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Bicycle politics in New York City: Rights to the City on Bedford Avenue and Prospect Park West

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**Bicycle politics in New York City: Rights to the City on
Bedford Avenue and Prospect Park West**

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Geography
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Senior Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how right to the city conflicts regarding the (de)construction of bicycle lanes in Brooklyn, New York affect the development of a more environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive city. Through an examination of two particular cases – those of Bedford Avenue in 2008 and Prospect Park West in 2010 – I show how conflicts over the physical space of bicycle lanes always embody larger, competing notions of community, civility, and (dis)order. Moreover, the construction, publicization, and mediation of these conflicting rights to the city additionally provide important insights regarding the direction of sustainability in New York City today, as well as the functioning of the state under Mayor Bloomberg’s administration. In light of these findings, and embedded within the context of anthropogenic climate change and neoliberal economic pressure, I argue that our efforts to create more sustainable and inclusive cities must begin with a more sensitive understanding of the material and symbolic effects that these different rights to the city produce. I also introduce a theoretical distinction between what I term *rights to place* and *rights to mobility*.

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I should also say that this work represents my greatest understanding of this particular topic at this present time. I'm sure I've gotten some things wrong, included too much tangential info, omitted valuable aspects, and overlooked far more. In spite of these shortcomings, I hope you find something valuable here, and emerge, as I have, with a renewed commitment to repairing our world.

Thank you.

Chapter 1:

Of Cities, Bicycles, and Conflict

The struggle to create certain types of communities among socially differentiated populations - with particular arrangements of goods and services, particular forms of movement, and particular types of public space - has always been an inescapable part of the urbanization process. Indeed, to say that such conflicts occur now hardly seems significant. But the explication of how and why they occur, as well as of the underlying ideologies, forces, and actors from which they stem, still offers a vitally important tool with which to understand contemporary urbanization processes, and the ways in which competing rights to the city involve not just conflicts over space and organization, but conflicts over how we ought to live. It is from this grounding that my current work emerges: the investigation of how competing rights to the city regarding urban transportation and the (de)construction of bicycle lanes in Brooklyn, New York have been constructed, publicized, and also mediated by the state.

Before we delve further, we must be clear on the meaning of the *right to the city*. The right to the city, a term first coined by French philosopher Henry Lefebvre in 1969, may be broadly defined as the “transformed and renewed right to urban life” (Lefebvre 1991). It is a right that understands the city as an *oeuvre*, or as a collective work created daily by those who live and work there, whose realization demands that all those who participate in the reproduction of the city as both a physical space and social construction deserve to share equally in its benefits and its hazards. Moreover, it demands that the ability to either reproduce the city that is, or produce the city anew, should also be shared amongst all of the city’s inhabitants.

In recent years, the idea of the right to the city has been greatly expanded by scholars such as David Harvey, writing that:

What kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relationships we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold.

The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our hearts' desire [emphasis added] (2012, 4).

The right to the city is therefore a plural and not a singular right, that includes, among other things, “the right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habit and to inhabit,” and “the right to the *oeuvre* [to participate in the *collective* work of making the city], to participation and *appropriation*” (Lefebvre, quoted in D Mitchell 2003, 17). The right to the city is thus both a theoretical concept and a political project that appears in different forms in different contexts, and may include everything from housing to transportation to public protest (Attoh 2011).

My work here will explore what happens when competing notions of the right to the city – as advanced by different stakeholders with different motivations in different ways – come into conflict regarding the (de)construction of bicycle lanes in NYC. Through an investigation of two particular cases – the deconstruction of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane in 2008, and the 2010 construction of the Prospect Park West bicycle path – I show how these competing rights to the city are always hotly contested,

that they can only be realized through lived practice and representation, and that they necessarily embody particular notions of community, civility, and (dis)order.

Furthermore, their respective construction, publicization, and mediation by different stakeholders at different scales, including the state, is never a straightforward manner, but rather a dynamic, never completed process through which particular notions of how we ought to live are legitimated.

To understand the conflicts over Brooklyn bicycle lanes, then, and the ways in which these competing notions of public space, social justice, and well-being are struggled over, we must first attempt to understand the particular social, political, and economic landscapes from which these conflicts emerge. Today, in the case of New York City, issues of environmental and social sustainability have emerged as central concerns amidst the backdrop of neoliberal globalization and anthropogenic climate change. Since 2007, in response to a growing chorus of citizens, politicians, and activists demanding greener forms of transportation and a more liveable urban environment, the municipal government, under the administration of Mayor Bloomberg, has undertaken the construction of hundreds of miles of new bicycle lanes across the city as part of the PlaNYC Sustainability Program.

Despite the well-documented impact of bicycle lanes and increased bicycle travel on the reduction of carbon emissions and atmospheric pollution, and the creation of safer, more accessible communities, the expansion of bicycling infrastructure and of bicycling transportation more generally still confronts a number of important obstacles. Broadly, these include everything from the stigmatization of bicycle travel, to the glorification of the private car, to the barriers of a built-environment designed for automobile travel. But

the largest obstacle to the expansion of bicycle transportation remains the issue of *space*: since the possibility of a particular action depends foremost on the existence of a physical space for that action, as well as the right to construct that space in particular ways, urban conflicts over bicycling and bicycling lanes always manifest through competing visions of space. Furthermore, these competing visions always transcend the physical spaces that they inhabit to include broader notions of community, civility, and (dis)order – notions which structure the very shape of our social and material lives.

These interrelated issues of transportation, public space, and the right to the city all came to a head in 2008 with the deconstruction of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane.¹ This controversy first began in 2007, when the NYC Department of Transportation (DOT), under the leadership of transportation commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan, installed a new bicycle lane along the heavily trafficked, north-south thruway as part of the larger city-wide strategy to make the streets more bicycle-friendly (Figure 1). While this lane now provided a direct route for cyclists commuting between the Brooklyn Bridge and Williamsburg, it also frustrated members of a local Satmar community – an Ultra- Orthodox sect of Hasidic Judaism– who lived along the route and firmly disapproved of the transformation.

¹ The Bedford Avenue bicycle lane was officially designated as a Class 2 bicycle lane, an on-street bicycle lane demarcated by a painted line.



Figure 1. A cyclist and a Satmar resident cross paths on the old bicycle lane along Bedford Avenue (Photo by Brian Branch Price, New York Post, 2009).

Citing safety concerns, as well as the growing number of inappropriately clad female riders cycling through the neighborhood, the Satmars then successfully lobbied the municipal government for the removal of fourteen blocks of the newly created lane between Flushing and Division avenues in South Williamsburg. Contestation escalated further in December of 2008 when guerilla activists tried to repaint the newly erased bicycle lane under cover of darkness only to have it removed again by the municipal government, prompting a confrontation with both the Satmar community police force and the NYPD. Criminal charges for the activists involved soon followed, as did a number of public demonstrations protesting against the bicycle lane removal, and led by local activists and organizations such as Transportation Alternatives (TA) and Times Up!. However, these efforts ultimately proved unsuccessful as the municipal government

upheld the Satmars' right to the city, and the bicycle lane was never restored. While broadly read as a dispute between self-righteous, cycling hipsters and backward, isolating Satmars, or, as New York Magazine reported, the "Clash of the Bearded Ones," the actual roots of this conflict, the strategies and visions through which different actors advanced their claims, and its ultimate mediation by the state, reveal a much more complicated reality, encompassing issues of social justice, privilege, and mobility.

A similar incident regarding the right to the city and bicycling transportation emerged in 2009 with the introduction of a street redesign project for the mile-long stretch of Prospect Park West between Grand Army Plaza and Bartel Pritchard Square (Figure 2). In response to mounting community concerns regarding the speed and safety of traffic along Prospect Park West, the local community board approved a DOT proposal in June of 2009 to reduce the current number of vehicular lanes from three to two, and establish an on-street bicycle path that would run adjacent to the park, separated with a parking lane from vehicular traffic.² While roundly supported by bicycle activists and municipal officials alike, some local residents - including former DOT commissioner Iris Weinshall, her husband, US Senator Charles Schumer, and a former deputy mayor - began organizing against the proposed redesign, arguing that it would cause unprecedented traffic congestion, hurt business, and endanger the welfare of other residents, families, and small children attempting to enter the park. The redesign was eventually installed in June 2010 following community input and modification, which then prompted two opposing community organizations - Seniors for Safety and

² The PPW bicycle path is a designated Class 1 path, defined as a path that is physically separated from both motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic, usually by a row of parking, pedestrian islands, or concrete barriers.

Neighbors for Better Bike Lanes (NBBL) – to file a lawsuit against the DOT suing for the path’s removal. Although the Brooklyn Supreme Court eventually dismissed the case in August of 2011 in favor of the DOT - due in part to ongoing monitoring efforts that confirmed the redesign’s positive effects on both traffic safety and community satisfaction - the appeals process is still ongoing.



Figure 2. Prospect Park West before and after the street redesign (NYC DOT).

What makes both of these cases unique, and what makes them so valuable to our current work of understanding how efforts to create more sustainable cities unfold amidst constant struggle and contestation, is what their respective construction, publicization, and ultimate mediation by the state says about larger notions of community, civility, and (dis)order in New York City. Moreover, understanding the process through which the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane ceased to exist, or the struggle between different actors that resulted in the Prospect Park West redesign, allows us to understand how socially differentiated actors working in relation to the structural apparatuses of the state claim

both space and power for their particular visions of urban life. The legitimization of a particular vision, and the corresponding criminalization of another, then holds profound consequences for matters of sustainability, social justice, and well-being for different actors in different spaces. As such, though nominally situated in issues of public space and urban transportation, the full significance of this work – as with the rights that it investigates – far transcends its local grounding.

In addition to providing an important opportunity to assess the practical direction of urban governance, sustainability, and social struggle in New York City, these two case studies also offer the possibility of expanding upon existing theorizations of the right to the city by distinguishing between what I would term *rights to place* and *rights to motion* - the former referring to the claims of the Satmar's and NBBL, the latter referring to bicycle path proponents. These two categories overlap in a number of important ways - e.g., while cycling rights along Bedford Avenue are foremost *rights to motion*, they also necessarily include the right to occupy space in particular ways and at particular times; just as NBBL rights to parking are *rights to place*, they also imply a right to a particular kind of motion. Still, I believe that a theoretical sensitivity to the distinction between their particular manifestations can yield valuable insights into future conflicts regarding matters of social justice and the right to the city. In addition, the examination of these two sites also allows us further opportunity to understand the continuing importance of public space to urban social life and the ongoing struggle for the control of state power.

My work thus explores the messy realities that make up these competing rights to the city, seeking to understand the conflicts behind the erasure of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane and the redesign of Prospect Park West, as well as the roles of the different

actors involved in their construction, publicization, and mediation. This work further seeks a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which competing rights to the city complicate common discourses of social and environmental sustainability, and how these conflicting rights might eventually be reconciled through the effect of state power. Though an exhaustive examination of this case would include everything from bicycling history to religious theology, my work here limits itself to an investigation of the ways in which these cases unsettle prevailing notions and flows of urban life, including issues of (dis)order, public space, mobility, and community. Only then can we begin to understand how the various stakeholders (e.g. Satmars residents, NBBL, cycling advocates, and the municipal government) struggled over this disruption and subsequent reformation.

At its core, this work represents an attempt to further understand contemporary conflicts regarding the right to create a particular form of urban life, and a particular kind of city. Though the Hipster vs. Hasid caricature may be unusual, the forces at work and the debates they propel certainly are not. Nor are the issues at stake – the conception of public space and the material potentials for more environmentally and socially sustainable communities – contained to Prospect Park or NYC. Indeed, struggles to define and materialize the right to the city are as broad and varied as the urban phenomenon from which they spring, as are the often corresponding struggles to adopt more sustainable modes of living. The chance for resolving these conflicts must then start with a deeper and more nuanced analysis of the factors behind them and the working of the stakeholders involved, with the hope that the understanding of particular cases may then strengthen our ability to handle these issues more broadly and in the future, with an enhanced potential to further the cause of social justice and sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this project stems from a wide array of geographic, sociological, and environmental work. Chief among these are the writings of David Harvey, Don Mitchell, Henri Lefebvre, and Timothy Mitchell on the theorization of the right to the city, the workings of public space, and the effect of the state in urban governance. Moreover, while strongly influenced by historical materialism, my investigation will not privilege class or capital *a priori* as a fundamental factor. Instead, I will instead seek to explain bicycle politics in Brooklyn, NY through a critical geographic perspective that incorporates insights from both Marxist and humanistic geographies.

As a way of beginning, David Harvey describes urbanization as the “geographical and social concentration of surplus product,” an inescapably political process that must centrally deal with the production and distribution of that “surplus” between socially differentiated populations (Harvey 2012, 5). The management of this process thus holds profound implications for the geographical locations and flows of people, goods, and services throughout the urban setting, which in turn has a great deal of say about the opportunities, hazards, and privileges that these populations will face. In other words, power in the urban context derives foremost from the ability to decide who gets what, and what (who) goes where. Furthermore, attempts to organize this urban surplus – that is, attempts to create certain kinds of cities – must critically engage with issues of order, quality of life, community, and criminality. The struggle to define these terms, which always proceeds concomitantly alongside their physical manifestations, thus encompasses what Lefebvre and others have deemed *the right to the city*.

Since the right to the city depends perhaps most essentially on the geographic locations and flows of populations, goods, and services, and because it remains by necessity a *collective* rather than a *private* right, issues of public space and mobility often emerge as central venues in the ongoing struggle to define and create the city. Don Mitchell's work thus expands on this notion of the right to the city by exploring the central role that public space plays in the creation of that particular right, emphasizing the importance of public space as both a potential site of unmediated and democratic interaction, as well as a site of violent exclusion through which normative ideas of (dis)order are (re)produced, for certain types of participation by certain types of communities. The common street thus emerges as one of the most prominent instances of urban public space - a site of perpetually fluid meaning and use, whose definition can only be found temporarily along a continual and contested process of becoming. In the case of Bedford Avenue and Prospect Park West, we can see quite clearly how the struggle to create a particular arrangement of use and access for bicycles or motorists thus necessarily engenders larger debates concerning the very type of city to be constructed, and with whose participation.

Mitchell's work further explores how this contested process of organizing space can only occur when "some group or another *takes* space and through its actions *makes* it public," where "the desires of other groups, other individuals, other classes, together with the violent power of the state, laws about property, and the current jurisprudence on rights all have a role to play" (D Mitchell 2003, 35). This insight then raises the question of how the material and symbolic processes of 'making' these spaces – or what I have referred to previously as their *publicization* - vary based on the nature of the rights being

constructed, as well as the actors involved. Benjamin Shepard and Greg Smithsion's work thus offers valuable theoretical grounding regarding the mechanics of public protest and action, while also providing important empirical research concerning the struggle for public spaces in NYC and the changing shape of urban transportation activism. Kafui A. Attoh's research on the transportation disadvantaged in Syracuse, New York, further shows how the imposition of "decidedly neoliberal terms [in the public provision of urban transportation], where the city is reduced to a workplace and where the urban poor are recognized only in their capacity as low-wage workers," also prominently structures both the type of transportation provided, and the possibilities for different forms of urban life (Attoh 2012, 8). The greatest import of these works, then, is their ability to understand distinct manifestations of competing rights to the city – through organization, protest, and the daily practices of urban life - as both stemming from and being constitutive of the various ideologies and actors that they support. In the case of Prospect Park and Bedford Avenue, we can then see how the clown parades, naked bicycle rides, community policing, and media coverage that occurred in both sites work to defend particular rights to the city at the same time that they help to create them.

Just as the construction and publicization of competing rights varies based on the nature of the rights and actors involved, so too will their mediation vary based on the peculiar constellation of structures that produce the effect of state power. Foremost to this assertion is the ontological question of *what is the state*, for which I draw primarily from the work of Timothy Mitchell, who understands the state not as a distinct or cohesive stand-alone entity, but rather as a "structural effect" (T Mitchell 1991, 94). The state is thus understood to be a "network of institutional mechanisms through which a

certain social and political order is maintained” through the “enclosing and partitioning of space, systematizing surveillance and inspection, breaking down complex tasks into carefully drilled movements, and coordinating separate functions into larger combinations,” as well as the use of disciplinary power, which works “not by constraining individuals and their actions but by producing them” (90). The primary importance of this conception thus lies in its ability to explain the “elusive, porous, and mobile” nature of the state/society boundary not as a problem to be overcome, but rather as an essential feature of what the state does (77). In sum, this structural approach allows us greater mobility to understand the processes through which variously situated actors are able to harness the effect of state power for their particular ends, such as the deconstruction of fourteen blocks of bicycle lanes or the expansion of cycling infrastructure, all of which remain inextricably tied to their particular rights to the city.

This investigation into the effect of state power then gains further focus with David Harvey’s work on urban governance in late-stage industrial capitalism, or “urban entrepreneurialism” (D Harvey 1989, 5), and Julian Brash’s work on urban governance in New York City under the Bloomberg Administration – what he deems “The Bloomberg Way” (Brash 2011, 138). Together, these two works investigate the underlying political-economic motivations and effects of urban governance in NYC under the Bloomberg Administration, as embedded within a larger context of neoliberalism and class conflict. As Brash and Harvey explain, municipal governance under Bloomberg proceeds through a language of technocratic and spatial anti-politics, where the city is cast as a homogenous, bounded entity with a single, unitary interest, best served by the rational application of technocratic and corporate management practices by a well-intentioned

elite. They additionally explain that while the emergence of this governing strategy has largely benefited the upper classes - whom Brash calls “the postindustrial elite” – state power has also been used on occasion to coerce the capital and members of this elite group in the interest of the overarching strategy of urban development. Viewed in conjunction then with notion of the state as a structural effect, we can see how the mediation of conflicting rights to the city regarding the (de)construction of bicycle lanes in Brooklyn depends upon the extent to which that right either supports or successfully challenges the neoliberal, entrepreneurial development strategy of the Bloomberg Administration, and the effectiveness with which the various actors involved – e.g., cycling advocates, Satmars, and Prospect Park residents – are able to harness the networks that produce the effect of state power in the construction and publicization of their respective rights.

This work then gains further significance when we consider the fact that most of the present literature regarding the right to the city, public space, and transportation in our contemporary age of neoliberal urbanization and accelerating climate change focuses only on the conflicts that arise between actors operating at different scales (e.g. rural migrants and the federal government, the urban homeless and city councils). Much less well explored are the conflicts between actors and communities operating between relatively similar scales - such as the case of the Hasids and cyclists in Williamsburg - and how these conflicts engage with and are mediated by larger structures and governing bodies. Furthermore, while the existing literature offers a wide range of theoretical and empirical research from which to build, the right to the city, as Harvey and Mitchell both argue, is not a right that can be formulated in abstract universalisms. Rather, it is a right whose definition and meaning depends upon its lived materializations, materializations

that will inevitably differ between spatiotemporal contexts. Therefore, it is not enough to simply theorize the functioning of neoliberal urban governance in New York City – we must work to situate these abstractions in material cases, such as the (de)construction of bicycle lanes in Brooklyn.

This project additionally engages with contemporary scholarship and practice regarding the deliberate attempt to create more socially and environmentally sustainable cities through expanded bicycle use and infrastructure. Building from the work of such activists and academics as Ivan Illich (1974), John Urry (2004), John Pucher (2010), and Jen Peterson (2011), and the example of cities such as Copenhagen and Bogota, this project supports the thesis that bicycle transportation can offer a plethora of improvements for personal and environmental health, resource use and efficiency, and social interactions, in comparison to a transport system dominated by private automobiles. (And it is here that the humanistic diagnostics of Illich and Peterson, in comparison to Harvey's Marxism and Mitchell's historical materialism, will be most useful, through their emphasis on the quality of intrapersonal interactions and the subjective experience of speed and distance in the pursuit of social justice and urban liveability.) Finally, as cities the world over continue to mobilize for expanded bicycle transportation and bicycling infrastructure, it now seems clear to me that the pressure to understand and eventually resolve the inevitable conflicts arising between competing rights to the city will only increase.

The investigation of this project depended primarily upon secondary data analysis, in the form of media articles, public statements and legal records, scholarly analyses, and official government records regarding the construction, struggle, and

dismantling of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane and the Prospect Park West redesign project. Data gathered from the City Council archives, New York City public records, academic databases, Internet archives, and library collections all proved essential in this regard. I also conducted one phone interview with an organizer from Transportation Alternatives, one of the City's most prominent transportation advocacy groups, and spent time observing traffic flows and usage along both Prospect Park West and Bedford Avenue in January of 2013. While additional interviews might have allowed me to gain an even more nuanced understanding of the ways that the bicycle lanes had been used and perceived by residents, as well as their impacts on the flow and form of urban life, time and other undergraduate constraints prevented me from doing so. However, the wealth of secondary data with which I was able to work still proved more than sufficient for my particular scholarly aims.

In sum, then, this work was motivated by the ways in which the conflicts between pro and anti bicycle lane advocates transcend issues of what constitutes inappropriate attire, or of how traffic flows might be most efficiently managed. Rather, what these two cases illustrate, and what my work seeks to illuminate, is the ongoing and contested struggle to create a certain type of city through the definition, materialization, and normative construction of order, quality of life, and criminality amidst momentous economic and environmental change. Inextricably linked to this project, as well, is the construction of a specific kind of public with a specific kind of public space, creating specific forms of access and mobility, and specific types of community. The narratives through which these different interests frame their conflicting rights, and the ways in which competing actors negotiate structures of state power also further complicate the

future of environmental and social sustainability in New York specifically, and urban areas broadly.

My second chapter thus begins by situating the (de)construction of bicycle lanes in Brooklyn within the larger context of New York City under the administration of Mayor Bloomberg, including the effect of neoliberal entrepreneurial governance, “The Bloomberg Way,” and the PlaNYC sustainability program. Emphasis throughout is placed on the peculiar historical, economic, political, social, environmental, and geographic contexts that have given rise to the present forms of governance in NYC, with an eye towards understanding how these contexts then shape the possibilities for more sustainable forms of transportation and urban living.

Chapter 3 then focuses on the case of Bedford Avenue, beginning with a closer look into the composition of both the Satmar and cyclist communities, their historical association with the spaces in question, and also the construction of their particular understandings of the right to the city. This chapter also addresses the question of how, and to what extent, did the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane unsettle prevailing notions of urban flow and form, addressing issues of mobility, access, community, (dis)order, and sustainability, and with what sorts of consequences for different actors. With this empirical grounding, we then move to an analysis of the publicization of these conflicting rights to the city and their ultimate mediation by the state. This includes the different manners of organization and protest that eventually culminated in the removal of the bicycle lane, as well as the subsequent resistance efforts and confrontations that continued after the lane’s official closure. Here, I also discuss the role of the Bloomberg

Way and state power, and their interplay with other forms of publicization and control such as community protest and policing.

Chapter 4 then introduces the case of the Prospect Park West redesign project, looking again at the composition of the different actors involved, the history of their claims to the space, and the construction of their competing rights to the cities. Here, as well, I seek to understand just what exactly the various groups thought they stood to gain or lose through the redesign, and what these perceptions reveal about their conflicting visions of the right to the city. Next, I investigate the publicization and mediation of these conflicting rights, including their representation in local media and community groups, the roles played by different levels of the city government and community participation, and what the construction of the bicycle path and the dismissal of the lawsuit might tell us about how conflicting rights are mediated under the Bloomberg administration.

Chapter 5, or my conclusion, then follows, and seeks to achieve a synthesis in which the state's role in mediating between conflicting community's rights, as well as some general observations regarding the negotiation of the networks that produce the effect of state power by various actors, become clear. This chapter further presents my best understandings of the construction, publicization, and mediation of conflicting rights to the city regarding bicycle lanes in Brooklyn, New York as expressed through the cases of Bedford Avenue and Prospect Park West. I finish with some concluding thoughts on the possibilities for future developments and research, and finally offer this work up as the keystone of my education as a Geography major.

Chapter 2:

NYC Governance and the Effect of State Power

Before we investigate the construction, publicization, and mediation of conflicting rights to the city having to do with the (de)construction of bicycle lanes in Brooklyn, New York, we must first situate ourselves within the larger socio-political, economic, and environmental contexts in which these conflicts take place (and space). While a comprehensive review of Brooklyn's present and recent history remains an impossible task, I will focus here on the investigation of two salient developments, namely: a brief history of the neoliberalization of city governance in New York City from the 1970s to today, and how it paved the way for Bloomberg's ascendance, and second, a look into Mayor Bloomberg's administration, governing techniques, and ideological vision, with a particular focus on the PlaNYC Sustainability Program and the Department of Transportation (DOT). Not only will this provide us valuable context with which to situate the right to the city conflicts later on, but it will also allow us to examine the construction of power in contemporary New York City, and more specifically, the construction of the effect of state power, and the efforts of variously situated actors to harness and influence it.

Although urban governance under the Bloomberg administration (as we will see later on,) undoubtedly remains the most important element to consider in the contemporary construction of power in New York City, the underlying developments that made Bloomberg's rise possible actually began as far back as the 1970s, with what Brash (2011) and Harvey (1989) have referred to, among others, as "the neoliberalization of urban governance." Following the post-war prosperity of the 1950s and early 1960s,

where US cities enjoyed years of middle-class growth and security as a result of Fordist systems of large scale mass production and government subsidization and regulation, the latter half the of the decade saw mounting and interrelated fiscal, social, and political crises. A global recessionary period, competition from newly industrializing nations, and the erosion of urban tax bases through inner-city disinvestment and white flight – spurred in part through mounting racial tensions, the private automobile, and federally subsidized suburbanization – all contributed to declining rates of profit and rising levels of urban municipal debt. Neoliberal economic and political practices then emerged as a means to discipline urban areas by rolling back or privatizing state services and reducing regulations to capital flows, with the explicit aim of increasing capital efficiency and profitability, and the at-least implicit aim of restoring a particular arrangement of class power (Harvey 2012).

While similar accounts unfolded in cities across the US, the case of New York City is particularly emblematic due to the severity with which neoliberal policies were used to discipline the remnants of the indebted liberal managerial state. NYC’s story begins in 1974, when the banks that had been underwriting the city’s mounting debt then began to dump billions of dollars of their city bonds back into the market, prompting a complete collapse of the financial bond market by March of 1975, and pushing the New York municipal government into technical bankruptcy. An elite mix of bankers, corporate and real estate executives, media members, and politicians, then seized upon this opportunity to radically reorient the direction and role of New York’s municipal government, demanding policy changes in return for providing access to previously inaccessible capital markets. Through drastic rollbacks of state services and social

provisions, new pro-growth policies and the reduction of barriers to capital flows, and a more privatized, professional approach to urban governance, these actors largely succeeded in reorienting the direction of NYC urban governance in support of their particular urban visions and political ends (Brash 2011).

But beyond depriving urban areas already suffering from widespread unemployment and capital disinvestment of additional government support, this neoliberalization of city governance also imparted a number of important normative conceptions regarding the functioning of government, namely: the intervention of private enterprise in city governance and privatist ideology. Coupled with widespread deindustrialization, unemployment, and fiscal austerity, these developments then paved the way for what David Harvey has termed “entrepreneurial governance” in New York City. Entrepreneurial governance, in a distinct departure from past managerial styles, responds to the increasing pressures of hyper-mobile flows of international capital by attempting to maximize “the attractiveness of the local site as a lure for capitalist development” (Harvey 1989, 5). Most commonly, this results in increased inter-urban competition, expanded public-private partnerships, an emphasis on finance and information technology industries, the recruitment of a high value labor force, and the “selling” of a particular sort of city. More troublingly, besides, is the fact that areas under entrepreneurial governance are also more commonly characterized by “increasing disparities in wealth and income” (Ibid). Harvey further identifies three interrelated conditions that characterize entrepreneurial governance: the proliferation of public-private partnerships; the necessarily speculative nature of these development partnerships that then assign disproportionate amounts of risk-absorption to the local state; and finally,

a focus on improvements to ‘place’ over ‘territory,’ where individual construction, infrastructure, or development projects – such as stadiums or civic centers – are purported to garner more widespread improvements and serve as catalysts for further development (7). While Harvey makes it clear that this shift towards urban entrepreneurialism does not automatically render urban governance “captive of solely capitalist class interests,” nor universally dictate “that its decisions are prefigured directly in terms reflective of the requirements of capital accumulation,” he does take seriously the coercive effect that deindustrialization, widespread unemployment, neoliberal policies, and super-mobile international capital exert (14).

While the shift from managerial to entrepreneurial governance in the context of neoliberal policies certainly marks an important development in the history of NYC, we must remember that such shifts are never monolithic, nor absolutely coherent. Brash thus shows how the “new bundle of governing practices - austerity, privatization, postindustrial urban development, neoconservative social regulation, a reliance on tax policy, state fragmentation, corporate subsidization, aggressive policing, and so on,” as paired with a new ideological alignment, ultimately remained incomplete due to the persistence of liberal governing traditions, the partial and uneven nature of privatizations, and the sporadic nature of private-sector elite interventions (Brash 2011, 53). As such, the greatest import of this particular ideological shift as it relates to our current investigation must be more rightly situated as providing the political and cultural groundwork from which Mayor Bloomberg would later win election as the “CEO Mayor,” celebrated for his supposedly apolitical and corporate governing strategies. For, as we will see later on, the mediation of bicycle lanes and rights to the city in NYC

depends in no small part on both the impulse to “sell” the city as a lucrative site of capitalist development, and the particular ideological vision with which the Bloomberg administration governs.

Brash (2011) argues that neoliberalism’s celebration of “freedom” and “individualism,”³ in conjunction with the recuperation of business in the public eye and a widespread desire to move beyond “politics as usual,” were both instrumental to Bloomberg’s triumphant mayoral run in 2001. Campaigning as a successful, self-made corporate entrepreneur, Bloomberg quickly came to represent practicality and technocracy in public service, where his enormous personal fortune would allow him to campaign – and later govern - free from ideological or political obligations. But for all the appearance of apoliticality, Brash avers that urban governance under the Bloomberg administration has in fact represented a particular “class project, [and] an effort to legitimize the power and wealth of the members of this class alliance and to reshape the city in line with its interests and desires (the attraction of a particular class of business investments and labor)” (138).

Furthermore, Brash argues that the “Bloomberg Way” seeks to mask its implicitly political ideology through a language of technocratic and spatial anti-politics, where the city is cast as a homogenous, bounded entity with a single, unitary interest, best served by the rational application of technocratic and corporate management practices by a well-intentioned elite (138). But the pursuit of this particular political and economic project has always been more than just a simple catering to capital investors and the postindustrial elite. Indeed, Brash locates “this administration’s ability and willingness to

³ See Harvey’s [2007] *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* for a full discussion.

employ state power to both induce and coerce” various actors as one of the central tenets of the Bloomberg Way, a telling example of the fundamental importance of the overarching priorities of entrepreneurial governance to the resolution of specific policy dilemmas and conflicts. In sum, then, we must understand the apparently apolitical, technocratic, and practical nature of the Bloomberg Way as both deeply ideological and political.

Jen Peterson (2011), in her work on the right to the city and urban transportation in NYC, further ties Bloomberg’s financial independence and entrepreneurial past to his penchant for leading “aggressive, future-oriented city planning efforts,” most notably through the PlaNYC 2030 sustainable growth plan (Peterson 2011, 109). PlaNYC, which was first announced in 2007, began as an “unprecedented effort to prepare for one million more residents, strengthen our economy, combat climate change, and enhance the quality of life for all New Yorkers” (PlaNYC Introduction 2011). Like other such “sustainability plans,” Bloomberg’s PlaNYC 2030 framed urban sustainability not as an obstacle, but rather as an “opportunity to create wealth, social equity, environmental benefits, and opportunity” (Rosan 2012, 966). Expanded again in 2011, PlaNYC now enlists the services of 25 different City agencies on 132 separate initiatives, including specific directives to make bicycling and pedestrian transportation safer, more convenient, and more accessible. While Bloomberg and his administration have frequently emphasized the positive impact of PlaNYC on “sustainability,” “liveability,” and “greening” in NYC – and indeed, the PlaNYC has produced notable improvements in these areas, including reducing carbon emissions, and expanding the amount and accessibility of green spaces and public parks – the plan has also been equally celebrated for its contributions to

NYC's continuing "competitive advantage" and status as a "world class city" (PlaNYC Sustainability Indicators 2011; Peterson 2011, 113). This "highly visible locality-enhancing growth agenda," to borrow a phrase from Peterson, thus ran the dual benefit of appealing, at least in theory, to both socially minded activists and capital concerned development interests (113).

While PlaNYC has since been criticized on a number of fronts – e.g. for couching gentrification in positive, sustainable growth language, and for not doing enough to target wealth inequality or disparities among social provisioning for hospitals and schools – it has succeeded in garnering international praise and recognition for both Bloomberg and NYC as vanguard figures of sustainable growth for the 21st century (145). Such acclaim even resulted in Bloomberg's 2010 appointment as chairperson of the C40 cities, a "climate leadership group" made up of representatives of the world's most populated cities (114). And Bloomberg himself has additionally sought to bolster this reputation by regularly sending representatives and deputy mayors to other cities around the US to publicize NYC's own efforts at sustainable growth, as well as to gain insights from the experiences and strategies of others.

Throughout, Bloomberg has been determined to show that "growth wasn't incompatible with green," and was furthermore prepared to use his entrepreneurial savvy and personal resources to advance this long-term vision for the city's continued growth (142). Viewed thus through the framework of entrepreneurial governance, it is not difficult to see how Bloomberg's vision of "sustainable growth" through PlaNYC 2030 stems at least in part from the desire to enhance NYC's global competitiveness and attractiveness to capital development, and in this sense, as yet another incarnation of what

Ethan Lavine has dubbed the “green urban spectacle” (Lavine 2012). Just as other urban spectacles such as World’s Fairs and monument building sought to capture the collective consciousness of a city or audience, and cultivate a particular impression of prestige or attractiveness for that respective city, so too did Bloomberg’s PlaNYC attempt, at least in part, to cultivate a similar sense of importance and admiration for NYC. By thus strengthening NYC’s brand as a progressive, livable, and future-oriented city, Bloomberg therefore sought to protect and reinforce NYC’s position as a valued locale for both an educated, high-value workforce and hyper-mobile international capital. As Peterson writes, “if the systems of this small place failed or the fragile conditions that nurtured intense economic and social exchange were harmed, so would follow its competitive advantage” (116). This will be an important point to remember when we analyze the specific mediation of bike lane and right to the city conflicts, for as we will see, the ability of different stakeholders to engage with and harness the effect of state power for their particular ends depends enormously upon the extent to which their visions complement Bloomberg’s entrepreneurial, ‘green growth’ agenda.

The manner in which Bloomberg set about designing and implementing the PlaNYC program also reveals another important aspect of his administration’s governing style and how mayoral state power functions in Bloomberg’s New York. Rather than focusing on forging a broad support coalition, with the assistance and involvement of multiple levels of city government, Bloomberg instead began drafting the PlaNYC plan with carefully solicited input from local community groups, the Regional Plan Association, the Municipal Arts Society, and local university departments. And rather than submit the plan to any of NYC’s 59 local Community Boards, five Borough

Presidents, or the City Council for feedback and approval, Bloomberg's office instead went public with the effort as soon as the draft had been completed (Rosan 2012). The implicit logic of this approach: that the most effective form of governance arrives not through a protracted political struggle, but rather through the targeted input from a small class of technocratic experts. Here, we can clearly see how Bloomberg's technocratization of public policy and the ostensibly apolitical nature of his practical, entrepreneurial approach manifest in his administration's eagerness to bypass traditional networks of policy deliberation, even in the case of long-term, citywide policy initiatives such as PlaNYC, for which he has been much maligned (Peterson 2011, 145).

But regardless of what we may think about Bloomberg's tenure as Mayor, or about the direction and performance of PlaNYC, we must still recognize that this supposedly apolitical and technocratic approach to urban governance is in fact deeply political and ideological. It is an approach intended to recast the city as a bounded, homogenous entity whose interests are best served by the application of rational, apolitical policy in the pursuit of a commonly held end. But of course, the city can never be bounded or homogenous anymore than its policy can ever be apolitical, and so the matter becomes a question of whose interests are being served by Bloomberg's entrepreneurial policies, and to what particular ends. For our inquiry, then, we may further ask: How does the Bloomberg administration's governing style, preoccupation with PlaNYC, and the "selling" of a certain type of City then influence their treatment of bicycle lanes involving competing rights to the city? And to what extent does the Bloomberg administration control the exercise of state power, and to what extent is state power controlled by other actors?

These are questions that can only ever be fully answered in specific cases, and ones that we will return to in Chapters 3 and 4. But before we move forward into our case-studies, let us first overview a number of important trends regarding first, the treatment of bicycle transportation under the Bloomberg administration, and second, the functioning of state power in NYC.

Bloomberg and Bicycles

Bloomberg's first term as Mayor began in 2001 with then Transportation Commissioner Iris Weinshall, appointed the year before by Mayor Giuliani, staying on to continue in her role as head of the DOT. Credited by many with reducing traffic fatalities and cutting the bureaucracy at the DOT by streamlining the requests and complaints process, Weinshall nevertheless gained the ire of activists throughout the bicycling community for not doing enough to support bicycle transportation in the City. Critics additionally accused her of being obstructionist and actively working to restrict the number of new bicycle lanes added to the city streets. The transportation advocacy organization known as 'Streetsblog' even went as far as to initiate a "Weinshall Watch" campaign to document Weinshall's ongoing offenses and pressure for her removal (Peterson 2011, 195). Tensions between Weinshall and the cycling community continued until her abrupt resignation in the spring of 2007. Although no official reason was given, many DOT insiders speculated that her resignation resulted from her dissatisfaction regarding the new long-term sustainability program being imposed upon the DOT by Bloomberg's office from above (Ibid).

Weinshall was succeeded on April 27, 2007 by now transportation commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan, just weeks after the official launch of PlaNYC 2030. Unlike her predecessor, Sadik-Khan's appointment as DOT commissioner was largely celebrated by city officials and cycling activists alike, highlighting her "superb mix of public and private sector transportation management experience" (Bloomberg, quoted in Peterson 2011, 127). Whereas Weinshall proved reluctant in her support for Bloomberg's long-term planning vision, Sadik-Khan aggressively supported it, commissioning the creation of the Office of Planning and Sustainability (OPS), and beginning action on the new Sustainable Streets program, the DOT's first-ever comprehensive strategic planning initiative. Like PlaNYC 2030, Sustainable Streets identified 164 specific actions designed to increase the safety, mobility, and, most significantly, the environmental sustainability of NYC's transportation network (DOT 2008). One important plank of the new Sustainable Streets program - in a sharp departure from past DOT policy - has proven to be the expansion of bicycle use and cycling infrastructure citywide, with the goal of doubling rates of bicycle transportation by 2012, (actually reached in 2011), and tripling by 2017. Indeed, since Sadik-Khan took over as commissioner in 2007, the City has installed more than 200 miles of new bicycle lanes, over 6000 new bicycle racks, and experienced a more than 100 percent increase in the total number of regular cyclists (DOT 2009; 2011). Bicycling fatalities and severe injuries have also experienced a 50 percent drop over the same period, supporting the positive correlation between increased bicycle use and increased bicycle safety (DOT 2010). Other notable, ongoing projects include the continued expansion of bicycle lanes and on-street bicycle lanes, expanded rapid bus service, a new bike sharing system to be introduced this summer, and the

continued reappropriation of ‘public streets’ for ‘public space,’ through street redesigns, new pedestrian plazas, and the Summer Streets program (DOT 2008).

Such progressive transportation developments have also piqued the interest of external observers. Just as Bloomberg and his PlaNYC 2030 program garnered national and international recognition for their pro-sustainability agenda, so too has Sadik-Khan secured the praise and recognition of cycling advocates and urban planners. In addition to winning the support of Streetsblog and Street Films, and holding regular speaking engagements at transportation and urban planning events, Sadik-Khan also secured the Presidency of the National Association of City Transportation Officials, Chairmanship of the Transportation Research Board's Committee on Transportation Issues in Major U.S. Cities, and was recently appointed to the Energy Secretary's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Advisory Committee. Sadik-Khan's turn-around efforts at the DOT have even gained their own inspiring moniker among transportation advocates: “The New York Story” (Peterson 2011, 213; DOT 2013).

Through the combined efforts of PlaNYC 2030, Sustainable Streets, cycling advocacy groups, and Sadik-Khan's leadership at the DOT, NYC's transportation landscape has begun a rapid transformation. Through new street redesigns, educational initiatives, curbside enforcement, and expanded coverage for both public and bicycle transportation, Sustainable Streets sought to advance a radically new conception of what role public streets should play, and of whose interests they should serve. No longer, it seemed, would the dominance of the private automobile in speed, space, and energy use proceed unchecked and unfettered. Jen Peterson (2011) sums up this sea change nicely:

The green growth machine that cast its sustainability vision on New York's streets between 2007 and 2011 hadn't either formed from traditional democratic mobilization of a growth coalition. Sadik-Khan's revolutionary gestures were made possible by a mayoral reorientation towards the question of whom the City's streets ought to serve, and how. His answer upturned the DOT's operating norms, landed advocates in positions of power, and planted new service and safety expectations in the minds of street users. As word of this change spread and its evidence appeared in the pavement, New York City became an icon in the global, livable streets movement (215).

Although Bloomberg and Sadik-Khan's efforts certainly deserve praise for their contributions to the making of a more sustainable city, it is also important to recognize these developments in the context of Bloomberg's vision of the entrepreneurial city, and interrogate what "sustainable streets" means to the strengthening of the city as a site of capital development and exchange. Bloomberg recognized, as did many others, that the City could not continue in nor improve upon its ability to attract the "well-educated, enterprising, highly mobile, international populations of the future" without improving upon its public spaces, resource use, and general liveability (at least for those who could afford it) (Peterson 2011, 14). In the realm of transportation, this meant confronting the private automobile's monopoly over space and mobility, and challenging its dominance as the unparalleled hegemon of NYC's transportation network. PlaNYC 2030 and Sustainable Streets can thus be seen as products of the administration's understanding that growth was not just compatible with green; it was also fully dependent on it. The

development of bicycle transportation under Bloomberg's administration could thus continue insofar as it contributed to his entrepreneurial vision for the City. In sum, then, it is my assertion that the treatment of bicycle transportation in NYC today depends on the complicated story of capital accumulation *and* environmental demands, stemming both from structural changes in the global economy and our planet's atmosphere, as well as the lived, every day experiences of individual and collective actors working to (re)produce different forms of urban life. Thus, the most important factor affecting the (de)construction of bicycle lanes and the state's role in the mediation of right to the city conflicts tied up with such projects - at least in regard to Bloomberg's administration and Sadik-Khan's oversight at the DOT - seems to be the entrepreneurial impulse to 'green' the city in public, celebrated ways.

Furthermore, since the most recent and forceful drivers of expanded bicycling infrastructure in New York City today are, undoubtedly, PlaNYC and Sadik-Khan at the DOT, it is worth considering the particular character with which such actors color the these advancements. We have already noted the entrepreneurial foundations behind Bloomberg's announcement of PlaNYC, but we may take this argument one step further when we consider the specific impacts that a sustainability/transportation plan arising foremost from the demands of neoliberal capitalism - rather than a commitment to environmental and social justice - produces. In this, it is helpful to turn again to Atttoh, whose work on transportation disadvantaged in Syracuse, NY explores how transportation planning from a neoliberal perspective - even if ostensibly designed to increase mobility for marginalized or underprivileged residents - still too often fails to provide for the full range of democratic participation and opportunity that the right to the

city demands. Writing in reference to a number of programs designed to provide greater transportation opportunities to welfare recipients, Atttoh critiques how their neoliberal assumptions provide greater mobility, but only “under decidedly neoliberal terms, where the city is reduced to a workplace and where the urban poor are recognized only in their capacity as low-wage workers” (Atttoh 2012, 8). So recipients receive rides, but only to areas providing low-wage labor and only during working hours, excluding access to “greater spontaneity, to anonymity, to ride collectively as opposed to individually, to be visible members of their communities, [and] to travel on the weekends” (9). While many of the issues raised in Atttoh’s work do not apply specifically to the investigation of bicycle lanes in NYC, we can still recognize how the neoliberal assumptions which underpin PlaNYC and the DOT’s treatment of bicycling transportation under Bloomberg might similarly result in undemocratic expressions that “exclude the poor and that create cities that ‘prioritize the “needs” of business and the wealthy’ over the marginalized” (4).

Furthermore, just as the development of bicycle transportation in NYC reflects certain aspects of Bloomberg’s governing vision, so too does the manner in which these developments were enacted reveal important lessons regarding the construction and effect of state power under the Bloomberg administration. First, as we have already noted, PlaNYC was initiated outside of the established channels of political deliberation, with the targeted input of private sector experts and local brain trusts. But, the Bloomberg administration also importantly included a space for various advocacy organizations to have their own voices heard and make their impacts felt, as shown through Weinshall’s resignation and many of the progressive actions contained within both PlaNYC and Sustainable Streets. It is thus too simplistic to portray Bloomberg’s style of urban

governance as a one way, top-down initiative, though neither can we anoint it as deriving through grassroots direction and input. Rather, we must understand urban governance under Bloomberg through his stylings as the “CEO Mayor.” Under Bloomberg, then, policy would be best handled by the targeted inputs of an array of public and private sector experts (be they corporations or activists), so long as their recommendations supported the City’s overarching development agenda. Political coalitions and contentious public processes would be avoided through superior management techniques and collaborative partnerships, and state power would be used to both encourage and discipline various actors as needed. Excluded from this governing process would be anyone who might oppose Bloomberg’s development vision, including the City Council, local community boards, and those supporting alternative paths to growth (or even stasis).

What Sort of State?

All of this then leads us to the important question of exactly what sort of state we are dealing with when we talk about Bloomberg’s administration, and how does that state’s power function. For this, we can first turn to the work of Timothy Mitchell and his theorization of the state. Mitchell’s work, as we remember, begins by embracing the “elusive, porous, and mobile” nature of the state/society boundary not as a problem to be overcome, but rather as an essential characteristic of the state’s nature (T Mitchell 1991, 77). As such, the distinction between state and society then emerges as a “line drawn internally,” rather than a border between two distinct spheres. Mitchell’s reckoning of the state not as a single entity, but rather as a “structural effect,” or a “network of institutional mechanisms through which a certain social and political order is

maintained,” resonates greatly with what we have already seen of urban governance under the Bloomberg administration (94; 90). Indeed, in the case of PlaNYC and Sustainable Streets, the work of different social movements and various corporate interests committed to enhancing NYC’s competitive advantage seemed to play a larger role in setting public policy than did the more ‘traditional’ executors of state power, such as the City Council.

Mitchell further encourages us to rethink what we mean by the phrase *state power*, arguing that it should be more fully understood as *the effect of state power*. Rather than stemming from a single self-contained entity, the effect of state power instead results from the “enclosing and partitioning of space, systematizing surveillance and inspection, breaking down complex tasks into carefully drilled movements, and coordinating separate functions into larger combinations,” as well as the use of disciplinary power, which works “not by constraining individuals and their actions but by producing them” (92, 93). As such, the ability to shape the future of transportation in NYC is held not by a single, self-contained governing body, but rather distributed both vertically and horizontally among a variety of actors with differing potentials for action.

Finally, state mediation of competing rights to the city depends enormously on what sort of ‘state’ we are talking about, as well as the efficacy of various actors to influence the networks which (re)produce the ‘state’ as a tangible effect, at the same time that this effect (re)produces them. Thus, the legitimization of certain notions of community, civility, and (dis)order through exclusionary violence with the backing of state power (and the corresponding criminalization or suppression of alternatives), depends both on the extent to which these notions reinforce prevailing structures of state

power and governance, and the extent to which the groups behind them are successful in harnessing those networks for their particular ends. As such, we can begin to see how a well-organized political community of Satmars might succeed in lobbying the Bloomberg administration to remove fourteen blocks of well-trafficked bicycle lanes, while an even more well-connected and wealthy group of New York's postindustrial elite might fail to accomplish a similar feat in Prospect Park, if the interests of the cycling lobby which opposed them fell more closely in line with the development goals of the city government. Let us now explain this point more fully through a closer examination of these two cases.

Chapter 3:

When Worlds Collide: The Case of Bedford Avenue

We will begin our examination of the Bedford Avenue case with an overview of the Satmar community in Williamsburg, since understanding the Satmar's historical presence along Bedford Avenue, their religious beliefs, and their ideological underpinnings is essential to understanding the construction of their particular right to the city. Furthermore, only once we have established a working picture of what transportation, public space, and normative conceptions of (dis)order looked like prior to the arrival of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane can we begin to understand how the bicycle lane unsettled those prevailing notions such that the Satmar community felt compelled to lobby for its removal.

The first Satmars arrived in Williamsburg in 1947, led from their namesake town of Satu Mare, Romania by the rabbi Joel Teitelbaum. Although various Jewish communities had been living in New York City since the early 1920s, the Satmars did not arrive until after the conclusion of World War II, due to what they viewed (along with many other Orthodox Hasidic sects) as the dangerous rise of Reform Judaism and the corresponding decline in orthodox religious practices – such as resting on the Sabbath and observing traditional gender segregations - among Jews emigrating to the United States (Kaplan 2004). But the devastation of the Holocaust convinced many that remaining in Eastern Europe was no longer an option. Political instability, economic disarray, and genocidal threats in the Old Country, coupled with the Hasidism's fervent opposition to political Zionism - the Hasidism believe that only the Jewish messiah can lead the Jewish nation back to Israel, and that any political attempts to “force” that end

constitute nothing less than a rebellion against God – then contributed to the mass Hasidic immigration to the United States, and to New York City, specifically.

Under Teitelbaum's leadership, the Satmars then settled in Williamsburg with the explicit aim of recreating the piousness and tradition of the Old World in the relative safety of the New. Even though economic and political necessities compelled the Satmars to abandon their traditional homes and community, they were determined to fortify themselves against the pernicious decline in religious observance that had too often accompanied the assimilation of European Jews into American culture. In addition to manifesting through efforts at geographical and cultural isolation, as I will discuss later on, this commitment to 'traditional' Judaism also resulted in a particular type of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, as compared with other Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform ideologies. Whereas other Judaic sects followed the Torah's commandments with a modern sensibility, making allowances for the use of electricity on the Sabbath, or by allowing men and women to attend school and worship together, Teitelbaum and his followers instead strove at all times to comply with the letter of the Hebrew laws, and fashioned their Williamsburg community around this fundamental obligation.

Zvi Jonathan Kaplan, drawing on the work of Jacob Katz, further explains the roots of the Satmar ideology and Orthodox Judaism in Austro-Hungarian Europe as being more than just a continuation of premodern Judaism, writing that:

In order to combat the threat of modernity, the proponents of tradition had to reinterpret the received tradition and make it more extreme. They therefore wove together halachic, aggradic, and kabbalistic materials to support their insular

worldview. Though they claimed to have merely rediscovered neglected strands of tradition, they ‘embarked on a course which can best be described as the invention of a new, more potent, tradition’ (Kaplan 2004, 166).

Jerome Mintz’s work on the development of Hasidism in the United States further locates this commitment to ‘traditional’ religious practices as the result of several concurrent strands of thought: first, it was seen as a debt owed to the generation that had been destroyed; second, it was a testifying victory over those who had sought to destroy them; and third, it was believed to be a necessary step to protect their community both from future aggression and outside corruption. Thus, in a manner quite distinct from previous waves of Jewish immigrants, the Satmars fervently rejected all talk of cultural assimilation and integration, and instead took “extraordinary pains to protect their identity as ultra-Orthodox Jews” (Mintz 1992, 29). Only through such enforced isolation and marked distinction from less-Orthodox Jews, the non-Jewish community at large, and all non-traditional practices, did the Satmars believe that they could preserve their commitment to God and to Judaism without corruption. Throughout their relocation and redevelopment in Williamsburg, NY, “distinctiveness from the American community, rather than acculturation, was the keystone of their social strategy” (Ibid).

Recognizing the Satmar’s emphasis on religious tradition thus as a self-conscious move to both distance and distinguish their community from the external world is also a crucial move in understanding their opposition to the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane. For, as I will argue, it is this very tendency towards group fortification and minority preservation that leads the Satmars to oppose bicycle lanes not as things in and of

themselves, but as both symbols of and conduits for dangerous intrusions into their self-segregating right to the city.

While the initial group of Satmars that immigrated with Teitelbaum in 1947 numbered in the mere dozens, the Satmar enclave that exists in Williamsburg today now stands as the largest Hasidic sect in the world, providing home to about half of the world's 120,000 Satmar adherents (Berger 2012). Their sect's longevity and tenacious homogeneity stems in no small part from the tightly regulated system of religious practices and social norms that inform nearly every aspect of life. While many of the Satmar's practices derive directly from biblical commandments, such as kosher dietary restrictions and the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest, other practices, like their uniform style of dress, the length of their payot (sideburns), and common use of Yiddish instead of English, exist instead mainly to preserve what Solomon Poll has dubbed the "sociological wall" that separates "this group from activities that might encroach on its own cultural stability" (Poll 1962, 3). Physical markers, such as plain black suits with *tallit* and *tzitzes* protruding from the edges, long curling sidelocks, and fur hats for men, or plain, modest clothing, wigs, and headscarves for women; common daily rhythms and necessities, such as ritual handwashing and bathing, kosher food, prayer, and the weekly day of rest; and a closed, religious education system with only two hours of secular instruction per day, all function to reinforce inter-group solidarity while simultaneously eliminating opportunities for external influence (Kaplan 2004). Even such practices that derive directly from the Torah or Talmud – commandments ostensibly dictated by God before distancing the Satmar Hasidism from the encroaching modernity of New York City ever became a thing - still work to restrict the number and type of interactions that

Satmars may have with the rest of the world, as access to kosher food, ritual baths, and a restful Sabbath often make traveling and working outside of the community exceedingly difficult.

Given the Satmar's historical commitment to cultural and geographical insularity, it is perhaps unsurprising that a sanctioned bicycle lane along one of their community's busiest avenues, carrying any number of non-community members and potentially subversive influences through the neighborhood in a direct and visible manner, would be met with opposition. However, as Solomon Poll's work shows, one of the Satmar's greatest strengths in maintaining their homogenous community, in addition to the external forms and cultural norms discussed above, has to do with the skill with which they have been able to previously incorporate external "innovations in ways in which they do not necessarily become a threat to group cohesion" (10). For Poll, this has occurred most significantly in terms of economic development, as the Satmar community has found ways to thrive economically while not only adhering to their religious principles, but also actually managing to imbibe seemingly secular activities with religious significance. This process thus worked by strengthening inner-group cohesion while providing for their material existence. The kosher food industry, clothing retail and manufacturing, and the religious education system, are all examples of those services which unite the economic, religious, and social spheres of Satmar community life, and serve to assuage the "fear of loss of group identification, of assimilation into the larger groups around them, and of the gradual breakdown of group values [that] makes such isolation a necessity" (Ibid).

Furthermore, while prohibitions against radio, TV, and the Internet still persist for

fear of their corrupting influence, the Satmars have still historically been successful in using those selfsame and other modern technologies for economic gains. Teitelbaum realized early on that his community would never survive amidst the conspicuous consumption and vice ridden cultural currents of New York City without economic security. To that end, the Satmars sought to reinforce their geographical and cultural isolation through economic ventures in both the diamond trade and local real estate, buying up much of Williamsburg, and amassing a social-service empire composed of loan associations, charities, meat markets, *shuls* (temples), and *yeshivas* (schools) (Powell 2006). But while the Satmar holdings are now valued at more than \$500 million, poverty still abounds, due in large part to their uncommonly high birth rates (the average Satmar family has eight children), their disinclination to move outside the of the community following marriage, and the emphasis on religious worship and cultural loyalty over secular education (Ibid). In all, there are simply not enough jobs within the Satmar community, or space enough within existing Satmar homes, to accommodate all that they would.

One of the most troubling aspects of this rapid internal growth then has been a rising housing shortage, greatly exacerbated in recent years by the gentrifying pressure of what Richard Florida has referred to as the “creative class,” whom Satmars know as “Artistens,” and everybody else knows as ‘hipsters’ (Florida 2003). Typically white, progressive minded, twenty-something college graduates, following on the heels of artists and musicians originally drawn to Williamsburg by cheap rents and abundant space, have been arriving in droves since the late 1990s, greatly inflating land prices and forcing the Satmar community into a greater geographical proximity with a culturally ‘promiscuous’

group than they had ever intended. While Satmar landlords initially approved of the opportunity to rent out space to the eccentric newcomers, cautious bewilderment soon gave way to hostility and suspicion when they realized that the *Artistens* were there to stay. Rabbis passed prohibitions against doing business with the newcomers, and discontented flyers in Yiddish began appearing along the neighborhood streets, entreating God to “please remove from upon us the plague of the artists, so that we shall not drown in evil waters, and so that they shall not come to our residence to ruin it” (Idov 2010). Specific fears, as well as the extent to which such fears pervaded the larger community, remain difficult to pinpoint, though the most echoed Satmar complaints regarding the *Artisten* population target their immodest clothing, inappropriate gender relations, and generally unobservant lifestyles, as among the most threatening of their general characteristics. In light of these historical and persistent fears regarding the threat of external influences and the decline of cultural homogeneity, it is perhaps unsurprising, then, that a bicycle lane along one of their busiest thoroughfares, trafficked almost exclusively by recently arrived, non-Satmar residents, would be met with such resistance.

As we move now from an historical overview of the Satmar community to the specific case of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane itself, it is important to renunciate that although the Satmar community is distinguished by highly pervasive and homogenous social norms, it is by no means without its share of dissent or independent exploration, as evidenced in part by blogs such as Hasidic Rebel, and recent strife regarding the succession of community leadership.⁴ And although not all Satmars opposed the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane – indeed, one prominent pro-cycling Hasid even claimed that

⁴ See <http://www.unpious.com/>; and Berger (2012) for more information.

“scores of people in the Hasidic community are actually pissed about this bike lane being eradicated at the behest of traditionalists” – we must also recognize how community pressure could convince would-be-cyclists against deciding to “come out as bike warriors,” for fear of ostracization (Savage 2009). Furthermore, while it is presently impossible for us to quantify or measure the extent to which such dissent exists throughout the Satmar community, the controversy roused by the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane certainly reveals the defensive stance with which the Satmars viewed the proximity of external influences, which, in this particular case, took the form of resistance to bicycle transportation and the people who ride them.

A Bicycle Lane in Brooklyn

The story of the bicycle lane then began in 2007, when, as part of PlaNYC 2030’s citywide push to expand bicycling infrastructure and use, the DOT installed a one-way bicycle lane along Bedford Avenue, right through the middle of the Satmar community (Figure 3).

Although not as nice or protected as the neighboring bicycle lane along Kent Avenue, Bedford Avenue was still one of the area’s main thoroughfares, and provided the most direct route for cyclists pedaling towards the Brooklyn Bridge. Cyclists began filling the lane night and day, on the weekdays and the Sabbath, riding past the steady flow of automobile traffic, disrupting school bus drop offs, and increasingly incensing Satmar onlookers. The Satmar’s opposition to the bicycle lane began almost immediately, and targeted several key issues: the cyclists posed serious dangers both to pedestrians crossing the street and to children being dropped off and picked up from

school, the bicycle lane destroyed valuable parking spaces, and the lane facilitated the proliferation of inappropriately dressed female cyclists riding through the Satmar neighborhood.

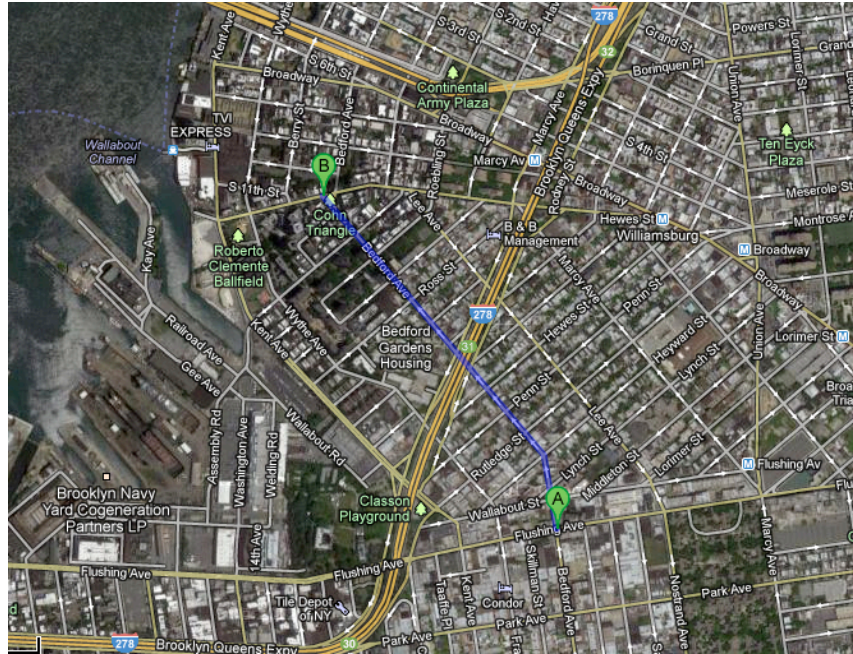


Figure 3. Courtesy of Google Maps.

This final criticism regarding the theme of “appropriate” dress then proved to be the most inflammatory for cycling advocates, culminating with Simon Weiser, a Hasidic member of Community Board 1 (CB-1 being the lowest rung of New York City government responsible for overseeing the land upon which the bicycle lane runs), commenting in the *New York Post* that “it’s a major issue, women passing through here in that dress code” (Quoted in Idov 2010). Many cycling advocates then seized upon this Satmar edict that prohibits one from viewing a member of the opposite sex in immodest apparel – the same rule that compels married women to always wear wigs in public – as evidence of the Satmar’s backwards, oppressive ways. In an instant the conversation became transformed from one of parking spaces and pedestrian safety to one of

appropriate modes of dress, reflecting larger Satmar concerns regarding the security of their community and the preservation of Ultra-Orthodox lifestyles, and cyclists concerns for the freedom to dress and move of their own volition. What had ostensibly been a conflict over the division of street space thus quickly revealed itself as a conflict over much more – the right to a particular sort of urban life marked by particular forms of movement, culture, and exclusion.

The Satmar's rejection of their *Artisten* neighbors, and the bicycle lane through which they travel, also draws heavily from concern over the preservation of their religious traditions, most significantly among the younger generations. As we discussed above, the reproduction of the Satmar community in Williamsburg depends upon the strict maintenance of distinct communal traditions, as well as the cultural and geographic isolation from conflicting belief systems and practices, e.g. US popular youth culture. The construction of a popular bicycle lane on one of their busiest avenues then constituted what seemed to be an imminent threat to this isolation, tempting sinful stares at immodestly dressed *Artisten*, and providing an unwelcome example of what personal, autonomous mobility might mean for young people. As one community member put it, speaking in reference to the possibility of mixing youth and bicycles, "if you have something that gives kids the feeling that they can go wherever they want... farther from their parents and community, it brings a lot of bad things" (Vos Iz Neas 2012). Although the bicycle lane did not usher in a new era of aversion for bicycle transportation – the Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum had instituted a children's bicycle ban decades before (Ibid) – the Bedford bicycle lane *did* lend bicycle transportation an institutionalized level of legitimacy that it had never enjoyed before. That the City government shelled out

\$11,000 to facilitate this bicycle intrusion only further wrangled the Satmar opposition, reacting against what they perceived to be the City's legitimization of the slipping away of their community (Idov 2010). An excerpt from Michael Powel's 2006 *New York Magazine* article regarding the presence of conflict within the Satmar community sums up the Satmar's rejection of this forced cultural mixing nicely:

They put questions to their rabbi: What should we do with our teenage girls who peer covertly at these artists? Why do these artists never put curtains on their windows? Can we force them out?

[The Rabbi] Zalmen, they reported, meditated a moment. *'You must close your curtains and pray and remember what it is to be Satmar,' he said. 'This is our shtetl, and our walls must go high.'* (Powel 2006, emphasis added).

By September of 2008, Community Board 1 – the lowest rung of New York City government that oversees the land used by the bicycle lane - had begun taking official measures to petition the DOT for the removal of the bicycle lane (in addition to the removal of another lane along Wythe Avenue, and the postponement of a planned addition along Kent Avenue). Then, on December 1, 2009, the DOT announced that they would be removing fourteen blocks, or just “a small part,” of the bicycle lane along Bedford Avenue between Flushing and Division (DOT quoted in Glazek 2010). Although the DOT justified the removal of the lane as “part of ongoing bike network adjustments in the area,” speculation on both sides of the conflict pointed to political

maneuvering and dealing between the Bloomberg Administration and the Satmar leadership as the real source of change (Idov 2010; Olshan and Shram 2009). Coming just four weeks after Bloomberg secured his third term as mayor, gaining just 50.6 percent of the vote (NY Times; 2009), many observers believed that Bloomberg needed the Hasidic vote – which tends to vote in a single bloc - to win the election, and that the demolition of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane was an easy bone to throw (Idov 2010; Glazek 2010). Whatever the true reason behind the demolition– and most probably there were several – the DOT and the City’s decision to remove the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane, especially in light of PlaNYC 2030, Sustainable Streets, and not infrequent past criticism regarding the DOT’s zealous expansion of bicycling infrastructure while remaining insensitive to local conditions⁵, did represent a significant strategic decision on the part of the DOT.

The demolition of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane additionally seems to support the power of local community boards when dealing with the DOT and the City government. While neither the DOT nor the mayoral administration is legally beholden to comply with community board edicts – CB’s function on a volunteer basis, with no more than 50 members as nominated by members of the City Council and appointed by the Borough president – the CB’s do tend to hold significant clout in their communities, and as such generally manage significant sway regarding the development of local projects (Guidera, 2013). Thus, while Bloomberg and the DOT under the leadership of Sadik-Khan may have initially supported the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane, the Satmar community board’s objections ultimately proved to be a stronger factor in determining

⁵ See Cassady 2011; Crowley 2009; and Shaer 2011 for more information.

the bicycle lane's fate.

We must remember, however, that to only examine a community board's preferences in conflicts over urban space is to ignore the larger array of organizational strategies and policy tools that both the Bloomberg administration, through its entrepreneurial approach to urban governance and emphasis on PlaNYC 2030 planning efforts, and non-state actors (such as the cyclists), employ to influence transportation and social development in New York City. Although community boards certainly exercise a certain influence in mediating between competing rights to the city, their impact is still dependent on and constituted by their constituencies, on the one hand, and the will of the Borough President, on the other, who remains directly connected to the Mayoral administration. As such, their power and policy derives from a particular blend of grassroots perspective and top-down directives, leaving them open to influence from a number of actors, at the same time that their power remains constrained within the context of broader City politics. It is thus necessary to examine the effect that political action and community organizing can have on bicycle lane conflicts beyond the workings of the community board apparatus, and reconsider, as Timothy Mitchell entreats us, how the effect of state power is both produced and harnessed by differentially situated stakeholders.

So, having failed to convince either the DOT or Community Board 1 to still the demolition of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane, cyclists and their advocates then turned to other tactics. Their first response was direct, local, and subversive. In the early morning hours of December 5th, just four days after the DOT has sandblasted the bicycle lane back into undifferentiated asphalt, three cycling activists returned to Bedford

Avenue under the cover of darkness with stencils and spray paint to reconstruct the bicycle lane themselves. Heavy snowfall, however, soon hindered their efforts, and they were forced to postpone the repainting. When they returned the following night, they were greeted by the Satmar's private community police force, the *Shomrim*, who encircled the activists and held them until the NYPD arrived. Although the would-be painters initially managed to escape that night without arrest, claiming that they had only been "touching up" the bicycle lane, and not technically vandalizing or defacing city property, the NYPD later caught wind of their actual intent when they uploaded a video to YouTube documenting their efforts. Two activists were then arrested, and the third was never publicly identified, though some sources claimed that it was actually a Satmar community member (Jaszi 2009).

In the YouTube video of the repainting, the activists declared that:

We are New York City cyclists, and our message is clear: Don't take away our bike lanes. We use this stretch of Bedford Avenue because it is a direct route to the Brooklyn Bridge. We will continue to use it whether or not there is a bike lane there, but not having one puts us at greater risk from cars. That's why bike lanes exist – for safety. Do not try to remove them, or we will put them back for our own safety (Repainting the Bike Lane on Bedford Avenue, 2009).

Having negotiated the official channels of City governance to no avail, these cycling activists then turned to direct action to accomplish their ends. Both their actions and rhetoric expressed a desire to actively participate in the production of the city in

which they would like to live, as well as a self-righteous willingness to work outside of official and legal networks to accomplish those ends: first, by repainting the lane after a democratic process decided it should be removed; and second, by refusing to allow the absence of an institutionalized and legitimate space for cycling deter them from traveling along Bedford Avenue. In addition to championing an unrelenting resilience to use the space as they see fit, the activists additionally advanced an important counter-narrative to the Satmar's argument that bicycle lanes make city streets more dangerous and more congested. By emphasizing the themes of "safety" and transport efficiency in their defense of bicycle lanes, the activists sought to tie their right to the city claim to an overarching bumbershoot of most desirable transportation practices. And rather than advance a defense of bicycle lanes stemming from issues of climate change, pollution, resource use, or social equality, the activists used the video of themselves repainting the bicycle lane - and taking direct, illegal action - to argue self-defense and to directly challenge the Satmar's own claim to the space.

On both sides of the conflict, then, we can see an interest in framing the right to the city argument through terms of safety and mobility, with each side claiming that their desired arrangement of space would provide the maximum personal and social benefits, where the opposing arrangement would bring only negative consequences. While part of the conflict between these opposing views has to do with how you define the terms – e.g. measuring transport efficiency depends in large part on what type of transportation mode one measures, on whether one privileges the efficiency of private cars or of bicycles – we must also be critical of the fact that some of the claims are simply inaccurate.

Take the Satmar's claim that the bicycle lane creates neighborhoods with more

dangerous transportation landscapes, or, as one Satmar school bus driver argued: “Bikes don’t obey any laws! ... They don’t stop. They just zoom through at a high speed... They don’t care about the kids” (Quoted in Schneider 2009). While it may be the case that a newly constructed bicycle lane might initially provoke feelings of insecurity and perhaps even a surge in traffic collisions as a result of its novelty, long-term data simply does not support the premise that bicycle transportation creates more dangerous streets. Although specific figures for Bedford Avenue are not available, there does exist a substantial body of government survey data and academic research confirming the view that bicycle lanes and increased bicycle transportation greatly *reduce* both the severity and incidence of traffic accidents and injuries, not just for cyclists and pedestrians, but for drivers as well (See DOT 2010, for a brief overview). Furthermore, the idea that a bicycle would prove more dangerous than a car, while weighing a tiny fraction of its weight and traveling at a tiny fraction of its speed, is frankly ludicrous. The real problem, then, probably has more to do with, as other Satmar residents have noted, that people simply “don’t know how to look” for the bicycles (Schneider 2009). Once again, we can see how supposed issues of safety and efficiency, like modest or immodest dress, can so often become stand-ins for larger conflicts over neighborhood change and the right to the city, encompassing the much larger spectrum of how we ought to live.

Following the activist’s unsuccessful attempt to reconstruct the bicycle lane, and the City’s prompt removal of what the activists had managed to repaint, activists from Time’s Up, an entirely volunteer-based and grassroots direct environmental action organization in NYC, and other cycling allies then turned to another form of protest, one decidedly marked by their pro-cycling stance and ideological support for the production

of a particular sort of city (Time's Up, 2009). Owing much to the French Situationists of the 1960s, a radical movement deriving from the belief that urban spaces should be used to create new, vibrant, and diverse forms of living, the Bedford Avenue cyclists first public protest took the form of a New Orleans style funeral procession down Bedford Avenue, where all the mourners were clowns, and all of the clowns rode bikes (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Benjamin Shepard, 2012. Benjaminheimshepard.blogspot.com

The Situationist's spirit of *détournement* and *dérive*, together signifying the playful appropriation of public space through which valuable social space may be created, was directly connected to both the form and subject of the Bedford Avenue protest. For while the funeral procession was nominally in memory of the late Bedford

Avenue bicycle lane, its full purpose was much more expansive, transcending even broad based issues of sustainable transportation to include normative notions of urban life and flow. Beyond the right to bicycle safely along public avenues, the cyclist's protest also advocated for a radically reconfigured understanding of the very purpose of city streets – one where leisure, social interactions, and fun would factor more prominently than miles per hour. Instead of treating New York City's streets as mediums for movement only, the clown mourners sought to highlight Bedford Avenue's inherently public and social nature, emphasizing the right to enjoyment and interaction in public spaces that must rightly trump the Satmar's narrowly conceived objections to diversity or free movement. Through their intentionally ridiculous attire and bicycles, the clown protestors thus sought to blur the line between carnival and protest, advocating for a radical reconceptualization of *street* space as *public* space by actively creating, if only for a moment, the vision of the city that they sought to erect (Shepard and Smithsimon 2011). This *performative critique*, which called “attention to the ideological norms that dictate both the described function of the environment and the manner in which such environments can be traversed,” thus worked by unsettling the culturally and legally structured behaviors that normally predominate along Bedford Avenue, swapping cars for bicycles, and fur hats for rainbow wigs (Furness 2007, 303).

But while this method of protest may appeal to the Emma Goldman in all of us (What's a revolution without dancing?), and certainly merits praise for uniting its ends with its means, its efficacy as a means of protest in the case of Bedford Avenue is unfortunately less commendable. On the one hand, the bicycle lane never returned. Now, while it may be the case that the reconstruction of the bicycle lane might have been

beyond the scope of what public protest could fairly accomplish, the clown's protest still failed to accomplish even auxiliary goals of softening the Satmar opposition, or of capturing the imagination or interest of the city at large. Apart from a few write-ups in liberal leaning publications such as *The Village Voice*, *The Brooklyn Paper*, and *The Gothamist*, with articles that focused mostly on the caricatured "Hipster vs. Hasid" debate, the mainstream press was totally silent. Indeed, the only aspect of the whole bicycle lane conflict that generated any substantial dialogue in the press was the much-hyped but never completed "naked bike ride," where cyclists planned to ride down Bedford Avenue in their underwear to protest the Satmar's objections to scantily-clad female cyclists (Schneider 2009). Whereas the clown procession was intended to call attention to the whole package of oppressive, automobile hegemony, the naked ride sought only to protest the Satmar's objections to immodestly dressed cyclists. As Heather Loop, one of the event's main organizers, put it, "if you can't handle scantily clad women... live in a place where you can have your own sanctuary, like upstate" (Loop, quoted in Campbell 2009). But this planned ride even wrangled activists at Transportation Alternatives, another one of NYC's most prominent pedestrian and cycling advocacy groups, who viewed the stunt as immature and off-topic, commenting that "a bike lane on Bedford Avenue is about transportation and road safety. Rhetoric or acts that pit neighbors against one another are not just irrelevant to this discussion, they are flat-out offensive" (Transportation Alternatives, quoted in Edroso 2009).

Although the ride never actually materialized (the planned date was snowed out, and it was never rescheduled), the inability of NYC's most active cycling advocates to form a common front with a common vision and tactics against the removal of the

Bedford Avenue bicycle lane certainly hindered their protest efforts, at the same time that it called attention to the complexity with which issues of bicycle transportation manifest and interact with other notions of urban life and flow. While this exercise may hold the possibilities of such a protest against an unrealistic standard, it still seems fair to say that the clown's funeral procession ultimately achieved more in the way of mobilizing an already motivated cycling base than it did by using "theater to draw attention to the danger faced by cyclists without safe, protected bike lanes" (Time's Up Press Release 2009).

So why did the cyclists' vision of their right to the city fail while the Satmar's right to the city gained institutional legitimization? Why did the bicycle protests prove ineffective while the Satmar's exclusionary claims gained political traction with a Mayoral administration ideologically supportive of bicycle transportation? Although the crucial *why* behind these processes remains elusive and complex, we can shed a great deal more light on the *how*. Already we have seen how the Satmar's right to the city derived from a religious and historical commitment to geographical and cultural isolation, and how their success in navigating local City politics greatly supported the privilege of that claim. In addition, we have seen how the debate over Bedford Avenue's bicycle lane transcends reductionist political explanations that do not account for Bloomberg's entrepreneurial governance or institutional support for bicycling infrastructure. And we have also seen how the construction and publicization of these competing rights to the city also reflect the sorts of values and visions offered by each respective claim.

Moreover, although bicycle transportation along Bedford Avenue did not live and die with the installment of the bicycle lane, it did legitimate and provide a highly visible

space for a class of people already viewed as subversive and undesirable. For a Satmar community long predicated on strict cultural separation, constantly struggling to protect its members - and especially its youth - against the sinful temptations of secular life amidst the sprawling metropolis that is New York City, the marked relief with which the bicycle lane threw the *Artisten* and other cyclists was simply too much to stand without a fight. Amidst mounting internal strife, in the form of housing shortages, economic slowdown, and succession feuds; and mounting external pressure, in the form of gentrification, encroaching *Artisten*, and the steady march of a capitalist popular culture seeming to grow and subsume without discrimination; the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane quickly came to represent the unwanted specter of community change. It is for this reason that I argue that beyond the much caricatured “Hipster vs. Hasid” conflict between backwards, isolating Satmars and progressive, mobility-liberated Hipsters, the fight over Bedford Avenue actually represents, at its core, an important conflict between right to the city claims based on the *right to mobility*, and ones based on the *right to place*.

Rights to Mobility and Rights to Place

Although we should always be hesitant before introducing new theoretical terms - especially since the “right to the city” already implies a whole gambit of overlapping, conflicting, and often ambiguous “rights” in both theory and practice (See Attoh 2011) - it is my belief that this distinction between *mobility* and *place* will actually serve here to illuminate rather than obfuscate, and enable us to further understand how conflicting communities construct their particular rights to the city. Keeping in mind, of course, that the drawing of this theoretical distinction on paper does not imply that the two can be

easily separated in practice, since *rights to mobility* automatically imply certain notions of place, just as *rights to place* necessarily support certain notions of mobility.

But first, let us be clear on some definitions. *Rights to mobility*, as I use it here, is a theoretical concept that draws on Lefebvre's *right to the city* as well as the emerging field of *transportation justice*. To refresh, the *right to the city* refers to the right to participate in the making of the city as a collective work, and the right to a fully realized human experience of that selfsame city, while *transportation justice* is the concept that transportation infrastructure should aim to equally and indiscriminately address the needs of all people, regardless of race, sex, class, gender, age, ability, and any other social signifier (Lefebvre 1991; Beyond the Backlash 2011, v). Each concept recognizes the paramount importance of transportation to individuals and populations in attaining goods and services, and accessing networks, opportunities, and experiences – in other words, everything from parks, schools, and hospitals, to shopping, employment, and civic participation – though they differ in their spheres of focus. While *right to the city* typically locates transportation as one part of the larger nexus that informs the form and flow of urban life, *transportation justice* is more commonly used as a metric with which to measure equality in public provisions for urban transport (Cass et al 2005; Martens et al 2012; Attoh 2012).

The *right to mobility* thus emerges in part as a synthesis of these two concepts, as a theoretical concept that asserts that the right to participate and experience the city as *oeuvre* depends upon the ability and freedom to move throughout its neighborhoods and streets; as a right dependent on available infrastructure, public funding, and juridical support, as well as personal and public time-space configurations, security, and cultural

norms; and, like the *right to the city* and *transportation justice*, as a political project that advocates for a more just and equitable distribution of transportation benefits and detriments. For cyclists demanding access to the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane, the *right to mobility* thus became a central point, rallying around the banner idea that *public* streets should be exactly that. This technique then allowed other, less rights-based issues such as climate change and urban liveability to play supporting rather than starring roles, while skating over the Satmar's rights-based objections to safety and place.

The Satmar's arguments against the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane thus advance a *right to the city* claim through a perspective of the *right to place*, rather than the *right to mobility*. While these two spheres are by no means contradictory or even exclusive – indeed, much overlap exists, as the cyclists *right to motion* occupies space in particular ways and creates certain types of places, while the Satmar's *right to place* implies a right to automobile mobility and the suppression of alternatives – the emphatic shift is still significant. Like the *right to mobility*, the *right to place* is another theoretical concept that draws from the work of the *right to the city*, asserting that the full realization of one's participation in the creation, benefits, and detriments of the urban setting depends most significantly on the ability to occupy space and create place. Since so much of the urban experience and the idea of the city as an *oeuvre* results from the dense grouping of human beings and social resources, and from the ability of individuals and populations to tap into those resources and networks, the ability to create and claim 'place' is clearly an important aspect of the human experience. Nor is this struggle for place limited to cities, as may be seen with land rights struggles all over the world, and the seemingly universal conflicts over 'who gets to do what where'.

In all of these examples, what is at stake is the perceived loss of community, of livelihoods, of neighborhoods, and of place. While some cases of conflicts regarding the *right to place* may be fairly straightforward – such as the bulldozing of indigenous settlements by nefarious multi-national corporations concerned only with reaping quick unsustainable profits – others, often between stakeholders operating at similar scales with similar positions of privilege and disadvantage, such as the one between the anti-bike lane Satmars and the pro-bike lane cyclists, deny easy surface judgments. Our job, then, as both critical scholars and just, compassionate human beings, must be to assess these conflicts on the grounds of justice in all of its forms (e.g. social, environmental, economic), as well as on the basis of the greatest good for the greatest number of people. And while not everyone will agree with my reckoning of these cases, as the particular balance with which I treat issues of justice and the greatest good are no doubt colored by my own bias, privilege, and experience, I believe that few will be able to take fair issue with my methods.

Upon first viewing the Hipster vs. Hasid caricature, it is tempting to write off the Satmar's opposition to the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane as unwarranted, backwards, and downright un-neighborly. Indeed, it was this very characterization that inspired such media coverage over what was, city and nation-wide, a relatively minor and local affair. Nevertheless, a fuller investigation into the history of their community in Williamsburg, as well as the material and symbolic effects that the bike lane produced, still reveals a more nuanced and sympathetic understanding of the conflict. Through such an investigation, we can understand how the Bedford Avenue bike lane fueled Satmar perceptions that their community was increasingly vulnerable to hostile and unwanted

external sources of corruption, while simultaneously representing the encroaching gentrification of their neighborhood by new, young, progressive-minded tenants. In sum, regardless of whether or not we agree with the Satmar's religious ideology, or their intention to remain an insular society in the middle of one of the most diverse cities in the world, we must still remain sensitive to the ways in which the Bedford Avenue bike lane challenged and unsettled their deeply held notions of community, order, and social ethics.

But the Satmar's right to place - significant though it is - is also importantly *not* a right to exclude, nor a right to segregate. Indeed, one of the most valuable theoretical aspects of the notion of "rights" is their universality – as such, the right to place for one individual or group must not deny others from realizing that same right. Nor, moreover, should we be concerned with preserving notions of community, order, and ethics whose reproduction depends upon exclusion and oppression (as might be said of Satmar behavioral and transportation norms along Bedford Avenue). In this vein we must remember that the avenue under question is a *public* street, a place whose very *publicness* depends upon unrestricted, equitable access and use. I have already alluded above to the importance of public space to the realization of the right to the city, to a thriving, democratic society, and to our collective well-being, and there is not space to continue that discussion here,⁶ so let it suffice for now to simply say that the publicness of Bedford Avenue is something that we should be interested in strengthening, not curtailing.

Furthermore, climate change and pollution are issues that may transcend even legitimate *right to the city* concerns regarding inclusivity and the quality of social interactions. We cannot continue to burn through fossil fuels at the rates we are used to,

⁶ For an excellent introduction, see Don Mitchell's *The Right to the City* (2003).

nor can we safely continue to rely on private automobiles for personal urban transportation. The effects on global weather patterns, crop yields, disease transmission, biodiversity, and air and water quality, especially on those underprivileged and marginalized populations who have contributed the least to anthropogenic climate change, are too cataclysmic to accept. Our window for action is quickly closing, and the broader shift in consciousness that will allow us to successfully mitigate and adapt to climate change must begin with smaller, practical solutions, such as replacing private automobile travel with bicycle use in those areas already well suited to it, due to topography, geography, and climate. The Bedford Avenue bicycle lane thus stands as an apt example of the ‘low-hanging fruit’ that we must harvest if we are to ever have any hope of preventing catastrophic environmental destruction, even accounting for its effect on the Satmar’s community life.

Therefore, to the extent that the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane disrupted exclusionary spatial practices, and contributed to the making of a more inclusive, sustainable city, we must say bravo. But, to the extent that the bike lane contributed to the decline of productive and cherished forms of community life for Satmar residents, we must continue to strive for less disruptive and more cooperative forms of development. So, acknowledging that Bedford Avenue, New York City, and the entire world would probably all be better off with the bicycle lane than without, can we imagine a manner of constructing the bicycle lane that would not have provoked such vehement opposition and collateral disruption within the Satmar community?

While some Satmar claims having to do with ‘disorder’ and ‘inappropriately dressed’ female cyclists can probably not be reasonably addressed, it may have been

possible to approach the bicycle lane's construction so that the Satmars felt like they had more of a say during the initial planning process, instead of it being a solely top-down DOT initiative. One of the Satmar's claims in particular, that the bike lane harmed local business, may have further been able to be resolved through increased dialogue and collaboration between the various stakeholders involved. For while bicycle lanes and increased bicycle travel have been shown to support economic growth in other areas of NYC, it is conceivable that the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane, trafficked primarily by non-Satmars along a stretch of shops that serve primarily Satmar needs (e.g. Judaica shops, prayer stores, Kosher delis, etc.), may have harmed local businesses by dissuading wary Satmars from interacting with the bicycle-riding *Aristens*, and the new bicycle lane. (This, too, may shed further light on why Bloomberg's administration caved so willingly to the Satmars' demands that the bicycle lane be removed, if perhaps PlaNYC could only be supported if it did not harm capital accumulation.) Bicycling education workshops, bicycle parking, or simply greater communication between opposing stakeholders may have been useful in diffusing any ill will or discomfort that could have translated into decreased economic activity for shops along Bedford avenue.

In addition, as appealing as the guerrilla activists and clown cyclists actions may be to sympathetic observers, their illegal actions and direct, public objection to both the decisions of the Community Board and the DOT certainly did not win them any friends among the Satmar community. Indeed, their disregard for the laws of city governance – not unlike a sullen child who doesn't get his way – almost certainly added to the Satmar narrative that the *Aristen* cyclists don't respect community, and that they are entitled and privileged. In short, blatantly defying the outcome of the local

democratic process was never going to gain any new Satmar allies. (Although perhaps that was never the point, as activists instead might have simply been ready to use the opportunity to call attention to the issue of bicycle transportation and infrastructure in the city more broadly.) I have no answer to the question of how best to respond to the deconstruction of the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane, but as long as the efforts to create more sustainable and inclusive cities require working with those who feel differently over how best to use space, (that is, always), it is at the very least worth considering the impacts that our actions and rhetoric will have not just on our supporters, but on our opposition, as well.

Wiley Norvell, spokesperson for the advocacy group Transportation Alternatives, may have said it best when he observed that the battle over the Bedford Avenue bicycle really became "a sort of stand-in battle for the anxieties people have about neighborhood change" (Popper 2009). Jen Peterson, as well, similarly echoed this sentiment when she wrote that the fight over Bedford Avenue could have really been "any public space in the community—which was also surrounded to the immediate north and southwest by public housing projects home to a significant population of low income African American and Latino residents" (Peterson 2011, 37). Undoubtedly, the Bedford bicycle lane unsettled commonly held notions of community, civility, and order within the Satmar community. And undoubtedly, as well, we can see how some of these changes produced desirable effects – such as decreased pollution, and increased safety and mobility for those trying to travel more sustainably – as well as negative ones – such as the invocation of Satmar hostility against cyclists and bicycle travel, and feelings of a loss of community. Why the Bedford Avenue case was decided as it was remains an open question, but through it all

we can see how the bike lane embodied so much more than tires and pavement, and included issues of sustainability, inclusivity and exclusivity, gentrification, automobile privilege, religious conviction, paranoid resistance to change, the effect and management of state power, and the general flow of urban life.

Chapter 4:

Prospect Park West: Neighbors and Bike Lanes

Located several miles south of the Satmars and Bedford Avenue, the Prospect Park West avenue runs adjacent to the western edge of Brooklyn's Prospect Park, an affluent and largely residential area of Park Slope that runs between Grand Army Plaza in the north, and Bartel Pritchard Square in the south (Figure 5). Brooklyn Community Board 6 oversees the area, along with the adjoining neighborhoods of Carrol Gardens, Cobble Hill, Columbia Street District, Gowanus, and Red Hook. As of the 2010 Census there were over 100,000 residents, an increase of several percent since the 2000 Census (US Census Bureau, NYC Dept of Planning 2010). While the community board district as a whole is not all that diverse, with 62.7 percent of the residents identifying as White Nonhispanic, 18.2 identifying as Hispanic, and 10.5 identifying as Black/African American Nonhispanic, as compared with 35.7 percent White Nonhispanic, 19.8 percent Hispanic, and 31.9 percent Black/African American Nonhispanic in Brooklyn as a whole, the two census tracts that border Prospect Park West are even less so, with over 80 percent of the residents identifying as White Nonhispanic (Ibid). Moreover, this tendency towards a more homogenous, white racial makeup has increased in recent years, as has a rise in household income. As I will discuss later on in more depth, the fourteen blocks of the PPW redesign now play home to some of the wealthiest and most politically connected persona in New York City, including former DOT Commissioner Iris Weinshall, her husband, US Senator Charles Schumer, and former deputy mayor under Guliani, Norman Steisel.

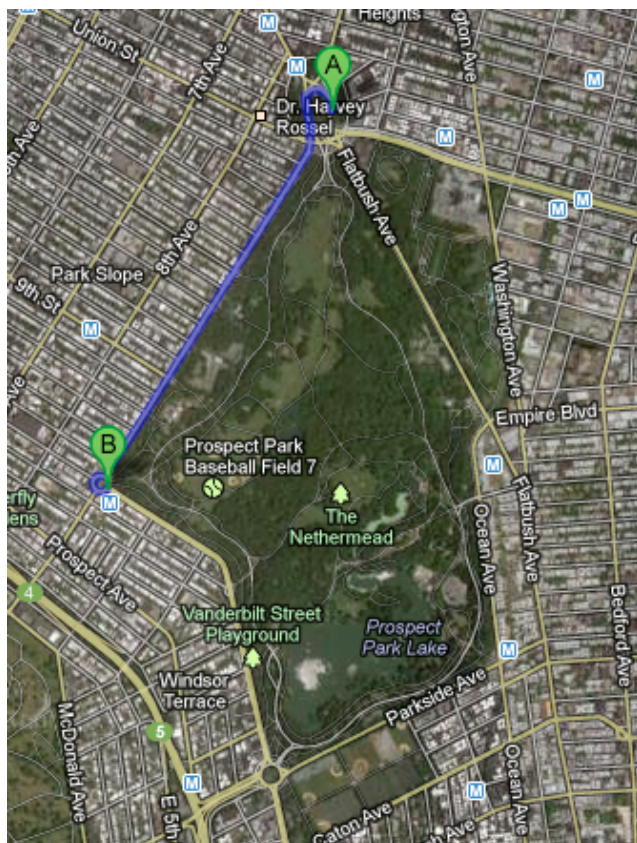


Figure 5. Courtesy of Google Maps.

The story of the Prospect Park West (PPW) redesign project, and the construction of the PPW bike path, began in the spring of 2007, when the Transportation Committee of Brooklyn Community Board 6, responding to community concerns voiced in previous weeks about issues of vehicular speeding and traffic safety, passed a number of motions requesting that the DOT address the “perceived/actual high rate of speed of vehicles traveling on... Prospect Park West,” and “study traffic calming measures on PPW, including the possible installation of a one-way or two-way Class 1⁷ bicycle path on PPW” (Brooklyn CB-6 4/2007; 6/2007). Although the constituents of CB-6 had long been concerned about traffic flow and safety along PPW, according to both anecdotal reports and official testimony, this was the first time that the community board had been

invited to take formal action by the community (DOT PPW 2013; Robbins 2011). And while the seminal thrust for action in this particular moment remains unclear – e.g. there was no exceptional or tragic accident around which the community rallied, as in other cases – the coincidental timing of Bloomberg’s PlaNYC 2030 plan and CB-6’s formal letters to the DOT does seem significant. That the community may have approved of this coincidental timing, with Bloomberg’s mayoral victory and PlaNYC 2030’s rhetorical commitment to sustainability and liveability (at least in the context of macro level capital development and global competitiveness), to advance their own safer streets initiative does not seem unlikely.

In April of 2009, two years after the initial requests for action were filed, Community Board 6 received the DOT’s proposed street design for PPW, a plan which would convert the three lane avenue along the western border of Prospect Park into a two lane motorway with a park-side bicycle path separated from motor vehicle traffic by a floating parking lane, and eliminate six parking spaces (Robbins 2011). Four weeks later, at the general body meeting on May 13, 2009, the Board then voted 18 to 9 in favor of conditionally approving the DOT’s proposed street redesign, providing that the DOT addressed a number of unresolved issues including street cleanings, the placement of traffic signals, and water drainage mechanics. In addition to these relatively minor concerns, and presaging subsequent conflicts to come regarding the use of public street space and vehicular flows, the Community Board additionally entreated the DOT to consider how they were going to “balance park users’ loading and unloading needs with the community’s desire to preserve and retain the maximum amount of parking on Prospect Park West” (Bashner 2009). In other words, CB-6 wanted to know how the

DOT could calm traffic and improve safety and access for both cyclists and pedestrians, *without* upsetting the prevailing hegemonic construction of street space that demanded free parking and privileged access for automobile traffic. Even though CB-6 had lobbied the DOT for help in creating a new arrangement of public street space and traffic flows, one that would encourage mixed uses in a safer, more sustainable, and liveable environment, they had still not fully departed from the automobile-centric understanding of mobility, nor seemed fully prepared to embrace the changes that such modifications would bring. This reluctance to fundamentally alter the prevailing norms of transportation privilege and mobility - even among those advocating for a more sustainable and livable transportation landscape – will also factor prominently later on when we discuss the construction of the competing right to the city claims surrounding the PPW redesign.

Following a year of additional community input and revisions, the DOT finally began the physical installation of the PPW bicycle path in June of 2010, in what marked the beginning of a six-month monitoring effort to gauge the lane's effect on traffic flows and safety. In December of that same year, the DOT then released the results of that initial monitoring project, whose data roundly supported the redesign's success in both improving safety and increasing use by pedestrians and cyclists. A few of their more notable findings:

- Rates of weekend cycling along PPW was almost doubled, while weekday cycling increased nearly three-fold;
- The percent of cyclists riding on the sidewalk fell from 46 and 20, to 4 and 3 on weekdays and weekends, respectively;

- Rates of motor-vehicle speeding along PPW fell from 3 in 4 to only 1 in 6.

Moreover, that same monitoring period also saw the total number of commuters along PPW rise for both the AM and PM rush hours, while the average commute time along PPW remained stable. And at the end of the six months, PPW still provided the quickest north-south route through Park Slope (DOT PPW 2010). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a community opinion survey conducted by CB-6, in conjunction with City Council members Brad Lander and Stephen Levin, found that over 70 percent of residents, living in both Brooklyn at large and in Park Slope specifically, supported the PPW redesign either as is or with some minor modifications (Lander, Levin, CB-6 2010).

While these findings succeeded in garnering the support of bicycle activists and municipal officials alike, some local residents who lived along PPW— including former DOT Commissioner Weinshall, Senator Schumer, and former Deputy Mayor Norman Steisel, had already begun organizing against the proposed redesign, arguing that the redesign would cause unprecedented traffic congestion, hurt neighborhood businesses, and endanger the welfare of other residents, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and small children attempting to enter the park or unload their cars. Writing in *The New York Times*, in a December 22, 2010 letter to the editor, Weinshall, Steisel, and fellow PPW neighbor Louise Hainline, herself a dean at Brooklyn College, argued that “when new bike lanes force the same volume of cars and trucks into fewer and narrower traffic lanes, the potential for accidents between cars, trucks and pedestrians goes up rather than down. At Prospect Park West in Brooklyn, for instance, where a two-way bike lane was put in last summer, our eyewitness reports show collisions of one sort or another to be on pace to be triple the former annual rates” (Hainline, Steisel, and Weisenhall 2010). That the

PPW redesign had increased traffic insecurity and produced negative effects throughout the neighborhood was repeated by a number local residents, including one 61-year-old resident who reported that:

The bike lane is dangerous, for one, and it's totally unnecessary. It's dangerous to people crossing with a baby, crossing with a dog, to old people... and the bikers don't follow the rules. Plus there's the fact that the traffic backs up and if one person double parks it's dangerous to the cars going by now that there's only one lane. There's so many near accidents" (O'Grady 2011).

These charges of "dangerous" traffic conditions, of unruly and disrespectful bikers, and of impediments to the free flow of automobiles quickly emerged as central claims of the PPW redesign opposition. The validity and implications of these charges will be discussed a bit later on, but for now it is enough to recognize that opposition to the PPW bicycle path, (recalling the DOT's monitoring data showing that the redesign had produced a safer streetscape without significantly impeding automobile flows,) emerged from tensions regarding neighborhood change at least as much as they did from actual changes in insecurity or transport efficiency.



Figure 6. Zoe Schlanger for the Gothamist

Although Weinshall and other PPW residents were certainly not the first to oppose the creation of a bicycle path in their own neighborhood, their political influence, material resources, and connections to some of NYC's largest media outlets did allow them to turn this NIMBY conflict into a city-wide affair. After their input failed to sway their local Community Board, Weisenhall and her neighbors formed the community advocacy group Neighbors for Better Bike Lanes (NBBL) in the summer of 2010 - which would later grow to include another offshoot organization, Seniors for Safety - and began preparing to sue the City for the bicycle lane's removal (Fried and Kazis, 6/21/2011, Figure 6). In another telling example of the group's wealth and political influence, NBBL's first move as an organization was to secure the *pro bono* legal assistance of one

of New York's most prestigious law firms, that of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher⁸. The enlistment of such an illustrious and successful international firm in what seemed to be an extremely local conflict was no doubt made possible by the connections Weisenhall had established during her time as DOT Transportation Commissioner, which included, most notably, a one Randy Mastro, Guiliani's former Chief of Staff and first Deputy Mayor, and now a Co-Chair of Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher's litigation department (Fried and Kazis, 10/03/2011).

In March of 2011, NBBL and Seniors for Safety, represented by Mastro and Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher, filed an official Article 78 challenge suing to overturn the DOT's decision to enact the PPW street redesign project. Since the project had already been put through a number of revisions and approved by the local community board, and because its efficacy in reducing collisions and increasing street usage was additionally supported by DOT monitoring data, the plaintiffs decided to frame their anti-bike lane argument *not* through issues of safety or community engagement - as they had elsewhere argued - but rather on the grounds that the DOT had not followed the City's historical landmarks and environmental review process before proceeding with the project. Although Prospect Park West itself had never been designated as part of the Landmark District or as an important historical site, it did border two sites that were –the Prospect Park District, and Prospect Park itself – which NBBL and Gibson, Dunn, and Crutcher argued should be sufficient. But the case was ultimately thrown out on August 16, 2011 by the Supreme Court of the State of New York, who, ignoring the irony behind the

⁸ Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher employs over 1,000 lawyers worldwide, and is the only law firm to ever win *American Lawyer's* "Top Litigation Department" award for two years, in 2010 and 2012. <http://www.gibsondunn.com/default.aspx>

plaintiffs' allegation that a bicycle lane and decreased motor vehicle traffic would produce negative environmental consequences, still judged that the plaintiffs hadn't complied with the statute of limitations when filing their claim (Supreme Court of the State of New York 2011).

Bicycling activists and DOT supporters alike were quick to praise the court's decision, though their opponents remained equally resistant. Overlooking the fact that the suit had been dismissed on a mere technicality, Commissioner Sadik-Khan used the opportunity to praise the DOT's work on PPW, stating that "the plaintiffs have been dead wrong in their unsupported claims about the bike path and DOT's practices... this project was requested by the community, they voted repeatedly to support it, and their support has registered in several opinion polls" (Sadik-Khan, quoted in Cardozo 2011).

Sympathetic media outlets were also quick to support the ruling, casting the plaintiffs as "self-important swells" who were obsessed, as TA spokesperson Michael Murphy described, with a "mad quest to overrule the wishes of their neighbors and destroy a commonsense, life-saving street improvement that has long since become part of the fabric of that community" (Del Signore 2012). The plaintiffs were further mocked as being one step away from "a war on crosswalks," while Sadik-Khan additionally dismissed the whole attempt to reverse the PPW redesign as "frivolous" (Ibid; Quoted in Cardozo 2011).

Meanwhile, on the other side of the conflict, opposition to the bicycle lane proceeded unabated, with residents continuing to charge that the lane endangered pedestrians and obstructed traffic. In one particularly emblematic comment, a 55-year-old Prospect Park resident alleged that she "got hit by a bike and ended up going to the

hospital because they don't follow any rules. And yet, we have to have two lanes for them? You can't even walk in the park with a baby carriage because they're all over the place and they follow no rules" (Casey 2011). And still another, this time from a 45-year-old resident:

“It's ridiculous. So you have bicyclists shouting at people who are trying to walk their dogs, people who are pushing strollers. It's ridiculous. And you can't actually see when you're crossing the street so you have to walk into the street to actually see oncoming traffic” (Ibid).

This opposition then fueled an additional appeals process, and in December of 2012 an appellate court ruled that the statute of limitations did in fact apply to three of the plaintiffs’ original arguments, but not to the fourth and final claim that the DOT had violated the State Environmental Quality Review Act (Del Signore 2012). The case was then sent back to the Supreme Court for review, and at the time of this writing is still under review.

Spheres of influence

But legal recourse was just one of many tactics employed by NBBL and Seniors for Safety in their opposition to the PPW bicycle path. In addition to mobilizing their resources and political contacts for action in the courts, Weisenhall et al also sought to influence the PPW redesign project through their privileged access to City officials.

Although Senator Schumer (Weisenhall's husband) remained careful not to take a public stance on the issue of the PPW bicycle path, numerous media outlets reported that he had worked behind the scenes to influence Bloomberg and the City council on the behalf of his wife and NBBL (Kazis 12/20/2011; Chaban 2011). According to one source involved with his political office, Schumer had in fact "asked legislators what they're going to do about [this and other] bike lanes," and had "shared his feelings privately with some members of the City Council" (Siefman 2011).

While direct evidence of Schumer's involvement in the PPW conflict remains elusive and inconclusive, other members of NBBL and Seniors for Safety still wielded enough clout of their own to secure spots at the City Council Transportation Committee's December 9, 2010 hearing on NYC DOT's bicycle policy. Former deputy mayor and NBBL member Normal Steisel, active NBBL member Carol Linn, and lead representative for Seniors for Safety Louis Carswell, all testified before the committee regarding the hazards of the PPW bicycle path, alongside Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and other PPW bicycle path opponents (Fried and Kazis 6/21/2011). Furthermore, while Weisenhall did not speak at the hearing herself, records show that in the weeks leading up to the hearing she did hold several meetings with Transportation Committee Chair James Vacca, as well as with City Council members Brad Lander and Steve Levin (Ibid). While there is nothing scandalous or improper about constituents meeting with elected officials, or being allowed to testify before policy deliberations, that NBBL and Seniors for Safety enjoyed such privileged access to the most elite levels of city governance as a result of their working political connections does raise important questions regarding the construction of power in NYC, as well as the ability of

differentially situated actors to access that power in the creation of a particular sort of city.

Beyond legal action and political influence, the PPW bicycle path opponents also sought to gain favorable coverage in the press, again, as a result of their political, connections and privileged resources. As internal NBBL emails reveal, such a strategy was designed to whip up public support against Sadik-Khan and the DOT's approach to bicycling infrastructure, as well as support their legal action in the courts. Although gaining the support of local businesses and residents would not change their legal argument that the DOT had violated proper procedures regarding the PPW redesign project, NBBL still sought to push the issue publicly because, as Hainline explained:

Our actions would be strengthened by showing that it's not just a few NIMBY 'old rich folks' (my words, not theirs) who are opposed to the bike lane. They [Gibson, Dunn, & Crutcher] felt that support from others, particularly members of the business community negatively affected by the lane, would broaden our chances as an article 78 would need to go in front of a politically-connected/appointed judge, who might choose to dodge a decision unless it seemed to involve more than just our group's dislike of the impact/aesthetics" (Kazis 10/05/2011).

Although the PPW bicycle path opponents could not allege issues of insecurity or community input in their legal challenge to the PPW redesign, that did not stop them from doing so in the press, with the help of a few well placed allies in the media. After

both sides of the PPW redesign held competing rallies on October 21, 2010, Weisenhall contacted the *Daily News* reporter who had covered the event to complain that the paper's coverage had been excessively "pro-bike." The writer then responded sympathetically, writing "I'll email my editor to make sure there's a few kicks at the freewheelers in there!". Although the PPW demonstration had drawn nearly five times as many supporters in favor of the bike path as against, the only quote featured the next day in the *Daily News* was from a bicycle path opponent. Although the reporter in question denied slanting the story to appease Weisenhall's request, former deputy mayor Norman Steisel then reported later that month to other NBBL members that the *Daily News* would "continue beating the drum" for their opposition to the PPW bicycle path. It would go on to publish a series of pro-NBBL and Seniors for Safety editorials, attacking both the DOT's general approach to bicycling infrastructure as well as the folly of the PPW bicycle path itself (Fried and Kazis 11/16/2011; NY Daily News 2/6/2011; 3/09/2011; 4/23/2011; 8/13/2011).

In yet another telling example, when NBBL's *New York Times* editorial seemed to be languishing without publication, Weisenhall put in a call to her "contact at New York Times... [who] said she would see what she could do," once again leveraging the political clout and influence she had won through her time as Commissioner in the DOT. Two days later, their letter was published (Fried and Kazis 11/16/2011). Throughout the course of their public relations efforts, NBBL and Seniors for Safety also secured the support of CBS-2's chief political correspondent Marcia Kramer – "an honorary member of NBBL (in secret, I know you have to preserve your status as an objective reporter)" (NBBL President Louis Hainline, quoted in Fried and Kazis 11/16/2011) – as well as

coverage (supportive, neutral, and oppositionary) in the *New York Times*, *NY Post*, *The Gothamist*, *The Brooklyn Paper*, *New York Magazine*, and even the British newspaper *The Guardian*. Again, while rallying resources to support one's cause, or securing media coverage is not in and of itself problematic, that NBBL and Seniors for Safety were able to secure support from such expansive and reputable members of the press does highlight the amount of political and public privilege with which there were able to advance their right to the city claim.

Throughout the PPW redesign conflict, NBBL and Seniors for Safety framed their arguments through issues of safety, efficiency, access, and disorder. Bikers, they argued, ignored both commonsense and legal traffic regulations, and frequently ran down bewildered pedestrians. Further, they averred that the bike path removed valuable parking spaces, disrupted automobile flows and increased the number of traffic collisions, and greatly endangered the lives of people attempting to access the park. As William Grinker, PPW resident and former city commissioner under Mayor Ed Koch phrased the issue, "it [the bicycle path] creates a traffic jam... it's a little more dangerous because the bikes don't pay any attention to the traffic lights" (Quoted in Durkin 2010). Or, Charles O'Donnel, lifelong PPW resident, put it:

They say they're slowing the traffic down but they've created congestion. It only takes one car to try to park, a truck making a delivery, and it's down to one lane... I've seen, in more than one occasion, a women with a baby carriage looking to cross with the light and these guys do nothing but blow whistles at them, curse at them, give them the old traditional finger (Quoted in Casey 2011).

What can we make, then, of this opposition, all of which seems unanimous in its condemnation of the PPW redesign as both dangerous and inefficient? Especially in light of the DOT's monitoring data that says just the opposite? Well, part of the problem, it seems, is that those objecting to the PPW redesign simply don't trust the DOT's data to begin with. Hainline, Steisel, and Weinshall all accused the DOT of "cherry-picking" statistics to create the inaccurate impression that the PPW redesign had reduced the number of traffic collisions, as well as twisting its data to portray the PPW bicycle path as more popular than it actually was (Hainline, Steisel, and Weinshall 2010; Seifman 2011). Opponents of the bicycle path also attacked the City Council's survey findings that a majority of residents supported the redesign, arguing that the survey never presented the possibility of alternatives, nor polled "hundreds of residents and neighbors of Prospect Park West, including many cyclists, who have been negatively affected by the lane" (Hainline 2011).

In addition, opponents also accused Sadik-Khan and the DOT of pushing their pro-bicycle agenda down the throat of the PPW community without sufficient community input or consultation, and of submitting a full report to the Community Board only after already deciding to make the redesign permanent. However, a number of correspondences between the DOT, Sadik-Khan, and CB-6 show that the DOT was in fact very receptive to community input and concerns. Indeed, it was as a result of community engagement, through CB-6's role in originally requesting the DOT's intervention, subsequent committee and general body meetings, and public hearings, that the final shape of the PPW redesign emerged, with a raised median separating bicycle

and motor vehicle traffic, expanded signage and safety features, aesthetically suitable building materials, and the return of 16 more parking spaces than originally planned (Bashner 2010; Sadik-Khan 2010; Kummer 2011; Palmieri 2011). In fact, the only evidence that I encountered of objections to the DOT's planning process - outside of those coming from NBBL and Seniors for Safety - came from CB-6 District Manager Craig Hammerman in his December 2010 testimony before the City Council Transportation Committee's hearing on bicycling in New York City. Even then, while Hammerman criticized the DOT for engaging with CB-6 and the PPW community only after the initial planning process had already begun, he still applauded the DOT's receptivity to local concerns and transparency throughout (Hammerman 2010).

Where NBBL and Seniors for Safety claims seem to have the most validity, then, is through charges that the PPW redesign greatly unsettled their taken for granted notions of traffic flows and public space. While allegations of lasting insecurity and increased collisions as a result of the PPW redesign are hard to support – the DOT's official monitoring data, the City Council community survey, and a plethora of other international, municipal, academic, and anecdotal research all support the notion that bicycle paths create streetscapes that are safer, more liveable, and more sustainable – there is certainly some truth to the idea that the new bicycle path might have created the *impression* of increased insecurity for drivers long used to speeding along PPW, or for residents unaccustomed to bicycle traffic along the edge of the park. As representative for Seniors for Safety Lois Carswell put it, the PPW redesign meant that "now you cross two lanes of traffic, then you go across this weird space in the street and then you hit a two-way bicycle lane on a one-way street... *It's very hard to learn new behavior like that*"

(Quoted in Pearson 2010, emphasis added). Even though the final PPW redesign included additional traffic signal lights, new crosswalks, large stenciled “LOOK” signs on the pavement and sidewalks, and rumble strips in the bicycle path, there is no doubt that transitioning from learned behavior for traversing three lanes of one-way motor vehicle traffic, to traversing two lanes of one-way motor vehicle traffic and a two-way bicycle path, was always going to take some getting used to.

In addition, it is also certainly more difficult now for residents of PPW who try to use their cars as they did before the redesign, since their unparalleled right of way as drivers is now slightly curtailed. But in a way, that was always sort of the point, since Bloomberg’s PlaNYC 2030 and the DOT’s Sustainable Streets program could only ever succeed in the creation of a more sustainable transportation landscape if that form which was the least sustainable – the private automobile – stopped being so convenient to use. While it may not be politically expedient to say so, promoting bicycle travel and public transportation has always depended in part on making private automobile travel more painful. This tension, then, between the positive rhetoric surrounding the promise of bicycle transportation, and the inconvenient reality that such advancements require a decline in automobile privilege, further emerged within the arguments of NBBL themselves. As even Louis Hainline recognized, writing in her 2011 *Brooklyn Paper* editorial:

Bike lanes improve the health, safety, and environment of the city. However, the two-way “parking-protected” bike lane on Prospect Park West has caused serious safety concerns and unnecessary inconvenience for local residents — especially

senior citizens, people with disabilities, families with children and neighborhood businesses (Hainline 2011).

This sort of tension can be found in any number of NIMBY conflicts, and although it acquired a particular character here due to the nature of the relationship between the issues at stake and the governing political agenda, we must still recognize NBBL and Seniors for Safety's opposition arguments, in part, as manifestations of this reluctance to unite the idea of more sustainable transportation with its reality.

As we have seen above, this case received an incredible amount of coverage in the press, with sympathetic outlets providing exposure for all sides of the conflict. While outlets such as *The Daily News* and *New York Times* ran articles that were both in favor of NBBL's suit against the City and highly critical of Sadik-Khan's approach to the expansion of bicycling infrastructure, the British paper *The Guardian* conversely editorialized in support of Sadik-Khan, portraying the conflict as a pivotal point in the global push for more sustainable cities. The media coverage was so ferocious that the daily news site *Streetsblog* even dedicated an entire series of articles to an investigation of NBBL's members and tactics, mining dozens of emails and interviews for evidence of impropriety or illegal organizing, and meticulously chronicling even inane details such as Senator Shumer's personal bicycling habits. Even the DOT itself created an entire webpage dedicated to coverage of the PPW redesign project, complete with a history of the case, timelines, key points, and important documents and slide show presentations, a privilege not conferred upon the myriad other sites of NYC bicycle lane conflicts. Furthermore, the extensive press coverage conferred upon this case may have something

to do with the hyperbolic and abstract rhetoric to be found on both sides of the issue, with redesign opponents decrying the end of their neighborhood security, and redesign proponents refusing to acknowledge that a new bicycle path might produce negative results in addition to positive ones. In any case, the sheer quantity of media exposure, and the passions contained therein, reveals quite plainly the extent to which conflicts over bicycle lanes are never solely about pavement and street space. Indeed, the impassioned, hyperbolic, and at times obsessive public coverage of the PPW redesign project shows the extent to which these conflicts in NYC also necessarily mobilize larger issues of the right to the city, the right to public space, and the distribution of power under Bloomberg's entrepreneurial administration.

Mobility, Place, and Privilege

We can also see now how the competing rights to the city involved in the PPW redesign project stem from an important division between *rights to mobility* and *rights to place*. While it is tempting to reject NBBL and Seniors for Safety as wealthy, privileged curmudgeons dragging their feet against the steady march of change – as, indeed, *Streetsblog* and many other observers did – their *right to place* arguments do not sound all that dissimilar from arguments advanced by other marginalized or disadvantaged communities dealing with gentrification, land titles, or resource conflicts in other parts of the world. What unites their claims is the firmly held belief that their *right to place* provides them with the legal and moral authority to decide how their community should live; that it is those who live in a particular place – be it the Amazon rainforest, a shantytown in New Delhi, or condominiums along Prospect Park West – who must needs

control the use and distribution of resources, benefits, and detriments, and significantly *not* the external others who would approve of that land for their own purposes or vision – be they multi-national agricultural corporations, economic development projects, or Brooklyn cyclists. But, as we have already seen in the case of Bedford Avenue, the right to place does not imply a monopoly over its production and use, especially when the place in question is a site of public interaction and shared ownership, such as Prospect Park West. Instead, the right to place asserts that all who interact with a particular space should be involved in the creation of its social significance and use, which, in the case of PPW, includes residents Chuck Shumer and Iris Weinshall just as much as it does the cyclists who commute along the avenue.

Moreover, while the likes of Iris Weinshall, Chuck Schumer, and Louise Hainline may have little in common with disenfranchised peasants, and while their conflict over street space may be far less vital than ones having to do with struggles over livelihoods and basic sustenance, neither are their pro-bicycle path opponents particularly materially disenfranchised, either. (Granted, of course, that cyclists must still struggle daily against the hazards of the private car's hegemonic reign and unrivaled influence on our mobility and socio-spatial interactions; but while these obstacles are by no means trivial, neither are they as immediate as securing one's next meal.) There is a reason why this conflict occurred along PPW and not along the eastern, less affluent side of the park. Indeed, for all of their egalitarian potential – providing healthy, efficient, low cost transportation; filling gaps in mass transit systems and underserved areas; and linking different neighborhoods to various centers and resources - bike lanes today emerge more often than not as vehicles for and indicators of gentrification: not only do they tend to attract

affluent, educated tenants to the neighbors where they are installed, but they are also commonly criticized as the “pet causes of affluent whites,” receiving undue government attention while arguably more pressing issues affecting lower-income minority groups go unresolved (Davis 2011).

Thus, in many ways, the conflict over the PPW redesign is a conflict between two privileged groups. Indeed, it is this common privilege – predominantly white, affluent, and educated – which makes this right to the city conflict so interesting to our analysis of the state and direction of sustainability in NYC today. The answer to why the DOT decided to pursue the PPW redesign despite the substantial political clout and financial resources of the opposition, then, must be located beyond a simple matter of money and politics, and instead account for the deeper and more complex ways in which PlaNYC, sustainability planning, and entrepreneurial governance now inform the future of transportation and mobility in New York City.

While conventional wisdom might have argued for Bloomberg to side with Weinshall and her allies - especially in light of previous political struggles over bike lanes, such as the case with Bedford Avenue – just the opposite occurred. Although the official reasons for this decision - as explained in DOT press releases and informational web pages – highlight the community’s desire for the new bicycle lane, as well as the myriad of health and environmental benefits that result from increased bicycle travel, they still do not explain why such reasons held ultimate sway in this particular case, but not in others. To this enigma, we might speculate that perhaps the PPW redesign – for a City administration that would stylize itself as a bastion of progressive, sustainable, urban living - was too large and visible a project to *not* come to fruition. That is, while Bedford

Avenue's bike lane – a busy, though rather un-emblematic thoroughfare in a Brooklyn enclave – might have passed as a political bargaining chip, Prospect Park West – alongside the famous Prospect Park, and connected with the public monuments and traffic of Grand Army Plaza – was simply too public and too prominent an avenue to *not* have its own bicycle path, at least to the extent that Bloomberg and his administration were concerned with the selling of NYC as a green, progressive, liveable, global city (which, as I have shown already, they greatly were). As such, we might say that the political pressure to acquiesce to NBBL and Seniors for Safety's demands was ultimately less important than securing the PPW bicycle path as a highly visible and symbolic monument to the direction of sustainability in NYC.

For those of us then concerned with how conflicts over bicycle lanes mobilize larger notions of community, mobility, and urban living, the greatest import of the PPW redesign conflict is its ability to show how the effect of state power operates in relation to a number of different stakeholders and a number of different priorities, both local and extra-local. Thus, such right to the city conflicts are never *just* a matter of parking or of local traffic flows, and they are never decided *solely* by the values and judgments of government officials. Rather, as the PPW case shows, the construction, publicization, and mediation of rights to the city conflicts necessarily involve both state and non-state actors responding to a variety of different pressures - social, economic, environmental, moral, political, etc. Moreover, the PPW case also shows, yet again, how debates which are ostensibly over traffic safety and transit efficiency more often revolve around intensely social conflicts having to do with ideas of community and urban life. Throughout, we are reminded of the ways in which conflicts over bicycle lanes always

involve more than just paint and pavement, and that these conflicts over space, and these conflicts over mobility, are fundamentally conflicts over the right to participate in the creation of the city, and “the right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our hearts’ desire” (Harvey 2012, 4).

Chapter 5:

Synthesis and Concluding Remarks

The creation of the city, through the production of its physical spaces and the social relations that give them shape, has always been an act of contentious struggle and conflict. In New York City today, the (de)construction of bicycle lanes and the expansion of more sustainable forms of urban transportation is no exception. With this thesis, I have tried to give some shape to the specific conflicts that arose along Bedford Avenue in 2008 and Prospect Park West in 2010, and have tried to show how these debates over the physical spaces of bicycle lanes today necessarily embody conflicting ideas over how we ought to relate to one another, over how we should relate to our surrounding environments, and over what sort of city we ought to construct. While my meaning may have at times seemed lost amidst the telling of NYC's political-economic history and of the specific forms of bicycle-centric street protest, I have endeavored throughout to show how the struggles over bicycle lanes in Brooklyn, New York in many ways reflect the struggles over how we ought to live.

Karl Marx famously wrote: "between equal rights, force decides" (Marx 1867). In many ways, this explains our story of competing rights to the city, and the conflicting normative notions over what sort of cities we ought to be building (and for whom), that debates over the (de)construction of bicycle lanes necessarily invoke. Along both Bedford Avenue and Prospect Park West, the struggles to enforce or protect certain forms of movement, and their associated notions of public space, community, civility, and (dis)order, necessarily return to force through the effect of state power. While this insight may not surprise us, the investigation of how this power interacts with the construction,

publicization, and mediation of competing rights to the city by various stakeholders in various ways does yield important insights regarding the (de)construction of bicycle lanes in Brooklyn in particular, and the direction of sustainability in NYC in general.

First, we have seen how Bloomberg's technocratic, entrepreneurial approach to governance – as colored by the effect of inter-urban capital competition in an age of neoliberal globalization, and rising calls from all quarters to combat the rising hazard of anthropogenic climate change – then resulted in the introduction of the PlaNYC 2030 sustainability plan, which has since become one of the most dominant actors influencing the expansion of bicycling infrastructure and more sustainable forms of living in NYC today. While we may take heart in the fact that progressive issues of environmental sustainability and urban livability now factor in the forefront of mayoral and DOT considerations in NYC, the unfortunate truth persists that such issues only seem to hold sway in the greater context of capital accumulation and neoliberal development. As our two case studies have suggested, more sustainable urban transportation only seems to matter to the extent that constructing bicycle lanes can increase NYC's attractiveness for educated workers, affluent tenants, and highly-mobile capital - at least at the macro level of planning. While critics such as Christina Rosan have noted the Bloomberg administration's receptivity to community-led proposals and willingness to work with local groups through the implementation of PlaNYC, the fact remains that these efforts still fail to address the social aspects of sustainable development in any fundamental way (Rosan 2012). Instead, the plan's overarching reliance on technocratic, top-down initiatives, and related failure to challenge underlying sources of structural inequality (such as a dearth of sustainable economic opportunities in marginalized communities),

leads to a disproportionate emphasis on ‘pet causes,’ while more serious concerns of gentrification, and equality in economic opportunity, environmental conditions, and urban livability, fall by the wayside.

In addition, we have also explored new theoretical concepts relating to the right to the city and the use of urban space, namely, the *right to mobility* and the *right to place*. While these two concepts are by no means mutually exclusive (indeed, they overlap in a number of ways, and in fact work together to create particular conceptions of space), the emphatic shift is significant when we begin to analyze right to the city conflicts over urban space and the (de)construction of bicycle lanes, as both the cases of Bedford Avenue and Prospect Park West illustrate. Furthermore, understanding the specific lenses through which different communities formulate their rights to the city – be it through the notion of the city as a public, interactive space, or through the idea that the reigns of neighborhood change must rest with those most immediate residents – allows us greater dexterity in mediating and resolving future conflicts (or perhaps even preventing them).

Moreover, we have also seen how the construction, publicization, and mediation of these conflicting rights to the city always depends on more than just one factor; and that this process is in reality a complicated, dynamic struggle that encompasses political alliances, economic and environmental concerns, ideas of community change, safety, and gentrification. That is why, for all of the positive effects that bicycle travel can produce – including improvements in climate change mitigation, transit efficiency, air quality,

economic development, personal health, and social interactions⁹ - that the expansion of bicycle infrastructure (not just in NYC, but around the world) still faces a number of important obstacles. The construction of a more sustainable and inclusive city then must necessarily begin with an expanded understanding of how these obstacles manifest over space, and how they always involve far more than just material stuff of bicycles and street lanes.

As with our original inquiry into how competing rights to the city are constructed, publicized, and mediated, this is a question that can only be answered in specific spatio-temporal contexts, and through lived everyday practices. But first, we might begin by recognizing that bicycle lanes - and the development of more sustainable transportation infrastructure more broadly - are not the magical avenues to utopia that our more romantic notions sometimes imagine them to be. They do often eliminate parking spaces for automobiles, complicating daily loading, unloading, and transportation rituals (as in the case of PPW); and their construction can portend a potentially dangerous transition process, as residents and drivers learn to negotiate the flows and nuances of an evolving transportation landscape. While it is tempting to dismiss these problems as necessary moments in the transition from one hazardous transportation system to another more in keeping with sustainable lifestyle practices, it is not so easy to dismiss the charge that bicycle lanes act as catalysts for gentrification, and that, as in the case of Bedford Avenue, they may contribute to the decline of closely held forms of community and social practices. (Since, for instance, many cultural barriers still exist to getting low-income and minority groups to use bicycles for daily transportation, it does still seem, at

⁹ See Illich 1974; Urry 2004; Pucher 2010; and Peterson 2011 for additional information and references.

present, to serve the wealthy and upward-mobile segments of society.) Nor, moreover, can we easily glaze over the real material effects that the restructuring of our transportation landscape produces, especially in the lives of those opposed to such transformations (for reasons both material and imaginary).

To recognize this connection, however, is not to say that these faults are the result of bicycle lanes as things in and of themselves. Rather, these negative effects must be understood as faults of our society, more rightly attributed to current constellations of power and difference, and of production and consumption. Thus, while we may strongly advocate for the expansion of more sustainable transportation practices, we must still remain sensitive to the ways in which such an expansion could produce undesirable or hazardous effects for various communities in various spaces. Even if we do not agree with a given community's estimation of those effects as "hazardous" – e.g. while we can certainly agree on the oppressive effects of gentrification, we may not be so receptive to the idea that bicycle lanes represent a greater hazard to pedestrians than does automobile traffic – we must still treat their objections with a sympathetic seriousness, without which we lose all chance of gaining new allies, or of building the sort of inclusive, socially productive city that we claim to envision.

One possible solution might involve the expansion of bicycling infrastructure alongside community outreach projects and educational initiatives, in which stakeholders would partner with different communities from the very beginning of the planning process (not just as an afterthought), and work to understand both the opportunities and obstacles facing the expansion of more sustainable forms of transportation in specific communities. The effect of state power certainly has a role to play in the making of a

more inclusive, sustainable city, but those efforts will only succeed if local communities and citizens feel like they can claim a voice and participate in the planning process. If, instead, these ‘greening’ efforts only consider the possibility of attracting neoliberal capital, then they will fail before they start. Looking again at the cases of Prospect Park West and Bedford Avenue, we can further see how the resolution of these ‘right to the city’ disputes depends in large part on the extent to which the local community rallied behind a particular cause, as well as the level of visibility that each conflict managed to reach. The importance of engaging with local communities from the very start (or better yet, before the start), is further shown through the Satmar community board’s successful opposition to the Bedford Avenue bicycle lane, as well as by the overwhelming support registered in the DOT’s opinion polls along PPW in their street redesign project.

Rolling Forward

Recognizing the vital benefits that reduced automobile travel and increased bicycle use can have on climate change, environmental pollution, social equality, and sustainable economic development, we must now turn our efforts to the question of *how* to affect this shift in our transportation landscape. That is, how do we build a more sustainable and inclusive city - with the simultaneous recognition of *rights to place* and *rights to mobility* - while also striving for a more just arrangement of resources, power and privilege? Or how do we at least proceed conscious of these issues, even if we cannot yet offer solutions? In New York City today, as in other cities around the globe, we must strive to try and evaluate this question in terms of the greatest benefit to the greatest number of people. In this sense, those stakeholders advocating more progressive

and inclusive forms of mobility, liveability, and sustainability – such as the cyclists and their allies – certainly offer a more desirable way forward than do the bicycle lane opponents of PPW and Bedford Avenue, who instead only provide “reactionary retreats into local enclaves of exclusion and privilege” (Godfrey 2013, personal communication). Nevertheless, despite our judgment in the preceding cases, we must still remain sensitive to the ways in which these desirable changes in our urban transportation systems can produce *both* positive *and* negative outcomes for differentially situated groups. Moreover, as New York City moves forward into a new election season with the future of PlaNYC potentially on the line, amidst the unveiling of a new public bicycle-sharing system, and a steady stream of bicycle-lane related conflicts over the right to move and be seen in public space, the issues that we have dealt with here will continue to assume an even greater significance.

Moreover, as we have seen now in both the case of PPW and Bedford Avenue, one of the crucial, initial steps in the construction of a more sustainable, inclusive city involves recognizing how bike lanes always involve more than just paint and pavement, and how they necessary mobilize certain notions of community, civility, and disorder that often prove disruptive to the prevailing social norms. Furthermore, we must interrogate how these different forms of mobility and social interactions also reflect and interact with different constellations of power, and how different stakeholders attempt to harness the effect of state power against the backdrop of entrepreneurial, neoliberal urban development and international preoccupations with more environmental sustainable forms of living. Lastly, we must remember that the ultimate goal of creating more sustainable, inclusive communities cannot be divorced from the method through which

such an end is sought. That is, in both the macro level of city planning and micro instances of individual communities, widespread, democratic participation, married to an insistence on social justice and empathy for all the stakeholders involved, must be paramount.

In sum, this examination of Prospect Park West and Bedford Avenue has revealed important lessons about the direction of sustainability in New York City today, and provided additional insight into how the effect of state power functions in relation to the making of a more sustainable city. Throughout, I have tried to show how conflicts over bicycle lanes necessarily mobilize conflicting notions of community, civility, and (dis)order, notions which hold grand implications for larger concerns of environmental sustainability, social equality, and urban livability. While the work of understanding how these normative ideas become wrapped up in and manifest in conflicts over urban space remains both time-consuming and complex, it is a necessary step in the greater work of constructing a more sustainable, equitable, and livable world for all.

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