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Cycling, environmentalism and change in 1970s Britain

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Introduction

From the perspective of second decade of the twenty-first century, the pivotal place of the bicycle within the environmental movement and its vital role in sustainable transport scenarios, especially with respect to low carbon futures, is almost self evident. While infrastructure provision and the realistic implementation of cycle planning in cities may practically still be honoured more in the breach than in actuality, it is rare to find a city or local authority, even in the UK where there is (unusually) no central governmental strategy, without some form of cycling plan linked to either environmental, health and/or carbon reduction targets.¹ CTC, the national cycling charity in the UK defines itself through a “vision is of a healthier, happier and cleaner world, because more people cycle” linking its own identity to reductions in environmental pollution.²

But the connections between cycling and the environment, this paper argues, were not always so self evident. The links between these two worlds of concern and activity had to be forged. The 1970s are widely depicted as the time of the emergence of the modern environmental movement and of a renaissance of cycling and cycling activism, but the differentiation between these two sets of activities and the specific relations between them are largely unexamined or only considered in brief summary and overview.³ Latterly, academic analyses have demonstrated the degree to which the bicycle has become a significant trope in “the discourse and practice of the contemporary environmental movement”.⁴ While broadly in agreement with previous discussions of the intersection of cycling and environmental activism, this paper seeks to extend them through a more strongly historicised account of the formation of the particular discourses around cycling and the environment. Specifically, it seeks to examine the relations between a) a new and emergent culture of radical environmental concern and eco-activism and b) existing cultures of cycling, with their own understandings of the environment. In particular, it concentrates on discussions within the Cyclists’

¹ The nearest Britain has at present is the summary report of the All Party Parliamentary Cycling Group (APPCG) *Get Britain Cycling* (April 2013) which is merely an advisory report without legal status. See <http://allpartycycling.org/>. The abortive 1996 National Cycling Strategy (Department of Transport, London: HMSO) was never implemented and undermined by changes in subsequent government policy.

² <http://www.ctc.org.uk/about-ctc>

³ Rachel Aldred, The Role of Advocacy and Activism in John Parking (ed.) *Cycling and Sustainability* [Transport and Sustainability Volume 1] Bingley, UK: Emerald 2012 pp.83-100

⁴ Dave Horton, Environmentalism and the Bicycle *Environmental Politics* 15(1) 2006: 41-58: 41

Touring Club (CTC) which had a long history of working to improve conditions for cyclist and campaigning for their rights. To do so the study draws on primary sources from the publications, journals and records of actions of the CTC and a broader selection of those within the environmental movement, concentrating on Friends of the Earth (FoE), who at the time, were most prominent of environmental activists lauding the bicycle. Relatively extensive primary quotations are used because it is important to present the arguments clearly and to understand the nuances of the positions being framed. The study confines itself to the experience in the UK although international links are also made where appropriate, particularly given the considerable flow of published material from the USA. It is important to make a national level study because of the particular nature of the polity in the UK and the relations between policy and civil society, especially at this point, where recognition of the importance of “the establishment” was much greater than it is today. The study thus also contributes to Oosterhuis’s call for an approach “that attends to national historical trajectories and national bicycle habitus”.⁵

This evidence allows us critically to consider how bicycles and cycling have been explicitly constructed as ‘natural’ allies of environmentalism since the late 1960s and the degree to which this linkage has been simultaneously intertwined with the forging of a broader, counter-cultural identity in the English-speaking world. Conversely, we need to consider the relationship of cycling groups and networks towards the growth of the environmental movement. As will become clear, this connectivity is not necessarily a two-way exchange: environmentalism is not an essential part of the repertoire of pro-cycling activism. Both groups considered were relatively marginal in broader social terms during the early 1970s and it should be noted that while positions and perspectives are given from both through official publications, each contained a variety of members of contrasting views and neither should be considered a monolith.

Our recent framework for understanding the connections between the two realms of bicycling and environmental concern has largely been provided by two authors key to the rise of cycling studies as an academic field. Rosen’s “Up the Vélolution: Appropriating the Bicycle and the Politics of Technology”, drawing from his PhD fieldwork in the early 1990s, identified this as a key period in which the bicycle was explicitly appropriated by a growing “DIY counterculture”.⁶ Within this broader do-it-yourself counterculture, the bicycle emerges as an icon inasmuch as it appears amenable to both appropriation and reinterpretation as an “appropriate technology”. In other words, the bicycle is capable of small-scale remaking and reinvention beyond the roles and forms ascribed to it by institutional agency (such as governmental policy or large scale manufacturing industry). In a similar vein, Horton clearly demonstrates the degree to which cycling had, by the end of the 1990s, become prominent, even salient in environmentalist discourse, an entanglement that is part of a much longer tradition of cycling as an invaluable component in the “oppositional cultures” of a range of social and political activism.⁷ After listing a series of reasons why the bicycle

⁵ Harry Oosterhuis, “Bicycle Research between Bicycle Policies and Bicycle Culture,” *Mobility in History* 5 (2014): 20-36. p. 35

⁶ Paul Rosen “Up the Vélolution: Appropriating the Bicycle and the Politics of Technology” SATSU Working paper N24 2002. Subsequently published in: Ron Eglash, Julien Bleecker, Jennifer Croissant, Rayvon Fouché & Giovanna Di Chiro (eds.) *Appropriating Technology* University of Minnesota Press 2002 (<https://www.york.ac.uk/media/satsu/documents-papers/Rosen-2002-velolution.pdf>)

⁷ Horton, *Environmentalism and the Bicycle* p.41; Dave Horton (2009) *Social Movements and the Bicycle* [<http://thinkingaboutcycling.com/social-movements-and-the-bicycle>]. Note that this relationship may not

is able to occupy such a position, Horton also importantly notes that “the bicycle has not been problematised and politicised by the environmental movement” and that this:

“results precisely from (and contributes to) the bicycle’s iconic status within contemporary British environmentalism. The bicycle symbolises the alternative society towards which environmentalism strives. In contrast, more recent technologies such as the computer and internet, although similarly important in constructing and organising green lifestyles, are regarded as merely useful. The bicycle is thus immune from eco-criticism; its elevated place within environmentalism requires its taken-for-granted, unequivocal endorsement.”⁸

As will become clear, however, the place of the bicycle in environmentalism has been the subject of critique from other cyclists. One might argue that as much as the eco-bicycle has been safe from internal criticism, it has been problematized from outside.

Horton’s conclusion on the intertwining of the two worlds is also instructive:

“Bicycle riding and contemporary environmentalism are mutually constitutive: environmentalist discourse prompts activists to ride bicycles, and that bicycle riding contributes to the making of environmentalism in general and the green lifestyles of environmental activists in particular.”⁹

Against this mutual intertwining, we should also pose the large numbers of bicycle users who would not have considered themselves as environmentalists in these terms. Even setting aside the many for whom cycling is a sporting, competitive activity (and thus worth campaigning for on this basis), there remain thousands for whom cycling is a way of experiencing ‘the countryside’. For this core group under consideration here, the bicycle is a means of close encounter with their environments: both as ‘natural’ landscape and through the heritage of the built environment. How, we must ask, is the environmental experience of these tourists created and mediated, and what understandings of the environment does this generate?

Retrospective consideration of the alliance between the bicycling and environmental concern can also mask the degree to which the arguments are not always and were not always so self-evident. Accepting the arguments of the specific forging of new discursive practices during the later 1980s and 1990s, this study seeks to scrutinise earlier instances of these connections and the appropriation of the bicycle by environmental activism.¹⁰ The selection of the decade of the 1970s as the chronological parameter should not be seen to impute a singular homogeneity to it. Subjecting time to an arbitrary division by decade may be a useful heuristic device but is no more than that. At worst it can be a significant distraction from the broader continuum of which it is part and from the

always be self evident outside of the confines and history of UK activism. For example, in Richard Weinberg & Daniel Lergh (eds.) *The Post Carbon Reader: Managing the 21st Century Sustainability Crisis* (Watershed Media/ Post Carbon Institute 2010), has no mention of cycling whatsoever in its consideration of transport issues.

⁸ Horton, *Environmentalism and the Bicycle* p.46

⁹ Horton, *Environmentalism and the Bicycle* p.46

¹⁰ It also attempts to respond to the concerns raised by the “Special Section: Bicycling, Mobility and History” in *Mobility in History* (Volume 5 2014) to locate cycling studies within a wider frame of mobility history and to engage in detailed analyses of the particular conditions and context of local studies within their comparative context.

processes of continuity and change mapped here. However, given the significance of 1970 for the emergence of the environmental movement in the Anglo-American world as mapped by the proliferation of groups, networks publications and events, and the transformation of political ideology at the end of the decade, through the governments of both Reagan and Thatcher, there is some justification for isolating this period for particular study as a coherent and meaningful entity. To understand the relation of cycling and the environment, a continuous narrative from the 1970s onwards is properly necessary, but requires treatment beyond the scope of this paper.

Background: Imagining Transport

By 1969 half of households in Britain were reported by the Department of Transport to have access to a car, and there was growing public and official realisation of the problems of urban traffic. Conversely, as Rivers pointedly commented, that also meant that 80% of the population had no exclusive access to a car.¹¹ The household data however, obscures the very highly gendered nature of car ownership and access within household: driving was a predominantly male (and still quite strongly middle class) activity.

The salient role of the car in the public imagination had been strongly encouraged by a series of policies since the late 1950s. A year after his 1959 appointment as Transport Minister, Ernest Marples (on his appointment, chief shareholder in specialist road-building firm Marples Ridgeway) addressed his Conservative party conference declaring “we have to rebuild our cities. We have to come to terms with the car”.¹² It was not too surprising that the conclusions of *Traffic in Towns*, the report by Professor Colin Buchanan, selected and commissioned by Marples in 1960, echoed this analysis.¹³ In the *Preface* to a mass market paperback version, Sir Geoffrey Crowther, former editor and chairman of *The Economist*, wrote that,

“to liberate the motor vehicle ... we shall have to make a gigantic effort to replan, reshape and rebuild our cities. ... What the Victorians built, surely we can rebuild. Nor is this an unpleasant necessity. Our cities, most of them, are pretty depressing places, and to rebuild them would be a worthwhile thing to do even if we were not forced to it by the motor car.”¹⁴

Marples also appointed Dr Richard Beeching as Chairman of the British Transport Commission.¹⁵ Similarly, Edward Heath, leader of the Conservative Party, stated as he opened the 1966 Motor Show, “Of course traffic in towns creates a problem. My approach is not to restrict, to hamper or

¹¹ Patrick Rivers *The Restless Generation: A crisis in mobility* London: Davis-Poynter 1972 p.14

¹² Mick Hamer (1987) *Wheels within wheels: a study of the road lobby*, London: John Murray p. 54.

Marples subsequently disposed of his shares by transferring them to his wife.

¹³ *Traffic In Towns* HMSO 1963

¹⁴ Crowther: *Preface to Traffic in Towns: the specially shortened edition of the Buchanan Report* Penguin 1964 pp.14-15

¹⁵ Beeching's first report, *The Reshaping of British Railways* (1963) dismantled significant sections of the British railway network during the 1960s. Cuts of 55% of stations and 30% of route miles were planned. It was followed by *The Development of the Major Railway Trunk Routes* (1965) recommending rationalisation to only 3,000 miles of key routes for future development. See Loft, Charles. *Last Trains: Dr Beeching and the death of Rural England*. London: Biteback Publishing, 2013; David Henshaw (2013) *The Great Railway Conspiracy* [revised edition], Dorchester, UK: A to B Books

confine the motorist. Instead, we must learn to cope with the motor car and care for the motorist".¹⁶ The Labour Party (in office 1964-1970), in thrall to Wilson's modernising rhetoric did little to change this direction, only reinforcing the justification of policy through a determinist depiction of technology. The 1970 White Paper (published shortly after Heath's election victory), *Roads for the Future* laid out a strategy for a 4 billion pound investment in trunk roads to double capacity in the next 20 years.¹⁷ Although these plans were not immediately implemented (and subsequently significantly reduced in a 1977 White Paper), the clear implication was that both the urban and rural environment should be rebuilt to accommodate motor traffic. Also in 1970, official reframing of the concept of environment in government thinking and the relation between transport and environment came to the fore as the Department of Transport was abolished as a separate government ministry and absorbed into the Department of Environment - but the primary policy driver was the roads programme.¹⁸ It was only to re-emerge as a separate department in 1976.¹⁹

Against this exclusive emphasis on planning and investing in the growth of motor traffic a range of voices began to be raised among the burgeoning ecology movement.²⁰ Initially, however, the primary concern was not with advocacy of the bicycle as a solution to the increasing problems of urban transport, but with the formulation of a comprehensive critique of the place, role and use of the car. The formation of the London Motorway Action Group in 1971 typified the growing critical response to the plans for increasing road building. It united civic societies, residents association and rate payers associations to oppose expansion of the London Ringway inner-city motorway plan that would have erased significant historic areas of housing, displacing and estimates 60-100,000 persons.²¹

Another opening salvo in the UK came from the newly founded Friends of the Earth. FoE in London was initially established in 1970 as a staffed office to voice concern for environmental issues, rather than the membership organisation which it later became. One of the launch publications was *The Environmental Handbook: Action Guide for the UK*, based on an American edition edited by Garret de Bell the previous year.²² The editor, John Barr, contributed an essay "The Traffic's Roar" (pp.191-197) in a section entitled "The Assaults on our Senses". He argues that "The cycle of ever-increasing reliance on the motor car with consequent reduction in quality and quantity of public transport must be broken". But the alternatives outlined are simply ensuring more responsible car use or, "better

¹⁶ Rivers, *Restless Generation* p.40

¹⁷ Ministry of Transport, *Roads for the Future: The New Inter-Urban Plan for Transport*, Cmnd. 4369, May 1970 pp. 6-7.

¹⁸ 1971 saw the introduction of tax relief on company cars

¹⁹ From 1997 it became the Department for Transport, Environment and the Regions, from 2001-2002 the Department for Transport and Local Government and from 2002 once again as the Department for Transport

²⁰ The term ecology is used here in preference to environment here to distinguish this movement from previous conservation-oriented groups and activities. The ecology movement of the 1970s addressed environmental issues but as an interlinked strategy that sought more radical social changes (demonstrating both right wing and left-wing forms)

²¹ Derek Wall *Earth First! and the anti-Roads movement* London: Routledge 1999 p.28; Rivers, *Restless Generation* p.80

²² John Barr (ed.) (1971) *Environmental Handbook: Action Guide for the UK* Ballantine/ Friends of the Earth. The other two titles were Richard Wiggs' *Concorde - the Case against supersonic transport* and a UK edition of Paul Erlich's *The Population Bomb*

still take the train, bus bicycle or walk". There is no sense of understanding the structural issues involved or of a different conceptualisation of urban mobility

From December 1971, *The Ecologist* magazine (also newly founded at the beginning of the year) provided a page to act explicitly as a 'Friends of the Earth Newsletter', indicating how close (and relatively small) the movement was at this time. These pages began by concentrating on issues of proposed mining in Snowdonia, and on glass recycling campaigns. These themes can be read as an Anglicisation of US concerns (to be expected considering its heritage), rather than appearing to be connected with emerging concerns for change elsewhere in Europe. Others, however, were beginning to campaign specifically on cycling issues, taking new directions from the style of lobbying that the CTC had been engaged in for nearly a century.

Bicycle Activism Before the Oil Crisis

"Commitment" a group (initially related to the Young Liberals) organised its first demonstration in late 1971. Its actions were reported in *Peace News* indicating both the conceptual linkage to other nonviolent activism and the practical adoption of road occupying tactics familiar from other marches and demonstrations.²³ In the cycling press the editorial in the October/November issue of *Cycletouring*, the bi-monthly member's magazine of the CTC, carried an extensive review of this new wave of activism for its readers' assessment.

"Commitment is the name of a new group whose activities have gained press recognition in the past few months as a result of 'bike-in' demonstrations in London in the past few months. One newspaper described how supporters had 'swept down Oxford street, wearing slogans like bike power', and had delivered a letter to the Greater London council demanding a network of car free cycleways.

'We will concentrate on bikeways for commuters, not only within central London but through arterial routes to the suburbs', says a Commitment spokesman. 'bikeways for pleasure, linking parks, theatres, concert halls and railways stations, are also planned. We believe we are fighting not only cars on the road, but cars in the head.'²⁴

These early protests over urban mobility spaces were motivated by opposition to the planned road expansions and the threat of rising traffic. Bicycles provided an alternative mode to the car, in a way that had not been explicitly framed before in traditional cycling organisations such as the CTC. These schemes are notable for introducing organised grassroots pressure for separate cycleways. Although debates on cycleways had surfaced among CTC members in the 1930s, nothing was resolved.²⁵ Drawing on the experience of New Town planning, especially the design of Stevenage, space for spaces for cycling had been able to be reconceptualised in segregated terms, breaking with prior insistence that roads themselves be made safe for cycling.

²³ See Wall *Earth First!* for interviews with protagonists. It may well also indicate the transnational linkages of the actions with those emerging in the Netherlands, though no direct evidence has yet emerged for this.

²⁴ *Cycletouring* October November 1972, p. 150

²⁵ See Peter Cox, "A Denial of Our Boasted Civilisation": Cyclists' Views on Conflicts over Road Use in Britain, 1926–1935 *Transfers* 2(3), Winter 2012: 4–30, Carlton Reid, *Roads Were not Built for Cars*, 2014. In brief, CTC opposed the introduction of separate cycleways fearing that these would lead to cyclists being forced off the roads and subject to second class conditions.

The CTC was initially deeply conflicted with respect to this new wave of activism. Whilst realising that there might be a degree of common cause in shared concern for cycling, the CTC, approaching its centenary year in 1978, expressed doubt as to the effectiveness of direct action tactics. It suggested that the “steady negotiation and reasoned persuasion” employed through its long history is more effective in the long run. Fears were also expressed that there would be a return to the sterile debates of the 1930s. It was also clear, however that the CTCs record in affecting government policy relating to cycling had become minimal at best.

For some CTC members, the actions of Commitment came as a welcome wake up call. They connected cycling to other forms of activism such in the anti-apartheid movement and for Shelter (Action on homelessness), both major, high-profile public causes at the time. The traditional role of the CTC working within existing institutions was foreseen as “increasingly redundant”.²⁶ For others, more numerous to judge by the four to one ratio of printed replies, CTC should have nothing to do with this wave of protest: publicity was not to be seen as an end in itself and that was all that direct action was deemed capable of achieving.

The CTC was in a difficult position, however. The peak membership years of over 53,000 in 1950-51 were long gone, and by 1971 membership reach a post-war nadir of 18,564, the lowest since 1925 - before the General Strike. Simultaneous with this decline in public support (and therefore also financial income), its technical role in relation to government reorganizations of transport had been dramatically raised following the 1968 Countryside Act.²⁷ Since the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 (section 27(6)), there had existed a category of routeway known as a Road Used As a Public Path (RUPP), defined as “a highway, other than a public path, used by the public mainly for the purposes for which footpaths or bridleways are so used.”. Many of the offroad trackways favoured by cycler tourists had utilised these. The 1968 act required abolition of the RUPP category allowing such former routes to be abolished if new evidence could be produced that there was no right of way, or to be reclassified as either byways open to all traffic, bridlepaths or footpaths.²⁸ Reclassification to footpath status was problematic, because it removed the right to cycle on such paths. Consideration should be taken as to “whether the extinguishment of vehicular rights of way would cause any undue hardship”.²⁹ Thus representation had to be made to the relevant committees in every reclassification case to prove prior usage and to argue the case in order to safeguard the right to ride on the byways within the three years of the special review period. Similarly CTC had also had to lobby the Forestry Commission, newly empowered under the Forestry Act 1967, to take a less restrictive attitude to access to Commission lands.³⁰ Other legislative changes, brought about by the restructuring of local government with the consequent delegation of powers to control roads and traffic to local authorities, meant that rearguard action also needed to be taken against the arbitrary introduction of “no cycling” signs in some areas.³¹ New pedestrianisation schemes (such as those in Preston or Chester) in particular created problems for cycle access to city centres, requiring lengthy detours.³² So, while a new chapter of activism and

²⁶ Russel King “Direct Action Pays” *Cycletouring* December 1972/ January 1973 p15

²⁷ *Cycletouring* 1974 27

²⁸ Countryside Act 1968 Part III

²⁹ Countryside Act 1968 Part III para. 10 (c) p. 58

³⁰ CTC AGM Special report, April 1973

³¹ *CycleTouring* Jun/July 1971 p.95

³² *CycleTouring* April May 1973 p.73

awareness of the future possibilities of cycling was beginning to be written outside of the traditional cycle clubs and lobbying bodies, important rearguard work behind the scenes was still being done to maintain existing rights and access.

The CTC was also involved in support for the British Cycling Bureau, “a PR body run by Planned Public Relations of London and funded by the British bicycle industry via a levy on all bicycles sold.”³³ A National Plan for Cycling was launched in June 1972, after the appointment of Eric Claxton. Claxton had been the Chief engineer for Stevenage and was responsible for the extensive cycleway network which, at the time was acknowledged as a world class example of parallel infrastructure.³⁴ However, the existence of both knowledge and examples of good practice were of little avail when it came to most decisions on urban development. As Justice Layfield’s (1973) report of the Public Inquiry into the Greater London Development plan commented “Scant attention is paid to the pedal cyclist ... He seems to be regarded as a virtually extinct species. ... the fact remains that in central London, the bicycle is often the quicker way”.³⁵ That CTC expressed a complaint that they had already made this point in 1971 only highlights their lack of impact. Another BCB booklet of June 1972 was entitled *Before the Traffic Grinds to a Halt*, urging government to provide better facilities for existing cyclists and to encourage others to ride. CTC’s principal input seems to have been solely concerned with leisure and the countryside not urban riding.³⁶

That there was perceived to be a crisis in transport in the opening years of the 1970s, prior to the problems posed by the oil crisis of October 1973 is clearly apparent. Though not published until 1974, the *Report of the Independent Commission on Transport* was compiled between February and December 1973.³⁷ The Commission, chaired and organised by Bishop Hugh Montefiore, brought together a range of expertise from industry, academia and the voluntary sector to take a wide ranging overview of what would now be termed the sustainability (or not) of British transport and to make policy recommendations. It framed the problem as a complex one involving financial and energy costs, environmental pollution and increasing social inequality (especially with respect to rural- urban divides and through age). The Report saw cycling as a crucial part of the urban transport mix, requiring support through comprehensive provision in low speed streets and segregated paths where appropriate. In its conclusions it far-sightedly notes that, “the real goal is not ease of movement but access to people and facilities. Movement is desirable only to the extent that access requires it”.³⁸ The clear understanding of transport as an environmental issue is outlined in the chair’s preface in which he describes its origins in a previous Commission on “Man’s Stewardship of the Environment” at a church leader’s conference in September 1972.

For the framing of cycle activism, however, one of the most significant events of 1972 was the demonstration in Paris on April 23rd, the largest of a number of other “bike-in” actions in London

³³ Carlton Reid 2014 *Roads were Not built for Cars* 2014 see also Reid, Carlton 2013 ‘Routes without riders’ *Get Britain Cycling* #2 summer 2013 pp.30-33 <http://getbritaincycling.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/GBC2013.pdf>

³⁴ Jones, Tim (2008) 'The Role of National Cycle Network Traffic-Free Paths in Creating a Cycling Culture'. Oxford Brookes University, Unpublished Thesis.

³⁵ cited in *CycleTouring* April May 1973 p.73

³⁶ As reported in *CycleTouring* August/September 1972 p.119

³⁷ *Changing Direction The Report of the Independent Commission on Transport* Coronet books 1974

³⁸ *Changing Direction* p.260

Rome and New York.³⁹ As the CTC Annual General Meeting put it, 1972 was “the year of bicycle demonstrations”.⁴⁰

Organised in large part by Amis de la Terre (founded 1970), the Paris bike-in had its roots in opposition to the proposal for a four lane highway along the left bank of the Seine echoing the events that had crystallised and galvanised protest in London.⁴¹ Most famously it is usually credited as the occasion of the coining of the term “velorution” to connect radical politics to cycling. Richard Ballantine’s account of the day, formed an important part of the chapter on “The Dream” in numerous editions of his bestselling *Richard’s Bicycle Book* first published in the US in 1972.⁴² He described an assembly of “10,000 bicycles of every conceivable type and condition” proceeding in festival mode until broken up by the CRS with tear gas and about 50 arrests, as a way of framing the need for direct action and involvement as a vital part of reclaiming spaces for cyclists

“The power of vested interests in maintaining a motor age is such that there will probably be a long drawn out struggle and concessions will not be won without a fight.

So don’t be surprised if you are beaned at a bike-in by a club-swinging cop who calls you a dirty communist, and don’t back off because of it. *You have a right to live.* Arguments which present the roller skate or bicycle as more economical, efficient etc are all well and good, but the situation is extremely simple: present transportation systems are filling the air with deadly fumes and noise and recklessly wasting a dwindling supply of natural resources. *They are killing and injuring people.* You have a right to live – it is your birthright – but you will have to fight for it. Do it”⁴³

Richard’s Bicycle Book was a publishing sensation, selling in the millions and going through numerous editions and revisions to reflect changing times, technologies and agendas in advocacy.⁴⁴ Alongside practical advice on choosing and maintaining a bicycle, information on riding techniques and history, was a chapter in which he laid out a virtual manifesto for a revolutionary cycling politics.

When the British edition came out in 1975 (after the author’s relocation to London) some of the strongest rhetoric was toned down although it reappeared in later editions. Instead he suggested

³⁹ David Dickson, *Alternative Technology* London, Fontana 1974. Note that the Bike-in predates the Critical Mass, and better describes the specific mass assembly or demonstration. See Chris Carlson *Critical Mass: Bicycling’s Defiant Demonstration* AK Press 2002

⁴⁰ CTC AGM Special report, April 1973

⁴¹ Michael Bess *The Light Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000* Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2003 pp.85-6. See also Pierre Samuel (2006) *Histoire des Amis de la Terre 1970-1989: Vingt ans au Coeur de l’Ecologie* [http://www.amisdelaterre.org/IMG/pdf/Histoire_des_AT_1970-1989.pdf]

⁴² *Richard’s Bicycle Book: A manual of maintenance and enjoyment* New York: Ballantine Books 1972, UK Edition London: Pan 1975. Copies of the US edition appear to have circulated relatively widely amongst British activists judging by the frequency that they could be found in second-hand bookshops in later years.

⁴³ *Richard’s Bicycle Book* 1972 p. 246.

⁴⁴ Significant changes in layout came in with *Richard’s New Bicycle Book* [fully revised] London, Pan 1990 and *Richard’s 21st century Bicycle Book* 2000

possibilities for practical action, listing addresses of organisations and campaigns to join, alongside advice on how to start one's own independent local action.⁴⁵

“Do what you have to do. There are many fronts and strategies. Each moment of opportunity is a matter of individual assessment and decision. It might be fun, it might be hard. It might be little, it might be great – the only rule I think, is to honestly do it for yourself. Do it because you want to because you must, not because you think you should. Sometimes the moment is right to move, other times there's something else to do. Life is dynamic; we develop, change, and grow every day. We move according to our best understanding of the moment, act as we are best able, and are responsible for the consequences – that's how we earn. Right and wrong are relative, the important thing is, if a chance to move comes your way, take it.”⁴⁶

Both advocacy of civil disobedience and linking cycling and to the rapidly growing ecology movement was explicit in Ballantine's writing.

By mid-1973 one can also add into the public discussion of the bicycle as a tool of radical or counter-cultural politics the contribution of Ivan Illich's June article in the Guardian. Extracted from *Tools for Conviviality*, (published September 1973), it was followed by *Energy and Equity* the following year.⁴⁷ E.F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973) also offered a similar re-evaluation of technology, building on his earlier work on intermediate technology which was epitomised by the bicycle.⁴⁸ The pressure group Transport 2000 was formed in 1972 to press for co-ordinated transport policy in response to disclosures of further threats to the rail network. A host of other reports and papers such as The Ramblers Association publication *Rural Transport in Crisis* (1973) and the comprehensive think tank paper *Personal Mobility and Transport Policy* by Mayer Hillman and others (1973) highlighted the failure to think beyond private motoring in transport policy.⁴⁹ A radical environmental/ecological movement had emerged at a local levels, mirroring the more obvious international movement prompted by the 1972 *Limits to Growth* report and the UN Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm in 1972 for which Ward and Dubos' *Only One Earth* provided a powerful framework.⁵⁰

The published report of the CTC Annual General Meeting, held at the end of March 1973 allows us a useful perspective and reflection on these myriad developments from the perspective of the established cycle lobby: one which had already begun to pick up significant numbers of new members and interest since the doldrums of 1971.

⁴⁵ Ballantine's politics reflected his family background in politics and radical publishing and he was clearly an enthusiastic reader of his great aunt Emma Goldman's works.

⁴⁶ Version from *Richard's New Bicycle Book* [fully revised] London, Pan 1990 p.351 - text slightly adapted from original US edition 1972

⁴⁷ Ivan Illich *Tools for conviviality* London: Marion Boyars 1973; Illich *Energy and Equity* London: Marion Boyars 1974

⁴⁸ E.F. Schumacher *Small Is Beautiful: a study of economics as if people mattered* London: Blond and Briggs 1973

⁴⁹ Hillman, M., Henderson, I., Whalley, A. (1973) *Personal Mobility and Transport Policy*, PEP (Political and Economic Planning) Vol XXXIX Broadsheet 542 later republished as part of the *Proceedings of the First International Pedestrian/Bicycle Conference, International Federation of Pedestrian Associations, London, 27-29 May 1974*

⁵⁰ Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, (1972) *Limits to Growth*, New York: New American Library; Barbara Ward & Rene Dubos *Only One Earth: Care and Maintenance of a small planet* Harmondsworth: Penguin

“It is, in fact, interesting to conjecture whether the club’s own happier membership picture is to some extent a reflection of what is happening on the other side of the Atlantic. There the new enthusiasm appears to be compounded of a number of elements – part fashion, part related to a concern for what is nowadays generally known as ‘the environment’ - and in this latter connection the past year has revealed among the many bodies now directly engaged in environmental problems in this country a growing interest in the usefulness and value of the pedal cycle.

The year 1972 was a year of bicycle demonstrations, inspired and organised by groups completely independent of the recognized cycling bodies. We would appear to be no longer the only voice in the wilderness!

Encouraging though these signs may be, however, it has again been evident during the year that cycling still gains little favour in the eyes of the highway authorities.”⁵¹

The low historic numbers of CTC members in 1971, and the significant reduction in recorded distances travelled by bicycle in government figures provide one image of cycling as an increasingly irrelevant activity at the beginning of the 1970s. Yet, almost immediately, new riders and forms of riding emerged: those who rode, as Horton describes, as part of their performance of identity as environmental activists, and whose riding constituted part of that identity. The old world of club rides on a Sunday and the traditional cycle touring was simply not part of their novel emphasis on the bicycle as part of a broader agenda of social change. Somehow, in the coming years, these two worlds would have to find some reconciliation.

After 1973

The oil crisis of the autumn of 1973 did not precipitate a new wave of cycling activism. It did provide a further layer of argument for advocates and a means of easy communication and public appeal for an already growing movement. By early 1974, *CycleTouring* reported local DAs (District Associations, the local club level organisational structure of the CTC) pressing publicly for more governmental action to encourage cycling, specifically in light of the energy crisis, and on newspaper headlines stating “Get Ready for the Bike Boom”.⁵² In June of that year CTC membership had grown to over 22,000 and reached 23,186 by the time of the autumn annual return. But this resurgence in fortune was also a source of tension between those who favoured increased militancy and action, and those who saw the club’s role as continuing to support the traditions of the bicycle tourist and to engage in polite use of political influence where necessary.

On one hand came demands for action and increased militancy:

“cyclists need to take action. They are being forced off the roads, particularly in urban areas, partly by the use of violence by motorists. I know this is a contentious statement, but, cycling everyday in Leicester I am convinced it is so.”⁵³

⁵¹ CTC AGM special report 1973

⁵² *CycleTouring* February/ March 1974 p.39

⁵³ *CycleTouring* April/May 1973 p.76

Such voices were echoed by the reception given by *Cycletouring* to the report of the Independent Commission on Transport (described above).

“A report in itself, however, is not enough. *Changing Directions*, and the recommendations which it makes, cries out to be read and acted upon by those in whose hands lies the power to do something positive and effective before it is too late.”⁵⁴

On the other hand, the CTC reflected a nostalgic almost bucolic view of bicycling.

“Just off the roaring, high-velocity motorways and the congested main roads, there is still a leisurely, low-decibel cyclists’ England. Here, quite apart from national parks, conservation areas and other tourists’ high spots, is an unspectacular, intimate countryside: and it is the cyclist, himself unspectacular, not the motorist who is best equipped to enjoy its pleasures of pub, church, market-place and cottage in all their variety of regional character”.⁵⁵

The majority of articles in *Cycletouring* continued to describe experiences of touring interspersed with occasional items on bird watching or church architecture.

Realistically, the emphasis placed on the traditional form of lobbying through parliamentary influence had long since ceased to be appropriate. In the early 1930s CTC had been able to rely on the presence of members and sympathisers in the Lords and the Commons, whose experiences of the freedom and liberation of cycling had been forged at the turn of the century or before.⁵⁶ Yet even by the end of that decade, the exclusion experienced by F. J. Urry, the CTC representative on the Alness committee (he was forced to write a dissenting view to the committee’s final report), demonstrated that reliance on these means was no longer adequate. Increased emphasis on direct action of civil society organisations in the 1970s as a means to promote change recognised that, while political decisions might still be as solidly in the hands of an entrenched establishment as ever, the CTC was no longer part of, nor had access to, that establishment.⁵⁷

Although it might overstate the case, what motivated much of the new interest in cycling was not cycling itself. Rather it was what bicycle use represented and what it enabled. Typifying this new approach, simultaneously trying to acknowledge the importance of the existing traditions of leisure, were writings by Philip Brachi. He was published by both the environmental press (*Ecologist*; Eco Publications) and also wrote for the British Cycling Bureau.⁵⁸ His outline arguments for the encouragement of greater cycling (“the most efficient means of transport known”) are still the basis of much cycle advocacy today, in Britain and elsewhere. There are, he writes:

⁵⁴ *CycleTouring* September/ October 1974 p.182

⁵⁵ Quotation used to open review of Frederick Alderson’s *England by Bicycle*. *Cycletouring* September/ October 1974 p.182

⁵⁶ Cox, P. (2014) ‘Cyclists and Conflicts over Road Use in Britain, 1926-1935’ in Duc, G; Perroux, O.; Schiedt, H & Walter, F. (eds.) *Histoire des transports et de la mobilité: Entre concurrence modale et coordination (de 1918 à nos jours)* Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Editions Alphil pp.279-305

⁵⁷ This is not to ignore the invaluable role of the cross-bench Friends of Cycling Group formed in Parliament in 1969 to (successfully) prevent a Highway Code ban on riding two abreast.

⁵⁸ Philip Brachi “Pedal Power” *Ecologist* 4(2) February 1974 p.52; *The Bike Book* [“covering all aspects of cycling and concentrating especially on environmental, political and planning issues”] Eco Publications: Cambridge 1973; *Cycling and the Environment* British Cycling Bureau 1977

“reasons aplenty for preferring pedal power. Enjoyment, exercise and an unrivalled economy and convenience are the ones most often mentioned. In another age, another culture perhaps, one might hope that the case for the bicycle might not require numerical proof. A source of pleasure and mobility perfectly suited to the human scale, neither endangering others nor bruising their freedoms; comprehensible, with a transparent honesty of form and operation; ecologically meek; such a device should need no defence.”

The language here connects both the emergent perspective on the environmental utility of cycling with a more conventional CTC approach that emphasises cycling for its own pleasure. While the CTC continued to puzzle over its proper role in this debate through editorial comment in *Cycletouring* and in debates at AGMs, one member argued that CTC’s traditional position could offer an even more radical political alternative.⁵⁹ While the essentially urban task taken on by FoE aimed at changing the way people travel to work, the challenge provoked by CTC’s vision of cycling was to promote a different set of priorities and values: the primacy of the pursuit of happiness rather than the wage packet. In a very real sense, as Bonham has argued, promotion of cycling as efficient travel serves the discourse of the efficient city and the maximisation of capital growth, rather than providing a radical green alternative.⁶⁰ Restating the emphasis on leisure and pleasure as goals might indicate a change in value systems.⁶¹

Beneath this, however was also recognition that very different constituencies were involved in the division between FoE and the CTC, despite the many shared memberships.

“It would be true to say that we do not necessarily represent the same people. The CTC has always had principally in mind the established cyclist and the dedicated: the Portsmouth Friends of the Earth have stated that their cycle route ‘is not designed to please current cyclists, but to encourage the far more numerous timid citizens and children who would like to cycle but are deterred by today’s terrifying road conditions’”.⁶²

Such a cleavage in cycling advocacy is still deeply pertinent four decades later, as witnessed by the reception given to the publication of the *Promoting Walking and Cycling* report in 2012.⁶³

The Portsmouth experiment was a short-lived implementation of a cycle priority on a stretch of road (similar to the German fahrradstrasse). Although initially supported by County and City Councils, the scheme was abandoned by both when faced with opposition from businesses on the route who feared decline in profits (even though no actual analysis appeared to have been carried out).⁶⁴ For the CTC such schemes hinted at the crux of the problem and a fundamental division of perspective.

⁵⁹ See e.g. Editorial *Cycletouring* Feb/March 1976 p 37-8

⁶⁰ Jennifer Bonham, 2006 Transport: disciplining the body that travels *Sociological Review* 57-74; Jennifer Bonham and Peter Cox The disruptive traveller? A Foucauldian analysis of cycleways *Road & Transport Research* Vol 19 No 2 June 2010

⁶¹ This position echoes the work of Andre Gorz: see. e.g. *Farewell to the working class* London: Pluto 1980

⁶² *Cycletouring* 1976 p38

⁶³ Full publication as Colin Pooley with Tim Jones, Miles Tight, Dave Horton, Griet Scheldeman, Caroline Mullen, Ann Jopsen and Emmanuele Strano, *Promoting Walking and Cycling: New perspective on Sustainable Travel* Bristol: Policy Press 2013

⁶⁴ *Ecologist* 6(6) 1976 p.231

“Perhaps the interesting question which now needs to be faced is that of the extent to which the CTC is to be involved in the campaigning for urban facilities and their detailed planning, particularly in the context of continuing to be regarded as the principal spokesman – as has generally been the case in the past – on matters affecting cyclists in the use of the roads.

As a result of the failure of the old Bicycle Union to carry out its proper function in the late 1880s, the club has assumed throughout its long history a traditional role of the “cyclists’ champion”. But where do we stand now in light of the apparent success of bodies such as the British Cycling Bureau, Friends of the Earth, and the ‘All Change to Bikes’ groups – all of whom have been so active in pressing for the special treatment of cyclists in towns and their segregation from motor traffic? ... Should we now leave it to the more demonstrative pressure groups so that we can concentrate on our first love – cycling for recreation in the countryside? Or is there a need to co-ordinate all the currently fragmented effort and weld it into an authoritative ‘common front’ – with its own official and representative spokesman?”⁶⁵

One such proposal was indeed being put forward by the BCF (British Cycling Federation, governing body of British cycle sport and affiliated to the UCI - international governing body) to amalgamate with CTC and the RTTC (Road Time Trials Council – governing body for Time Trialling - for many years the only accepted form of British competitive road cycling) to form a single, national representative organization for cycling and cyclists. This came to nothing when the RTTC refused even to talk to the other bodies.

CTC membership continued to grow, almost doubling from its low point to reach 35,195 at the end of the decade.⁶⁶ This resurgence was reflected in broader terms – as Watson and Grey titled the opening chapter of *The Penguin Book of the Bicycle* “The bicycle in fashion again.”⁶⁷ At the local level a number of new cycle campaigning groups were being formed, often initiated by CTC members. These new campaigning groups linked FoE and CTC members with those of other organisation such as conservation societies. Groups in Sheffield and Leeds in 1977, for example, were followed by the formation of London Cycling campaign in September 1978 and the national organisation of Sustrans in 1979.⁶⁸ Yet their existence also points to the need for organizational structures and forms that were not possible within the CTC DA system and the need for coalitions that linked what remained as very different worlds.⁶⁹

While these new groups were appropriate vehicles for the conduct of local campaigns, demonstrating and utilising the skills and interests of a diverse range of peoples, the perspective of many who defined themselves as cyclists remained rather aloof. As Rob Van der Plas wrote in the opening section of *The Penguin Bicycle Handbook* (1983),

⁶⁵ *Cycletouring* 1976 p38

⁶⁶ *Cycletouring* Feb-march 1980: 61

⁶⁷ Roderick Watson and Martin Grey *The Penguin Book of the Bicycle* Harmondsworth: Penguin 1978

⁶⁸ *Cycletouring* June/July 1977 131

⁶⁹ These local groups connected to form The National Cycle Campaign Network, which still continues today, having become Cyclenation in 2008 the complexity of today’s cycle campaigning and representation is well described by Cyclenation’s simplified diagram (<http://www.cyclenation.org.uk/about>) which even so omits the separate actions and inputs to parliament of British Cycling (the renamed BCF) which also claims to represent everyday transport cycling to the UK Parliament.

"in the late seventies, the bicycle took on another role, as a political tool. It became a symbol of ecological awareness, a challenge to the almost universally accepted economic priorities of the motorist. This seems to be part of an international trend; beginning in the early seventies, it reached Holland in 1975 and is now sweeping through the British Isles. When I went to live in Germany in 1979, protesting cyclists were taking to the streets there as well ... it's a movement with which one feels some sympathy, but in a way it is also alarming, because the typical participants are often sufficiently inexperienced as cyclists to know what is good for cycling and what isn't." ⁷⁰

For the cycle trade too, this was a boom time.⁷¹ The peculiar nature of the British cycle market meant that domestic production was dominated by Ti-Raleigh, while the import trade operated on a virtual cartel between a handful of key firms. Many specialist manufacturers – for example, almost all trade bicycle makers – had disappeared as a result of declining markets resulting from the end of delivery services in the retail sector.⁷² Domestic mass production was very much fashion- and image-driven and relied on a relatively conservative range of designs. Outside the mass market small scale local manufacture also flourished though mostly producing bespoke racing and touring frames. Hence, there were opportunities for small scale localised production of specialist material such as cycle trailers and trailerbikes. Products such as the Bike Hod trailer (Bike Hod Products, London) and the Shuttle bicycle trailer (Pedley equipment Co. Ltd., Saffron Walden) were almost exclusively sold through mail order, advertised in the back of *Cycletouring*. Bickerton (1971), and Micro-Cycles (1976) emerged as compact folding bikes during this period, but notably as innovations from outside of the mainstream of industry, founded in situations supported by small enthusiast user and supporter networks with independent finance. (The Brompton was conceived and the company registered in 1976 but the first batch of 30 not completed until 1981). What was not available was significant investment money, or access to the broader cycle trade: after all, the overall economic climate in Britain was extremely poor, with the collapse of the Labour government in 1979 over the issue of IMF loans and rising unemployment. That the cycle business was a growth area in this time is remarkable.

Discussion

The emerging environmental movement in the UK recognised the bicycle as a means to address core issues of environment pollution, congestion, and the liveability of cities. FoE in particular took a leading role to promote a new way of understanding cycling: as a subject for campaigning in its own right.⁷³ This activist-oriented involvement with cycling linked strongly to counter-culture elements.⁷⁴ These are not simply evident through the occasional adoption of high profile direct action methods, but also in the economic sphere with the emergence in the latter part of the decade

⁷⁰ Rob Van Der Plas *The Penguin Bicycle Handbook* Harmondsworth: Penguin 1983 p.13

⁷¹ Graeme Fife *Bob Chicken: a Passion for the Bike* Privately Published by Robert J Chicken Snr. 2005: 37
see also Michael Breckon *A Wheel in Two Worlds: The Ron Kitching Story* privately published 1993

⁷² Randy Rzewnicki and Peter Cox "Cargo Bikes: distributing consumer goods" in Peter Cox (ed) *Cycling Cultures* University of Chester Press 2015

⁷³ See e.g. Jonathan Holliman, *Consumers Guide to the Protection of the Environment* [revised and updated] London: Pan/Ballantine (in conjunction with FoE)1974; Mike Hudson *Bicycle Planning* London: FoE 1978 and Mike Hudson, *Way Ahead: The Bicycle Warrior's Handbook* London: FoE 1978

⁷⁴ c.f. Andrew Kirk *Appropriating Technology: The Whole Earth Catalogue and counterculture environmental politics* *Environmental History* 6(3) 2001

of the first of what was to become a new wave of Bike co-ops that flourished in the 1980s. The York cycle co-op, launched in 1980, was actually founded with the encouragement and involvement of the local FoE.⁷⁵ Independently produced newsletter/magazines such as “*Freewheeling: the monthly magazine for cyclists*” (“Covers the bicycle as a means of transport and in technology”) in Edinburgh ran themed issues on practical topics such as Wet Weather Cycling (September 1979).⁷⁶ Another nationally distributed magazine almost archetypal in its countercultural (ethics and aesthetics) was *Undercurrents*. It was co founded by Godfrey Boyle involved with the Open University Alternative technology Group in Milton Keynes and pioneering electric bike advocate. The OUATG conference, *Developing Pedal Power* (December 1978), examined “planning and social aspects of encouraging pedal power and the technical developments in cycle design”.⁷⁷

What binds these together is a shared interest for the technology of the bicycle, both as a machine in itself and as a part of a bigger system of mobility. These concerns are coupled to a broader desire for social change, of which the bicycle forms an essential part. In these visions, the bicycle, and riding are a means to ends. They are important means, and so function and the specifics of technological innovation are valued, but nevertheless such innovations and new technologies are ultimately ways to better achieve broader goals of urban change.

Perhaps the most vivid illustration of the function of the bicycle in this perspective is provided by John P Milton’s article in *The Ecologist* (1977).⁷⁸ Titled “Living in the American Alternative” it sketches an imagined future where cycling and walking are the primary modes of mobility, alongside electric cars and other hireable vehicles (for specific use) to supplement the free electric buses that provide mass transport. Notably, although circulated in the UK this is a vision conceptualised around the North American city. Although geographic specificities are considered, there is also a sense in which the technological dimensions transcend the actualities of the physical place, and thus the eco-imagery is strangely desensitized to the variability of actual environments.. The utopian imagery is propelled by a technocentric standpoint, derived from Schumacher and Mumford, where innovation is rife, but its measure of acceptability is whether or not it serves to increase the capacity of the local community and economy and to move away from oil-dependence. Although bicycle use is a central tenet of the restructuring of transport in this re-oriented city community, its centrality derives from its place within a larger vision of a sustainable community.

The pragmatic reality of cycle campaigning in Britain at this time, was that however cogent and well presented the arguments; they carried little weight in practical decision-making processes. Despite all the local schemes, national campaigns and evaluations, the two volumes of the 1976 Government consultative document on Transport Policy contained only passing reference to cycling (11 lines), and those dominated by fears about its dangers.⁷⁹ Indeed the CTC had demanded and received a correction in parliament after Denis Howells (Transport Minister) had claimed 4757 cyclist deaths in

⁷⁵ *Undercurrents* Issue 40 1980 p.6

⁷⁶ See adverts in *Ecologist* 10(4) pii2

⁷⁷ The CTC’s contribution was a paper by Stephen Dalloway (of HQ staff) on *The present Day Bicycle: Room for improvement*. For coverage of the subsequent movements in British cycling and their links to counter-cultural thought and action through the 1980s and 1990s, see Peter Cox, “Activism and Market Innovation: Changing Patterns in the Cycle Trade” *paper presented to 4th Cycling and Society Research Group Symposium at CTC Guildford 7/9/2007*

⁷⁸ John P Milton “Living in the American Alternative” *Ecologist* 7 (7) August September 1977 332-240

⁷⁹ *Cycletouring* October/ November 1976 p.165

1973 (as against a true figure of 336) in his (erroneous) statement that “cycling is the most dangerous method of travelling around this country”. Lobbying by The British Cycling Bureau, representing industry, and FoE failed to get clauses on cycling inserted into the 1978 Transport Bill, excepting a single mention of bicycle parking.⁸⁰

The frustration of these campaign groups through the 1970s was both exacerbated and transformed by the election of the conservative government in 1979, when Margaret Thatcher, the following year pledged her commitment to “the Great Car Economy”. Although beyond the scope of this paper, from this point on, we see a transformation of activism into other concerns and an increasing concentration on the immediate necessity for anti-car and anti-roads studies, rhetoric and action rather than advocacy of a positive vision for cycling.⁸¹ For the moment it should suffice to note that policy documents and manifestoes of the Ecology Party in the early 1980s barely make mention of cycling.⁸² The cycle campaign networks continued their work, but the limited opportunity structure of the British political system necessitated working almost entirely at local level, and that much of the work engaged in had to be working against further erosion of rights rather than articulation of a positive vision.

For the CTC, its centenary anniversary year of 1978 forced it to consider its own history and position. Though benefitting from the general increase in cycling activity, and acknowledging the broader importance of this, speeches made for the centenary make clear that those responsible for the club and its direction were still focussed on cycling for pleasure.⁸³ Although recognising that basic transport issues were an introduction to riding as bike for many people, and that the club should take an interest, they were not really the business of the club.⁸⁴ Rather, “It is the aim of CTC to encourage recreational cycling”.⁸⁵ Using romanticised images of an early morning ride in mist morning lanes, CTC Council chair Jim Bailey used his speech at the National Dinner to give “his opinion that militant approaches by obviously well-meaning pressure-groups do NOT assist, and affirmed his belief that the club should not become too political”.⁸⁶ While CTC contributed to other campaigns such as Transport 2000, which had among its new aims in 1979 “to press for better provision for the needs of cyclists and public transport users” it eschewed the campaigning role for itself, focussing on serving the pleasure riding needs of its members. It was entirely possible - and legitimate - to describe the focus of the CTC at this time on the pleasure of cycling and appreciation

⁸⁰ *Cycletouring* June/July 1978 219

⁸¹ For example, *The Ecologist* carried virtually no reference to the importance of cycling to an environmentalist perspective through the whole of the 1980s.

⁸² *The Reckoning : policies and consequences for Britain Now* (Norwich: Ecology Party 1980) p. 7 Section 10 Transport makes no mention of the place of cycling, but only of reducing transport demand by decentralisation on local markets and giving “priority to the forms of transport that make a gallon of fuel go furthest -= like railways and canals” Similarly *The Ecology Party Manifesto for a Sustainable society* Transport (revised 25 March 1984) has a single mention of cycling. TR413 “to provide extensive cycle route networks and other facilities wherever appropriate”

⁸³ *Cycletouring* 1978 June/July centenary special issue

⁸⁴ For example, as part of the Transport Research Laboratory symposium on “Cycling as A Mode of Transport” in October 1978, TC National Secretary Les Warner attended and presented a paper on the history of the club

⁸⁵ R.F Meade “Cycletouring from School” *Cycletouring* April/ May 1980 p.115

⁸⁶ *Cycletouring* 1980 p.126

of the countryside, complementing racing clubs' interest in competitive cycling, so summing up the world of cycling without any mention of its potential as transport.⁸⁷

The paradox of the tension between these positions is that both rely on a core theme of the environment, but demonstrating radically different understandings of its meaning. For the activist groups, the environment is constructed in global and relatively abstract terms. Generalised nature, embodied in specific urban conditions, is threatened by inappropriate transport uses. The bicycle is a means by which these abuses can be rectified. Therefore, transformation of urban spaces and the introduction of new infrastructures are ways to provide more opportunities more conducive to riding, to encourage others to ride and therefore to provide overall benefits to the local and global environment.

For the traditional cycle tourist, it is the experiential dimension of direct encounter with an 'other' that is all-important. Through the whole of the first half of the twentieth century the *CTC Gazette* (forerunner of *Cycletouring*) had presented a distinctive narrative of cycle touring as a means of encounter with the sublime.⁸⁸ Although frequently conveyed in terms of a "natural" other, an encounter with an unexamined and pre-critical nature, the all-important "countryside" depicted in both image and text encompasses the heritage of human tradition. Houses and Churches are as much a part of this domesticated environment as Hills and mountains. Echoes can still be found in the 1970s accounts of the construction of the countryside as that which provides an encounter with the pre-modern, whether in landscape or in architecture. This environment thus depends not on a nature/culture binary divide. Instead the fully human experience depends on becoming more aware of encounter itself. The sensibility is romantic, even nostalgic, but frequently re-iterated in a language of awareness. Being able to notice things and to read one's surroundings are treasured qualities that lead to an increased appreciation of cycle touring. One way of interpreting these contrasting approaches to the conceptualisation of the environment is to read them as formulations of an urban - rural cleavage.

Interwoven is a second distinctive cleavage between utility and leisure. The CTC's insistence on the retention of the importance of leisure enabled them to create a discourse that presented riding as a source of enjoyment, a deliberate act of choice not based on rational evaluation of the benefits but just on the pleasures that are liberated by its pursuit. This aligns strongly with other amateur engagement in sport. That it involves bodily effort is not a problem but part of the desirable characteristic of the activity. Riding is not a means to an end but an end in itself. In practical terms, the activity is gratuitous. Set against this framework of leisure is a contrasting conceptualisation of riding as a practical means to an end. Framed as the antithesis of leisure, riding for transport is utilitarian, quotidian labour. To advocate commuter riding within this conceptual binary is very difficult. As a means to an end the labour involved is gratuitous if it is the end that is important. From this perspective the normalisation of transport cycling that FoE was arguing for inevitably struggled to gain purchase. Only with the addition of other imperatives, that is, concern for the environmental impacts of one's travel choices, or for symbolic value and identity formation, does

⁸⁷ As is done by Les Woodland *Cycle Racing and Touring* London: Pelham 1976

⁸⁸ For an exploration of the formation of value in cycling and the environment see Cox, P. (2008) 'Voyeur, Flâneur or Kinaesthete? Cyclotourism and the production of experience' *Paper presented at 'Cultural Production and Experience: Strategies, Design and Everyday Life', University of Roskilde, Denmark, 13-14 November 2008*

utilitarian riding begin to make sense in a generally hostile environment. If the environments of riding were to change, with the introduction of, for example, comprehensive infrastructures and other policy interventions, then utilitarian cycling becomes a more obvious possibility.

The limitation of this analysis is that it is clearly drawn from a rational choice model of action. However, we must also acknowledge that this model dominates analysis and practice within the transport and planning field. Importantly, these directions are also pursued by the nascent ecology movement. The case for changing urban transport needs is presented, in its public face at least, as a series of rational propositions and logical arguments that point to the futility and dangers of an entirely car-oriented travel future.

From a critical perspective, what is perhaps more interesting is a subnarrative that comes through discussion within the CTC. Although not articulated in depth, nor explored to its full implication, the possibility of a different rationality hinted at in the discussions above. This posits a different basis of value than simply practical reason, but points toward a value-system rooted in the pursuit of happiness rather than the wage packet. When the understanding of happiness is coupled with identification of the experiences of the world encountered through leisure riding, then we begin to move toward a position more readily associated later with Deep Ecology. At the time, much of this voice appeared to the newer generation of cycling activists as so much irrelevance - "*Cycletouring* is strangely fabulous, as if another Britain existed filled with country lanes, thatched cottages, fields and rolling hills ...Bicycling becomes a kind of escape, and the modern world is scathingly mentioned from time to time".⁸⁹

In a sense, within we see in these tensions between the two contrasting worlds of bicycle riding in the 1970s is a prefiguration of future debates within the political environmental movement that were to emerge in the following decades, and of a longer term discussion in environmental ethics as to how values are constructed.

Another unresolved disjuncture between the two positions is the place of pleasure. Central to the CTC's stance, and one that had remained constant over the past century, was that one of its core roles should be to ensure that riding is pleasurable. People should be introduced to riding for pleasure. For this one needs both the right machinery and pleasant space in which ride. The emphasis on technology is not simply to enhance the capability of the machine itself, but to ensure the most enjoyable riding experience: hence *Cycletouring* writers' the long-standing emphasis on the classic British lightweight touring bike, with its drop handlebars to enable a variety of riding positions depending on the conditions and saddlebag or panniers to carry luggage. As far as spaces to ride, the emphasis on pleasure tended to stress the ability to escape from the city and to directly encounter the joys of the outdoor life in the countryside. What was not done at this point was not connect this emphasis on pleasure with the stress in infrastructure provision and urban design in the environmental pro-cycling movement. The concern of the latter centred on infrastructure as a means to alleviate the problem of safety and security. When pleasure was considered in connection with cycling, for example by commitment, the bike and the cyclepaths were merely means to connect and provide access to other forms of leisure activity (parks and concert halls), not viewing riding as a potentially pleasurable activity in itself. Again, this is a tension that remains unresolved in

cycling advocacy and research.⁹⁰ Rethinking pleasure, rather than leisure, would provide an opportunity for stronger conciliation between these positions.

In charting these events of the 1970s in detail, we can see that the relationship between cycling and the environment was neither clear nor unproblematic. Environmentalists certainly embraced the bicycle as a means to a more sustainable future, though with considerably less vigour than was to be visible in the following decades. They were joined by others interested in preservation of urban life and heritage, not necessarily as bicycle advocates, but in opposition to increased car use and dependency. Those who had campaigned for cyclists' rights and for access to the countryside for many years prior to the advent of the modern environmental movement did not necessarily see the new enthusiasts as natural allies. The differences were not simply over the matter of tactics, but of the wider goals, and of the relationship of ends to means. The legacy of the 1970s continued to be felt as other strands of counterculture took shape in the context of Thatcherite Britain and bicycle campaigning was once more reshaped with different key players and contributors.

While a large degree of rapprochement has been reached in the decades since these events, the bewildering number of organisations and networks to this day continue to indicate a number of tensions between different positions beneath the surface of outward co-operation. It is perfectly possible to recognise the value of both approaches (and others arising at later points in time), but this does not resolve the tension between them. That both positions continue to be recognisable points perhaps to a form of cognitive dissonance. This heritage is not entirely unproblematic in relation to current aspirations for an increased modal share for cycling in transport planning, but its recognition may assist in comprehension of the complexities of British cycle advocacy.

⁹⁰ For a recent discussion of this see contributions to cycling panels at *Networked Urban Mobilities*, 10th anniversary Cosmobilities Conference, Copenhagen 5-7 November 2014 (proceedings forthcoming)