12

FIXING THE CITY IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM

Institutionalized DIY

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Introduction

Today most American cities make automobile traffic the priority, and pedestrians seem like a disruption to efficient, fast moving traffic. There are cities that have even eliminated sidewalks, as if everyone can and has to drive, disregarding those with disabilities, youth, and the elderly. To what extent can one claim the existence of a public realm if streets are more or less devoid of people and social interactions? Examining car-free streets activism in San Francisco, California, alongside spatial changes in the last two decades, this chapter discusses both the possibilities offered by grassroots activism and its limitations in making cities socially, environmentally, and spatially just.

San Francisco is a city in which room for lower-income populations is shrinking rapidly. In most parts of the city, rents are only affordable by six-figure-income earners who work in the information technology sector at Silicon Valley companies. Hartman (2002) notes that "HUD's [US Department of Housing and Urban Development] 2000 Annual State of the Cities report concluded: 'A person earning the minimum wage in San Francisco would have to work the equivalent of 174 hours a week just to pay the median rent.'" Hartman adds that cases like "fifty-seven hundred applicants for fifty-five affordable housing units" for a new affordable housing development in the city become a cruel joke for many families. The shrinking space for lower-income populations is detrimental to social diversity and justice. While the quantity of spaces in which low-income and disadvantaged populations reside is already an issue, the quality of lower-income areas poses yet another spatial justice problem.

Urban form, health, and spatial justice

The quality of the built environment plays an important role in both determining public health and in environmental justice activism. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 1999) notes that physical activity reduces risks of coronary heart disease (the leading cause of death in the United States), hypertension, colon cancer, and diabetes, along with depression and anxiety. In the US, approximately 12.5 million children and adolescents are obese (CDC 1999). Pan *et al.* (2009) note that the rate of obesity is lower in non-Hispanic whites compared to other ethnic groups. A number of studies show that physical activity is linked to built environment variables, as well as income levels and ethnicities. Giles-Corti *et al.* (2005) suggest that "people who live within walking distance of urban parks are reported to be nearly three times more likely to get the recommended amount of daily physical activity" (cited in Cutts *et al.* 2009). Gordon-Larsen *et al.*'s (2006) study shows that lower socioeconomic status (SES) is linked to lower levels of physical activity due to lack of access to amenities. In a nationwide longitudinal study in which income levels, facilities for physical activity, and obesity rates are correlated, researchers conclude that "low-SES and high-minority block groups were less likely to have facilities" for physical activity and were "associated with decreased physical activity and increased [risk of being] overweight" (ibid.). The same researchers add: "Inequality in availability of physical activity facilities may contribute to ethnic and SES disparities in physical activity and overweight patterns." Such studies indicate the importance of creating urban forms that support physical activity as a way to make healthy lifestyles affordable for everyone but especially for those who are historically disadvantaged. More importantly, these studies underline that inequalities are built into the urban form, including inequalities in terms of access to health-promoting urban amenities.

Despite its fame for progressiveness, San Francisco for many years did not make it to the top of the list of the best bicycling cities in the United States. However, recent years have demonstrated a different trend. The city's bicycling infrastructure is now over 200 miles in total length, and new public plazas and parklets (sidewalk extensions for recreational use) are springing up fast. These cultural and spatial transformations can be attributed partially to grassroots activists and partially to an interesting dynamic between citizens who volunteer to transform the city and local governments that not only make citizen-initiated physical transformations in the city possible, but also encourage them.

San Francisco is a city that historically has accommodated multiple counter-culture movements, ranging from civil rights activism to alternative lifestyles. Car-free streets events (CFSEs) that have been flourishing in the city are one such movement. These events bring together those who are less interested in automobile-oriented urban form and lifestyles than the majority of urban residents. CFSEs such as Critical Mass and Park(ing) Day have been key elements in the continuous evolution of bicycling culture in San Francisco. In addition, these events are aligned with neighborhood-scale grassroots organizations, such as the Wigg Party and Fix Fell, which focus their

efforts locally in their neighborhoods and streets. These events have not only been effective in promoting bicycle culture, but they have also resulted in a reimagining of the potential for public engagement in the quality of urban streets.

In multiple ways the CFSEs challenge automobile-oriented urban form and demonstrate alternatives. They stand out with their claims on the city and their drive to "fix" the city. Parallel to the cultural shift that these movements bring about in the city, there have been major changes in the form of the city and in the way in which spatial transformations take place.

This chapter focuses on an examination of CFSEs and protests, such as Park(ing) Day and Fix Fell, and the city's recent programs, such as the parklets, Pavements to Parks, and Better Streets programs. Using interview data gathered during the events, spatial analysis of physical urban transformations, and content analysis of the city's programs, this chapter discusses the extent to which the Complete Streets initiative has the potential to contribute to urban social and spatial justice, and under what circumstances it does not, and whether the ways in which governance and implementation of Complete Street principles take place may thwart the idea of just cities in the larger perspective, instead of enabling them.

Public space vs. parking automobiles

Today, relying on private transportation is the norm for many, and having parking space readily available is an absolute requirement for the urban driver. Public streets are utilized as parking spaces wherever possible, despite the fact that the city is also home to those who do not own an automobile. In fact, in San Francisco County there are 0.58 automobiles per capita; only 43.9 percent of workers commuted to work by driving (36.0 percent) and car-pooling (7.9 percent), and these numbers were lower by 4.5 and 2.9 percentage points respectively compared to 2000 data (SFMTA 2011).

This positions parking spaces at the heart of spatial politics of urban spaces. Parking spaces are leasable land and a valuable commodity in dense cities. Ferguson (2005) estimates that in commercial areas, parking lots comprise about 60 percent of the built cover. There are a total of 448,000 parking spaces in San Francisco, 281,700 of which are on-street parking places, and of those, 29,103 are metered parking spaces (SFMTA 2011). Parking meters generated $40,520,486 for the city of San Francisco in the 2010–2011 fiscal year (SFMTA 2011). Parking permits add $9,040,407, and parking tickets add $86,306,584 to the total revenue (ibid.). Individual residents, too, can capitalize on their parking spaces by renting them out.

Evidently, parking spaces have a direct influence on the socioeconomic diversity of cities. According to Jia and Wachs (1999), in San Francisco, minimum off-street parking space requirements for new housing developments increase housing costs by more than 10 percent. Thus, parking creates an obstacle in building more affordable housing (Henderson 2009). On the other hand, parking spaces are potential public spaces that can be utilized to enhance the quality of urban life.

As Putnam (2000) outlines, even though informal social connections do not necessarily lead to formal participation in civic life, they still play a significant role in sustaining social capital. Research shows that, independent of cultural differences, the more space devoted to motor vehicle traffic, the weaker the relations between neighbors (Appleyard *et al.* 1981; Hart n.d.; Transportation Alternatives 2006). Replication of the same research in other countries indicates that social relations are thwarted by automobile traffic despite geographical and cultural differences. On-street parking spots are potential extra public spaces for such casual interactions and extra green space in the city, at least in the view of the city's residents whose views are aligned with car-free streets and livable city ideas.

CFSEs and their role in urban production

A city like San Francisco, with an unmistakable heritage of activism, unsurprisingly gives birth to innovative urban grassroots movements and enables others to flourish. Scholars observe a wide variety in citizen-led production of urban space and more specifically, appropriations of urban space. Examples include community gardens; participatory projects led by community-based non-profit organizations (Hayashi 2010); individual appropriations in urban space, such as yarn bombing; community-driven appropriations of urban space mediated through a physical infrastructure provided by architects, such as the ECObox (Petcou and Petrescu 2011); and rather insurgent Chinese fan dancers' appropriation of public spaces (Chen 2010).

CFSEs are unique grassroots urban interventions. They present temporary opportunities in which marginalized groups of people, collectively and deliberately, in a certain time frame, and with a goal of long-term urban transformation, occupy a public space and appropriate it for their desired use. These events are directly about access to streets, and they depend on people to reclaim streets and occupy them for a variety of uses. The participants' marginalized quality warrants attention (Morhayim 2012). Bicyclists and pedestrians alike have not been the primary concern of automobile-centered planning until recently. Most cities do not provide easy and safe access to bicycling and other non-motorized means of transportation. Thus, on one hand, those who cannot drive, find not driving economically wiser, or simply prefer alternate modes of transportation are marginalized and limited in the context of access to streets. They are also limited in terms of freedom to choose their desired transportation mode and thus to maintain their lifestyle and identity. Similarly, in regards to pedestrians, streets are considered transportation corridors rather than social spaces.

However, on the other hand, advocates of livable cities and bicycling are not always from the marginalized sections of the society in terms of gender, socioeconomics, and race. For instance, in the case of bicyclists in the US, about 75 percent of bicyclists are male, and only 25 percent are female (Alliance for Biking and Walking 2012). While "bicycling levels are roughly evenly distributed among all income classes," higher-income people are more likely to bicycle for leisure and less likely to bicycle for utilitarian purposes (Alliance for Biking and Walking 2012).

Yet, the demographics of San Francisco bicyclists do not reflect the demographics of the city. Forty-nine percent of San Francisco's population is male, and 50 percent is female. While among bicyclists people from all ages, races, and genders are found, the majority of frequent bicyclists in San Francisco are men (72 percent), Caucasian (70 percent), and between the ages of 26 and 35; only 23 percent of frequent cyclists are women (SFMTA 2008). While Caucasians make up 53 percent of the city's population and Asians make up 32 percent, Caucasians make up 70 percent of frequent cyclists, whereas Asians only make up 12 percent. African-Americans (7 percent vs. 2 percent) and Hispanics (14 percent vs. 10 percent) are similarly underrepresented in the bicycling community in the city (SFMTA 2008).

Nevertheless, CFSEs as goal-oriented, focused, and locally organized urban appropriations by grassroots masses communicate a shared imagination from the bottom up due to cyclists' marginalized status in the context of access to safe streets and non-motorized transportation (Morhayim 2012). As Critical Mass bicyclists occupy streets and block automobile traffic, as participants of Park(ing) Day introduce a variety of social uses and additional green space into sidewalks and parking spaces, and as participants of Sunday Streets take up the whole street space for a variety of activities without any presence of automobiles on the streetscape, highly contrasting urban experiences replace the everyday use of streets.[1] These groups constitute counter-publics because of their marginalized position and because they introduce counter-discourses within the public sphere (ibid.). CFSE appropriations strike as overt dialogues between marginalized communities and the mainstream public over the uses of urban public spaces and access to the streets in the form of spatial performance. The events' participants communicate their desired uses of urban streets not in city hall meetings, but on the streets to those who reside there. Participants show what it would be like if streets accommodated a variety of social uses and non-motorized transportation modes. The communication takes place through appropriation of streets, rather than through the usual form of protest in the street such as demonstration rallies.

Park(ing) Day is one such CFSE. Rebar, a design studio based in San Francisco, created the first park(ing) spot in 2005. Rebar's designers/activists brought sod and chairs and paid a parking meter for two hours on a downtown street in San Francisco. Rebar's idea was quickly embraced locally and globally (Park(ing) Day 2013). The next year, residents of 13 other cities celebrated Park(ing) Day with 47 park(ing) spots. In 2011 there were 975 park(ing) spots in 162 cities in 35 countries. On-street park(ing) spots that people create during the annual Park(ing) Day feature all sorts of arrangements, such as mini-golf parks, grassy parks, sandy beaches, a setting for a grand piano recital, and yoga and meditation spaces, to name a few. Park(ing) spaces attract people in various ways, and the opportunities they create for social interactions are the highlight of the event for passers-by.

Besides play, leisure, social interaction, and greenery, the park(ing) spots also offer citizens the chance to be politically engaged with one another. Some of the park(ing) spots reflect general issues that are in debate, such as the legalization of marijuana, and others critique more land-related issues. For instance, a model of a

state park with a dead fish in a pond surrounded with yellow crime scene tape in order to comment on the state's budget cuts that would result in the closing of 220 state parks in California. Many park(ing) spots make direct references to even more locally contingent issues, sometimes on the exact spot in the street or sidewalk where a group of people are demanding particular physical changes.

Various publics take advantage of Park(ing) Day in order to enact their ideal spaces in a street-theater manner. The events expose power struggles between counter and mainstream publics and values embedded in urban form. The tension over the right to urban streets is at times marked by devaluation and marginalization of fun and play in public spaces, and at times by prioritization of efficiency over green space and social interactions. Bicyclists, advocates of green space and spaces for sports and play, and citizens wanting more room for casual interactions present just a few examples of the many urban qualities that livable city proponents advocate.

Park(ing) Day provides an open canvas to the residents of the city to share their urban needs and temporarily recreate part of a public street to respond to their needs. Appropriation of space creates a public forum and fosters discussion in the public sphere. Park(ing) spots are free-speech platforms distributed in each neighborhood, rather than in one central town square, in exchange for on-street parking. The park(ing) spots foster spatial communication of right to the city claims and urban design ideas and enable residents to demonstrate their opinion. Some of the participants' reflections about Park(ing) Day can be outlined in the following categories.

Alleviating a sense of marginalization

Bicyclists comprise a significant public during the CFSEs. Riding a bicycle instead of driving an automobile is an overt choice, and the lack of bicycling facilities is an everyday obstacle for bicyclists. Participants of CFSEs often mention their feelings of marginalization in everyday life. Angela, who identified herself as a bicycle advocate, was interviewed at Rebar's park(ing) spot. In a setting decorated with inflatable cushions and a wall made of recycled milk crates containing potted plants that separated the park(ing) spot from the automobile traffic, she stated the following:

> We wanna go against how these spaces are taken for granted . . . it doesn't have to be car dominated. Cities don't have to be just designed around cars. It was a design choice, and we can make other choices . . . I really think the urban realm should be open to pedestrians, to people . . . we as taxpayers and citizens should be able to use the spaces that we pay for . . . Normally as a cyclist and as a pedestrian you are literally pushed off.

The feeling of being pushed off is a recurring theme in each CFSE. Interviews demonstrate that those who join the events identify themselves as part of a like-minded community (Morhayim 2012). The sense of being part of a like-minded community entails the belief that these individuals make the same rights demands

regarding urban space and take a political stand about it by occupying streets. The opportunity to gather in public spaces of the city and collectively transform streets into their ideal spaces serves them as a way to gain a sense of community and empowerment.

Feeling connected

The CFSE participants' desires are not limited to the demand for adequate bike paths, lanes, and sharrows (shared lane markings). In a different park(ing) spot, three adjacent parking spaces were joined together by a team from a coffee shop who called their installation "Ritual State Park" (Figure 12.1). The ground was covered with sod, and the space exhibited a camping tent, a picnic table for four, and two people in bear costumes, a grizzly bear and a panda. Those who got their coffee from the shop were sitting outside, despite the overcast weather. A participant named Kevin said:

> There is grass instead of cars. It helps to connect a little bit more. Without grass I wouldn't stay more. It is life, it grows, it has color, adds a lot . . . Nothing disconnects you from air, grass, asphalt, rain drop, smell. Being connected is a pretty awesome thing . . . concrete is hard, nothing there . . . Here in park(ing) I am stationary. I am connected to the people, the elements of nature, to energies.

FIGURE 12.1 Ritual State Park park(ing) spot

Source: Aditi Rao.

As Kevin details, a green space on a street provides a spot to take a break. It transforms a street to a space where one can hang out, rather than just pass by. It allows one to have an attentive experience of the surroundings and the people who occupy the same space. Kevin, who says he is not an automobile hater but thinks there are too many cars, sees parallels with his park(ing) spot experience and bicycling. He says that driving can be a very negative experience, whereas on a bicycle, "I can really have a sense of openness . . . there is definitely a camaraderie amongst people on bikes . . . when inside the car you are separated from this."

Neil, another Park(ing) Day participant who seems to agree with this connecting experience, says, "It makes you stop and pause." The difference in the experience of the street during Park(ing) Day is a feeling of "openness, people are less closed off and just trusting." The sense of openness that both of these participants enjoy is about being connected to nature, people, and urban surroundings. As opposed to a desire to escape the chaos of the city, interviewees expressed a yearning to be more connected with one another in the urban setting and to enjoy what the city can offer.

Neil also notes the differences between park(ing) spots and city parks:

> This is definitely outside of the norm . . . public parks got a similar vibe . . . except obviously parks are sort of on their own, isolated . . . separate from the city . . . this is a lot more integrated into the fabric [of the city].

Public parks are isolated from the downtown area, while streets are integrated with urban life. Yet access to streets is limited in the sense that streets do not accommodate space for social life or green space, an amenity that would be useful for those who do not live close by city parks.

Collective imaginations

Urban streets are designed to accommodate automobile-oriented ways of life. The ease and accommodation provided by parking on the streets, entrances to garages, traffic lights, and all such design elements, which most people accept as necessities, are for other groups an obstacle to the multiple public uses that streets could offer as public spaces. Thus, the car-free streets grassroots communities, particularly bicyclists and pedestrians, take advantage of the events to enact spaces that match their values and present their counterdiscourses about urban form.

Bryan, a self-proclaimed bicycling advocate, thinks that "events like this, having a collective sense of streets being used differently . . . plays into these larger ideas of how we want to operate as a community, how we want our streets to look, and how we want to behave in these streets." Susan, a 34-year-old who does not drive a vehicle or have a driver's license, was interviewed at the California Institute of Integral Studies park(ing) spot and talked about her ideal urban space:

> I have a fantasy of living somewhere where vehicles are not allowed, especially the downtown core. Just it would be walking and a lot more lanes for bicycles

. . . we pay to have roads built but have we actually chosen to have roads built? Is that what we would choose to have where our tax money spent on? . . . To me it is more valuable to have space for bicycle parking and more emphasis on pedestrian traffic . . . being out and being able to have a place to sit down where you can comfortably . . . rest or eat lunch ... Reclaiming space is all about remembering that it is our city and our space.

Fixing the city

There are other parallels between the bicycling counterpublic and Park(ing) Day, and one particular similarity is the prevalence of "do-it-yourself" (DIY) culture. Bicyclists interviewed at CFSEs often stated that they enjoyed the sense of freedom, liberation, and empowerment one feels when bicycling. Taking their shared imaginations as a foundation, bicyclists project the everyday sense of freedom found on a bicycle onto urban space and claim their freedom to appropriate urban space according to their needs.

Regarding the DIY culture, Furness (2010, p. 142) refers both to "a process of fixing/building/altering bicycles and an expression of self-reliance." According to Furness, DIY culture is an extension of the punk culture, a culture also characterized as "cultural resistance rooted in the rejection of dominant norms and consumerist values . . . [and] a collective desire for more participatory technologies and more democratic modes of technological production." For example, customizing multiple-gear bicycles into single-gear ones is an expression of rejecting dependency on "expert" knowledge and technologies that bicycle companies impose on them to make consumers dependent on their services and bicycle parts (ibid.). The same idea of self-reliance and rejection of expert knowledge can be applied to rejecting urban forms generated based on knowledge and standards created by planners and engineers.

Bicyclists' rejection of expert knowledge and desire to be self-reliant are not limited to bicycle technologies and a desire to modify their bicycles. Evident in CFSEs, appropriations on urban streets are direct projections of the bicyclists' DIY ideology regarding bicycles onto the urban space; bicyclists actively try to fix the city the same way they fix their bicycles. With the ambition of making the city more "bikeable," these counter-publics have taken the matter into their own hands and occupy and fix their city while also manifesting their DIY/fixer culture.

The park(ing) spots on Fell Street (between Scott and Divisadero) were a telling example of bicyclists' desire to "fix" the urban form. Located on six adjacent on-street parking spots, the collective park(ing) space exhibited a banner that read "Fix Fell," taking its name from one of the organizing neighborhood communities that are comprised of bicyclists and residents. The park(ing) spots depicted a solution to bicyclists' safety concerns on the exact block where they feel most unsafe.

Fell Street is a major bike route for bicyclists. It is part of the least hilly route (the Wiggle) to travel from Market Street to the Panhandle and Golden Gate Park. Yet even though it is a residential street, it is like a one-way major highway with

three car lanes. A dedicated bicycle path is located on the left side of the street, sandwiched between heavy vehicle traffic on the right and parking spaces on the left. Moreover, automobiles making left turns to enter a gas station—located on the corner of the block and at the end of the bike path, cut through the bicycle path, increasing the already existing safety concerns of bicyclists.

Given these conditions, residents have been demanding the city make Fell Street a better and safer place for pedestrians and bicyclists by separating the bike lane, adding physical barriers, and removing parking spots. Confrontations on this stretch of the street can be traced back to at least a few months before the Park(ing) Day in 2010 to the day in which a "bicycle spill" happened. Attempting to resemble the BP oil spill, bicyclists chained themselves to several junk bicycle pieces they laid down at the entrance of the gas station in order to block its entrance (Fix Fell 2010a). One of the city's supervisors attended the three-hour long protest and declared his support for the bicycle issues. Drake Logan, one of the activists, underlined the immediate connection between global environmental problems caused by oil dependency and everyday health and safety risks that people face on the streets because of planning that prioritizes oil-dependent lifestyles over creating safer and more livable streets: "Now it is the time to break the city laws when city laws aren't protecting us against injury or death on city sidewalks. And, when the government is not making BP or any other oil companies clean up what they have done in the Gulf of Mexico" (Fix Fell 2010b). The protest ended with arrests and fines, but the needs of bicyclists were presented in the public sphere in a noticeable way.

Park(ing) Day provided a different kind of opportunity for neighborhood organizations on Fell Street—Fix Fell and the Wigg Party—to demonstrate their vision for Fell Street: on-street parking removed and sidewalks extended and used as social spaces rather than travel-only spaces (Figures 12.2 and 12.3). The Wigg Party is a neighborhood bicyclist organization whose goal is the betterment of the overall Wiggle route. Its park(ing) spots echoed the ongoing discussion about the removal of parking spots on the street in order to make the bike lane safer. In addition, organizers aimed to introduce a more residential feel to the neighborhood by limiting the automobile presence and extending the sidewalk.

Park(ing) spaces on Fell Street transformed spaces normally occupied with cars into an outdoor living room, with couches, rugs, cushions, tea corners, and planters, all standing side-by-side with the heavy traffic, the only separation being the bicycle lane. Passers-by and residents alike sat in the park(ing) spots to read a book or chat with one another.

The park(ing) spots became an agora for residents with differing opinions, as activists reconfigured the street to accommodate their needs and lifestyles. Not all residents' ideals were in perfect alignment, however. While I was observing, a couple of confrontations happened between the neighbors and those who were setting up the park(ing) spots. One resident expressed her discontent regarding the bicyclist community being powerful and aggressive. She was worried that eventually bicyclists will take her parking space away, despite the fact that she has been

FIGURES 12.2 and 12.3
Fix Fell, Fell Street Park(ing) Day spots in 2010

Source: Author.

a home owner in the city for many years, whereas the bicyclists are primarily young people who are renters. Her point of view implied that owning land/property makes a person more eligible to decide for the city, but being a renter does not, despite the fact that both groups of people reside in the same city.

Another incident was a confrontation between a neighbor and those who were taking advantage of the park(ing) spots. The neighbor stopped to express her disapproval about the nature and ideology of the installations, adding that she finds the event ridiculous and not having enough parking spaces is unimaginable. Though she left dissatisfied after a few minutes of discussion, one of the Wigg Party organizers stated that in fact the park(ing) spot served its main purpose despite the bitter tone of the discussion. According to him, getting a chance to talk face-to-face about the conflicting demands of residents was the primary point of their installation, more so

than a few hours of enjoying the extended social space. In that sense, the park(ing) spots they organized met both goals of creating a different space and fostering a debate about such physical transformation of the streets.

Events like Park(ing) Day are exactly about such contestation over urban space. CFSEs, by providing transitional experiences and creating a forum between mainstream groups and counter-publics, let the unspoken be spoken between opposing groups, in the heart of the city, in its public streets. They are an attempt at democratization of urban processes and claiming a share in decision-making. Rios (2010) argues that when identity groups claim public space, cultural imaginations of public space lead to "empowerment, and, ultimately, political efficacy." Park(ing) spots on Fell Street, in fact, were translated into a tangible urban transformation project.

Spatial changes: institutionalized DIY

Livable city advocates' visions of alternative streets become visible through CSFEs. Dissemination of their counter-discourses in spatial ways in the public sphere opens up possibilities for the creation of actual counter-spaces (Morhayim 2012). Thus, the events themselves may be temporary appropriations of urban space, but their impact on urban space is greater than that.

In the last two decades the city's physical form has changed to a great extent in order to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians.[2] The city today accommodates over 129 bike lanes and shared roads and over 201 miles of total bicycle network (SFMTA 2008, 2012a). The San Francisco Bicycle Coalition's membership increased from the hundreds to over 11,000 between 1992 and 2011 (SFBC 2011). The coalition, through its members' support, has provided bicycle access to mass transit, helped extend the bicycle network, and organized communities to close Golden Gate Park to automobile traffic on Saturdays, in addition to car-free Sundays. Fell Street, which was a hotspot of confrontation during the Park(ing) Day in 2010, has been going through a series of transformations in order to make the street safer for bicyclists. The bike lane was already painted green and by the late 2012 the city approved proposals for adding poles to separate the bike path from the heavy traffic, the removal of on-street car parking and installation of concrete planters for further separation of the path from automobile traffic (SFMTA 2012b). Furthermore, the city organized temporary traffic closures under the Sunday Streets program together with a non-governmental organization and worked with Rebar to make parklets happen, in addition to a number of new plazas created in recent years.

CFSEs go beyond symbolically making a territorial claim on public space. Like any ritual or performance, these temporary events create collective meanings and contribute to shared imaginations. Some of the CFSEs, such as Critical Mass, also communicate that citizens are willing to cross legal boundaries in order to experience their city streets the way they want, even if it will be a temporary experience. Participants' willingness to reshape their city plays a major role in the process in which the city is being transformed.

The cultural and social capital of Rebar's partners is also worth noting in terms of their role in Park(ing) Day's success. "Trust for Public Land (2008), a nationwide non-profit that focuses on developing parks for public use, is another logistic and financial contributor that makes Park(ing) Day possible" (Morhayim 2012). Moreover, in an interview, Rebar stated that its first park(ing) spot installation received immediate support from the mayor of San Francisco's administration (Freedenberg and Jones 2009). A phone call from City Hall started the process of collaboration and led to the integration of the Park(ing) Day idea into the City's Pavement to Parks Program and the construction of parklets. As of January 2014, 42 fixed parklets and seven mobile parklets have been constructed (Pavement to Parks 2012a) (Figure 12.4). Thus, the bottom-up quality of these appropriations is strongly supported by the social and cultural capital of its players, and the events' success and ability to influence and bring about change are not disconnected from power dynamics.

The parklets are unique, given that a "community-partnership model" characterizes these projects. They are administered under the Pavement to Parks program. Those who would like to construct a parklet are required to go through a permit process. The Pavement to Parks program started in 2009 in order to increase the amount of public space in the city by rebuilding underutilized roadways. As part of this project, up through 2012, five new plazas have been constructed in San Francisco.

FIGURE 12.4 Valencia Street Parklet

Source: Author.

The implementation of these projects is made possible by a number of actors' contributions, such as local neighborhood/community/non–profit membership organizations' and nearby businesses' facilitation efforts, private donations, volunteer labor, and designer and construction companies' *pro bono* or reduced price services. Even the maintenance of the parks is supposed to be provided by one or more of these actors. For instance, the Divisadero Street parklet was made possible with the efforts and resources of several organizations, including the Great Streets Project, volunteers, and Mojo Bicycle Café (a café and bicycle shop located across from the parklet). Landscaping services and materials such as a decking system, cabling, wood, hardware, and planters were donated. Another portion of the funds came from an office that works under the direction of the mayor's office, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development's Neighborhood Marketplace Initiative, whose focus is to attract businesses to the city. Only "the first few parklets were sponsored by the City as demonstrations" (Pavement to Parks 2012b). The city's current website does not mention any government funds for the new parklets (Pavement to Parks 2013).

The *New York Times* reports that the new projects in San Francisco are part of a bigger traffic calming project that includes new traffic signals and planters, which has resulted in 53 percent collision rate reduction for the 11 blocks around Guerreo Park since 2004 (Arief 2009). These developments, paid for through community/private partnerships, serve as both a traffic calming strategy and repurposed public spaces, a combination of services and urban amenities that would traditionally be provided by the city.

The first parklet on Divisadero Street that is still in existence today, was constructed initially as a six–month–long pilot project in 2010. It has been followed by 42 more parklets as of 2014. Parklets similarly benefit public health by increasing pedestrian activity, as evidenced by research on local case studies. According to the San Francisco Great Streets Project (a campaign initiated by San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association, and the Project for Public Spaces) survey on the Divisadero Parklet, the average number of weekday visitors doubled, and pedestrian activity (people per hour) increased by 37 percent on weekday evenings.

Parklets are supposed to be used as public spaces, yet unlike the rest of the streets, they are privately constructed and maintained. Although extra usable public space is added, the city does not always spend public money in order to bring the projects to life. The city's role in the construction of parklets is reduced to one of manager and permit provider, and in the case of objections during the 10-day public notice period, the city holds public hearings. The San Francisco Planning Department requires parklets to place signs that will make it obvious that they are open to the public and not only to customers of the businesses that established the parklets.

Shifting responsibility for public space from the city to individuals, businesses, and community organizations is a strategy that goes beyond the Pavement to Parks Program. Under the Better Streets project (www.sfbetterstreets.org), since 2012 the city has guided its citizens to "become active in creating Better Streets" in their

neighborhoods by providing "a comprehensive 'how-to' guide on installing elements" that will make streets more livable/better (SFMTA 2012c). Under this program various actors in the city apply for permits to sponsor and improve the streets. Property owners, residents, or business owners can improve sidewalk landscaping, street trees, special sidewalk paving, outdoor café seating, sidewalk merchandise displays, bicycle racks, and parklets. Community organizations such as neighborhood groups, merchant associations, or community benefit districts can improve larger-scale projects. Any parties who apply to conduct changes on their streets are also expected to be responsible for the maintenance of the altered area.

Expecting various patrons in the city to take on a number of responsibilities—such as to determine the need for improvements in the public space, apply for a permit, generate and provide funds, carry out construction, and even later on provide maintenance—transcends boundaries between traditional public and private notions of space regarding use, maintenance, and responsibility of providing the public spaces.

Discussion

The relationship between activists' DIY sentiments found in CFSEs and the recent physical transformations taking place in the city is hard to dismiss. On one hand, these public spaces are much more *public* than many other public spaces in terms of the ways in which they come to life. First of all, grassroots movements disseminate ideas about alternative urban spaces in the public sphere. Regarding their actual construction, to some extent, they may be considered a step ahead in planning practices, given the variety of partners involved in the process, other than the city. The process of different actors collectively re-envisioning and constructing parts of the city's public spaces resonates with Lefebvre's (Lefebvre *et al.* 1996) idea of *œuvre*—collectively building the city as a work of art, and being an *inhabitant*. The projects come to life through processes in which experts, non-experts, and businesses act like *inhabitants*, rather than simply *habitants* of the city. Yet, many users and residents are still only involved to the extent that they are allowed to object to the new constructions during the 10-day public notice period and after the permits are granted.

The projects may also be seen to be more democratic because they respond to many San Franciscans' recent aspirations to make the city more environmentally friendly. When possible, reclaimed and recycled materials are used in the construction of the parks (such as with the fallen trees used in Guerrero Park), and green landscaping is added. Besides being "green," parklets also speak to both the social and healthy lifestyle aspirations of some San Francisco residents and to Complete Streets advocates, as these places may encourage casual interactions and discourage the use of motorized transportation. Thus, the projects make the public spaces of the city more inclusive of its many residents' urban needs, culture, and values.

While there are positive aspects of such community partnership processes, there are also negative ones. The appearance of new parklets depends on demands from

nearby businesses or neighborhood groups' ability to organize and collect funds. Because the projects rely on resources provided by for-profit and non-profit organizations and strong social capital, they are more likely to take place in already economically vital neighborhoods. Thus, the future of extra public spaces holds the potential for unequal development throughout the city because the decision regarding where the parklet should be located is not made by a central organization or the city's planning department. This can create an even greater divide between upper- and lower-class neighborhoods in the city. Ocubillo (2012) argues that because the success of the parklets depends on pedestrian activity, and thus local merchants, and because of the parklets' local-scale focus, parklets may reinforce inequities. Lavine (2012) argues streets with parklets may become less accessible to low-income residents.

Joassart-Marcelli, Wolch, and Salim (2011: 707) note that if non-profits start to overtake the responsibility of providing resources for recreation from the governments, the absence of non-profits "from low-income and minority neighborhoods reinforces inequities in the distribution of park and recreation resources." The same is likely to be true for future development of parklets. The highest concentration of affordable housing units in San Francisco occurs in neighborhoods such as Western Addition, Downtown/Civic Center (Tenderloin), Bayview, Potrero Hill, Mission Bay, and South of Market (Figure 12.5). Yet those areas exhibit few to no parklets, despite the fact that already disadvantaged low-income communities would benefit most from health-promoting spaces.

Parklets' quasi-public/quasi-private character creates further confusion regarding their role in urban spatial justice. Despite the fact that parklets are public spaces, it is unknown whether they clearly communicate this to passers-by, since not everyone pays attention to the placards that are often placed below eye-level on the furniture. The parklets are often sponsored by coffee shops across the sidewalk, and they look like extensions of those coffee shops. Passers-by may not always know that they can use parklets without purchasing anything. Given that the projects are fairly new, however, over time more people may come to know about their open access.

The fact that sponsoring businesses are also responsible for the maintenance of the parklets may interfere with the ideal qualities associated with public spaces. The First Amendment gives every citizen the right to be in public spaces and the right to free speech, which includes the right to protest in public spaces. The initial private investment and continuing maintenance requirements by sponsors of the parklets and some parklets' outdoor coffee shop look raise questions regarding the public qualities of such places. After all, businesses make financial investments in these fixed structures with expectations of profit return. In this case, would the businesses let citizens hold protests and engage in free speech or let homeless people sit or sleep in parklets?

San Francisco residents' willingness to take action to make their streets more livable and bicyclists' DIY aspirations and the projection thereof onto urban space seem to have become a solution for a local government that lacks funding for public
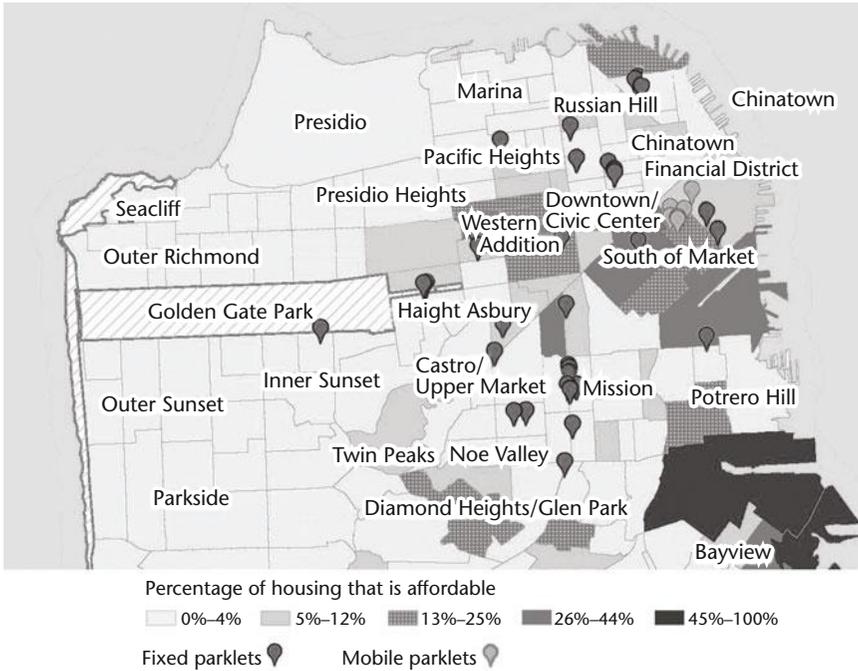
FIGURE 12.5 Map shows fixed and mobile parklets overlaid onto a map that shows affordable housing percentage in different parts of San Francisco. Darker colors indicate areas with higher percentage of affordable housing

Source: Reproduced based on information gathered from Pavement to Parks (2012a) and San Francisco Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Branch (2013).

projects in the aftermath of a crisis–hit economy. It appears that temporary CFSEs are less of a headache than previously thought and are even useful for local governments wanting to warm the mainstream, automobile-centered population up to the idea of creating a more livable city and limiting automobile access. Moreover, the city can tap into its residents' willingness and outsource the cost that it takes to provide more livable and healthier public space improvements. In the case of San Francisco, the DIY attitude seems to be institutionalized by the city.

These case studies highlight the complexity that characterizes urban processes, especially in terms of arguments about spatial justice. The projects such as those that happen under Pavement to Parks and Better Streets programs make the city more appealing and inclusive for populations such as non–motorists, who are marginalized by historically prevailing automobile-centric planning. However, at the same time, the social capital and private entrepreneurship required to make these projects happen, and lack of central land-use planning, hold the potential for unjust spatial development among different neighborhoods in the city, particularly for disadvantaged, low–income populations. Even though the civic sector's

involvement in transforming the city appears to be a step towards sustainable and democratic production of urban space for certain populations, it may reproduce already existing social and spatial inequalities for low-income groups. Thus, the idea of Complete Streets should be evaluated not only by the end product in a vacuum, but also by the location, distribution of the redevelopment projects, partners involved in making the projects happen, and the social, cultural, and economic resources required to make the new livable streetscapes happen. Otherwise, the Complete Streets are bound to stay incomplete in terms of accessibility and ethnic and socioeconomic diversity.

Notes

1   Critical Mass and Sunday Streets are other examples of CFSEs taking place in San Francisco, CA. Critical Mass is a rather insurgent event in which bicyclists gather monthly and ride en masse in the city streets, blocking automobile traffic. Sunday Streets is a city-sanctioned event that closes select streets throughout the city to automobile traffic on designated Sundays to allow for casual car-free social gatherings and physical activity (for further discussion of these events, see Morhayim 2012).
2   Two decades ago corresponds with the start of Critical Mass, an iconic car-free streets event.

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