

Introduction to Grassroots Community Parades





Parades are public events that mark holidays, stage public celebrations, and display civic and/or ethnic pride. Many become, over the years, a kind of community ritual.

Unlike protests or political demonstrations, which are disruptions that challenge the status quo in pursuit of social transformation and justice, parades have traditionally celebrated existing institutions, identities, or communities, and have a spirit of harmony rather than disruption.

Mainstream parades often have corporate sponsorship, or feature prominent political figures in celebrated roles. Even Pride parades, rooted in a history of political protest, have become large, corporate-sponsored affairs featuring figures of political and state power (such as high-level politicians and the police).

Historically, parades have been used as a tool to create political power.

They have been public presentations of social and political relations that often uphold the status quo. But they have sometimes been tools to challenge hegemonic structures of power

(see Davis). **Grassroots community parades enact new social relationships and ways of being together in public space.**



A grassroots community parade is one that is created by and for everyday people. This type of parade is focused on community transformation, healing and/or justice. A grassroots parade inherently disrupts the status quo, inverts hegemonic social relations, and gives everyday people a platform in public space.

Grassroots parades often feature large-scale paper-mache puppets, as well as hand-crafted parade art and costumes. **Their use of humble materials like cardboard, recycled paper, and wheat paste demonstrates the transformative power of imagination and the ability to transform everyday objects and materials into a spectacular collaborative creation.**



A grassroots, or “people-powered” community parade can, at its best, create a feeling of deep togetherness and shared purpose, bring art into public space, and transform the streets participants move through.

These community parades seek to transform parade-goers into participants rather than just audience members, producers of meaning and culture rather than just consumers.



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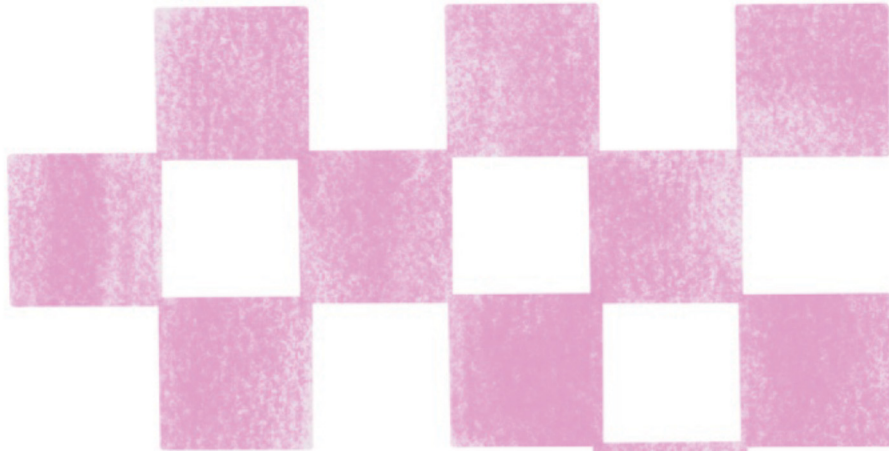
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In his work on the science of awe, Dacher Keltner writes about how the simple act of walking can bring about an experience of “awe” on an individual level. When *many* people walk together, the individual experience is scaled up, allowing people to feel part of something larger. This kind of awe-experience is what Emile Durkheim referred to as “collective effervescence.”

“Walking in unison gives rise to goodwill and collaboration... [It] activates our sense that we are serving a purpose larger than the self” (Keltner, 103-4).





In describing the significance of processions, Rebecca Solnit argues that gathering and walking together is a form of democracy:

“[T]he street is democracy’s greatest arena, the place where ordinary people can speak, unsegregated by walls, unmediated by those with more power... Parades, demonstrations, protests, uprisings, and urban revolutions are all about members of the public moving through public space for expressive and political rather than merely practical reasons” (Solnit, 234).





Like ancient or present-day processional performances – pilgrimages, religious pageants, protests, and marches – parades are a way to step outside of normal life.

A parade can be an important way of knitting communities together, providing an opportunity to gather through a heightening of everyday public spaces. When parades take place in and around the civic spaces of day-to-day life, they transform those spaces into something different and exciting. Furthermore, the embodied act of walking, moving, and celebrating together in public space creates a sense of solidarity and connection (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and McNamara).

Mayday Parade Minneapolis, MN

<https://www.maydaympls.org/>

Started 50 years ago by In the Heart of the Beast Theater, Mayday Parade is a community-organized parade that celebrates the coming of spring, as well as community joy and resilience.

“Every year, beginning in February with community meetings, and culminating on the first Sunday in May, we wrestle with big issues and big ideas through community dialogue, art-making and play. The May Day Ceremony needs and invites many people to work together, crafting relationships that weave our community together in surreptitious ways.”



Peoplehood Parade Philadelphia, PA

<https://www.spiralq.org/>



Running for 25 years, the Peoplehood Parade is a grassroots parade led by community arts organization, Spiral Q, which brings together arts and activism.

“The Peoplehood Parade joyfully lifts up PEOPLE, especially the everyday Philadelphians working toward collective liberation. ... Activists, neighbors, and youth come together each Fall to build Peoplehood’s giant puppets, banners, and performances that celebrate Philly’s justice movements and nurture community connections.”



Everything Under the Sun Parade Portland, OR

<https://www.everythingunderthesunparade.org/>

The Everything Under the Sun Parade is an annual community celebration that celebrates radical joy and reclaims the creative power of ordinary people to sculpt a just future. Started in 2024, this parade believes that ordinary people can make extraordinary things, and that making art together helps build stronger, more connected communities.

Like the Mayday and Peoplehood parades, Everything Under the Sun (EUTS) includes months of envisioning, art-making, and community-building. EUTS hosts monthly Community Puppet Builds for the general public, and partners with community or activist groups to build puppets that reflect their social change mission.

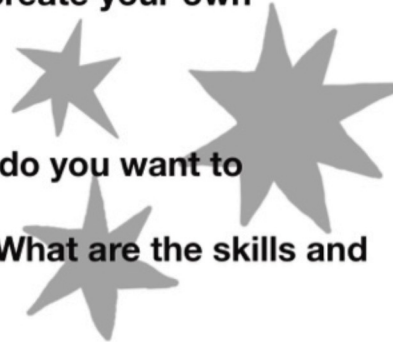
It's a people-powered joy parade!



**Consider this your invitation to create your own
parade-as-community-ritual!**

**What is important to you? What do you want to
celebrate or change?**

**Who do you want to walk with? What are the skills and
resources of your group?**



**Parades can be community rituals that can help us
practice new ways of being together in public space.
In this time of community distress, we need events like
these more than ever.**

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**Created by Kate Duffly, Everything Under the Sun Parade Director and
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