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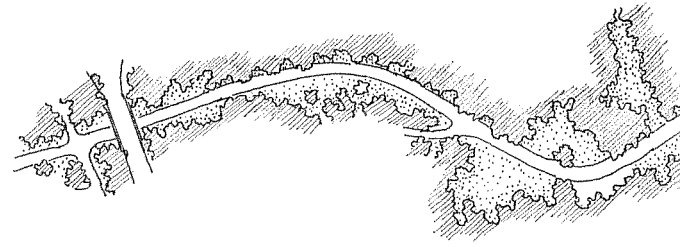
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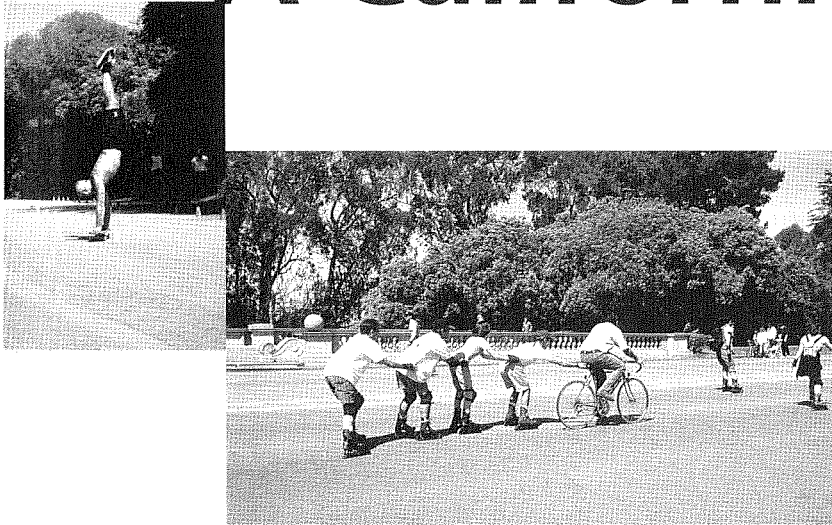
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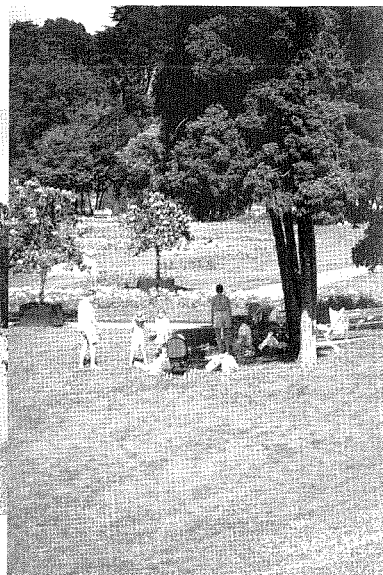
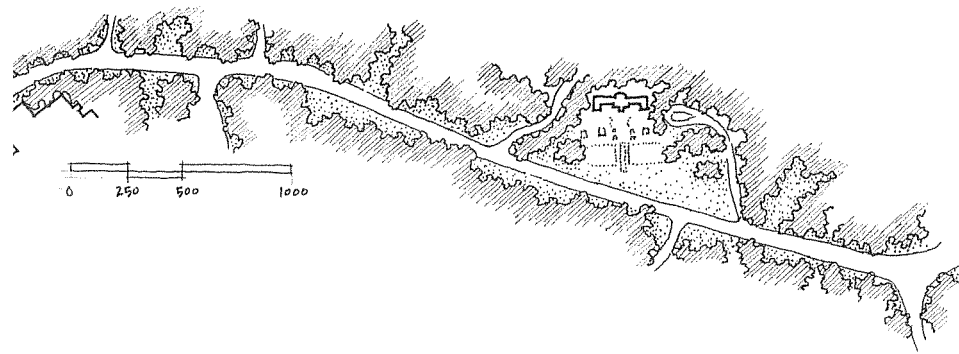


A California Passegiata



Every Sunday morning, San Francisco's Parks and Recreation Department strings barriers across Golden Gate Park's John F. Kennedy Drive, barring automobile traffic for half its length. The wide, elegant roadway, conceived as a carriage drive for polite society but debased during the week as a commuter cut through, becomes an ululating artery of self propulsion, an agora of the American obsession with movement. The street becomes the vibrating, energizing spine of this 1,100 acre, nineteenth-century pleasure ground — all because the city skips its nervous Nellying about liability and lets the vertiginous action rip.

The asphalt is seized by a teeming surge of bicyclists, inline skaters, trolley riders, skateboarders, roller skaters, bike racers, runners and their prolific variations. In the byways, the disco skaters, slalom skaters and street hockey players rhythm and swerve and smack, entertaining spectators who occupy the natural theaters formed by the picturesque topography. The kids are out, too, carefully watched by parents, egg crated in helmets, elbow protectors, and knee pads, demonstrating their splayed-leg lack of expertise on skates or trundling along on training wheels, indulged in the illusion of independence.



The paths that parallel the roadway are filled with amazed onlookers — parents propelling baby carriages, interlinked elderly couples, strollers who seek the security and warmth of numbers and wide-eyed tourists. Some of the edging meadows capture weekly habitués of communal athleticism: hackysack players and jugglers who kick and flip under particular Monterey cypresses; volleyballers who shout from an exceptionally wind-sheltered enclave, Wiffle ball and Frisbee players. Other meadows, less proprietary, harbor the eddies of the human tide the quietly seated observers of the fray: parents and children who recognize each other from school and neighborhood, drinking juice and checking for injuries; families picnicing on broad blankets; and lounging lovers willing to be distracted from each other by sleek athletes.

The hot exoticism of the rose garden, the rhododendron dell, the conservatory and the tree fern forest bejewels the roadway and gives satisfaction to the veterans of flower shows and garden clubs, families in their Sunday best posing for the picture to send Far East or back East, and the plump ladies who miss the winter back in Russia not one bit. At the pedestrian underpass near the

conservatory, instead of the lurking danger we have come to associate with such places, the civilizing urbanity of live music, acoustically resonant in the arching tunnel, lures an audience crowded cheek to cheek. In the morning the music flows from a sparkling jazz trio, in the afternoon from a Middle Eastern, New Age ensemble with a loin-clothed, dark-headed Fabio who stirs the juices of at least three quarters of his audience.

An ample, curving roadway, set amidst the generous pastoral of easy undulating lawns and the arcing shelter of enclosing tree groves simply structures this articulate, savory sociability. People can make it their own — with heat, happiness and the inevitable West coast-left coast hipness. The speed and the risk are unfettered yet there are generous, genial havens in the invisible lines of demarcation, mutually agreed upon by the tacit negotiations of urban life, socializing habit, and the salubrious effect of shared pleasures. The spaces layer up and everyone, including the elderly, the young and the less than Span-dex-ready, finds a place to be.

Diagram of Martin Luther King, Jr., Drive; scenes from a Sunday in the park. Courtesy Louise A. Mozingo.