

Bikes vs Cars Discussion Guide

Director: Fredrik Gertten

Year: 2015

Time: 90 min

You might know this director from:

Becoming Zlatan (2016)

Big Boys Gone Bananas! (2011)

Bananas! (2009)



FILM SUMMARY

When a child first rides a bike, freedom is the sensation that comes flooding in. I can glide atop the pavement! I can take myself places! When Aline Cavalcante and Dan Koeppel hop atop their bikes in São Paulo and L.A., they too feel that sensation. Yet somehow in their quest to take themselves where they're going with their own power, they are making a political statement, climbing atop their activist chariots and riding bravely into the mainstream crawl of the automotive norm. Why? They live in cities where car is king.

Swedish director Fredrik Gertten lives in Malmö, Sweden and he hops on his bike every day to pedal himself to and fro. Much as in the world's cycling capitals Copenhagen and Amsterdam, riding a bike is not a political statement or environmental stand. It's just a practical way of going about one's daily business, a relatively safe and reliable means of transportation.

BIKES VS CARS takes a humanistic approach to the environmental issue of transportation. Although less cars on the road certainly leads to greener societies, the film presents a picture of the devastating and often fatal chaos that prevails in cities around the world where the automotive industry has been allowed a free hand to draw up their car-dominating urban schemes. Uncovering some of the motivating factors - both political and financial - Gertten presents a people-centric look at how we choose to get ourselves around.

Whether or not you plan on pedalling, walking, or driving your way to your next destination, BIKES VS CARS is crucial viewing, a message from a movement already underway, a call to contemplate where our city-planning priorities reside in the transportation department. If, as São Paulo urban planner Raquel Rolnik states, "the concern is about the flow of cars. It's not about people," what kind of a world are we creating for ourselves?

FILM THEMES

With gridlock standard fare in many of the world's urban settlements, and "how's the traffic?" as common a question as "how's the weather?", car-centric city planning is currently flaunting its fatal backside.

NORMS VS. ACTIVISM

The manner in which we conduct our lives is in a state of constant flux, with norms being extremely time-sensitive notions. Where once the model of city planning called for individuals to live and work in the same geographical area, the advent of the car threw that model up in the air. Transportation became not only the benchmark of community but also the game-changer, and proximity to commodities was tossed in the backseat. With the car you can get anywhere, so why ride a bike? Better put, you can't ride a bike in many cities, and a car is something society demands of its people. By opting for a bike over a car, one is perceived to be making a political statement, and the norms define the activist.

IN BED WITH THE BUCK

In *BIKES VS CARS*, we witness the adage "money makes the world go round" in action, most poignantly as Toronto mayor Rob Ford bulldozes his city's plans for cycling regulations. As the car industry and political parties cruise hand in hand along the urban expressway of greed, and oil companies are the third top-spending lobbyist in the U.S., it's no wonder the far-less lucrative cycling sector is being run over. With money's incredible power to drive political decisions, the car continues to dominate the urban landscape as long as people vote in corruption.

SPACE

"You cannot make life better in the city by making more room for cars," states L.A. resident Dan Koeppel. There is only so much space in a city. Why grant that to cars over people? As a car stands still for 95% of its life and requires not only space to park but gas stations to fuel it and roads to transport it, its space requirements are immense. In addition a car-centric city planning model drives the construction of shopping malls, suburban sprawl, and reduces more green models of living, such as self-powered transportation. Mobility through the personal car, however, is proving itself as a non-viable way of moving forwards, with the traffic jam as the ideal example of what happens when too much is crammed in too little space. As Raquel Rolnik puts it, "The traffic jam is the solution."

CAN WE COEXIST?

Development in the modern world happens quickly. With the number of cars expected to double in under a decade, we struggle to keep up. The way the car has defined - and paralyzed - the contemporary city setting is becoming unlivable. As Aline Cavalcante states, "We're reaching a point where it's impossible to live." In that place of intolerable conditions, anger arrives. Hostilities emerge. A war between city dwellers develops in rush-hour traffic, and humanity is put to the test. With cyclists mowed down daily and political agendas prioritizing the dollar over dying cyclists, we wonder: can we find a way to coexist, with everyone granted a safe and civil way of getting around?

**"You own a car,
not the street.
The street
belongs to all of
us. This is not a
war. It's a city."**

Aline Cavalcante

**"Go to any big
city and you can
see for yourself
where a car-
oriented policy
leads: Nowhere."**

Raquel Rolnik

**"For us to not
have access to
freeways is like
the end of the
world."**

Los Angeles inhabitant

FILM FACTS:

- BIKES VS CARS had its global premiere at the SXSW Film Festival in 2015, and became the first film to ever be screened open air at the festival, with 300 cyclists pedal-powering the screening.
- The term gridlock is defined in the “Merriam-Webster Dictionary” as “a situation in which streets are so full that vehicles cannot move.” Over the course of 2015 in the United States alone, gridlock consumed 7 billion hours of drivers’ time (or 42 hours per rush-hour commuter) and over 3 billion gallons of fuel. According to the BIKES VS CARS site, Americans currently cycle for 1% of their trips. If this was increased to 1.5% of trips, the U.S. could import 462 million gallons of gasoline less per year.
- Los Angeles, a city with 70% of its area dedicated to roads and car parking, has been synonymous with the traffic jam, and in 2005 was named the most congested city in the U.S. In 2015, however, Washington, D.C., claimed the U.S. award for the worst city for traffic congestion, with the average commuter losing 82 hours annually to traffic. Los Angeles came in second on the list (80 hours), followed by San Francisco (78 hours), New York (74 hours), and San Jose (67 hours).
- In 2010 there were one billion cars on the planet. That number is projected to double to two billion cars by 2020.
- Biketivism is the term for an activist movement for safe, smart, and reliable bicycle transport.
- In 2014, 89.7 million cars were manufactured around the globe. China led the pack, producing 23.7 million cars that year, followed by the U.S. (12.1 million), Japan (9.3 million), Germany (5.9 million), and South Korea (4.5 million).
- Horace Dobbins established the California Cycleway Company in 1897, in order to build a bicycle tollway between Pasadena and L.A. Dobbins was elected mayor of Pasadena in 1900 during a time when the bicycle was all the rage. With the invention of the automobile, however, his cycleway quickly went into disuse.
- Chris Paine, the executive producer of BIKES VS CARS, previously directed two documentaries on the electric car: “Who Killed the Electric Car?” (2006) and “Revenge of the Electric Car” (2011).
- Director Gertten found it difficult to film cyclists from a car for the film, as bikes are always quicker than cars. For that reason he hired an excellent cyclist in the cities where he filmed to ride a bicycle fitted with a camera in order to capture the bike-riding scenes.
- The concept of “ghost bikes,” or white-painted bikes placed where a cyclist was killed by a motorist, serves as a memorial and a reminder to motorists to share the road. The first ghost bike appeared in 2003 in St. Louis, U.S., when Patrick Van Der Tuin saw a car hit a cyclist. Initially naming his efforts “Broken Bikes, Broken Lives,” ghost bikes can now be seen around the globe.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Find out more about the [Bike Data Project App](#), that was launched alongside the film’s release. It collects data on how often and how far cyclists in various cities cycle, in the hopes of affecting city planning and influencing politics.
2. Reflect upon how you mobilize yourself. If you don’t already and you are able to, try hopping on a bicycle and seeing where and how quickly it takes you. Impossible with your lifestyle? Contemplate the reasons why.
3. Donate to the BIKES VS CARS movement [We Are Many](#)’s web campaign and help to help spread the message of cycling’s benefits.
4. Learn about People for Bikes, a charitable foundation for the promotion of cycling, and read their list of [5 WAYS TO BRING MORE BIKE LANES TO YOUR COMMUNITY](#).

We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.