dedicated to including a range of bicycling assemblages in the event by closing streets in multiethnic central LA, rather than starting in a more politically friendly but wealthy area such as Santa Monica. Along the same lines, we hoped to get the city on board to make our event "official" because that would make a bigger statement than just another environmental event. We secured Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's tentative support in fall 2009, and in January 2010 we started meeting with city staff to manage the logistics of our first event.

Because the mayor had recognized the political value of supporting a sustainable transportation event like ours, the meetings gave us an unusual position of power. Instead of finding the political nature of urban planning to be a roadblock to our project, we were able to use it to our advantage. Automobility's hold on urban planning in LA came across in these meetings in many ways. While a few individuals supported the spirit of the event, city staff often referred to the event as a bike race, and cut down our proposed route from fifteen miles to less than eight. What we had in mind, temporarily creating a bike friendly space in central LA, simply did not make any sense to them.

In one meeting, a supervisor from LADOT told us that, "the streets were made for parking and travel. They weren't made for an event." In that instance, two CicLAvia committee members immediately refuted the staffperson's claim, arguing that streets are a multi-use public space. Later the same individual rejected a section of the proposed route that would divert motorists from a surface street onto a highway,

informing us that, "we don't force people to get on the freeways. Some people don't feel comfortable driving on the freeway." The message, that LADOT preferred to accommodate fearful motorists rather than improving conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians, further proved the need for an event that gave people the opportunity to feel comfortable outside of their cars on city streets.

CicLAvia closed seven and a half miles of streets in Los Angeles from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 10, 2010 (10-10-10). An estimated 30–40,000 people rode bikes or walked along the route, which passed from historically Latino Boyle Heights in East LA through Little Tokyo and Downtown LA, into Central American MacArthur Park and Koreatown, ending at East Hollywood's Bicycle District, a hub for the cycling community in central Los Angeles.

The planning committee made sure that we sent people along streets commonly used by transport cyclists and adjacent to public transportation lines because we viewed the event as a sort of open house for bike commuting. We hoped to introduce novice cyclists to the idea of transport cycling by giving them an opportunity to walk and ride through the urban grid without feeling menaced by motorized traffic, and to show people who used bikes recreationally how quickly they could pass through town. From my perspective, we gave people an opportunity to experience urban cycling as privileged flâneurs, rather than as marginalized bodies out of place.

When the committee got together to debrief a few days after the event, they shared that many participants in 10-10-10 commented that they would not normally have traveled through the neighborhoods on the route, while others who habitually rode that route commented on the liberating experience of passing through familiar territory but without the familiar terror of inattentive motorists. City staff complimented the event. People expressed a lot of awe at the city, marveling at the surprisingly short distances between neighborhoods, and praising the vistas they had never noticed from inside their cars. Many, many people had smiles on their faces. It showed itself to be a great opportunity to build relationship between residents, visitors, and the city. Many participants posted videos on YouTube showing their enjoyment of the day.

The next CicLAvia in April 2011 attracted double the participants, and the route for the next event on October 9 has been expanded to accommodate the crowds and to incorporate historically Chinese- and African American neighborhoods. Now the board of directors of a fledgling nonprofit organization, the planning committee continues to focus on attracting participation from low-income communities along the route, emphasizing that it is an event for everyone.

Conclusion

Central Los Angeles has little physical bike infrastructure, but activists have made inroads by breaking down the barriers between bicycling assemblages so that the bike lanes going in now benefit the most vulnerable cyclists. Physical infrastructure has started to follow from human infrastructure. Whether this safeguards the affordability of LA's central neighborhoods remains to be seen.

Recently, I visited LA for a press conference celebrating the opening of a bike lane on Seventh Street, a backbone of CicLAvia's route. LACBC had launched a campaign to get LADOT to prioritize striping bike lanes on streets in low-income neighborhoods, focusing on multicultural Seventh Street, which parallels Wilshire Boulevard and has been used widely by cyclists as an informal bike route. As stated on their website, "Seventh Street is an essential place to have bike lanes because it's in an area where many residents cannot afford cars and rely on public transportation, walking, or bicycling to get to work or downtown." A promotional video showed bicyclists speaking in English, Spanish, and Korean, languages commonly heard along the street. In addition to Seventh Street, lanes are being installed on First Street in Boyle Heights and along Martin Luther King Boulevard in Leimert Park, a historically African American neighborhood with a growing Latina/o population. Invisible cyclists now fit into the scope of LA's bike planning.

Creating a space for flânerie through CicLAvia encourages the development of human infrastructure for bicycling because it puts different assemblages together in the same time-space without requiring a physical transformation of the built environment. While CicLAvia may seem like a recreational cycling event, the new bike lane on Seventh Street shows the culmination of this experiment in a permanent statement that all bicyclists have a right to ride in traffic in LA every day.

Approaches to making cities more bike-friendly that focus on physical bike infrastructure overlook the contribution that users make to their landscapes. Creative uses of urban space such as happenings take advantage of its inherent flexibility, and produce possible worlds despite existing infrastructural obstacles. Using an ethnographic approach allowed me to spend time talking and biking with people, listening to their individual stories, and observing how they rode. It helped me grasp the diversity of bicycling that already exists in Los Angeles, instead of only envisioning a bike friendly future à la Copenhagen or Amsterdam.

My embodied, politically positioned methods allowed me to consider all bicyclists as legitimate participants in a community of practice. This helped me to identify human infrastructure as something that could bridge gaps between seemingly disparate groups. When physical infrastructure goes into place without the support of the community, it can sometimes make bicycling a divisive issue, as has happened occasionally in LA, New York City, and elsewhere. As cyclists, we all risk invisibility on car-dominated streets. Addressing gaps in the networks within the population of existing cyclists will make future urban planning efforts better suited to a diverse community of use/rs.

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