



CHAPTER 1

Introductions and Intersections

Two-Wheeled Conventions

In the week preceding the 2004 Republican National Convention (RNC) hundreds of thousands of activists from around the United States converged on New York City to demonstrate their collective dissatisfaction with the George W. Bush administration and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Protesters arrived with handcrafted banners, makeshift signs, elaborate costumes, musical instruments, bullhorns, giant puppets, and droves of literature. Some people even brought their bicycles. For this latter contingent, the eight days surrounding the demonstration doubled as the Bike National Convention, a series of events hosted by New York City's direct action environmental group, Time's Up! Bicyclists both organized and participated in free bike maintenance workshops, direct action planning sessions, a bicycle carnival, and various group rides, including a scenic jaunt through the city's parks, a "dumpster diving" tour of Lower Manhattan, and radical history tours of community gardens, squats, and famous protest sites dotting the Lower East Side.¹ Before the start of the Republican convention, the visiting two-wheeled politicians joined bike riders from the five boroughs to take part in Critical Mass, a monthly bike ride/ritual held on the last Friday of every month in cities throughout the world. Originating in San Francisco in 1992, Critical Mass was conceived as a group bike ride and a leaderless celebration that ultimately grew in both size and popularity as a response to the continued marginalization of bicycling and non-motorized transportation in modern cities. Each

month cyclists taking part in this “organized coincidence” try to fill the streets with riders to demonstrate their collective solidarity and send a message to the public: “We are not blocking traffic; we *are* traffic!”²

On Friday, August 27, more than five thousand cyclists swarmed the streets of Manhattan and brought auto traffic to a grinding halt on parts of the island. It was a tremendous display of pedal power and antiwar creativity, and by far one of the largest rides in the event’s history. Equally historic was the staggering display of police force used to arrest 264 bicyclists, some of whom were not even on the ride. In addition to brutalizing a number of (unarmed) cyclists, the New York Police Department (NYPD) illegally seized 338 bicycles as part of their arrest evidence, going so far as to forcibly remove bicycles from nearby fences, bike racks, and signposts by cutting through locks with high-powered saws.³ In the ten days surrounding the Republican convention, nearly four hundred bike riders were arrested, including Joshua Kinberg, the inventor of a bicycle that prints text messages sent from Web users directly onto the street in water-soluble chalk. Under the moniker “Bikes against Bush,” he planned to use the device as an interactive performance art piece during the RNC and his arrest is notable because it took place live on national television while he was being interviewed (about his bicycle) on MSNBC’s *Hardball*.⁴ Without making a mark on the street or possessing any spray paint, Kinberg was charged with criminal mischief and his possessions were seized as evidence: his cell phone, chalk printer, and laptop computer were illegally held for more than a year and his bicycle was never returned.⁵ Just two days prior to his arrest, Kinberg demonstrated the device in another televised interview, leaving an emphatic, if not ironic, message chalked on the sidewalk: “America is a free speech zone.”⁶

Police continued to arrest and seize the property (bicycles) of hundreds of bike riders in the months following the convention, and in 2005 video evidence and written documents confirmed that the NYPD conducted prolonged surveillance on cyclists and Critical Mass organizers in the period leading up to the RNC protest, even infiltrating a small memorial ride staged in honor of a cyclist killed in traffic.⁷ The city kept bicyclists and judges tied up in court for the better part of the next year, in part because they hoped to shut down Mass by requiring parade permits for roadway processions of twenty or more vehicles or bicycles, along with any processions of two or more people attempting to use the road “in a manner that does not comply with all applicable traffic laws, rules and regulations.”⁸ When the judge dismissed the city’s claims, Sheryl Neufeld, of the New York City Law Department, responded with the unfounded assertion that Critical Mass “continues to be a danger to the public safety.”⁹ Charles Komanoff, an economist, veteran bike advocate, and former head of New York City’s Transportation Alternatives, produced an economic report in 2006 that paints a sobering picture of the city’s crack-

down on bicyclists: it spent roughly \$1.32 million harassing, arresting, and prosecuting people who took part in 24 bike rides between September 2004 and August 2006, the same 2-year period, incidentally, in which the city spent just \$460,000 installing 15.3 miles of bike lanes in the 5 boroughs.¹⁰

The harsh response to Critical Mass in New York and a number of other U.S. cities clearly points to the perceived threat of leaderless public demonstrations just as it validates Dan Rather's prescient observation that "Americans will put up with anything provided it doesn't block traffic."¹¹ But what it fails to explain is why a bicycle ride, of all things, could ruffle so many feathers in cities with complex socioeconomic problems, school budget deficits, crumbling public infrastructures, and a slew of auto-related fatalities and injuries. Such dramatic and costly measures not only call into question the very function of public spaces and whether roads are indeed public; they also prompt a more basic set of questions about how and why bicycling can be simultaneously interpreted as a protest, a parade, a party, a threat to the status quo, and, even more bizarrely, a "terrorist-type behavior."¹²

Riding a bike is, of course, not always bound up with the tensions of police cruisers and undercover surveillance choppers. Millions of people in the United States love to ride bicycles and they do so for exercise and leisure, to visit friends and run the occasional errand, to attend college classes and compete in sporting events, to go camping in the country, and to explore city alleyways in the middle of the night. Bicycling is one of the most popular recreational activities in the United States and becoming a more attractive mode of urban transportation due in part to longer traffic delays, wildly fluctuating oil and gas prices, and the increasing costs of owning and operating a car. Indeed, the number of utilitarian, or utility, cyclists who use bicycles for some form of daily transportation or commuting is increasing sharply.¹³ New York City and Chicago saw 77 percent and 80 percent increases in bicycle use between 2000 and 2006, while Portland, Oregon, a city boasting one of the highest rates of cyclists in the country as well as a vast cycling infrastructure and a vivid culture of bike devotees, witnessed a 144 percent increase in bicycle use between 2000 and 2008.¹⁴ Amid surging gas prices and warm weather, cyclists came out in droves during the spring and summer of 2008, hitting the streets from Philadelphia to Los Angeles and in most cities in between.¹⁵ New York City bike shops at one point had difficulty keeping new bikes in stock, while San Francisco bicyclists occasionally outnumbered automobile drivers on a few busy corridors.¹⁶

Despite these positive trends, the stark reality is that only 1 percent of the total U.S. population rides a bicycle for transportation and barely half as many use bikes to commute to work.¹⁷ If these figures seem extraordinarily low, it is because they are. Less people ride bicycles in the United States than in almost every country throughout Asia and Europe, with the exception

of England, with whom the United States is tied (along with Australia). In contrast, bicycling accounts for 27 percent of trips made in the Netherlands, 18 percent in Denmark, and roughly 10 percent in Germany, Finland, and Sweden.¹⁸ China, despite its staggering pace of new automobile ownership, still has a strong reliance on bicycle transportation, and in Tokyo, Japan it is estimated that more people ride bicycles to local train and subway stations each day—as part of their work commute—than there are bike commuters in the entire United States.¹⁹ John Pucher, a bicycle transportation expert and urban planning professor, best puts the U.S. figure into perspective by noting that Canadians living in the frosty Yukon (adjacent to Alaska) bike to work at more than twice the rate of California residents and more than three times that of commuters in Florida.²⁰ Even the Northwest Territories, just shy of the North Pole, boasts a higher percentage of bike commuters (1.6 percent) than three of the largest U.S. cities ranked among the best in the nation for bicycling, including Oakland, California (1.5 percent), Honolulu, Hawaii (1.4 percent), and Denver, Colorado (1.4 percent).²¹

Bicycling is not only a fringe mode of transportation in a country with more vehicles than licensed drivers; it is a form of mobility rendered virtually obsolete by the material infrastructure and dominant cultural norms in the United States. Navigating a U.S. city by bicycle is for the inexperienced cyclist or casual rider a seemingly daunting challenge if not a completely undesirable task. Of course, people can and do ride bikes in any urban environment, and the health benefits alone far outweigh the actual risks of doing so. But statistics are somewhat meaningless when one is faced with the actuality of sharing the road with an almost ever-increasing volume of automobiles, driven by a growing number of aggressive drivers, with shorter tempers, in bigger vehicles.²² If and when one is capable of assuaging concerns over their safety (real or perceived), there are a slew of other issues for bike riders to contend with, the least of which is simply finding a safe place to park one's bike. For example, outdoor bike racks are generally scarce or inconveniently located, indoor parking facilities are almost nonexistent in U.S. cities, makeshift bike racks like parking meters are gradually disappearing from urban spaces (replaced by digital boxes), and most employers do not allow employees to bring their bicycles inside their place of work, much less provide facilities to shower and/or change clothes.²³ One can add to this any number of issues, including the prevalence of road hazards, a decreasing number of independent bike shops nationwide, and a relatively hostile street environment in which it is not uncommon for male drivers to sexually harass women on bikes and to intimidate, taunt (getting called "faggot" is all-too-typical), and occasionally kill male cyclists.²⁴ Even seven-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong is not immune from these general trends; he was threatened and

almost run over by a vengeful driver following a verbal exchange on the road in the late 1990s.²⁵

Whether one chooses to ride a bicycle or does so out of necessity, daily mobility quickly becomes an issue when some of the most mundane, routine experiences one has as a bicyclist are fraught with a degree of hassle that one rarely experiences as a driver. Sara Stout, a prominent bicycle advocate and car-free activist in Portland (Oregon), describes how this everyday sensibility begins to transform one's perspective about bicycle transportation and the need to effect some sort of change: "At first bicycling is utilitarian, it's just how you choose to get around . . . but it becomes political really quickly because it's hard to get around. There are difficulties at every turn, and there seem to be injustices at every turn. There's always a problem."²⁶ The problems Stout hints at, and indeed, the ones with which her activism is so comprehensively engaged, become political not simply because they adversely impact the mobility of bicyclists but because the burdens themselves are a set of restrictions preventing everyone—not just dedicated bike riders—from having the option to easily and safely utilize the cheapest, most efficient, and most practical form of personal transportation for short trips: the kind American drivers take more than 50 percent of the time they get behind the wheel of a car (three miles or less). These impediments, along with collectively poor access to adequate public transportation, high-speed transit, and even the most basic pedestrian infrastructure like sidewalks and crosswalks, also function, conversely, as a set of aids. They make it possible for people to see bicycle transportation as undesirable, dangerous, and/or childish; they make it easy for people in the United States to use cars for 69 percent of all daily trips of one mile or less, and they make it painfully comfortable for Americans to avoid taking collective responsibility for transportation-related pollution and oil dependency. Perhaps most significant, they make it seem natural for most adults to never consider the idea of riding a bicycle in the first place.

Automobility

The historical transformation of the United States into a full-blown car culture is commonly, though somewhat erroneously, attributed to choice or desire, as if the aggregation of individual consumer choices and yearnings necessarily built the roads, lobbied the government, zoned the real estate, silenced the critics, subsidized auto makers, underfunded public transit, and passed the necessary laws to oversee all facets of these projects since the 1890s. One of the primary stories used to bolster this broad-based claim is that of America's love affair with the automobile—a common trope in U.S. popular culture that colors our understanding of transportation history and also buttresses some

of the most partisan arguments posed by the car's vigorous defenders.²⁷ It is unquestionable that many Americans do, in fact, love their cars and cling to the myth of "The Road" with the zeal of Madison Avenue and Jack Kerouac combined. However, the fidelity of the narrative is almost irrelevant when considering how it is put to use and for whom it is made to work. That is to say, while the love affair serves a variety of social and cultural functions in the United States, it is particularly compelling to a relatively small group of free-market ideologues and multinational corporations (particularly oil conglomerates) who largely govern and/or profit from the production, marketing, sales, and regulation of the automobile. Indeed, the love story satisfies two of the most cherished myths of free-market capitalism concurrently: it corroborates the idea that consumer choices equal authentic power (i.e., people vote with their wallets), and it normalizes the false notion that consumer desires ultimately determine the so-called evolution of technologies—a position that ignores the profound roles that material and cultural infrastructures play in the success of any technology, much less the development of technological norms. Such explanations not only are misleading; they also effectively downplay some of the most undemocratic and thoroughly racist decision-making processes at the heart of postwar urban development and transportation policy implementation in the United States, as well as the political influence historically wielded by what could easily be termed an *automobile-industrial complex*.²⁸ This is not to suggest that power is always exerted from the top down, nor to imply that the average person plays no role in the production or contestation of technological and cultural norms. Rather, it is simply a way of acknowledging that technological desires and choices, particularly those concerning transportation and mobility, are necessarily constrained by the profit imperatives of very specific and very powerful institutions and organizations.

These interconnections partly constitute what John Urry calls the "system of automobility": the assemblages of socioeconomic, material, technological, and ideological power that not only facilitate and accelerate automobile travel but also help to reproduce and ultimately normalize the cultural conditions in which the automobile is seen, and made to be seen, as a technological savior, a powerful status symbol, and a producer of both "modern" subjectivities and "civilized" peoples.²⁹ Even in its earliest uses, the term *automobility* refers less to a form of transportation than an ideologically and symbolically loaded cultural phenomenon. A *New York Times* contributor in 1922 writes, "As a rule, automobility implies higher individual power, better economic distribution and a potentially higher social state."³⁰ It is with good reason then that Steffen Böhm sees automobility as fundamentally political inasmuch as it "entails patterns of power relations and visions of a collective 'good life' which are at the same time highly contestable and contested."³¹

The “good life” that Americans learn to associate with automobility is partly due to the way in which driving is so tangibly employed in the construction of American-ness itself: it is a *de facto* expression of citizenship in the United States and a means by which one becomes part of the national “imagined community.”³² Benedict Anderson argues that one of the ways people participate in something as politically and geographically disparate as “the Nation” is through a shared, mediated ritual, and he points to the rise of print media—or what he calls print capitalism—as the basis for modern nationalism inasmuch as reading the newspaper is an “extraordinary mass ceremony” in which individuals engage in an activity that is simultaneously repeated by millions of other people, at the same time, every day, throughout the entire year.³³ Of this practice, Anderson asks, “What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?”³⁴ If one takes Anderson’s question seriously, then with respect to the United States, the present-day answer to his rhetorical question is arguably quite simple: driving.

Driving, and more specifically the act of driving to and from work, is not only an integral part of American life, it is one of the most ritualized tasks performed by the largest number of U.S. citizens each day: roughly 120 million commute by car, including 105 million who drive alone.³⁵ This solitary/collective practice is a key practice in defining what it means to be American, or more accurately, what it means to *do* like an American. Thus, instead of imagining the nation through print capitalism, as Anderson argues, one might say that Americans imagine the nation through mobile capitalism or *auto capitalism*: a process wherein the United States is habitually reconstructed as a “republic of drivers.”³⁶ Within this republic, the “gauge and emblem” of freedom is not the sovereign state, as Anderson suggests, but the gauge itself, which is to say the speedometer mounted on the dashboard of every one of the 250 million vehicles in the United States.³⁷

The automobile resides at the core of the post–World War II American dream and it functions as both the literal and symbolic centerpiece of a narrative equating individual mobility with personal freedom. As William F. Buckley Jr. puts it, “The *right* to drive a car is the most cherished right in America, of special, sizzling importance to young people.”³⁸ Thus, it is hardly surprising that Americans tend to shrug off the negative aspects of driving despite its obvious hazards (roughly 6 million crashes, 2 million injuries, and 42,000 deaths per year in the United States alone) or the multitude of environmental, social, health, and economic costs associated with automobility.³⁹ Nor is it surprising that critiques of the automobile are taken quite personally in the United States, often condemned as symptoms of a fringe ideology or manifestations of “cultural elitism.”⁴⁰ Within this prevailing cultural context, driving a hybrid vehicle can just as easily signify smugness as the seemingly

innocuous attempt to limit driving in a public park can imply support for an “anti-automobile jihad.”⁴¹ Putting one’s critique into action can be even more problematic, as the ad hoc network of activists associated with Reclaim the Streets undoubtedly realized when the event—a traffic-blocking, guerilla-style street celebration—earned a spot on the nation’s draconian list of domestic terrorist threats: a designation giving the federal government and state police forces the unprecedented ability to prosecute potential dance party participants under the Patriot Act.⁴² Because just as nationalism requires the creation of a certain set of “others” from which a citizenry can implicitly or explicitly define itself in contradistinction—such as foreigners, native peoples, and/or immigrants—the “republic of drivers” similarly requires a set of “others” from which its citizens can assert their ever-modern values of high speed, personal independence, and hyper-privatized mobility. Pedestrian rights advocates, environmentalists, and especially urban bicyclists all serve this role in various capacities. Consequently, not only do bicycle transportation advocates face the uphill battle of promoting non-motorized mobility to a car-driving, car-loving public; they are also charged with the onerous task of habitually defending bicycling and bike riders from disproportionate scrutiny, burgeoning hostility, and, on occasion, the coordinated efforts of major metropolitan police departments.

Pedal-Powered Critique

Against these odds, support for bicycle transportation is growing in the United States, and so are the ranks of those drawing critical attention to the intersecting problems of auto-supported sprawl, oil reliance, and “car addiction.”⁴³ Indeed, there is a distinctly political impetus spurring many of today’s bicycling advocates to challenge the institutions and practices of automobility as well as the spaces in which the automobile is materially and ideologically constructed as the king of the road. One can see this ethos at work in Critical Mass, but it is a disposition similarly embraced by a legion of bike enthusiasts, environmentalists, cultural workers, tinkerers, and a variety of “small-scale, autonomous groups” whose objectives are not part of the “dominant transport or leisure cultures.”⁴⁴ The emergence of what Paul Rosen calls a *bicycle counterculture* began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when pro-bicycle advocacy groups and anti-car environmental protests sprouted in the Netherlands, England, Sweden, France, and, most strikingly, the United States, where the ubiquity of the automobile has consistently thwarted both the viability of bicycle transportation and the development of cycling traditions common to Asia and Europe. Spurred by the urgency of the 1970s oil crisis and a passion for human-powered transportation, these bike activists, or *biketivists*, sought to address not only the everyday challenges and dangers facing cyclists on the

streets but also the social, ecological, and spatial benefits of a radically efficient and otherwise sustainable technology: a “vehicle for a small planet,” as Marcia Lowe puts it.⁴⁵

In voicing their support for utilitarian cycling as an immediate and/or long-term alternative to the automobile, a growing number of Americans are beginning to see the bicycle as much more than just a utilitarian collection of metal tubes, wheels, chain links, pedals, and a saddle (seat). The bicycle is variously seen, and in many cases actively reconceptualized, as a source of self-empowerment and pleasure, a pedagogical machine, a vehicle for community building, a symbol of resistance against the automobile and oil industries, and a tool for technological, spatial, and cultural critique. Formal advocacy, independent media, and the creation of grassroots cultural practices are some of the tools with which people simultaneously convey their aspiration for human-powered mobility and their intense frustration with a car culture in which the rhetoric of the freedom of the road often replaces the actual right to freely use the road. Bicycling, in other words, is seen as a symbolically powerful gesture capable of signifying, for example, “support for alternative energies,” or somewhat differently, a desire to not “spend life inside of a box.”⁴⁶ Chris Bull, an independent bike maker and founder of Circle A Cycles in Providence, Rhode Island, indicates that biking is also part of a wider cultural shift that begins at an individual level, with people “pushing themselves in all areas of life to consume less, pollute less, live differently.”⁴⁷ Indeed, many bicyclists are drawn to the idea of opting out—as much as possible in a petroleum-based economy—from contributing to the ever-increasing profits and power of oil and gas corporations. Sheldon Brown, the recently deceased guru of U.S. bike tinkerers, similarly alludes to oil-related wars as a reason why people cycle: he says he went from being an off-and-on bike commuter to a full-time devotee (with few exceptions) on the day Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.⁴⁸ Claire Stoscheck, a feminist bike advocate in Minneapolis, puts emphasis on the material simplicity of the bicycle and on the way riding fosters open-air connections with one’s surroundings. More emphatically, she sees biking as a means of literally and metaphorically “subverting the dominant isolationist, individualistic, over-consumptive car culture.”⁴⁹ Bicycling, as an antiviolence educator in California so eloquently puts it, is fundamentally political because “it bears witness to a commitment to change and the possibility of changing the way we think and act.”⁵⁰

The bicycle, like the automobile, is an object that becomes meaningful through its relationship to an entire field of cultural practices, discourses, and social forces. These linkages, or what cultural theorists call *articulations*, are not naturally occurring, nor are they due to the essence of the bicycle itself.⁵¹ Rather, they are made: people construct, define, and modify these connections by writing about bicycles, displaying them in museums, documenting

them in films, representing them on T-shirts and posters, singing about them, fixing them, and, of course, riding them. The intentionality of a specific rider, advocate, or documentarian can extend only so far, however, because the processes that collectively fix meaning around the bicycle, the act of cycling, or even the cyclist him- or herself are historically rooted, geographically and contextually specific, and shaped by dominant ideologies and everyday habits. Put simply, a bicycle means something much different when used by an RNC protester in 2004, versus a Chinese schoolgirl in 1968, a Swiss chemist in 1943, or a Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) graduate student in 1999—all the more so if one accounts for the reasons they are riding, the directions they are going, the speeds at which they are traveling, and the types of bicycles they are pedaling. People can and do make bicycling meaningful, in other words, but not within a context of their own making.⁵² Indeed, just as the physical movements of an urban cyclist are influenced by the presence of cars and framed by a road designed for cars, the processes with which we make sense of bike riders, bicycle technologies, and cycling are similarly framed by the norms and assumptions bundled up with automobility. The power of this regime, in other words, stems from its coercive spatial and temporal organization of bodies and machines, but also from its capacity to structure meaning: to mold the ways we think about, engage with, struggle over, and ultimately make sense of both transportation and mobility itself.⁵³

By “renovating and making ‘critical’ an already existing activity,” bike activists politicize bicycle transportation and in doing so reveal the extent to which bicycling—like all forms of mobility—is also made political in the context of “social and power relations that are systematically asymmetrical.”⁵⁴ This dialectical tension is fundamental to the politics of bicycling with which this book is concerned: a set of issues that are in some ways “not about the bike.”⁵⁵ Or should I say, they are not only about the bike. The politics of bicycling encompasses everything from the most pragmatic affairs of the urban bike commuter, to the rhetorical limits of bike advocacy, to the representation of bicycle transportation in mass media. More specifically, it encapsulates a set of complex questions about the role of technology in society, the importance of mobility in everyday life, and the broader struggles over how public spaces are used and disciplined, segmented and unified, celebrated and stolen. By focusing on the intersection of these issues and the myriad ways they play out through the contestation of automobility, this book not only pieces together a cultural and political map of the bicycle in the United States; it also uses the bicycle as an object with which to analyze and critique some of the dominant cultural and political formations in the so-called Western world.

Like all maps, this one is necessarily incomplete and shaped by the biases of its would-be cartographer. Consequently, cyclists solely interested in navigating through their respective interests in racing, fitness, or the fabled ori-

gins of bicycle technologies will likely find as little guidance and comfortable terrain here as social scientists seeking a neutral assessment of automobility, environmentalists yearning for a bike-centered treatise on carbon emissions, activists hoping for a bikes-as-freedom manifesto, or urban planners eager to find a concrete plan for the redistribution of concrete. Instead, the routes I highlight are meant to construct a more complex and explicitly politicized atlas that uses history, critical theory, media analysis, and ethnographic data to consider the prospects as well as the problems posed by bicycle transportation, cars, and the auto-mobile paradigm that connects them. In doing so, I hope to achieve a few modest and intertwined goals.

First, this book is meant to intervene in, and contribute to, a series of dialogues and debates about the socioeconomic, cultural, and political roles of transportation and personal mobility—most specifically, as they play out in the United States, where there is both widespread support for driving and a general “lack of research on the political contestation of automobility.”⁵⁶ Second, by positioning the bicycle at the center of this conversation, I wish to draw attention to a legacy of bicycle transportation advocacy that is either ignored outside the relatively small circles of bicycle enthusiasts and historians or simply not documented. Finally, by critically engaging with the ideas, practices, and discourses of bike advocates I want to trouble some of their taken-for-granted assumptions to encourage a more progressive politics of bicycling that explicitly privileges the goals of social and environmental justice as part of a more robust vision of “transportation equity.”⁵⁷ Consequently, this book is largely organized around a number of tensions that illustrate both how and why technology is never neutral, space is never empty, and mobility is never disconnected from power.⁵⁸ For example, Chapter 2 begins with a historical analysis that looks at the ways in which people both envisioned bicycling in the late nineteenth century and utilized a technology that Iain Boal rightly describes as an “ambiguous, contradictory thing.”⁵⁹ The 1890s, in particular, was a period in which the bicycle was at once construed as both a liberator and a disciplinarian that ostensibly did the work of the moral reformer, the nationalist, and the industrialist by itself: it reorganized bodies away from sin, distraction, and sloth toward sobriety, rationality, and physical and moral fitness. Bicycling was a technological practice incorporated into a narrative of feminist emancipation, utopian socialism, and cultural resistance, and at the same time it was widely praised for its seemingly natural ability to affirm some of the most dominant norms of the era. Perhaps most significant, the set of ideas and practices that came to define the “bicycle era” ultimately, and ironically, laid the groundwork for the system of automobility against which today’s bicycling advocates find themselves uncomfortably positioned.

The anxiety over the role of mobility as both an expression of technological liberation and a reification of the status quo is a contradiction that simi-

larly frames Chapters 3 and 4, in which I turn attention, respectively, to the emergence of bike activism in the late 1960s and 1970s and the development of Critical Mass in the early 1990s. Like their bike riding counterparts in the 1890s, these later generations of bicyclists were/are necessarily preoccupied with the spatialities of mobility that define, and in some ways dictate, the function of the modern street and the basic ability of one to traverse it without requiring a car as a prerequisite possession. But whereas the bicycle era normalized bike touring, country rides, and practices otherwise used to escape the metropolis for greener pastures, the *modus operandi* of post-automobile bike advocacy emphasizes the importance of asserting, utilizing, and even contesting the urban space(s) in which the automobile reigns supreme. This lineage of activism, which extends from the Dutch Provo's free White Bicycle Plan in 1965 up until (and well beyond) the RNC protest outlined earlier in this chapter, positions bike advocacy as part of a pro-urban politics that emphasizes what Henri Lefebvre famously called the "right to the city."⁶⁰ It comes in the wake of years of auto-centric policies in the United States and Europe, and it stands in contrast to both the accepted paradigm of urban mobility and a mode of bike advocacy that sees politically motivated critiques of automobility as a hindrance to bicycle transportation, if not a contemptible project.

The prospects and limitations of both bike activism and a spatial politics of car culture are intricately connected to the process of communication, whether one looks at the actual discourses of bike advocates or considers the manner in which transportation technologies and bodies also become meaningful as sites where messages are produced and ideas translated. Chapters 5 and 6 address the relationships between transportation and communication in order to interrogate the often contradictory ways in which media work in conjunction with automobility. Chapter 5, for example, looks at how bicycling and bicyclists are represented in both entertainment and news media in the United States, in formats such as Hollywood films, television shows, print news, and broadcast journalism. Here one finds the development of specific narratives and stereotypes that do some important cultural work by legitimizing and ultimately reinforcing the dominant image of the automobile cultivated by/through the spectacle of auto advertising and the popular narrative of the infallible car. In contrast, I use Chapter 6 to explore some of the ways in which bicyclists use independent or alternative media to articulate bicycling to an entirely different set of ideas and technological practices that constitute a DIY (Do It Yourself) bike culture in the United States. Through a variety of creative outlets that range from punk music and zines to street art and blogs, bike enthusiasts contest a one-dimensional reading of bicycling and in doing so draw attention to the subcultures, technological practices, and political

perspectives that animate their love for the bicycle as well as their critique of both car culture and the dominant paradigm of bicycle transportation.

Chapter 7 similarly engages with the ideas and practices implicit to DIY bike culture but I turn attention specifically to the network of community bicycle organizations and community bike shops that now dot the landscape in cities throughout the Americas, Europe, Australia, and parts of Africa. In addition to charting the development of bicycle education programs and the unique cultural/pedagogical spaces in which community bicycle organizations are housed, I discuss the social complexities of mobility that inform everyday bicycle mechanics as well as the coordination of local and international groups who facilitate bicycle aid programs as means to assist poor people in the so-called Third World or Global South. My aim in drawing attention to the latter objectives of community bicycle organizations is to explore some of the fundamental possibilities, as well as the contradictions, implicit in the desire to help change the world. That is to say, recycling and building bikes can function as an effective and empowering way to educate people and otherwise break down the barriers of race, class, and gender privilege that are interconnected to/with mobility. But when coupled with a paradigm of economic development in which the bicycle is positioned as a postcolonial tool for realizing the benefits of entrepreneurial capitalism, this set of practices raises important questions that demand further reflection and critique. Indeed, the final chapter also takes issue with the current socioeconomic trajectory of globalization as a way to reframe debates about the future of bicycle transportation, the limits of automobility, and the potential for realizing an American *véloration* in the twenty-first century.