A thesis submitted to the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy of Central European University in part fulfilment of the Degree of Master of Science

Contested Streets, Contested Technology

The Appropriation of the Bicycle and the Performative Politics of Critical Mass in Budapest and Prague: A Case Study.

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May, 2010

Budapest

Erasmus Mundus Masters Course in Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management

MESPOM

This thesis is submitted in fulfillment of the Master of Science degree awarded as a result of successful completion of the Erasmus Mundus Masters course in Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management (MESPOM) jointly operated by the University of the Aegean (Greece), Central European University (Hungary), Lund University (Sweden) and the University of Manchester (United Kingdom).

Supported by the European Commission's Erasmus Mundus Programme

Erasmus Mundus

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS submitted by:
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for the degree of Master of Science and entitled: Contested Streets, Contested Technology: The Appropriation of the Bicycle and the Performative Politics of Critical Mass in Budapest and Prague: A Case Study.

Month and Year of submission: May, 2010.

Urban spaces reflect the very nature of our society – the dominant socioeconomic ideology in our culture, our attitudes toward each other, the environment, and materiality. Modern urban planning and the capitalist fetishism of automobiles, have led to the colonization of urban spaces by a systemic phenomenon known as automobility, composed of the social, cultural, spatial and economic aspects associated with cars. The Situationists International, a group of avante garde artists and theorists from the late 1950s, were particularly concerned with the dominating aspect of automobility on their cities, and advocated for a reconception of the *everyday* through the creation of *situations* – alternative possibilities that broke away from the normal use of space.

In this sense, Critical Mass, a social movement that contests the dominant use of city streets and spaces by automobility, by replacing traffic with a moving mass of bicycles, marks a resurgence of Situationist principles. Furthermore, it continues a long tradition of politicizing the bicycle as a technology, not only as a mobilizing tool, but also as the fundamental idea behind a new revolution in transport mobility.

This is particularly true in the Central European cities of Budapest and Prague, where record numbers of participants and significant changes in bicycle infrastructure and culture, are testament to the demonstrative and practical power of Critical Mass' pedaling revolution.

Keywords: < automobility, bicycle, critical mass, public space, social movements, situationist international, urban space, Prague, Budapest.>

Acknowledgements

This project owes its inspiration and completion to a number of people.

First, I would like to thank Tamara Steger for assuring me that this was indeed a topic worthy of research and one that she would fully support and supervise. Her guidance, advice and perspective have been crucial to the development of this project as well as to my own as a researcher.

Thank you to Alan Watt for exposing me to the involved world of Environmental Philosophy, and challenging me to consider the human condition in more ways than I previously considered possible.

Thank you to Kriszta Szabados and Irina Herzeg for their generous and unconditional support and understanding throughout my two years studying at Central European University. Furthermore, thank you to the Central European University Foundation for providing funding for thesis research.

A big thank you to Justin Hyatt, Daniel Mourek, Sinya, and all the other people who were gracious enough to talk to me about their work and experiences with Critical Mass and bicycling in the city. You are all an inspiration to me.

An especially large thank you to Zoltan Arvai, without whom much of this research would have been impossible, or at the very least, empty.

And finally, I would like to thank Milos Milicevic, for his countless offerings of wisdom, critique and praise, without which I would never have embarked on a project such as this.

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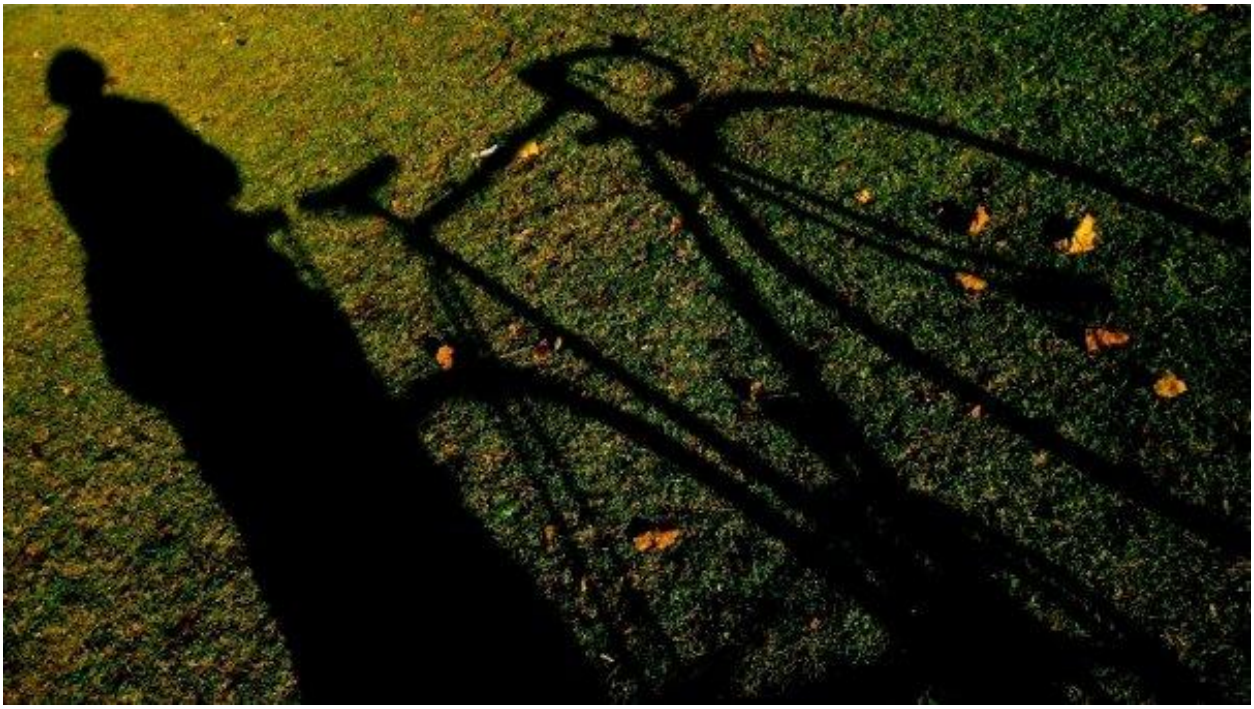

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 The Bicycle: A Personal Note

Learning to ride a bicycle was a momentous rite of passage in my youth – one that led to greater mobility, independence, maturity and a heightened sense of connection to my immediate surroundings. It was not, at any point, something I considered political, or even defiant. Instead it was a form of transportation and recreation, an activity to revel in alone or share with friends. But as I passed into adulthood and my desire to traverse greater distances led to the acquisition of a car, the bicycle became a less rational form of transportation, at least one rendered irrational by the spatial organization of the urban environment in which I lived. Bicycling was dangerous and risky. It was something reserved for the weekends – trips to the country, rides through quiet

residential neighborhoods, or sport. It was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a form of transportation – at least not for those who could afford otherwise.

In time, this attitude shifted. As I became more aware of the environmental and social implications of driving and the prohibitive costs associated with owning a car, I made the then radical choice to abandon driving and readopt the choice vehicle of my youth. It was through this process that the political significance of the bicycle revealed itself. I found myself negotiating spaces designed for cars, observing the profound physical and cultural embedment of automobility in my environment, and meeting frequent articulations of hostility from drivers whose trajectories I happened to momentarily obstruct. I was suddenly detached from ordinary culture, a member of an unequivocally marginalized group of people, who either by choice or necessity did not journey across the city in an enclosed vessel. It was a frustrating and enlightening process, but one that I eventually learned to navigate, learn from and encourage. It was liberating, challenging, empowering and defiant. It was, in short, political.

Of course, I was not the first (nor the last) to have a political experience on a bicycle. The bicycle has, since its emergence, been a highly politicized, contested technology. One that has and continues to, act as both the impetus and tool for social change. It has provided empowerment, emancipation and democratization. It has been employed in the diffusion of radical ideas and has led to momentous social reform. It has been wielded as a weapon and observed as an agent for peace.

1.2 Background

It is important to understand why the simple act of riding a bicycle in modern cities can be a politicized act – to recognize the sociocultural arithmetic that marginalizes the bicycle as a form of transportation. Many attribute this marginalization to a systemic force coined 'automobility'; the complete set of social, infrastructural and economic attributes associated with automobiles in urban environments. Indeed, when city planning becomes in large part the domain of traffic engineers, thinking first of the automobile in their organization of city space, it is not difficult to imagine how other forms of transportation, like bicycling or walking, may be severely limited or ignored altogether. One must only spend a few hours in most contemporary cities, observe the prioritized concern for the circulation of cars on city streets, the amount of space allotted to parking spaces, and the proliferation of traffic signs intended solely for drivers, to recognize the deep-seeded dominance of automobiles in modern culture. Thus, choosing to walk, or ride a bicycle is, in many cases, a risky choice, both literally, in terms of physical endangerment, and figuratively, in terms of social marginalization.

There are political implications to the use of the bicycle in spaces dominated by automobility. In environments like these, those who choose to ride a bicycle make a clear statement that they will not conform to the dominant transport ideology of their culture, whether they recognize this declaration or not. Those who ride a bicycle for lack of financial means to drive a car or use public transport, are a reflection of the economically marginalizing nature of automobility – evidence that for all its claims of democratization and freedom, the car creates a dichotomy of the 'haves' and 'have-nots,' rendering many immobile, particularly in environments lacking efficient and/or affordable public transport infrastructure. In all cases there exists a tangible

stratification of transport identities, in which those identified as automobile drivers are, through both self-perception and cultural recognition, given the upper hand.

One has to question how any culture that is so deeply entwined with the trappings of a technology reliant on vast amounts of space, raw natural resources and most importantly, oil – not to mention it's intrinsic relationship with greenhouse gas emissions and local air quality concerns – can expect to forge ahead as is, without encouraging a major paradigm shift. Too often the answer is sought in technological fixes.

If we just develop a renewable source of fuel, automobility can perpetuate, unchanged.
If we replace every petrol station with battery charging stations, the electric car will see that automobility will perpetuate, unchanged.

If we unearth our remaining stocks of oil, regardless of the precarious environmental implications in doing so, automobility can perpetuate, unchanged.

Perhaps the answer lies not in finding a technological solution to perpetuating automobility, but rather shifting our dependence on it. For even if technology managed to mitigate all of the polluting and extractive costs associated with automobility, we would still be left with the stratifying, isolating ideology attached to it. Perhaps the answer, then, lies in choosing (as has been done in cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam) to rethink our urban environments, to incorporate other forms of travel and uses into city streets and spaces. When an economic system and the spaces conducted by and created to serve that system, are so heavily reliant on a

single technology, it can seem impossible to reshuffle it all – to level the echelon of priority and integrate other uses into urban spaces.

It is easy for policy-makers to dismiss the practices employed in other cities (again, using Copenhagen and Amsterdam as examples) as incompatible with the cultural, geographical and spatial conditions of their own cities. Indeed, replacing the infrastructure and social fabric of a city like Budapest, with that of a city like Copenhagen, not only seems inconceivable, but, simply put, illogical. These are cities with different needs, different histories and different landscapes. But this does not mean that a different reality cannot be conceived of and exemplified. Herein lies the importance of demonstration.

Recently, the bicycle has become the centerpiece for a vast and varied movement aimed at reconceiving the ways in which we prioritize the use of urban space and challenging dominant cultural and economic principles that orchestrate and organize society. Known as Critical Mass (CM), this globally diffuse movement tackles problems of urban mobility and the misuse of public space at a local scale, by generating mass numbers of cyclists to temporarily overtake spaces normally inhabited by cars and symbolically refuse, if only momentarily, to be relegated to the realm of the irrational or unthinkable. Practiced in hundreds of cities worldwide, it is a movement rooted in the belief that urban spaces should be accessible to many, not a privileged few, and that change is possible through the reclamation and reconception of said spaces.

In this respect, the methods and ideology behind CM are astonishingly reminiscent of the theories and practices of the Situationist International, a group of European thinkers and activists

from the 1950s who envisioned a form of urbanism devoid of the exclusivity and marginalization bred by the growing proliferation of capitalist ideals and conventions. Led by Henri Lefebvre's ideas regarding the city, and the guidance of Guy Debord, the Situationists sought to redefine what they perceived as the urban spectacle – the social mire of imagery, media and spatial organization that plagued everyday city life – by providing random alternative scenarios in public space.

It is evident that our relationship with automobiles and automobility must change. While it may seem irrational to imagine a complete regression to a wholly car-free society, it does not seem implausible to imagine a decrease in our dependence on cars, or the relegation of our city spaces to them. This can be achieved, as has been proven in other cities, but for these changes to occur, their possibility has to be tangible, real and accessible. People must witness for themselves a different reality in order to recognize its feasibility. Through CM it is the bicycle that is currently providing that alternate reality.

1.3 The Case of Budapest and Prague

There is little doubt that the international practice of CM has increased the visibility of bicycling as a form of transportation. It's sheer growth both in terms of international diffusion and local participation, is testament to this. People like riding bicycles. Furthermore, people seem to desire the incorporation of bicycles in their transportation systems, and inclusion on city streets. This is especially clear in the post-socialist cities of Budapest and Prague, where the late (relatively) arrival of widespread automobility has led to a sociocultural love affair with cars, and the possession of one is considered an "extremely important symbol of economic and social

status as well as personal freedom" (Pucher and Buehler 2003:4). Debord once said that, "The automobile is the most notable material symbol of the notion of happiness that developed Capitalism tends to spread throughout society" (1959: 1). Indeed, it is sensible to assert that for a society only recently introduced to the fruits of capitalism, the general population did not defend against the 'colonization' of automobility in its cities. A technology once reserved for the well connected or elite, it was suddenly diversified and available to the masses, and in many ways associated with newfound democratization. Personal car ownership in Hungary and the Czech Republic rose about 30% and 60%, respectively in the period between 1990 and 2001, while public transport dropped in a corresponding manner (Pucher and Buehler 2003). Public transit modal share in Hungary has dropped from 82% to about 55% since 1988 (OECD/ITF 2009).

Without question, there are myriad externalities associated with the increase of automobility after the economic transition. An increase in personal car ownership and decrease in public transport use has caused a subsequent rise in the cost of public transport and the deterioration of services in some cases (Pucher and Buehler 2003). Both Prague and Budapest have experienced significant changes in land use, characterized mainly by spatial relinquishment of public space for parking and through traffic, in some cases going so far as to render once diversely used public squares into 'virtual parking lots' (Pucher and Buehler 2003: 11). These cities have also experienced an influx of suburban growth, where the availability of cheap, open land has paved the way for lower density residential developments, car-oriented shopping centers and restaurants, and of course, highways.

While these areas are still serviced by some form of transportation, they are mainly accessible via highway infrastructure, and the large presence of parking lots is reminiscent of the type of development that characterizes much of the United States: wide, flat outdoor spaces reserved for the storage and movement for cars, and indoor (mainly commercial) private space for people. Traffic in these cities has also become a major issue, as rush-hour travel results in congestion of most major streets. This has many obvious implications, including local and regional air pollution, contributing not only to local public health concerns, but also to global climate change. However, it also creates a visual and sensory frenzy within the city center, in which non-human machines fight for access to tight spaces, using horns and acceleration pedals as their primary weapons.

This is not to suggest that the aforementioned 'love affair' with automobiles that this region has engaged in is ubiquitous. While many have taken to the wheel, there still remain a number of people who choose public transportation, walking, and to a lesser extent, cycling as their primary forms of transportation. In Prague, an estimated 43% of the population utilize the well integrated, modern public transport system, while about 55% of Budapest's population get around using the flawed, but efficient network of local and suburban buses, trams, trolleys, metro and railway (A*M 2010; BKV 2009). As for cycling, these numbers are not nearly as commanding – 1% in Prague and an estimated 5% in downtown Budapest – but nonetheless deserve noting, as they still reflect a demographic that prefers the mobility of two wheels to that of four (A*M 2010; CSBP 2010).

Of course, these modal split estimates are not the primary cause for intrigue in these Central

European cities. Shares of 1 and 5 percent seem hardly significant when a collective 76 to 88 percent of the population (1.3 million and 1.8 million in Prague and Budapest, respectively) use personal vehicles or public transit for personal mobility. What *is* an absolute cause for intrigue, however, is the number of people who have, over the years, climbed out of the proverbial woodwork to herald the use of bicycles, both as a form of transportation and as a tool against the reign of automobility. A small part of this visibility can be attributed to daily choices people make to ride bicycles in these cities, foregoing other forms of transportation. But the foremost factor here – certainly the primary impetus for this study – is the overwhelming size and popularity of CM rides in both cities. In the last few years, both Prague and Budapest have witnessed huge growth in participation at these rides, reaching 5,000 riders in Prague in September of 2009, and an estimated 80,000 riders in Budapest in April of 2008 (A*M 2010; CMB 2010). These numbers soar high above average participation levels for CM rides throughout the world, perhaps in part because they are held only twice a year and are the result of the combined grassroots efforts of many individuals and organizations.

The CM rides in these cities have the unique effect of literally overtaking city streets – a feat which is visually and physically shocking for participants and observers alike. They effectively create an alternate reality, in which city streets are no longer the domain of automobiles, but rather the shared space of pedestrians, cyclists, skateboarders, and a variety of other forms of transport identities. Their celebratory dissidence is an example of the revolution in practice, of the *living critique,* which acted as the basis for Situationist theories against the spatial and ideological invasion of modern capitalism. This is particularly interesting given the timing of the emergence of the Situationist International and that of bicycle activism in Prague and Budapest.

The SI banded together in 1957, just 12 years after the beginning of the so-called *les trente glorieuses*, or the 'glorious thirty years' that marked a period of unparalleled economic growth and transition following World War II (Ross 1996; Ardagh 1973). This period of prosperity was marked by an increase of capitalist ventures, a spike in the service economy, increased urbanization and, importantly, the unprecedented growth of automobility (Ross 1996; Ardagh 1973). The work of the SI, firmly bound by a collective disbelief and sense of discord with the prevailing ideologies and urban manifestations of this era, reached a climactic point during the May 1968 student and worker rebellion in France, during which members of the SI and others used many ideas and tactics established by the Situationists in constructing and executing their revolution – 23 years after the start of the transition (Knabb 1997).

Now, roughly 20 years following the beginning of Central Europe's economic transition, a new kind of revolution, albeit peaceful and less obviously driven by anti-capitalist rhetoric, has emerged, in which its proponents take to the bicycle to alter the everyday experience of mobility on city streets, and challenge the tenets of automobility – striving to redefine and restructure the use of public space in their cities.

1.4 Scope of the study

While an examination of the similarities between the French post-war economic transition and the post-socialist transition in Central Europe is certainly a worthwhile endeavor, it is, in the interest of time and focus, not an objective for this thesis, and merely mentioned as a linkage between the emergence of the SI and that of CM. What this thesis is concerned with is learning

how the proponents of CM in Prague and Budapest, revolutionize the *everyday* through the political appropriation of the bicycle, and how this appropriation is lived through a performative commentary of automobility on city streets. In order to better appreciate the nature of contemporary bicycle politics in the study cities, knowledge concerning both the appropriation of bicycle technology by social movements and the theories concerning and opposing automobility must be gained.

To this end, the study will fulfill the following objectives:

- **Describe the historical and contemporary politicization of the bicycle and examine the themes of automobility and urban space.**
- **Explore the theories established by the SI.**
- **Examine how CM participants in Prague and Budapest both appropriate the bicycle as a technology and engage Situationist methods in a performative critique of automobility.**

Objectives 1 and 2 will be met and elaborated on in the literature review, while objective 3 will be explored in the case study analysis. It is expected that through the fulfillment of these objectives, the following research questions will be answered:

- **How does CM politicize the bicycle in Prague and Budapest?**
- **How is contemporary bicycle activism related to the *living critique* created by the SI?**
- **What is the role of CM in contesting the use of urban space and increasing visibility for bicyclists in Prague and Budapest?**

While it may seem that a review of the historical and current appropriation of bicycle technology is unnecessary in explaining the current politicization of the bicycle in Central Europe, it is

considered critical to establishing a theoretical basis for such a study. Similarly, while this thesis is not primarily interested in *thoroughly* exploring the issue of automobility in Central Europe, as such, an understanding of the concept and its role in organizing urban space is crucial to understanding the cultural environment that has given rise to CM.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

While the ideas introduced below will be further explored in detail in the literature review, it is thought important to briefly outline the key concepts that will form the bulk of the theoretical framework for this thesis. They are as follows:

- **Politicization of the bicycle**

This refers to the appropriation of bicycle technology in the empowerment, mobilization and political tactics of social movement actors and groups.

- **Automobility and Urban Space**

Understanding the nature of automobility and its relationship with urban space is key to understanding the impetus for CM action. In this case, automobility refers to the combination of social, economic, cultural and spatial factors related to the car, while urban space refers to the social and physical spaces that construct the urban environment.

- **Situationism**

The theories established by the SI were highly critical of capitalism in general, but especially (and importantly for this study) of automobility. Concepts coined by this group, including detournement, derive, and unitary urbanism will be explained in detail and used to illustrate the current practices of CM in Prague and Budapest.

- **Performative Critique**

This concept, employed by Furness in his theoretical study of CM, will be used to describe the experience and function of CM in contesting the use of urban space and city streets, and further draw linkages between CM and Situationism.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The first part of the literature review will serve to establish the theoretical framework for this thesis, by delving into the topics mentioned in section 1.5. These are reiterated below:

- **Politicization of the bicycle**
- **Automobility and Public Space**
- **Situationism**
- **Performative Critique**

The subject of CM has not been ventured into at length in academic circles. A relatively young movement, most of the literature pertaining to it is journalistic in nature. Of the scholarly articles exploring CM, only two are concerned primarily with the movement (Blickstein and Hanson

2001; Furness 2007), while others make mention of the movement as part of larger changes in the use of bicycles as transportation (Pucher *et al.* 1999), or in review of environmentalism and bicycle culture (Horton 2006). Ferrell (2001) explores the movement in his book, *Adventures in Urban Anarchy*, likening CM to an anarchist critique of rampant automobility. In a similar vein, Zach Furness (2010), notably the most dedicated academic researching CM to date, explores the politicization of the bicycle in contemporary movements (namely CM) against the polemics of car culture, in his recent book, *One Less Car*. While these books are worth mentioning in terms of adding cogency to the argument for studying CM, they will not be examined here. Instead, the remainder of the literature review will attempt to summarize CM using the available literature, and take account of the points raised by Blickstein and Hanson (2001) and Furness (2007) in their analyses of the movement.

2.2 Politicization of the Bicycle

> *As a social revolutionizer, the bicycle has never had an equal. It has put the human race on wheels, and thus changed completely many of the most ordinary processes and methods of social life*
>
> - New York Evening Post 1896

In his analysis of contemporary bicycle activism and the appropriation of technology, Zack Furness posits that, "it is important to recognize the ways in which such forms of appropriation politicize a seemingly neutral form of technology, and also politicize important aspects of everyday life including transportation, consumer ideology, and the urban landscape (Furness 2005: 402). This points to the significance of developing an historical understanding of the ways in which the bicycle has, as an innovation, both enabled the empowerment of citizens, and the

critique of cultural norms, so that we may better comprehend the current manners in which the technology is being used.

The bicycle has seemingly always been at the center of the contest for public space. As early models of the two-wheeler emerged in urban areas, concerns over the safety of pedestrians and equestrians in the presence of such "heedless and impetuous" riders arose, and a dispute driven by transport identity was conceived (Herlihy 2004: 45). This conflict did not diminish as the technology's popularity grew, and some cyclists took to riding in groups to offset the often-physical displays of hostility borne by non-cyclists in different localities. Originally a technology afforded only to those with the financial requisites, bicycles gradually provided increased mobility to a wide variety of people, as a growing supply and visions of democratization led to increased affordability (Herlihy 2004). This increase in accessibility bred a host of new social concerns (for those fearful of change) and advances, from the mobilization of the working class and the democratization of mobility (Bijker 1995; Horton 2006; Herlihy 2004; Furness 2005; Riordan 1991; Willard 1895), to the emancipation of women from the constraining realm of domesticity and stringent clothing standards (Strange and Brown 2002; Marks 1990; Furness 2005; Horton 2006; Hoefer 2007).

2.2.1 Feminism

> *I'll tell you what I think of bicycling. I think it has done more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world. I rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a bike. It gives her a feeling of self-reliance and independence the moment she takes her seat; and away she goes, the picture of untrammeled womanhood.*
>
> -Susan B. Anthony

The role of the bicycle in the women's rights movement is manifold and worthy of examination. Furness asserts that, "Understanding women's use of cycling technologies as a form of appropriation is both justifiable and important, because it was not a simply a matter of women learning how to "use" a new form of technology," (2005: 408). This particular technology endangered the immobility, social standing and customary clothing restrictions typically applied to women. Indeed, prior to the bicycle's invention, women were largely immobile, relegated to the private sphere of the home and kept from the public 'male' sphere by claims of distinction based on frailty, softness of character and fitness for domesticity (Strange and Brown 2002; Herlihy 2004; Marks 1990; Furness 2005; Hoefer 2007). Clothing was restrictive, consisting of tight Victorian corsets and long binding skirts, meant to restrain physical limberness and retain the delicate, honorable complexion expected of women. That bicycles were not, in the eyes of men, intended for use by the 'fairer sex' is evident in Frances Willard's account of a newly learned male bicyclist:

> An English Naval officer had said to me, after learning it himself, "You women have no idea of the new realm of happiness, which the bicycle has opened to us men." (Willard 1895)

Bicycling was not only perceived as existing outside of the female domain, but also prevalently identified as tantamount to the utter desecration of female sensibilities. Women, so divinely endowed with graceful, lithe physiques, and pleasant, diminutive character, had little place riding an instrument that would enlarge their muscles, spike their interest in the public sphere and add mettle to their diaphanous dispositions (Strange and Brown 2002; Herlihy 2004; Marks 1990;

Hoefer 2007). This sentiment is further reflected in this German journalist's rantings in an 1896 issue of the magazine *Youth:*

> Have you ever seen anything more off-putting, uglier, or meaner than a wench on a bike, wheezing, her face red like a turkey, her eyes reddened by the dust? I haven't ... What a horror! Is there any element of beauty to such a furious dame on wheels? Cycling makes our women haggard and angular, unwomanly from the out- and the inside. Off your bikes, female sex! Or you will no longer enjoy the right to call your sex the fair one (Quoted in Hoefer 2007)!

Still, scores of women took to the bicycle, many of which viewed the technology as a strong opportunity not only for dress reform, but also for emancipation from restrictive gender-based, religious and social conventions (Strange and Brown 2002; Furness 2005). One such woman was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who heralded the bicycle as an agent of peace and democracy, and seized the new technology to advance the causes of women (Stanton 1895). Strange and Brown contend that, "Stanton transformed the bicycle into a political and even religious issue. Touting the bicycle's potential to redefine femininity and promote transcendentalist spirituality, Stanton believed that the bicycle might hasten women's emancipation by liberating them from patriarchal social norms and the constraints of organized religion" (2002: 611). Since cycling was in every sense of the word, an *independent* activity, women were suddenly confronted with the possibility of traveling through the public sphere without the accompaniment of a chaperone, thus transforming not only the form in which they traveled, but also their relationship with public space itself. Patricia Marks, in her account of women and the bicycle, states, "The woman who traveled on her own wheels, then, whether she did so for a lark or for serious transportation, expanded her boundaries well beyond the home circle. She became a citizen of the world" (1990: 203). In this sense, the relationship between 19th century women and the two-wheeled

invention marked a shift in they ways both they (women) and the rest of the population, viewed public space, both socially and physically.

2.2.2 19th century Socialists

> *Already I knew well enough that tens of thousands who could never afford to own, feed, and stable a horse, had by this bright invention enjoyed the swiftness of motion which is perhaps the most fascinating feature of material life, the charm of a wide outlook upon the natural world, and that sense of mastery which is probably the greatest attraction in horseback- riding.*
>
> - Frances Willard (1895)

Women were not the only social benefactors of the bicycle's invention. Many social historians and theorists depict the bicycle as a great mobilizing force for the working class and burgeoning Socialist movement of the late 19th century (Bijker 1995; Herlihy 2004; Furness 2005; Riordan 1991; Willard 1895). Most forms of personal transportation were then unaffordable for the working masses, rendering them immobile in contrast to their privileged counterparts. But the risk of future political mobilization of the proletariat was nonetheless observed – and with good reason. Bicycling threatened to diffuse political organizations in ways that other technologies before it had not, and became an integral component of Socialist activity, not simply in terms of transport mobility, but also in recruitment and the dissemination of information (Bijker 1995; Herlihy 2004; Furness 2005).

Socialist organizations formed in various countries, all utilizing the bicycle to varying degrees. According to David Herlihy, these organizations, like the Birmingham, England-based Clarion Cycling Club, not only encouraged cycling among its members, but also engaged groups of

'cycling scouts' tasked with "spreading the gospel of proletarian revolution…and the ideals of Socialism" to previously unreachable localities and audiences (2004: 274). Similar organizations included the Socialist Wheelmen's Club formed in 1989 (Riordan 1991) and other, smaller working class cyclists' associations dispersed throughout other western European countries, though none as large as the German Workers' Cycling Federation formed in 1896, otherwise known as the "Enlightenment Patrols of Social Democracy," or Solidarität, who used bicycles to ride en masse through public squares distributing organizational literature and whose numbers grew to 330,000 members by 1933 (Furness 2005; Dodge 1996). In all of these cases, these groups were not only geographically liberated by the bicycle, but also seized the opportunity to use this new form of mobility to take to the streets wielding their message of Socialist fraternity and inclusion.

2.2.3 Environmentalism and the Bicycle

> *With cars driving affluent societies towards the environmental apocalypse, bicycles become the route to ecological sanity.*
>
> - David Horton

> *The bicycle is the perfect transducer to match man's metabolic energy to the impedance of locomotion. Equipped with this tool, man outstrips the efficiency of not only all machines, but all other animals as well.*
>
> - Ivan Illich

While these historical examples provide a valuable basis for understanding the sociopolitical appropriation of the bicycle, what is perhaps most interesting is the ways in which the technology has been and continues to be associated with environmentalism, climate change

advocacy, and urban struggles, including issues regarding transportation, public space and automobility (Blickstein & Hanson 2001; Carlsson 2002; Horton 2006; Furness 2005 & 2007; Pucher *et.al.* 1999). Indeed, scores of people globally have taken to the bicycle as the transportation component of a particular lifestyle, or in forms of political metaphor involving direct action to challenge existing power structures or raise awareness about environmental issues (Carlsson 2002; Horton 2006; Mapes 2009; Furness 2005). Many of these people have chosen a bicycle as a tool because of its energy efficiency, the self-propelled freedom it provides them, and perhaps in part, because of its historical association with democratization and equitable mobility (Horton 2006; Illich 1974; Carlsson 2002; Hurst 2009).

Some contemporary illustrations of such appropriation include long-distance bicycle campaigns organized by individuals or groups aimed at raising awareness for environmental issues or promoting peace, while others adopt a more assertive, confrontational employment of the bicycle, using it in direct action for oft similar goals. For instance, in 2009, a 30-day cycling tour of five countries, entitled 'Green Bikes for Peace,' organized by the Hungarian Cyclists' Club and the European, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, engaged a group of youths to participate in a mobile project aimed at promoting sustainability (GBP 2010). In a more radical vein, an organization named, 'Bikes for Peace,' from Boulder, Colorado, advocates a *car-free* lifestyle through the adoption of the bicycle as a primary form of transportation, offering statistical, educational, entertainment-oriented and editorial information through a website and local events (BP 2010). In some cases, the target and event are more explicitly direct. Two recent campaigns come to mind.

The first, a campaign known as 'Ride Planet Earth,' was started by a single person, who set out to raise awareness about the significance of environmental sustainability in tackling climate change, by riding his bicycle from Brisbane to Copenhagen in time to petition government leaders at the UN Climate Conference in 2009 (RPE 2010). This initially personal expedition grew into a campaign of global proportions, leading to the 'Ride Planet Earth' day on December 6, 2009, during which thousands of cyclists throughout the world took to the streets on their bicycles to demand more local attention to transport-related climate change issues (RPE 2010). Below is an excerpt from the RPE website depicting the action:

> On 6th December 2009 cyclists across the planet took to highways, streets and dirt tracks demonstrating their capacity and willingness to take action against dangerous climate change. On 28th November 2010 they will return to do it again to ensure a sustainable future for our planet.

The second, known simply as 'Bike Bloc,' was the brainchild of Climate Camp, a UK-based direct action group targeting climate change issues primarily at the national level and the Denmark-based Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, a collective of artists and activists (BB 2009; CC 2010). The primary aim of the bike bloc was for it to:

> Move as a swarm, harnessing its collective energy and unpredictability to flow through the streets and create greater possibilities. The swarm is the way the bike bloc functions: individual cyclists who move and work together as an organized unit, with the potential to become an unstoppable force.

Bearing the slogan, "Put the fun between your legs," this campaign involved the efforts of an international coalition of grassroots activists, whose combined work led to the construction of multiple compound bicycles, considered a 'new tool of civil disobedience' designed to act as

mobile roadblocks in a protest scheduled during the UN Climate Change Conference (CC 2010). The bicycle construction took place in a squatted Copenhagen warehouse, during which hundreds of people worked cooperatively, dismantling and reconstructing bicycles, sharing knowledge, exchanging ideas and food. Through this process the bicycle was not only employed as a symbol of sustainability and community building, but also used more literally as a tool for protest – a chariot for dissidence and a shield against authority.

2.3 Automobility and Public Space

> *It is not a matter of opposing the automobile as an evil in itself. It is its extreme concentration in the cities that has led to the negation of its function. Urbanism should certainly not ignore the automobile, but even less should it accept it as its central theme. It should reckon on gradually phasing it out.*
>
> - Guy Debord

Much of the literature surrounding this appropriation of the bicycle relates it directly to its proponents' opposition to what many call 'automobility' or 'motorism' (Adams; 2000; Blickstein & Hanson 2001; Furness 2005; Furness 2007; Horton 2006). It is then, considered a crucial aspect of this literature review to explore the concept of automobility and the urban issues associated with it, in order to better comprehend the nature of contemporary bicycle activism – particularly that of Critical Mass.

It is important to consider that the trouble with automobilism is not necessarily a critique of the automobile itself, but rather the complex constellation of social, economic and spatial concessions made for it. John Urry defines automobility as, "the self-organizing, self-generating, non-linear world-wide system of cars, car-drivers, roads, petroleum supplies, and many novel

objects, technologies, and signs" (2004: 27). It is an "array of interlocking, social, cultural, technical and economic forces (Conley and McLaren 2010:1), an 'ideology of subjugation and obedience," (James n.d.), which has "displaced mass transportation and altered city planning and housing in such a way that it transfers to the car functions which its own spread has made necessary," (Gorze 1973:1). It is a form of private mobility which capitalizes on and colonizes the public realm, "reconfiguring the relation between place, space and the mobility of objects," (Sheller and Urry 2003: 115) – one that has been cast as the point of departure for a reckless modernist extravaganza in urban and city planning, which has led to the disintegration of communities, the loss of public space and civil society, unsustainable practices in transport and energy use, and the general deterioration of city spaces (Illich 1974; Jacobs 1961; Mumford 1964; Kunstler 1993; Auge 1995; Adams 2000).

It has, in a relatively short time, completely transformed our urban environments, geographic identification, communities and patterns of social interaction. It has usurped the 'public' from public space and rendered a great percentage of it private; a quasi-public stage on which people in isolating capsules negotiate tight spaces with little cognizance of the dynamic world around them – a true exercise in individualism. Eduardo Vasconcellos, the director of the National Association of Public Transit in Brazil, and well-versed proponent of car-free, transit-oriented development, provides this profound anecdotal example of the effects of automobilism on the physical organization of public spaces and our perception of automobile technology.

> The car is so deeply immersed in our culture as an ideological 'being' that it replaces human beings in people's minds. It is like a powerful fetishism. When I was waiting at the crossing with a friend in Sao Paulo I decided to test how this phenomenon had also affected his perception. There were several automobiles, buses and trucks around us and I asked him: "What is coming from there? You have three guesses." He said: "Well, a car!" I said: "No, take your second guess."

> He looked and said: "A vehicle." I said: "No, and now you have your last chance." And he answered, angry with me: "An automobile." I still wonder when he will realize that what was coming was a person, inside a metal case, and that there is no reason whatsoever for that person in the role of a car driver to have priority over us standing on the sidewalk (Vasconcellos 2001: 157)..

It is precisely this separation of the 'human' from automobility that time and again surfaces in writings about the urban condition (Jacobs 1961; Mumford 1964; Kunstler 1993). The urban environment is a living, dynamic representation of our society's accomplishments and follies, indicative of present and future inclinations – apertures through which we may analyze the manifestation of ideas and dominant cultural values, the construction of social norms, their growth and their decay. These are made most evident by the ways in which we prioritize the use of urban space – the, flow, purpose and organization of a city's physical structures. Space, according to Henri Lefebvre, reflects social dominance, a politicized realm, constantly negotiated, reconceived and restructured (Lefebvre 1991; Soja and Hooper 1993; Jones 1994). It is the ultimate reflection of our society – the platform upon which social, economic and cultural exchanges are played out – and a major element in the construction of cultural norms and the generation of social behavior. Space defines our surroundings, affects our sense of place and identity, challenges our thinking, and inspires our choices – both mundane and momentous. It is a part of us, as we are a part of it.

Thus, the domination of the very spaces to which we are deeply connected to, by varied, impersonal, and restrictive manifestations of automobility, is a dehumanizing, marginalizing and isolating condition. *One that we, as a society perpetually feed, so that it may continue feeding on us.* Jane Jacobs sums this sentiment up perfectly in her seminal work on the failures of modernist urban planning, *The Life and Death of Great American Cities,* with the following

witticism:

> What if we fail to stop the erosion of cities by automobiles?… In that case, we… will hardly need to ponder a mystery that has troubled men for millennia: What is the purpose of life? For us, the answer will be clear, established and for all practical purposes indisputable: The purpose of life is to produce and consume automobiles (Jacobs 1961).

It may seem that this is certainly true of the urban sprawl phenomenon. One must only spend a few hours in a typical suburban American city to experience the full extent of the social, cultural, economic and spatial amalgam that is *automobility*. In this context, the absolute dominance of the car and its milieu is palpable; not a single meter of space is designed or configured without the full consideration of the automobile's place in it. It is a socially alienating, constricting environment, where the majority of public space occurs indoors, while outdoor space is reserved for the movement, storage and showcasing of automobiles. Many older European cities bear the good fortune of having been built, at least partially, before the advent of cars, and still retain some car-free outdoor spaces, where human social interactions can be played out (Wright 2005). Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that while these cities may not have suffered the predetermined absence of car-free space, they have been adapted, contorted and vivisected to accommodate automobility. A tremendous amount of space is allotted to automobility – even in Berlin, a city noted for its green spaces, efficiency in public transportation, and efforts to incorporate car-free development into its planning structure, a reported 41 percent of public space is used solely for cars and their myriad requirements (Hyatt 2006). In any light it is evident that automobility has enjoyed a long-standing, nearly undisputed reign over our cities and public spaces.

2.4 The Situationist International

> *To fail to criticize everyday life today means accepting the prolongation of the present thoroughly rotten forms of culture and politics – forms whose extreme crisis is expressed in increasingly widespread political apathy and neoilliteracy, especially in the most modern countries.*
>
> - Guy Debord 1961

At a time when the full extent of automobility was beginning to manifest itself in European cities (i.e. the mid 1950s), an avant-garde group of intellectuals, artists and writers, formed the Situationist International and began a brief, but significant, intellectual foray into what they perceived to be a catastrophic siege of cities and urban space by the forces of capitalism and automobility, deemed the *spectacle* (Vanegeim 1961; Furness 2007; Smith n.d.; Debord 1959; Pinder 2000). Drawing on Marxist theories regarding the alienation of workers, the Situationists believed that capitalism had led to the creation of a society in which only consumers and producers existed, and artificial 'needs' were created to mask the detachment people felt from their surroundings, while further fueling consumption (Marshall 2000). Promoting the concept of 'unitary urbanism,' a belief that the spatial organization of cities should reflect human interaction and imagination, rather than commodification and isolation, they encouraged and took part in varied forms of contesting space, implementing a method known as *detournement,* through which well-known images, texts and physical spaces were altered and transformed, to inspire creativity, thought and critique among the public (Debord 1967; SI 1955; Black 2000;

Furness 2007; Pinder 2000). In his article, 'Old Paris is no more – Geographies of spectacle and anti-spectacle,' David Pinder summarizes the work of the SI with the following:

> The Situationists were concerned above all with contesting and bringing about revolutionary change in dominant social relations and the social organization of space. A prominent part of this was their interest in studying the power and politics of urban space, as well as seeking to transform those spaces through what they termed "psychogeographical" practices. By critically exploring the city, the Situationists aimed to reveal not only the play of power in the city but also the play of possibilities. The Situationists' theorization of the spectacle became a key component of this contestation, an attempt to critique what they believed were the alienating conditions of post-war societies marked by the "colonization" of everyday life and space by the commodity (Pinder 2000: 358).

Their quest for *psychogeographical* meaning was supplemented by the practice of the *dérive*, a creative exercise through which city spaces were discovered and analyzed by groups of people slowly passing through them, observing the effects of spatial organization on the psyche and imagination (Furness 2007). The *dérive* was the main method employed by the Situationists in their quest for a 'new way of life' and a divorce from the 'spectacle', in that it enabled them to better understand the interactions between public space and behavior, while developing new ideas for the use of space (Situationists 1955). The insights gleaned from these experiences led to the application of the aforementioned *detournement*, through which the Situationists hoped to break the messages and institutional truths associated with commonly recognized images and media (Furness 2007; Pinder 2000). It also inspired the creation of *situations*, in which people were encouraged to take command of a space and reconceive its use, creating a new spectacle in place of the usual psychological suffocation and revolutionize the everyday. (Debord 1957; Bogdanov 1989; Furness 2007; Pinder 2000). To Debord and the Situationists, the right means through which to change the system was to create and sustain an alternate reality – one that could inspire people to imagine better possibilities (Marshall 2000; Furness 2007). This excerpt

from Peter Marshall's article on Guy Debord and the Situationists articulates this belief:

> The way out of the Situationists was not to wait for a distant revolution but to reinvent everyday life here and now. To transform the perception of the world and to change the structure of society is the same thing. By liberating oneself, one changed power relations and therefore transformed society. They therefore tried to construct situations, which disrupt the ordinary and normal in order to jolt people out of their customary ways of thinking and acting.

These methods relied on the fundamental idea that 'culture and materiality are not static' and that through the *living critique*, or, "a direct engagement with the material environment…the function of a space could be inverted while producing a new relationship with that space – even if the experience was temporary," (Furness 2007: 305). Raoul Vaneigem expresses the ultimate function of the *living critique* in replacing an existing reality with a desired one, "In the dialectic of part and totality, *the curved slope of revolution* is the project to construct daily life in and through the struggle against the commodity form, so that each phase of the revolution is carried in the style of its final outcome" (Vaneigem 1967).

This is where the Situationist legacy in contemporary forms of performative dissent lies. The practice of *detournement* is critically similar to the work of iconic street artists such as Banksy and Shepard Fairey, whose individual art involves infiltrating museums and installing personal pieces of art, distorting existing paintings or images, emblazoning city walls, streets and billboards with thought-provoking images (Banksy 2010). It is also manifest in the efforts of groups such as the Guerilla Girls (2010) and publications such Adbusters (2010), who manipulate advertisements to critique neoliberal capitalism and the commodified institutions of fine art, and provide continually updated advice on how to replicate or create similar types of visual dissent (Adbusters 2010). Plainly stated, the concept of *detournement* is present in the

efforts of every individual who has ever wielded a brush and paint can, paper and glue, or sunflower seeds and a spade, and aimed to alter the visual and psychological elements of public space.

As regards the *living critique* or the production of an alter-*situation*, movements like Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets, which critique the current relegation of public spaces to automobility and private interests, by hosting street parties, mass rides and carnivalesque protests, are excellent examples of the contemporary invocation of this Situationist legacy (Furness 2007; Carlsson 2002). While both movements are interesting subjects, the following section will be dedicated solely to exploring how Critical Mass has invoked, and successfully expanded on these principles, using the bicycle in a defiant performance, to demonstrate alternative possibilities for the life of spaces.

2.5 Critical Mass and the Performative Critique

> *The contagious pleasure of a movement like Critical Mass threatens the precariousness of today's world, which depends on cooperative participation by the majority of people as workers and consumers. CM is an unparalleled practical experiment in public, collective self-expression, reclaiming our diminishing connectedness, interdependency and mutual responsibility. CM provides encouragement and reinforcement for desertion from the rat wheel of car ownership and its attendant investments.*
>
> – Chris Carlsson (2002)

'Contagion' is perhaps the best word to describe the element that has turned CM into a phenomenon. Originating in San Francisco in 1992, it was the creative product of a collaborative group of cyclists who were 'fed up' with the constant marginalization they felt as individual riders in a city long yielded to automobility (Blickstein & Hanson 2001). Initially

coined – though fortunately later renamed after a moment in the documentary film *Return of the Scorcher*, in which a journalist notes that at a busy intersection in China, bicyclists negotiated through passage by waiting at the crossing until they had reached a *critical mass* of bicycles, at which point they could ride safely without being hit by cars – the *Commute Clot*, CM was an opportunity for cyclists to converge on the last Friday of each month and 'ride home' together, essentially 'becoming traffic' during rush-hour (Furness 2007). As time passed, the monthly ride gained popularity, partly due to the nascent realm of digital communication, and partly due to the aforementioned contagion of a dynamic mass of merrymakers bounding down streets normally populated by cars (Blickstein & Hanson 2001).

It is an excellent example of the resurgence of Situationist practices – one that has spread to hundreds of cities in the world in less than 20 years (Dyer 2002). Based on direct action, the movement takes the form of a mass event, during which bicyclists take command of the streets in a display of political theater – a spectacle that by its very nature has the capacity to engage interest far beyond the scale of its participants (Blickstein & Hanson 2001; Carlsson 2002; Furness 2005 & 2007). Beyond increasing visibility for cyclists, CM is credited with providing 'legitimacy' to the claims of formal organizations, leading to improvements in bicycle and transport infrastructure in cities, and granting advocates a place in the urban policy framework (Blickstein & Hanson 2001; CMB 2010).

As a movement, it enjoys myriad definitions, from a rally or a celebration, to an 'organized coincidence' (Blickstein & Hanson 2001), 'an experiment in true democracy' (Stender 2002), 'a demonstration of social space' (Sojourner 2002), a 'living, collective affirmation of the human

drive for authentic, unmediated community' (Carlsson 2002) and 'nothing less than the sudden, breathtaking transformation of public space by a collective act of will and imagination' (Wilson 2002). A unique quality of CM – one that indeed reflects the 'collective' nature of its execution – is that it is a seemingly leaderless movement, which functions in a non-hierarchical, loosely organized structure (Carlsson 2002). Typically held on the last Friday of each month, in the spirit of the original San Francisco ride, CM is often anarchic in nature, in that it seeks no official permission, avoids institutional or political affiliation and is not bound by any overarching 'dogma' or specific collective identity (Ferrell 2001; Kessel 2002). It enjoys a certain amount of fluidity, in that it can (and is expected to) be shaped by its participants, taking on a life that is reflective of its riders (Dyer 2002). This particular quality is perhaps what is most responsible for its rampant adoption on a global scale, for it allows the movement to be molded and adapted to fit within the physical, social and cultural parameters of different cities with varying needs.

The growth of CM has also been attributed to the adoption of the Internet in social movement mobilization, a framework similarly employed to examine the growth of transnational social movements, particularly environmental and alter-globalization movements (Blickstein and Hanson 2001; Bennet 2003; Feixa *et.al.* 2009; Sullivan & Xie 2009). Blickstein and Hanson (2001) argue that a critical aspect of CM's success has been its global diffusion through Internet communication, and that it has, in turn facilitated the development of a global discourse on sustainable practices in transportation and land use, that targets intrinsically local issues:

> While face-to-face interaction among participants has been vital to sustaining CM rides, cyber-interaction via electronic discussion lists was critical to the diffusion of Critical Mass in the mid 1990s. The Internet has served as a space of debate about the group and as a medium for spreading information about Critical Mass to

distant locations (Blickstein & Hanson 2001: 358).

Their study was largely an analysis of the spatial nature of politics, and the role of 'geographical scale' in political mobilization. Applying Cox's (1998) theory of *spaces of dependence* and *spaces of engagement*, they contend that while CM is directly aimed at altering the condition of local urban spaces on which participants depend, due to the communicative reach of the Internet, the messages and lessons portrayed by CM are widely distributed, thus broadening the space of engagement, and creating a fundamentally 'glocalized' movement (Blickstein & Hanson 2001; Swyngedouw 1997). Certainly, the growth of CM to hundreds of cities worldwide, and the numerous contemporary incidents of bicycle themed demonstrations or political action, is testament to this assertion. Furthermore, the fact that in many cases, including Budapest and Prague, the main center of communication for CM at a local scale occurs through internet sites, is evidence of the global movement and its tactics working at a local scale, to combat local issues.

CM has also been assessed as a form of *performative critique*, through which bicycle riders create a collective spectacle as a means of "raising questions about the nature of automobility, the polemics of car culture, and the (mis)use of public space" (Furness 2007: 300). The temporary, celebratory seizure of city streets that CM employs, is according to Furness, an act of multiple functions, as it not only serves to provide new spaces of communication and interaction for the participants, but also creates a revolutionary environment in which both the tactics and the actors' aspirations are tangibly demonstrated and experienced (Furness 2007). Within this environment, riders are free to shape and contribute to nature of the mass, using a mode of communication best called *xerocracy*, by which people spread messages through printed fliers

and posters, distributing their own 'missives' and information about the rides prior to and during CM (Furness 2007; Klett 2002).

It is important, in this context, to consider the larger role that CM plays in redefining space, in that it temporarily changes and renegotiates the power structure established by the dominant ideology of the automobile, by creating a so-called *Temporary Autonomous Zone* (TAZ) in which space is momentarily freed from its normal use and replaced with an alternate purpose just long enough to avoid institutional interference (Furness 2007; Bey 1991). In Lefebvre's concept of space, which is constantly redefined and negotiated by changes in symbolic power structure, this aspect of CM is the single most important function, in that it clearly disrupts the typical structure of space, providing not only a new spatial experience for its participants, but also a demonstrative spectacle for onlookers, who may be expected to re-imagine the possibilities of urban space, and perhaps even their place in it (Lefebvre 1991; Furness 2007; Debord 1967). It is in this sense that CM takes on the nature of a performance – one that is carried out in both a demonstrative capacity and as a practical (though ideological) substitution for the *everyday* (Furness 2007; Debord 1967).

2.6 Gaps in the literature

As previously mentioned, few theoretical analyses of CM have been carried out to date. Most of the literature that exists is of a journalistic nature, occurring in newspapers, weblogs, and magazines, or anthologies, such as '*Critical Mass: Bicycling's Defiant Celebration*,' edited by Chris Carlsson, one of the founders of the original CM. Literature of a more academic nature exists in the work of Blickstein and Hanson (2001), Furness (2005 & 2007), Horton (2006) and

Pucher *et. al.* (1999). These analyses have been largely theoretical in nature – some more focused on CM than others – and based on existing literature and media, rather than empirical research. While they have provided a healthy analytical perspective for this thesis, they, as a body of work, constitute a particularly Western perspective of CM, focused mainly on the movement as a USA or UK based phenomenon. They have not ignored the existence of CM outside of these cultural and geographic borders – in fact, much to the contrary they have used the movement's growth outside of these parameters to exhibit its uniqueness and significance as a research topic – but have also not essayed to explore instances of this widespread existence.

But as one of the defining features of CM is its form of *glocalization*, it seems natural and almost necessary, for the following step in building this body of research to include focused case-study based knowledge, analyzing how different localities engage in carrying out these theories, and how their work (as particular to their environment and goals) negates or supports these theories.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

As I established in Chapter 2, the body of work constituting the literature on CM is largely theoretical in scope and focused mainly on the Western incarnations of the movement. Therefore I intend to analyze CM in practice, focusing on its recent adoption in the cities of Budapest and Prague. This research will be carried out with the following methods.

3.1. Research Design

My approach in this research is that of an engaged participant – a passionate observer with an interpretive perspective – using traditional qualitative methods such as ethnographic data collection, interviews and archival research, as well as Wacquant's less traditional 'carnal sociology,' a method premised on deep immersion utilizing the body as a vector of knowledge…to analyze the hidden material and symbolic dimensions that define a particular social world and the mutual penetration of agent and world (Hancock 2009:94). This

'immersion' approach is considered crucial in my role as an engaged participant observer, as the experience of bicycling in the city and participating in CM is largely 'carnal' in nature, and must be understood as such in order to accurately interpret the information gleaned from events and personal interaction with interviewees.

Furthermore, through my role as an urban cyclist and participant of CM, my research is supplemented by personal knowledge, and the fortunate ability to engage with interviewees as a peer, so as to avoid the "caricaturizing of social groups" (Kidder 2009) and "experience for (my)self events as they happen and the circumstances that give rise to them" (Emerson *et.al* 1995). Guided by Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) counsel to "study things in their natural settings" great care was taken to collect data during CM itself or during CM-related events, and many interviews were held in social spaces common to the proponents of CM (i.e., cafes or workspace frequented by bicycle couriers in Budapest, and DIY bicycle workshops and cyclists' social gatherings in Prague). Research methods employed consist of the following:

3.1.2 Literature review

The literature review aims to illustrate both the historical and contemporary appropriation of the bicycle, while providing a frame of reference for the case study analysis. Theoretical framework for data analysis is established through an examination of the concepts of automobility and urban space, and the exploration of Situationist theory. Furthermore, any existing academic literature related to CM has been consulted, though to date there is no published material regarding the movement in either Prague or Budapest.

3.1.3 Data Collection

Participant observation is recorded and structured through ethnographic field documentation, in the form of brief notes and longer, reflective entries. These data are gleaned from extensive ongoing participant research in Budapest and a ten-day research trip in Prague. Notes are analyzed for recurring themes. Both personal insights and strict observational details are included and will form part of the analysis. These data are derived from personal participation in CM and other bicycle related events and gatherings, including CM in Budapest, September 22, 2008; April 2009 and April 24, 2010, as well as an *Alleycat* race on May 6, 2010, and a bicycle maintenance workshop on April 12, 2010 and CM in Prague on April 22, 2010.

3.1.4 Interviews

A primary method of data collection occurred through interviews with key members of the CM movement in Prague and Budapest, as well as with participants during and after the events. Siedman (1991) suggests that interviewing is a crucial function of social science research that exposes the researcher to a subject's thoughts and opinions enabling a better understanding of the issues at hand. Principal interviewees were selected through the identification of individuals closely linked to CM in both cities. This was accomplished by consulting organization and movement websites and related media publications. Further subjects resulted through the suggestions of primary interviewees, in a form of 'snowball sampling' (Strauss 2008). While most interviews were semi-structured and formal in nature, lasting 60 to 90 minutes, many were incidental, taking place during CM rides or at social gatherings. The latter form of interview is considered not only appropriate, but also necessary, as a large part of the analysis is based on the experience derived from participating in CM and physically navigating urban space in an extraordinary manner.

	Questions
Attitudes about the bicycle and automobiles.	
1	Do you ride a bicycle regularly? Any particular reason or reasons?
2	Do you drive a car in the city? How is the experience different from riding a bike?
3	Can you tell me about traffic in the city? How does it affect you?
Functions of and motivation for CM.	
4	What is Critical Mass?
5	How did it come about in this city? When did it begin? Did any particular group put it together?
6	What does CM do? Why is it important in your city?
The CM experience.	
7	Could you tell me a bit about why and how you got involved?
8	How does it feel to participate in CM?
9	Is there anything political about CM?
Urban space	
10	What is the significance of the routes in the major CM rides?
11	What kinds of issues do you think CM raises? In other words, can you think of any specific problems in this city that CM might address?
12	Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Table 3.1 Interview design.

Formal interviews were conducted in both cities, with people involved in or affiliated with the organization of CM. Interviewees were offered anonymity before each interview. Those interviews in which anonymity was requested will be referred to as numbered footnotes in the results section. The structure and design of these interviews are detailed in Table 3.1. In Prague, interviewees included members of the World Car Free Network (WCN), The Environmental Partnership (NP) and Auto*Mat (A*M), a local mobility-oriented organization, and main actor in the car-free movement. In Budapest, the subjects were more diverse, including the founders of Budapest's CM – whose work as bicycle couriers puts them in a unique position to discuss the use of space in the city – a dedicated CM participant and local theater director, representatives of a local NGO dealing with environmental concerns and issues related to public space, and a journalist, whose Internet blog deals directly with bicycling issues in Budapest and the

surrounding region. Informal interviews, lasting 10 to 30 minutes, were conducted with participants in both cities, including students, parents, expatriates and politicians. It is hoped that such a diverse interview-base will provide a thorough and insightful illustration of the significance and experience of CM in these cities.

3.1.5 Archival Research

As previously mentioned, there exists a lack in scholarly literature pertaining to CM in the CEE region, or anywhere outside of the United States or United Kingdom for that matter. While other, journalistic forms of literature are explored; a large part of the data collected for this thesis comes from local media sources such as weblogs and websites, documentary films and news articles. Many of these documents and sites contain valuable quotes and perspectives from movement actors and participants, and provide a wealth of information. They are considered paramount to developing a complete understanding of the situation in Prague and Budapest, and must be consulted before and after CM events in order to gain insights into local motivations for promoting and participating in CM, as well as measuring personal experiences and reactions to the events.

3.2 Limitations

As with any study, particularly one conducted in countries presenting significant language barriers, some limitations exist. First, the events in question were scheduled for the latter part of April, making a significant portion of the data collection impossible until just before or after this period. A more involved, thorough analysis of participant experiences and motivations is desired, but simply unfeasible in the time allotted for this research. Second, while measures were taken to ensure in-depth, comprehensive data collection, such as long interview times, and the examination of a diversity of documents and media, the limitations of language are an issue

worth mentioning. Certainly, a native speaker of Hungarian or Czech has access to certain cultural colloquialisms and lingual discernments that a foreigner with only rudimentary command of either language does not. With that said, it is important to recognize these limitations and use whatever means necessary to adequately overcome them. Methods of adaptation involve the cooperation of a translator during interviews when possible and the utilization of translation software in analyzing Internet related media.

Chapter 4. Case Study Profiles

4.1 Budapest

4.1.1 History

The idea of mass bicycle rides in Budapest began as it has in most cities, with small groups of urban cyclists, organizations, and bicycle couriers getting together to enjoy the shared experience of riding through the city *en masse*, as opposed to the very individual experience of navigating city streets alone (CMB 2010). These rides resembled the more traditional "San Francisco" model of CM, in that they occurred on the last Friday of every month, had no official permission and were shaped by the movements of the mass itself (Sinya pers. comm.; Carlsson 2002). But

while these rides, about 50 in total, attracted relatively large numbers of participants from time to time, they did not influence the wider public in the way that the more recent, large-scale rides have (Sinya pers. comm.).

The first incarnation of these large rides occurred in September of 2004, in direct response to a public statement made by mayor Gabor Demszky, who had refused to organize Car Free Day activities in the middle of the week during rush hour, which was (and still is) international practice, to avoid disrupting traffic and angering motorists (Sinya pers.comm.). This ride, which was the result of the combined grassroots efforts of CM continued to garner participants over the years, achieving a record 32,000 riders in April of 2006, followed by 50,000 and an estimated 80,000 in the following two years, making it undeniably and consistently, the largest CM in the world (CMB 2010). This degree of participation led to increased media attention and political influence for cycling, improvements in infrastructure, and perhaps most importantly, continuous growth in the population of urban cyclists, reportedly doubling annually since the September 2004 ride (CMB 2010).

4.1.2 Goals and Achievements

Though leadership of Budapest CM is widely credited to two main figures, it still remains a loosely organized, non-hierarchical movement, driven primarily by a small, but diverse coalition of individuals, including bicycle messengers, cycling advocates, environmentalists and academics, and secondarily by the grassroots efforts of many volunteers involved in promotion, mobilization and crowd management during rides (Hyatt pers. comm.; Sinya pers. comm.). In keeping with the inclusive, democratic ideology that CM worldwide seeks to establish, it has remained, since the beginning, a non-partisan, unregistered movement, existing as a community,

a movement, an action and an Internet site that has become a space for further discussion and relations within the cycling community (Carlsson 2002; CMB 2010).

While CM, as such, is not directly involved in negotiations with local policy makers and planners, and makes efforts to remain unaffiliated with party politics, it has, as a movement provided the impetus and validation needed by registered organizations that lobby for improvements in bicycling infrastructure (Hyatt pers. comm.; Sinya pers. comm.; CMB 2010).

> CM makes it possible for the cycling groups to get through the mayor's front door. It is the hard arm for the Hungarian Cyclists Club (Magyar Kerekparosklub – MK). They can make demands and if they are not met, we can ensure that thousands of people take to the streets on their bicycles (Sinya pers. comm.).

Like the 'radical flank effect' discussed by Furness (2007) and the increase in authenticity asserted by Blickstein and Hanson (2001), CM Budapest's public, inclusive celebration of the bicycle serves the function of exposing the wider population and decision makers of the possibility of cycling as transportation, helping advocacy groups achieve their goals. The CM Budapest website defines CM and its goals with the following:

> Critical Mass Budapest is a mass demonstration aimed at bringing the public's attention to the crisis caused by motor vehicles, e.g. traffic jams and environmental pollution. It promotes the bicycle as a healthy, fast, cheap and environmentally friendly alternative mode of transport. The organizers of this event would like to encourage the local population to use their bicycles for transportation whenever possible, and not just for recreation or sports (CMB 2010).

Among the many achievements attributed to the CM movement in Budapest are an increase in media and political attention for bicyclists, the diffusion of the movement to other Hungarian cities, an increase in bicycle infrastructure and the inclusion of cycling experts in the city planning process, and the allocation of government funding towards the implementation of

bicycle infrastructure throughout the country (CMB 2010). CM has also attracted the participation of high-profile figures, such as the president of Hungary, László Sólyom, foreign ambassadors, local politicians and celebrities, and has been instrumental in developing local programs to promote bicycling among the general population.

Budapest has in fact, experienced many visible changes in the last few years. New bicycle lanes have been established in former car parking spots, bicycle racks have been installed near metro stations and squares, streets have been converted to reflect a multiple use ideology, local businesses have widely started catering to cyclists and, of course, new bicyclists are appearing daily on city streets. Though significantly smaller than the planned rides, monthly CM rides known as *Minimal Mass* and the *Night Rides* still occur, perpetuated by an ever-changing group of veteran and new cyclists. Bicycling has taken on the form of a visible culture, expressed in fashion and clothing styles, shows and events exhibiting bicycle related art and products, and parties carrying bicycle themes, and in the sheer numbers of people using bicycles as transport (CCH 2010; Weston 2010).

4.2 Prague

4.2.1 History

The development of CM in Prague bears a different history, though the movement began at roughly the same time as it emerged in Budapest. In the nineties, activists were keen on throwing street festivals as a form of protest to contest urban space, and cyclists were incorporated, creating small bicycle masses within the broader context of a street party. This form of protest continued through the mid nineties, until phasing out in 1996, and it was not until

2001 that the first CM ride occurred, organized by members of NP and the WCN (Mourek pers. comm.) This ride involved about 25 participants, who collectively began promoting CM to a wider community; using the *xerocratic* method of distributing fliers and missives during rides, through independent media and on the Web (Mourek pers. comm.). Monthly CM rides continued for several years, progressively picking up steam and growing to a few hundred people from time to time (Mourek pers. comm.).

Unlike most cities practicing CM (Budapest included), Prague's mass rides are not referred to as CM, but rather *Cyklojízda*, the Czech term for 'bike ride', on behalf of the organizers' objective to personalize the event and make it more palatable for the Czech population (Cyklojízda 2010; Masare pers. comm.). This is reflective of the personal, close-knit and unique nature of Prague's rides and the community involved in promoting it.

Due to the lack of a large community with a vested interest in urban cycling, like the bicycle couriers in Budapest and San Francisco, the job of promoting and organizing CM rides rested on the efforts of a small network of environmentalists and transport mobility advocates, including people from the aforementioned NP and WCN, as well as Auto*Mat (A*M), which formed in 2003, as the collective vision of a group of people with progressive ideas for Prague's urban spaces (Mourek pers. comm.; A*M 2010). Rides continued to grow with the help of media and communication developed by creative members of A*M, though they lacked any institutional support and often led to clashes with the authorities and automobile drivers, and in some cases, the arrests of participants, for 'blocking traffic and disturbing the peace' (A*M 2010; Mourek pers. comm.).

The Cyklojízdas did not gather large numbers of participants as they did in Budapest, but then, the rides were not the sole form of activism utilized by A*M and their community. The organization held 'parking days' in which car parking spots would be furnished with tables and chairs and people would sit down to enjoy a meal together, they held demonstrations near roads and zebra crossings to highlight issues with traffic and automobility, and worked with artists, poets and other creative types, in developing intriguing images and media, and performance protests (A*M 2010; Mourek pers. comm.). The coalescence of these different forms of activism led organizers to realize that the Cyklojízda could be more than just a ride, but rather a festival, incorporating annually changing themes (Mourek pers. comm.). It is this idea that has led to increased participation and interest in A*M activities, and this idea that continues to inspire Prague's Cyklojízdas.

These rides, in close resemblance with the two major Budapest rides, are planned twice a year, in April and September, and have seen continued growth since 2006 (A*M 2010). The largest to date, occurred on World Car Free Day in September of 2009, during which A*M coordinated a large Cyklojízda followed by a street festival coined, "Experience a Different City," featuring street vendors, performance stages, outdoor cafes and educational booths, meant to provide participants with an alternate urban experience (A*M 2010; Mourek pers. comm.; Harding pers. comm.).

4.2.2 Goals and Achievements

Prague's CM, though different in planning and organization than more traditional CM events, still shares similar goals to those expressed by others. Defined on the Cyklojízda website (2010) as:

…graceful, picturesque rides of cyclists, kick scooter riders, inline skaters and other non-motorized transportation through means of the the city, which evoke waves of attention in the streets.

It is intended to provide an experience of free movement within the city, and an alternate space in which to meet and celebrate, as well as to engage novice or timid bicyclists in the process of riding a bicycle in city space (Cyklojízda 2010.) Additionally, A*M has released their "Five Points for Prague," a mission and petition developed to make specific demands from the city for improvements in cycling and pedestrian infrastructure. They are as follows: 1. To develop a long-term approach to promote walking and cycling, 2. Allow contra-flow passage of cyclists on certain city streets, 3. Make major intersections safer by giving cyclists priority over parked cars, 4. Optimize the green intervals at busy pedestrian crossings in the center to increase pedestrian safety, and 5. Include elements of cycling infrastructure in all reconstruction and new road construction in the city (A*M 2010). And, as is the case in Budapest, it is additionally expected to strengthen the case of cycling advocates in dealing with local policy makers and planners (Mourek pers. comm.). In this respect, it has been credited with a number of achievements, both in terms of participation in the big Cyklojízdas and support from the public, and in urban infrastructure changes in Prague.

These include a sharp increase in riders and participants, reaching 5000 attendees to the Car Free Day event and ride in September 2009, the acquisition of thousands of signatures supporting A*M's 'Five Points for Prague', the installation of bike lanes on a main thoroughfare in 2007, an agreement by which the city must include bike lanes on any new street, and an increase in the number of urban cyclists (A*M 2010). The rise in pressure that the rides and related events have created has also led to more government interest in cycling issues, including the creation of a committee on cycling in the city (Mourek pers. comm.). This year's April ride was also

testament to the rise in institutional interest in both CM and the promotion of the bicycle as transportation, as it was coordinated in conjunction with the Danish embassy, whose members (including the ambassador), along with organizers from A*M, led the ride from start to finish (Field Notes 22 April 2010).

A*M's social reach in Prague is also manifest in the strength of the community that has both conceived the organization and grown from its efforts. While Prague's streets are not painted with cyclists as they currently are in Budapest, there is a strong, creative force of people working together to promote cycling and alternative lifestyles in the city. Small monthly CM rides still occur, composed mainly of 'hardcore cyclists' but still greeting a few new participants each month (Harding pers. comm.). Individuals have even started their own CM initiatives, including one man frequently mentioned in interviews, whose efforts to mobilize people on transportation issues were recently awarded by the mayor (Mourek pers. comm.; Harding pers. comm.; Masare pers. comm.). Free monthly 'DIY' bicycle repair workshops are hosted by the concerted efforts of A*M, groups of activists and artists, and other community members, in a building occupied by an artists' collective, a weekly 'farm to table' produce delivery program is coordinated by a veteran cycling and transport advocate, through which Prague residents are personally connected with a local farmer, thus exposing them to the personal and physical origins of the food they consume, and numerous events are scheduled throughout the year highlighting ideas for improving city life, sharing community-building strategies, and providing cultural enrichment (Mourek. pers. comm; Field Notes 21/4/2010; A*M 2010).

Chapter 5. Results and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Findings show that both Prague and Budapest are indeed unique cases for the question of automobility and bicycle activism. As relatively young democracies, only recently exposed to the 'rewards' of modern capitalism, they've engaged in an interesting and eager relationship with automobility – both in terms of production and consumption (Pucher *et. al*. 2003**)**. Many perceive car ownership and municipal 'concessions' made for cars as a 'right,' rather than a privilege, and equate cycling as a form of transportation with 'crazy behavior,' recklessness, or lack of financial means (Mourek pers. comm.; Harding pers. comm.). This has made the efforts of transportation and bicycle advocates particularly challenging, as their work has not merely been a matter of convincing their governments to consider the bicycle as a factor in municipal transportation schemes, but has also been a question of encouraging a cultural perception shift

among people – getting them to envision and eventually adopt different possibilities.

The interviews conducted, data reviewed, and my own participant immersion in both cities, revealed stories, that while similar in some respects, bore entirely different narratives, written by varying histories, cultural challenges and timing. In light of these historical variations, and the markedly different experiences provided through my own participation in bicycle activism in these cities, the remainder of this analysis will take care to identify each city in its own right, rather than conflate their experiences.

5.2 Critical Mass – A Bicycle Revolution

5.2.1 Empowering Cyclists

Every pedal is a push toward freedom.

- Czech artist.

CM is an anomalous manifestation in these Central European cities. Participant numbers as high as 80 thousand in Budapest and 5 thousand in Prague are testament to this, and, if nothing else, to the assertion that a significant percentage of the population in each city enjoy riding bicycles, and desire the inclusion of bicycles in urban infrastructure enough to join the ranks of thousands of others in these mobile celebrations. One has to wonder what it is that consistently draws such imposing numbers to these rides, and manages to command sustained loyalty and attention from its members.

Part of this question may be answered by the illusion of safety and protection that new riders feel as part of the mass, suddenly finding themselves within the protective borders of so many

bicycles, where they are typically isolated and threatened by traffic. The individual experience of riding with traffic can be especially harrowing in these cities. As an urban cyclist in Budapest, I've had several run-ins with cars – some ending more pleasantly than others – and while experience has led to increased awareness and confidence, the nervousness of riding among cars remains an ever-present feeling. This is not an isolated feeling. In a recent, informal documentary film (Borz 2005) made after the 2005 Budapest CM on Car-Free Day, an interviewee offered this advice on navigating the city:

> *You have to bike around the city as if everybody was chasing you. In the last couple of months I've been hit by a car two times.*

CM creates a situation in which cyclists no longer feel threatened by vehicular traffic and can engage in the experience of riding a bike in the city without fearing for their safety, yielding a sense of power and collectivity to the act of cycling. Jane Harding, an activist working for A*M in Prague, revealed this aspect of CM while explaining her motives for participating in both the large, planned rides and the smaller, monthly rides in the city:

> *I feel safest when I'm cycling in a group. Cycling in this city, particularly on my own, is a hazard. So when I am in the CM, I feel especially empowered in a group situation like that (pers. comm.).*

This feeling of empowerment was manifest in nearly every participant interview conducted in either city. Like the experiences of early feminists and 20th century Socialists, who were spatially liberated and socially empowered by the bicycle, CM participants find a collective strength both in riding the bicycle and in overtaking city streets. A journalist in Budapest shared this perspective, "Personally, I loved it. For the first time in my biking history in Budapest (with two, more or less serious, car and businflicted accidents behind me), I could cycle without

having to constantly watch out for vehicles refusing to notice me by the curb or in the righthand lane priority intersections, and passengers forgetting to look behind before opening their doors" (Balázs 2005).

Many participants interviewed expressed feelings of empowerment and solidarity gained while riding in the mass – a feeling that was supplemented by the pre-existing independence and freedom that bicycles already provided them – because of the affirming experience of being surrounded by thousands of people sharing a similar interest; confirming that people not only feel unsafe riding in the city under normal circumstances, but that they also appreciate CM for the strength it provides them.

> *It feels great to be a part of this collective, and especially taking over the streets, often space that is usually unavailable for bikers (Szczygielska pers. comm.).*

Certainly the experience of sharing something you love with a collectivity of others, in space usually deemed unsuitable territory, is nothing short of liberating. As one interviewee shared, "It feels like being a part of something larger than yourself. It creates an atmosphere of connection, where you feel like you somehow share something in common with all these strangers--even if fleeting and temporary…" (Hwa pers. comm.).

This excerpt from my field notes taken during the Budapest CM in April further reflects this:

> Nothing can prepare you for the experience of riding a bicycle among tens of thousands of other cyclists in an urban setting. It is virtually impossible to understand until you are immersed in it, surrounded by people on bikes and all other forms of non-motorized, wheeled transport, literally commanding vast amounts of space with their excited, empowered revelry. The city itself seems transformed. Riders on bicycles appear from every direction, heading towards the starting point at Roosevelt Square and the Chain Bridge. These are teenagers, young professionals, families, and the elderly – people on rollerblades, roller scooters, and skateboards. An immitigable sea of people creating an environment of inclusion, celebration and mobility.

The notion of inclusion – that all people, including non-cyclists, are welcome – is manifest in both Budapest and Prague. As a former member of the WCN in Prague, wrote, "The Critical Mass is such an attractive flow of festive energy that it cannot help but draw people out of their cars. There should be briefcases in bike baskets and workers with their hard hats still on their heads pedaling a new kind of mobile expression" (Logan 2006). With such an inclusive environment come feelings of shock and validation, a combined emotion composed of dissent, celebration and collectivity. This is evident in the field notes below:

> The Prague ride began in the city center at a historical square and wove its way out onto the highway and to an outer district. The sense of celebration and freedom among the riders was palpable - a visible glint of defiance and disbelief in their eyes, as they rode in unison in paved space from which they are ordinarily excluded. Smiles and sounding bells were the lingua franca, and save for the occasional confrontation with a confused or irate car driver, it was a tensionless space, temporarily reclaimed. This reclamation was not exclusive to cyclists. Skateboarders, rollerbladers, a few joggers, people bound to wheelchairs and even a few dogs, joined the ranks of merrymakers, blithely navigating the streets, highways, and tram tracks comprising their trajectory.

These elements – the inclusive nature of the movement, the defiance, both individual and collective, and the empowered solidarity that riders express while participating – are indicative of a much greater significance surrounding CM. They suggest that CM is by its very nature, a revolution. Participants and organizers alike, whose rhetoric, while at times ideological, reflect the desire to radically deconstruct and reevaluate the role of the bicycle in the city, and the nature of the urban environment itself, support this assertion.

5.2.2 Imag(e)ning the Revolution

> *This is also a communicating, circulating mass and one that symbolically finds its way into the passenger seats of car drivers and sends the message: Don't be auto*mated! Don't get stuck in your fuzzy metallic box for too long!*
>
> - Stephen Logan (2006)

CM is revolutionary in its practice and use of symbolic gestures and imagery. This is true for both Prague and Budapest. For instance, the very image that defines Budapest's CM is highly confrontational. A simple monochromatic image of a person holding a bicycle over his head, wielding it weapon-like, in a symbol of triumph – it sends a clear message that within the mobile boundaries of CM, the bicycle prevails. It is used not only in posters and stickers, but also in action, as each major ride culminates with the collective lifting of the bicycles by the entire mass. While this obvious image may seem simplistic, or to some, excessive – indeed, as Michael Coleville Andersen, a widely recognized bicycle 'ambassador' from Copenhagen, offered, "in Copenhagen, lifting your bicycle over your head in a political gesture, would be like lifting a vacuum cleaner." (pers. comm.) - it represents an aspect of CM Budapest that has perhaps had the strongest influence on participants – new and tenured. But whether perceived as a political, defiant gesture, or dismissed as unnecessary, it is undeniable that the image of thousands, or even hundreds of people hoisting their bicycles in the air is a powerful, and certainly unusual vision.

> *I've never seen or experienced anything like it. Standing in a sea of people lifting their bikes made me think of the bicycle in an entirely different way. Last year was my first CM. I remember browsing through photos a few days later and thinking that we looked like warriors (Kiss pers. comm.).*

Posters observed during personal participation in previous CM rides in Budapest exhibit similar portrayals of the bicycle as an enabling tool. For instance, in one image, a cyclists soars in the air atop a mountain bike, kicking cars off of the boulevard. Similarly, while the bike never seemed to catch on in Prague's CM (in the film *Auto*Mat (2009)*, a documentary about the work

of the organization and the problems of automobility in Prague, a sole cyclists is depicted lifting his bicycle during an A*M event) much of the images incorporated into A*M's promotional media, including t-shirts, posters and stickers, portray the bicycle as a triumphant alternative. For example, one image displays a large robotic machine resembling a street cleaner, 'consuming' parked cars at one end, and 'ejecting' bicycles from the other. To further radicalize the image, a clear good –vs- bad distinction is created by depicting the 'car' side as bleak and desolate, and the 'bicycle' side as green, lively and safe. Like the practice of *detournement*, advocated by the SI, the organizers of CM in both Prague and Budapest, take well-known images and gestures – namely that of the weapon (as is the case in Budapest) and that of the car as a majestic, liberating vehicle (as is the case in Prague) and turn them into tools for inspiring new ideas in people.

5.2.3 Performing the Revolution

I do believe CM is part of a visible bicycle culture and does help to promote further cycling within the city. CM can be an example of the world as it could be. We move hundreds of people down the street in minutes, with a capacity that's dozens and dozens of times greater than that of transit and certainly that of some personal vehicles, and I think that's inspiring to a lot of people. Also I think it's a strong example of people enjoying the streets, of using the streets the way they feel they have the right to use them and I think that's empowering for everybody.

- CM Participant (Seattle)

Aside from the gestular and symbolic imagery employed by CM in revolutionizing the bicycle and perceptions about the use of space, lies the massive importance of the ride itself. This is the act that challenges, in every capacity, the current use of public space in these cities, and the dominant socioeconomic ideology that supports it. In creating *situations*, as was the ultimate goal of the SI, CM participants and organizers help to revolutionize the *everyday*, by replacing

the ordinary function of their city spaces with a different, visionary example of mobility. As one participant in the Budapest CM affirmed, "Critical Mass for me is a form of affirmative manifestation of a certain kind of politics and lifestyle, and a form of showing that it is possible to imagine an urban environment with a different type of communication, thus transforming that environment" (Marianna Szczygielska: pers. comm.).

The demonstrative power of CM is unique in that, unlike many other forms of protest, which take up a space in order to express their grievances and rally behind their claims, CM rides overtake a space, while simultaneously providing an alternative function for it (Furness 2007). This is crucial to CM as it not only exposes participants to the experience of riding as traffic, but it also provides the general public with the idea that bicycles can be a form of transportation, and that streets should not necessarily be the sole domain of automobiles. While it does take the form of a moving celebration and does in many ways resemble nothing more than a parade, it offers itself as a practical solution to a marginalizing urban situation and does not beg for, but rather demands recognition as such.

> *It would be a dead end street to create situations detached from the reality of life. … This day was an amazing experience for me. We were very brave to risk our good reputation and the big numbers by using Critical Mass as a tool instead of putting it behind an exhibition case. [Politicians] had better start getting ready now – the bicycle revolution will happen whether they want it or not (Kuku 2009, quoted in Udvarhelyi 2010)*

The classic CM phrase, "We are not blocking traffic! We are traffic!" evokes this desire to organize the ride within the 'reality of life' as it communicates the idea that bicycles and their riders (as well as anyone else involved in the ride) deserve a place on public streets (Carlsson 2002). This is an important function of the so-called *traffic* rides held during Car-Free Day in Budapest, which have no predetermined route and no official

police escort, as they are intended to show Budapest that bicycles are, indeed, traffic and not a recreational tool that should be relegated to sidewalks and shoddy infrastructure (Sinya pers. comm.).

Apart from exhibiting that bicycling can be a form of transportation. This demonstration is also instrumental in showing cyclists that it is acceptable to ride a bicycle in the city and that it can be both enjoyable and safe. This April's CM in Budapest carried a very simple message: *Bike on Monday* (CMB 2010). The simplicity of such a statement is not without impact. Nor is it without careful consideration for human nature. Organizers operate under the experienced assumption that with a little push, people will adopt the bicycle and use it more regularly – all that is necessary is the validation gained through a CM experience (Sinya pers. comm..).

> *I care about one thing: showing people that it's possible to use a bike and to help them to take the first step. After the first step, it's up to them. If not, ok, use your car, it doesn't matter. But 50% will still take to the bike, because it's good. It's one sentence: More bikers. More bikes on the streets. Try it on Monday.*

This idea, that people will recognize the 'good' in cycling through CM, resonates in the opinions of many. Jane Harding, a CM organizer in Prague, offered, "I think people may feel like yes, this is great, because I don't think people on their own will take the initiative to cycle in the city. But if at first they ride in a group, then maybe in a pair, eventually they may feel ok riding on their own" (pers. comm.) Many people also associate the demonstrative aspect of the rides with an increase in visibility for cyclists and/or a growth in so-called bicycle culture. "For me, CM is a chance to show the rest of the city the importance of bike culture. At least in Budapest, as far as I can see, it has developed a lot in the past few years," said a veteran participant in Budapest (Gonzalez pers. comm.).

Just as it is important to recognize the significance of CM in growing bicycle culture and increasing the acceptability of cycling as a form of transport, because as a transport mobility advocate in Prague noted, “I think that's the most important thing. For young people to realize that it's cool to cycle.” (Mourek pers. comm.), it is necessary to understand why this demonstrative revolution developed in Central Europe, and what elements of culture and the city it aims to contest.

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5.3 Politicizing the Bicycle: Contested Spaces, Contested Statements

5.3.1 Budapest – Of Drivers and Cyclists

Every movement has its impetus, its reason for existing and perpetuating. CM as a global movement is united and propelled by a shared love for bicycling and the belief that bicycles can be a form of transportation, but as previously mentioned, it is unique in that it conforms to local grievances and develops in accordance with local goals. In Budapest, CM was originally the territory of a distinguished few, who either through employment and subsequent lifestyle, or environmental choices, had, much like the practitioners of the *derive* during the SI’s time, developed a keen understanding of the relationships between the city and those traversing it, by daily riding their bicycles through spaces usually avoided by those outside of automobiles. While some of the rides they engaged in and certainly their own experiences negotiating singularly dominated public space may have been politically motivated, it could be argued that the bicycle in itself was not fully politicized until the events leading up to the September 2004 ride. One of the founders of CM offered this anecdote in describing the political turning point:

> *The mayor said, "Budapest will never be Amsterdam. We cannot have Car Free Day on a weekday because it will cause too many problems for cars." Can you*

> *imagine this sentence? So we banded together and used the 'xerocracia' method of passing out fliers,etc… We went out on the city's official Car Free Day to Andrassy Street, with about 3000 fliers and walked up and down the street in a line handing them out to everyone we passed. The day of the ride, there were 4000 people. We couldn't believe it.*

Certainly for a community whose daily work involved negotiating traffic to get from point A to point B, as quickly and safely as possible on bicycles, a statement like this must have caused significant outrage and feelings of further marginalization. The government's refusal to close the streets in accordance with Car Free Day, because of the hindrance it would create for cars, communicated specifically that in the context of transportation and circulation, automobiles were the number one priority. And just as the mayor's decision sent a specific message, the unprecedented turnout of thousands of people on bicycles at the first major CM ride, informed both Budapest and the government that the cycling community was a resolute force, that once on bicycles, made quite a spectacle.

Of course, the motivation for the first big CM in Budapest – and its continued organization – was not solely based on defying the mayor's now infamous statement, but also driven by the legitimate concerns of many who believe that the use of their city streets for the accommodation of automobiles is irrational, unsafe and in some cases, somewhat inhuman.

> *When you use the car, rain doesn't matter, wind doesn't matter, You are inside a big metal box with windows. For humans, this is bad. It isn't normal. I mean we live in a modern world, the conscience is modern, but our genes and our blood are not as modern as our brains. It's not comfortable for the body. Ok it looks comfortable, but it's not right (Sinya pers. comm.).*

While it is recognized that cars serve a purpose within society, the empowerment they give drivers and the marginalization and fear they inspire in non-drivers are a major reason why

people find it important to participate in CM and advocate for the diminishing of automobility in Budapest. One participant, a self-identified car driver and urban cyclist, said, “I drive a car. When I'm biking though, I hate cars. Some drivers are courteous, but too many are aggressive and inconsiderate. Unfortunately there have been many close encounters with cars, even though I consider myself an extremely safe biker,” (Ferrell pers. comm.). Others point to the aggression and drivers exhibit, both in the everyday, and as is the case with this example, during CM, “The drivers are so aggressive too. I’ve seen drivers fist fighting with cyclists during CM. So there's a lot of aggression. Pedestrians and cyclists are afraid of this. Societies are just sick and there has to be more progress. But there is not much progress with car drivers,” (Mourek pers. comm.)

Feelings of disenfranchisement from the city at the will of drivers and automobility are also expressed, as was the case with this participant in Budapest, “I normally ride in downtown, and well, it's terrible when it comes to traffic. Sometimes I feel that this city is not for people; it's too crowded. Drivers absolutely do not care about cyclists,” (Borz 2005). Therefore, riders find pleasure in the spatial experience of CM in Budapest, as the streets that are normally marginalizing and full of traffic, particularly the major roads, are rendered safe and unpolluted. As one participant notes, “I've ridden along Andrassy Street today and it looks beautiful. It was great. All day without car fumes. You can't even see parked cars,” (Borz 2005). Further, some people perceive cars and the ‘privileging of car-based transportation,’ as a “socially normative phenomenon that merits a new socialization in the direction of being less car-dependent” (Hwa pers. comm.).

Some drivers in Budapest have recently become interestingly vociferous in response to CM and its associated achievements, most notably a group of ‘concerned’ urban car owners who object to

the installation of new bicycle infrastructure on one of the city's largest boulevards (Sinya pers. comm.) This group was featured in a short video posted on the *Index.hu* media Internet site, in which they associated bicyclists and CM with the false conspiracies of the diplomatic elite who have allegedly constructed the Climate Change discourse in an attempt to generate profit, and further blame CM itself for creating large amounts of pollution by causing major traffic jams in the city (Index 2009). They go as far as to suggest that cyclists should have to pay weight taxes among other fees, to pay for such infrastructure, and offer a final solution of "hanging the cyclists!" (Index 2009). One of the organizers of CM offered this response in a blog posting on the CM Budapest website:

This is not an issue of drivers, cyclists or pedestrians….We are all taxpayers. These weight taxes are about one thousand HUF a month. The majority of our taxes do not go to cover transport and road maintenance, but rather to pay for the medical treatment, loss of life and noise that come at the expense of suburbanization and smog (CMB 2009).

Of course antagonism between cyclists and car drivers is not fully characteristic of the situation in Budapest, and is in fact, cautioned against by organizers and participants alike (Sinya pers. comm.) In fact, sometimes the communication exhibits deep respect for drivers, who cyclists recognize are not the problem, but rather a product of the problem. "Well, I was surprised at what I saw today when I rode in the city. When I turned into Andrassy Street I almost cried from happiness. Seriously! I could see Heroes' square from Bajcsy Street as if it was the Champs Elysee. It was great! I was in the street during the day. Big respect to drivers because of what I saw today. They really started to show solidarity with bikers on this day," (Borz 2005).

5.3.2 Prague – Contesting Auto*Mation

While in Budapest, the argument against automobility, at least according to the conversations I had with participants, seems much more based on the division between drivers and cyclists, the situation in Prague is largely framed on the conditions of automobility upon the city, its spaces and its people.

Empty automobile obsessions leave a bad taste in the city's mouth. We are at the critical point and we need to radically break from the parking-lot fantasies of the few. The city cannot take it anymore. In the bicycle we find an escape from the hold that automobilism has on the city (Logan 2006).

There is no question that automobility has conquered Prague in nearly every manner possible. It is as evident in the near void of a visible bicycle culture as it is in the sheer number of cars and the span of automobile infrastructure laid out throughout its urban spaces. Cities – at least, large ones like Prague – are the domain of capital and, as such, the domain of cars. In the film *Auto*Mat* (Marecek 2009), an improvisational performance artist is depicted standing inside a Skoda (Largest car manufacturer in the Czech Republic) showroom, paying homage to the *Oktavia*, one of the company's highest selling models:

> *Oh, great one! Oh frightful and powerful. Oh Oktavia! Pride of meadows and forests, treasure of the Czech land. Goddess of honey, roads and milk of journeys. Oh Oktavia! Accept our sacrifices: pedestrian deaths, acid rain, asphalt landscapes. Oh Oktavia!*

With such a large national investment in the production of cars it follows that transportation planning would be primarily focused on their circulation, and that the population would receive deep, multangular encouragement to adopt automobility, to the point of considering its existence in the city as a citizen right.

> *In Prague the number of cars is still growing. We have now about 654 cars per 1000 inhabitants. Everybody wants to drive a car. You know the young people; they think it is their right. They are upset that they have to pay for parking – they*

> *think it should be free. And nobody explains to them that this is not true! This is public space. It costs money (Mourek pers. comm.).*

But as my interviewee exclaimed above, this tendency of automobility and those involved in it, to self-righteously claim public space, comes at the expense of non-drivers – over 30% in Prague – and renders many parts of the city, most notably, squares, sidewalks and streets, unsafe or inaccessible for any other form of transit (A*M 2010).

> *Wecenclas Square used to be a beautiful public space, with no dominant function other than living. Now it's a parade of cars. Cars parking, cars moving, cars honking. Where is the life in that?*[1]

Indeed, this prized historic square, a boulevard of sorts, leading up to the National Museum, is no longer the lively, pedestrianized space it once was. While it is in fact, still lively, due to throngs of tourists, restaurants and corporate retail stores, replete with neon signs and promises of good fortune, the dominance of vehicles is clear. Pedestrians must at times wait for unforgivingly long periods of time to cross the street at one of few zebra crossings available. Furthermore, the only remaining local authenticity supplementing the sense of place is the architecture of the buildings, as both the inner and outer environment have taken on the replicated appearance of a glorified shopping center. This is not to suggest that there is anything intrinsically damaging about the development of commercial interests in Prague, but simply to note that in this case, the presence of automobility in public space, seems to coincide with a wider adoption of global capitalist ventures, further strengthening the case that the struggle to reclaim streets and public space is not solely against automobility, but perhaps also against the socioeconomic system that encourages it.

[1] CM Participant in Prague. 22 April 2010.

The case for automobility does not end in the symbolic ownership of space, nor in its heavy presence in the Czech economy. Cars are, according to multiple sources, nearly unequivocally supported by the media in most public debates over the use of space, and car proponents have recently taken to protesting new measures intended to control car traffic, in some cases, going so far as to co-opt the very name of the single most anti-automobility movement in the world (Mourek pers. comm.).

> *There is also a Car Mass. It's a ride of about 200 cars. Last year they started and now the media writes about them. To me it's a joke, but people seem to take it seriously. It all happened because the city is making new rules about speed in town. There were about 3000 inhabitants along the highway that sued the city for noise pollution and they won, so the city had to do something and they lowered the speed limit to 50 kilometers per hour. Now these drivers are complaining that this is too slow…*

But while the numbers depicting car ownership and the visible dominance of automobile infrastructure in the city may indicate that the majority of Prague's population are entirely accepting of the conditions of the city, there are growing numbers of people who are dissatisfied with the city's continuing trend of constructing new roads and highways, and making further concessions for cars in the city center. Daniel Mourek, who works for the Czech foundation, NP or *Environmental Partnership*, and a long-standing alternative transportation and place-making advocate, shared this information about the correspondence he receives from city residents:

> *It's a disaster. Everyday I receive emails from people complaining about the new road construction. But the majority, you know if it's not a NIMBY situation, then it's ok. You have to reach another critical mass of people.*

CM is instrumental in contesting these issues and spaces, not only in the work that organizers do outside of CM, but also in the act of riding itself, as they symbolically demonstrate that these spaces can and should serve more than one function. Judging from what I witnessed at the April

CM ride in Prague, it is apparent that these desires for *something different* are not the idealistic ramblings of some lunatic fringe, but rather the legitimate demands of a progressive diversity of participants. One such street is the *Magistrala*, a major thoroughfare that runs directly through the city. In my own experience participating in Prague's ride, I was stunned to find that the mass had seemingly left the city and occupied a highway – something I'd never done during a CM ride. I later inquired about this and my interviewee responded:

> *We never left the center. This is precisely the issue. That highway cuts right through the center of the city and sends a clear message about what's most valued here. We ride on this particular highway because it's a relic from Communist times. The Russians built it in order to easily get their tanks into to the city, and the only purpose it serves now is to move thousands of cars in and out of the center daily. There are people who have bigger ideas for this space. They'd like to turn it into a boulevard. Something more inviting and accessible.*[2]

It is the role of CM then, to highlight these urban space issues in Prague, and demonstrate that an alternative is possible, though seemingly unreachable to those still unconvinced of the solubility of such deeply rooted automobile culture. As the founder of A*M exclaimed in the documentary of the same name (Marecek 2009): "These events will take place until Prague is for people, not cars. Wheels up!"

5.3.3 Local Politics

That CM has politicized the bicycle in terms of transportation is not a contested assertion among experts in Prague and Budapest. Both the CM Budapest and the A*M websites list greater attention to cycling as transport, allocation of funds within municipal budgets for cycling infrastructure, the creation of cycling committees and a bicycle Ombudsman, and increases in

[2] Interview with Participant and Volunteer at Prague CM. 22 April 2010.

bicycle infrastructure as some of their achievements (CMB 2010; A*M 2010). Bicycling as transportation has increased annually since 2004 in Budapest, and though there is but a small contingent of urban cyclists in Prague, their numbers have also grown in the last few years (CMB 2010; A*M 2010). Greg Spencer (pers. comm.), a local commuter cyclist, bicycle advocate and journalist for the Regional Environmental Center in Szentendre, commented on the gains in cycling infrastructure and culture in the city:

I can't deny that CM has had a visible impact on bicycle culture here in Budapest. It has exposed many new riders to the possibility of biking as transportation. And it has certainly had an effect on infrastructure. You could say that these new bike lanes, racks, and the pedestrian zones springing up in the V District, have happened thanks to CM.

CM has accomplished this by using the bicycle as a political tool, implementing symbolic gestures and space occupation to call attention to the demands of the cycling community. As the 'hard arm' for registered cycling organizations, CM can perform the functions that would potentially jeopardize these organizations (Sinya pers. comm.). For instance in the summer of 2009, negotiations concerning the construction of new bicycle paths on Margaret Bridge, left out previously agreed upon terms promising the installation of two paths, leaving the community with hopes of only one (Sinya pers. comm..). CM was then called upon to organize an impromptu ride in which cyclists would demonstrate the necessity for two lanes by riding over the bridge as normal traffic. Soon after, the plans were renegotiated to include two lanes (CMB 2010). Earlier, in 2006, prior to the Hungarian Parliamentary elections, a ride called the "Tour de Voks" or "Tour de Votes" was organized, during which riders visited the different party headquarters and performed bike lifts before hand delivering a collective petition for improvements to bicycling infrastructure (CMB 2010).

Participants also feel that they are actively participating in a politicized event, citing increased visibility as the movement's primary function. One participant interviewed provided the following perspective, "I think this is *the* event regarding bike culture in the country, which is why it is so important. I also believe that with its increasing visibility and popularity, it has led to the improvement of biking infrastructure in the country in the past few years and adding to the double bike paths-construction on the Margaret Bridge," (Gonzalez pers. comm.).

Interviewees in Prague confirm this as well, asserting that CM increases attention for cyclists and increased institutional support. "Without CM there would be no pressure on the town. You have to have both – the mass and the people behind it. Like when we were organizing the first one, the police were giving us a really hard time, now they are like oh, yeah, where do we go... they provide patrols for the routes. So this is now working." (Mourek pers. comm.). Now, bicycling as transportation has a meaningful presence within local planning and government circles, and new, best practices models are being considered for the city.

> *Here it took so long to make a shared lane for buses, bikes and taxis. But not many people know about it. Because people have this perception that cycling is dangerous. You know this integration, before that it was all about segregation, building trails, but Auto*Mat and this new committee, we've managed to change the course on that. Now we're talking about integration… (Mourek pers. comm.).*

Another interesting quality of CM in these cities is the manner in which it fits – or doesn't fit – into the local political climate. In Budapest, CM has remained adamantly apolitical as part of its all-inclusive ideology, and a fear of marginalizing the movement by affiliating itself with any political parties in a country with markedly divisive party politics (Hyatt pers. comm.; Sinya pers. comm.) This is undoubtedly one of the main factors contributing to its unprecedented growth as a movement. CM provides an environment in which politics are eliminated, and the

only article in question is the bicycle. “The people love it. Because now, in Budapest, it's very hard to find a place where you can be happy without any problem. There is an economic crisis…always the politics, are you right or left? It's very hard to be peaceful without problems. But during CM everybody can forget his or her problems.” (Sinya pers. comm.). Indeed, as one participant affirmed, “CM is the only demonstration in Budapest that occurs without violence or some sort of conflict. That’s why I participate every year. It gives me and everyone else the opportunity to forget that we don’t agree about most things.” [3]

In Prague, the presence of political affiliation is a bit more visible, which perhaps in some sense, explains why the movement has not grown in the way that it has in Budapest. While participating in Prague’s CM, I spoke with a participant who was a member of the New Green Party, and an official in the Ministry of the Environment. His bicycle was painted green and adorned with a placard that he later explained said, “ One percent of the transport budget to cycling.”[4] While this sort of political campaigning seems incongruous with the apolitical (at least nonpartisan) inclusive environment that CM is purported to provide, the organizers of the movement do not consider it so. As a member of A*M said in a later interview, “These people have every right to be there. I get really irritated when participants complain about their presence at the rides. These few politicians have been here from the beginning. They helped start CM and they have done a lot to raise awareness about cycling and public transportation in Prague.” (Masare pers. comm.). Though he wished to remain anonymous, he had this to offer about CM, “I have been riding a bicycle my whole life. I ride to work at the ministry every day and I'm working hard to get more infrastructure and respect for cyclists. These rides, the big and

[3] Interview. Participant in CM Budapest and local theater director. 29 April 2010.
[4] Interview. Participant in Prague CM. Member of Environmental Ministry. 22 April 2010.

small, they're important because they send the message that bicycles are a real form of transport, not just something for sport or for the country."

Indeed, it was clear from my conversation with the politician that both CM and cycling were a personal matter, and not just the strategic platitudinous keywords of career politicians that organizers in Budapest want to distance themselves from. One organizer said, "The politicians always want to meet with us, and our message is just that it's better if we don't meet. The thing is that we care about making Budapest a better place, and they care about advancing their careers. I originally believed that the best way to make Budapest a better place for cyclists, was to use CM to get past the door of the mayor's office and engage in a dialogue about bicycling - for three or four years. But I soon realized that this is absolutely not the way. They really don't care about what we have to say. They don't even care about what Budapesters have to say." (Sinya pers. comm.).

I don't care about politics, or the government. I'm concerned with one thing: getting more bikes on the streets. This will be good. If we are more, things will change. That corner in China that gave CM its name. That is Budapest. If a lot of bikers can travel safely and do it together, things will change. The city will be forced to accommodate us.

Chapter 6 Recommendations and Conclusions.

6.1 Summary

This thesis has revealed that CM, as a social movement, has the capacity to not only critique the use of urban space, but also provide viable alternatives to its use, by performing a transportation revolution in an oft non-confrontational, celebratory manner. There are serious implications to the actions of CM both globally, and in Central Europe, as they force us to reconsider the spatial organization of our public spaces, namely streets, and the dominant ideologies that govern that space. By politicizing the bicycle, a widely used technology with a history of sociopolitical association, CM engages a diversity of participants, making the movement and its ideologies widely accessible and adoptable. Because CM is largely shaped by its participants and the spaces it temporarily inhabits, it is a highly transferable movement, easily molded to fit the needs and specificities of individual localities and serves the greater purpose of exposing critical issues

endemic to these localities, and as is the case in Budapest and Prague, has the power to influence the political institutions that govern these issues.

6.2 *Recommendations*

6.2.1 Understanding Urban Space: A note for policy makers and designers

A better understanding of the role of urban space in revealing the dominant ideologies of culture is crucial to understanding human relations and behavior. Space is integral to the construction of norms, to creating a sense of place and providing people with geographic identity. The work of the SI, Henri Lefebvre, Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford, and others, critically evaluate the modern use of space, and especially, the role of automobility in rendering that space inaccessible to a large percentage of urban populations, marginalizing people and endangering the health of cities. From the perspective of urban planning and design, architecture and transportation planning, it is crucial to consider the interacting roles of space, technology and a city's inhabitants, so as to avoid situations in which the public space becomes subject to a single ideological hegemony. Perhaps in considering the Situationist concepts of *unitary urbanism, derive,* and *detournement*, today's decision makers can break away from the narrow scope of automobile-oriented development and consider more inclusive design, replete with images and spaces that spark the human imagination rather than suppress it. By incorporating multiple functions into the spatial organization of cities, and adopting a more human scale, planners can start to unravel the stronghold that automobility has on our cities.

6.2.2 Transportation

If anything is clear from this research it is that a large percentage of the cities studied desire a change in their transportation schemes, or at the very least, the inclusion of bicycles as a form of

transportation. Bicycles offer a practical, environmentally benign, socially democratizing, healthy form of transport, at low energy and financial costs. They connect people to their urban surroundings, exposing people to spaces in ways impossible to experience in a car. In Central Europe, where automobility has been embraced and accommodated, bicycles provide and inspire a viable alternative for the use of space, often incorporating a diversity of transit modes and functions. Remembering the bicycle in transportation planning and development, then, is a major recommendation.

6.2.3 Advocacy

Social movements have a lot to learn from CM, particularly those in Prague and Budapest. While this thesis was not concerned with other social movements in the region, interviews revealed that in the context of protest and demonstration, CM is the only movement, particularly in Budapest that provides a virtually problem free experience, devoid of party politics and ideological rhetoric. Certainly for the activist groups involved in the organization of CM in both cities, the real breakthroughs in their work arrived after the emergence and growth of CM. Perhaps by adopting the celebratory, but demonstrative and practical tactics of these large rides, other social movements can advance their causes more successfully, reaching a wider audience and empowering people through the phenomenon of a shared experience.

6.2.4 Further Research

As was discussed in the literature review, a lack of theoretical research concerning CM as a social movement exists. Furthermore, studies of CM, the politicization of the bicycle, and/or the contemporary contestation of urban space by social movements in the cities evaluated are practically nonexistent. Central Europe is at a critical turning point in terms of urban

development and economic growth. Changes in power structures, the availability of material goods, and the adoption of capitalist values have left their effects on urban spaces, the environment, and population. By delving further into the question of space and the ways in which it is contested, we can develop a better understanding of the current situation in Central Europe and how it may be mitigated.

6.2.5 MESPOM

This particular recommendation has both personal and practical bearings. As a program focusing on Environmental Science, Policy and Management, there is a lack of coursework concerning issues of urban planning, environmental sociology, and environmental social movements, to name a few faculties. It is the opinion of the author, and certainly of many of the authors cited in this thesis, that the social and spatial aspects of urban life are crucial not only to understanding society's impact on the environment, but also to creating solutions to these impacts. It is indisputable that the work of sociologists, urban planners and environmental advocates influences the decisions that shape our environment – both urban and non-urban. Perhaps in integrating more social science coursework into the MESPOM program, students will be better prepared to critically assess the truly holistic nature of environmental studies.

6.3 Conclusions

The relationship between the bicycle and automobility is an interesting phenomenon to analyze, particularly in the context of Central Europe, where automobility has had a later emergence than its older capitalist counterparts. Automobility is a force in that it is not solely concerned with the automobile, but instead the system of social, spatial and economic concessions and conditions linked to the technology. Urban planning has been long concerned with automobility and the

circulation of traffic (ie, cars), rendering all other forms of transit marginalized, particularly bicycles. This is no less true for Prague and Budapest, which experienced the colonization of automobility in their urban environments, creating a rampant fascination with car ownership and city flight. Combined with the association of bicycles with the proletariat and insane behavior, riding a bicycle as transportation was long considered irrational, or simply unthinkable by a large population.

But like the practitioners of the *derive* in the SI, the few who either by necessity, employment, or the sheer enjoyment of exploring urban spaces at a different pace and different scale, chose to ride bicycles in the city, adopted the tactics of CM and tailored them to fit their own cities, to raise questions about the reign of automobility in their cities and streets, and the place of the bicycle in the transportation discourse. By creating alternate situations in the form of mobile celebrations on city streets normally reserved for the use of cars and car drivers, CM advocates have helped expose the population to the joys of cycling, empowering individuals to ride their bicycles in the city, as well as increase visibility for issues surrounding transportation and land use. In the latter sense, they have had a significant influence on local planning processes and have worked toward the successful implementation of bicycle infrastructure in their cities.

With the bicycle as its tool, CM has created nothing short of a revolution in Central Europe – one that is sure to continue affecting local culture, transportation policy and the use of public space.

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Personal Communication

Ferrell, Emily. Critical Mass participant. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 24 April 2010.

Gonzalez, Szandra: Critical Mass participant. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 24 April 2010.

Harding, Jane: Former volunteer for CarBusters magazine and the World Car Free network. Advocate with Auto*Mat and Critical Mass organizer. Semi-formal interview. Prague, 14 April 2010

Hwa, Yixing: Critical Mass participant. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 24 April 2010.

Hyatt, Justin: Environmental advocate with the Hungarian Young Greens (Zold Fiatalok) and longterm participant and volunteer with Critical Mass. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 24, February 2010.

Kiss, Andrea: Critical Mass participant. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 24 April 2010.

Masare, Vitek: Critical Mass participant and organizer. Volunteer for Auto*Mat in Prague. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 25 April 2010.

Mourek, Daniel: Transportation and mobility advocate with the Environmental Partnership in Prague. One of the original founders of CM and continued organizer. Semi-formal interview. Prague, 13 April 2010.

Sinya: One of two founders of Critical Mass and owner of Hajtas Pajtas, the local bicycle courier company central to the organization of CM and all bicycle messenger related activities and events. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 7 May 2010.

Spencer, Greg: Journalist with the Regional Environmental Center and long-term urban cyclist, advocate and commentator. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 6 May 2010.

Szczygielska, Marianna. Critical Mass participant. Semi-formal interview. Budapest, 24 April 2010