

Cities, States and Bicycles. Writing Cycling Histories and Struggling for Policy Relevance.

A Review Essay.

Jesse J. Gant and Nicholas J. Hoffman, *Wheel Fever: How Wisconsin Became a Great Bicycling State* (Madison, WI, Wisconsin Historical Society, 2013)

Lorenz J. Finison, *Boston's cycling craze 1880-1900. A Story of Race, Sport and Society* (Amherst, Ma, University of Massachusetts Press, 2014)

Evan Friss, *The Cycling City: Bicycles and Urban America in the 1890s* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015)

James Longhurst, *Bike Battles. A History of Sharing the American Road* (Seattle, Wa, University of Washington Press, 2015)

Margaret Guroff, *The Mechanical Horse: How the Bicycle Reshaped American Life* (Austin, Tx, University of Texas Press, 2016)

Melody L. Hoffmann, *Bike Lanes are White Lanes: Bicycle Advocacy and Urban Planning* (Lincoln, Ne, University of Nebraska Press, 2016)

Paul Smethurst, *The Bicycle: towards a global history* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)

The current profusion of publications on cycling and cycling history suggests a definite trend. Certainly, it appears as if every academic press feels mandated to produce a book on some aspect of bicycling. Whether this will prove simply a passing flavour of the month and disappear as rapidly as the bicycle enthusiasm of the 1890s that prompts a number of these studies remains to be seen.

Reading these studies in parallel, and reflecting on other recent works in the same vein (most notably Bruce Epperson's *Bicycles in American Highway Planning*, published in 2014), one is instantly drawn not only to compare content, but also to consider the way that they are currently framed and justified. This framing is as much to present practices and their appropriations of the past as it is to histories. They pose both historiological and historiographical musings, and their rapid proliferation at this particular moment in time also raises questions about the application and role of historical research in relation to current policy making. To what extent is academic study feeling a need to visibly demonstrate its relevance to social, political and economic drivers outside of itself? This article both reviews the texts and seeks to locate them in a broader context.

The first question to consider is what this multiplicity of studies adds to our understanding of cycling(s) history/histories? Twenty-five years ago, when I first began to think about cycling history in any depth, one searched hard to find much (in English) beyond frequently repeated populist narratives and the work of specialist enthusiasts, often hard to find in a pre-web age. There were one or two more closely researched texts that, by their rarity, became almost canonical. But the overall impression gained of cycling history was of a universal and general narrative and concentrated largely on the 19th century. Within transport history, bicycles and bicycling as transport were generally invisible. Against these narratives the invaluable and growing volumes of *Proceedings of the International Cycling History Conference* (first held 1990) and other enthusiast-generated type and club histories published by the Veteran-Cycling Club and similar specialist networks provided (and continue to provide) insight into micro-histories and technical studies. Today, it is difficult to keep up to date with the volume of material emerging, and even more difficult to maintain sufficient currency in all the parallel narratives required to contextualise cycling within the relationships of other mobilities. However, a common strength of current scholarship, especially on cycling, is its willingness to embrace interdisciplinarity, and multiple possible approaches are on display here.

One thing that emerges very rapidly from comparison is the variety of analytical frames adopted. All (except Smethurst) focus on the USA, but each reflects a different facet of the ways in which histories of cycling can be approached, in terms both of the core research interest and how its findings can be best presented for its intended audience. Each of the works is a full of its own particular insights and carefully selected illustrative quotations: between them they expand our understandings of the role of cycling as transport (often intertwined with sport) in a number of different ways. They also search for policy relevance. Author's commonly reflect on their own riding experiences as an introductory narrative device, in all but one, conclusions emphasise the import of their findings for cycling today. To organise the wealth of data these books collectively provide and to enable discussion of their import for transport history, it is easiest to start with the micro-level studies and work outwards to the broader works. In this, we also take them more or less in order of publication.

Gant and Hoffman's *Wheel Fever* is not published by a University Press. As befits a product of a State Historical Society, to illustrate its text, it boasts a wonderful set of colour reproductions of prints and photographs from a vast range of local archives, almost all of them new to this reviewer. For these alone it merits recommendation for anyone with a general interest in cycling history. The study is constrained by the parameters of the state, and occasionally reads as if a little forced into a celebratory acclamation of its boundaries,

with wider links and geographical contexts underplayed. This aside, the narrative follows a familiar pattern for cycling histories, charting a chronological path through the latter years of the 19th century. Although a familiar story, it is immensely rich in local detail, showing especially how the 1890s looked through the pages of *The Pneumatic*, Milwaukee's own cycling paper. Through this lens the bicycle appears as a canvas onto which "broader social anxieties" (p.11) were projected.

The authors frame their discussion as an examination of contending forces of egalitarianism and conservatism, illustrating it with a fascinating claim in the *Pneumatic* of March 1894 which declared that the bicycle has "long been recognized as a new social force" (p.111), a description that echoes across the texts assembled here. What clearly plays out in their study, however, is that in reality, cycling in this period was frequently a force for the (re)production of privilege, effected through specific forms of structural inequality in different social and spatial locales. Thus, for example, although cycling may have been claimed by some as a causal factor in liberation for women, perhaps a more critical reading of the evidence suggests a need for greater nuance. The liberatory potential attached to cycling is not an inherent quality of the bicycle, but instead, the bicycle served (and still can serve) as a tool to enact changes in claims on public space and to make publicly visible previously excluded social groups. Thus, in a theme that re-emerges most clearly in Melody Hoffmann's book, the bicycle is a technology used both to reinforce and to disrupt forms of privilege. This insight allows us to view the differential outcomes of the contestation of power across lines of class and colour as well as gender. As the authors point out, the bicycle is a powerful tool through which to instil in a community a sense of pride and community. For those on social or economic margins, this may well be a way to build valuable social capital and to advance claims to greater social standing. When this capacity is wielded from positions of existing social power and relative elite status, cycling's emancipatory capacities are less convincing. Many women riders may have gained advantage through the bicycle to transform perceptions of gender roles, but in terms of class and race, many of them were already among the privileged.

There is a tension throughout the book between the depiction of the bicycle as a vehicle of leisure and pleasure and of sport, and its advocacy as transport. This is most strongly apparent in the conclusion that reads at times as a somewhat artificial celebration of the possibilities of riding in Wisconsin today. The almost complete absence of discussion of the 20th century, especially in relation to the concluding chapter on the impact of that legacy today, begs a host of questions about change and continuity which no doubt warrant other researches.

Overall, and rather oddly for a study predicated specifically on place, the one theme that felt missing was any sense of the history and construction of landscape with respect to the development of Wisconsin as a “great bicycling state” - especially as a destination for visitors. The details of social, political and cultural dimensions overshadow the environmental and spatial, even though the overall structure is intended to demonstrate the importance of cycling to a sense of “an outdoor way of life”, as William Cronon puts it on his back cover endorsement.

In *Boston's Cycling Craze 1880-1900*, Finison takes an even closer view of his subject, this time focusing in on a single city's relationship with cycling and confining his gaze to the two decade period that has provided the greatest area of interest for cycling history in general. Many of the subject tropes are again familiar, but Finison's innovation is to tell these stories by focusing on the places of specific individuals within the city. Central to this biographical approach is Kittie Knox, to whom the book is dedicated. Her location within intersecting layers of Boston's classed, raced, gendered and religiously divided society allows the author to delve into the complexities that her advocacy of the bicycle represented: “a biracial twenty year old ... associated with ... the major ‘coloured’ cycling organization in Boston .. who wore [rational] cycling clothing of her own design” (p.1). Finison brings out the entanglement of complex inter-connections of social class, racial, religious and gender dynamics through extensive reference to and illustration by contemporary sources.

What emerges, in common with the other studies, is the degree to which the bicycle served as a canvas upon which social tensions could be played out. Finison's world is less celebratory and more complex, his images of cycling full of both potential and contradiction. Its very innovation allowed different social groups to claim it as a means to further their own specific agendas reflecting localised struggles over space, identity and power. Some groups clearly attempted to use the bicycle as a means to break down social divisions while for others it provided a tool to maintain privilege. Finison ends in 1900, taking it beyond this date only to wrap up the biographical details of the characters previously outlined. There is a sense of inevitability and a declensionist feel to these narratives, yet overall it suggests that more might usefully be done to elucidate the broader social and political forces at play providing the motive power for the changes depicted. The success of the book is that it not only provides an engaging coverage of its subject matter but that it also prompts the reader to want more.

Evan Friss's *The Cycling City: Bicycles and Urban America in the 1890s* speaks to much of the same ground as the previous two volumes, but by taking a broader canvas, is able to reflect the degree to which the phenomenon of the boom and crash was a national one.

Drawing on source material from a huge range of different locations, Friss is less able to identify the subtlety of local nuances that make Finison's study intriguing. Nevertheless he also refuses to homogenise riding practices, insisting throughout on the multiplicity of meanings and practices that the term 'cyclist' can cover. Importantly, his comparative stance exposes the recursive relationship between cities and their transport and mobility systems. The city is not simply an inert backdrop or "an organic blob, merely absorbing the impact of external factors" (p.5). As an alternative, he alerts the reader to the myriad factors in the life of the city that shape its individual transport patterns, just as much as the transport shapes the city. The diverse patterns apparent in the former two studies is neatly summarised: "Meaning was constructed and contingent on the type of person, who rode the bicycle and the nature in which he or she rode. In so doing, riders connoted distinct messages about the activity of cycling and the bicycle itself" (p.28). This construction of meaning and identity and the interplay of these formations with actual journey-making is carefully brought into focus as he argues that the meanings of trips and the functions of the bicycles depended on the riders and their contexts (p.58). While not explicitly elaborated, there is a high degree of theoretical sophistication in his analysis of place and the processes of construction, echoing and further developing John Urry's approach in *Consuming Places*. Friss refuses to be drawn into crass connections with 21st century bicycle transport policy debates: nevertheless, his study carefully shows that an historical analysis is deeply pertinent to those debates, as Oosterhuis has argued in 2014. In Friss's succinct analysis: "No consensus existed (even among cyclists) about how to regulate bicycles because no consensus existed about the bicycle itself. How people thought bicycles should be classified not only related to the way bicycles moved about the city but also depended on what people thought the primary function of bicycles was" (p.64). From this author's participation in numerous cycling policy conferences over the past decades, it is clear that this question is still far from resolved today.

The national perspective also provides a clearer backdrop against which to explore the dramatic crash in cycle production and sales at the end of the century. Friss's conclusion is to refute again the idea that the cycling boom was solely killed off by another form of transport, whether streetcars or automobiles, and to insist that it had "more to do with its loss of social and cultural appeal" (p.194). The importance of the car, even prior to its widespread presence on the streets, was that it could serve as a repository for the very same utopian fantasies that had briefly been invested in the bicycle (and cycling). Cycling had boomed because it enabled investments of meaning, identity and aspirations of future change. This work and the previous studies provide substantial evidence for these identificatory

investments, whether rooted in class, ethnic or gender roles and relations or in the vision of the city and nation itself, expressed in part by the contributions to road development.

Linking cycling to utopian aspirations raises the further question as to whether the problem was that the bicycle was intrinsically incapable of fulfilling the fantasies projected on to it or whether the bicycle was a part of a more complex mobility system, in itself an expression of power relations (as Cresswell pointed out in his *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*) unable to respond to competing demands. Friss's contribution to this debate is to spotlight the degree to which, at the time of the boom, riders had to invent everything: from infrastructure to identity, from surfaces to planning to fashion. Although their disappearance was rapid, their legacy of laws and roads "served as the pretext for thinking about and building the transportation network of the twentieth century" (p.201). Most significantly, he suggests, is that the 1890s cemented the idea of the bicycle in the North American context "as a fashionable, sporting device, designed for middle-class recreation" (p.201). Despite the complexity of contemporary competing images and narratives, particular projections dominate over a longer period by being able to draw on resources of greater social capital. Precisely how these competing narratives change and how some come to dominate forms an underlying research question for James Longhurst's *Bike Battles: A history of sharing the American Road*.

Longhurst writes explicitly from a background as an environmental historian but the book reads more as an extended socio-cultural study. This is no bad thing and the book provides in scholarly but very readable style, an analysis of cycling as it serves as a locus of conflict over the use and ownership of public commons. What, he consistently asks, are the various forces that serve to shape the use and non-use of the bicycle in ever-changing contexts? Taking a longer historical overview allows Longhurst to identify different constructions of the cyclist, as contending factors sought to centralise or marginalise its place in a mobility framework at various points in time. Although a useful cultural history in its own right, when read against the previous studies, his framework provides alternative ways to classify and understand the divergent tendencies identified in the other studies. Discussing the 1890s, he identifies three simultaneous but competing discourses: Positive elitism, "promoting cycling as a gentlemanly and morally uplifting recreation; Negative elitism, leisure cyclists as self-serving elites whose "whose amusements got in the way of productive enterprise"; and a populist view of cycling as a "morally uplifting pursuit for the lower classes and women" (p.54). Deliberately providing an overview and summation, he also avoids the trap of reductionist narratives. While the 1890s definitely looms large, the bulk of Longhurst's book is also at pains to point out the way in which cycling has been consistently re-imaged and re-imagined over the years. As with each of the first five books here, *Bike Battles* is full of

choice quotations lifted from contemporary periodical sources: minutiae of debates that, while long forgotten in themselves, often have peculiar resonance to the discussions over cycling policy and implementation today. Longhurst is particularly good at recognising a pithy summary. For example, to illustrate the positive elitism generated by 1890s riders, he cites a correspondent discussing the uniqueness of cycling in generating a camaraderie: "Owners of Wheelbarrows do not amalgamate on the ground of a common interest in wheelbarrows, nor does property in a hand cart or a delivery wagon constitute a bond of amity" (p.57). Such claims for a special fellowship of the wheel occur in cycling literature through the 20th century, but rarely so strikingly.

Longhurst is also very notable for the diversity of sources he uses to unfold the cultural constructions of cycling, especially referencing film and TV, both documentary and popular. By using popular sources he constructs a convincing argument for the infantilising of the bicycle (and concurrent removal from transport debates) not only as a feature of American exceptionalism, but one which is also not just a product of the 1950s. Consistently he shows how new cultural meanings could be attached to the bike through public discourses and how these meanings can be shifted quite rapidly when larger political questions demand, as occurred during the second world war and in post-war zones of American occupation.

Concluding, he suggests that today's resurgence in activism around bicycling for transport in the USA may be interpreted as a third wave boom following those of the 1890s and 1970s. Indeed, the current resurgence in interest in cycling is reflected and amplified by these titles, and also by the proliferation of publishing on other cycling subjects, from riding guides to sports biographies. In claiming continuity of process through the years, Longhurst explicitly disowns his headline title. (One wonders about the discussions between author and publisher on this point). He argues that the contestations of meanings of the bicycle and cycling that are illustrated in his chapters are *not* best understood as battles in a war. Rather, they are nothing more than the normal processes of political negotiation played out in public spaces. Again, although bikes are the primary material theme of the book, they are a means to illustrate larger social, cultural and political processes. A corollary of this approach is that he is able to argue that a longer view might provide better understanding of the creation of path dependency in transport planning, through examining what didn't happen as much as by concentrating on events. Although path dependency is an important element in understanding the relation of history to policy, we need also bear in mind that contingency plays a very important part.

Longhurst refutes a determinist view by identifying the deeply contingent processes through which norms and practices emerge. Emphasising changes in imagery and practices of

cycling between the 1930s and 1950s, he is able to demonstrate how a technology becomes a socio-cultural object and how transposition of US imaginaries of the bicycle into the very different socio-politico-cultural context of post-war Japan resulted in unexpected long-term economic and technical transformations of cycling. Although this opens up the relationships between a North American history and a more global approach, these broader implications of these differences are beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, his argument prompts the reader to want to explore further.

Many of the same exemplars and themes are to be found in Guroff's *The Mechanical Horse*. Whereas the previous titles stem from academic study and are more clearly aimed at specialist audiences, Guroff adopts a conversational style of writing and in the jacket notes her magazine editorship is emphasized more than her academic career and contributions to the International Cycling History Conferences. She is poorly served by her (academic) publisher's decision to use unnumbered endnotes and combine them with a full bibliography, so that the narrative content is actually less than one third of the 288 pages. A significant portion of source information is thus printed twice, (quotation and reference) and searching for sources of the narrative can be difficult. What looks like one of the larger books is actually one of the shortest. Similarly, the bold claim of the sub-title does not really reflect the content. "*How the Bicycle Reshaped American Life*" suggests a demonstrable causality, but her content does something different. Perhaps more interestingly, and in line with the other studies here, a vast amount of newspaper and journal references have been gathered to how bicycles and cycling have served as a canvas onto which social concerns could be projected. There is rapid movement between examples and ideas to keep the reader interested and there are valuable insights that prompt ideas for further study. As an introduction, her work neatly charts "America's relationship with the bicycle [as] an on-again, off-again romance" in which today "the United State seems to be in the throes of another dewy-eyed affair" (p.157). What is perhaps missing in comparison with the other titles here is a sense of the various social, political and economic forces at work behind the events and ideas described. 'Americans' appear as a remarkably uncontested and homogenous group. The social differences, divisions and contestations that mark the previous studies are far from the forefront of Guroff's celebratory narrative. To what extent this omission is justifiable provides the premise of Melody Hoffmann's book *Bike Lanes are White Lanes: Bicycle Advocacy and Urban Planning*.

At first glance, Hoffmann's work, a product of her PhD study, is far removed from the historical approaches of the other volumes reviewed here. Yet her central concern "how the burgeoning popularity of urban bicycling is trailed by systemic issues of racism, classism, and displacement" is precisely that identified by the earlier authors looking back some 120

years. She points to the same critical and analytic questions that emerge from those historical studies and in doing so points to serious questions that should be asked about the writing of bicycling histories. That cycling today can result in the reproduction of social inequalities should be of no surprise to those who engage with Finison's or Friss' exposition of the way this was done in the 1890s. Yet much of the enthusiasm that engenders the publication of those studies has yet to seriously engage with the ambiguities of the reality of cycling practices. Hoffman's thesis exposes an unarticulated but very present assumption that cycle advocacy and promotion is (or ought to be) somehow inherently egalitarian. Yet much of these studies tell us that this is not so. Indeed, the promotion of the bicycle as an efficient mode of urban transport reproduces exactly the primary aims of the city as a focus of capital accumulation.

Hoffmann rightly critiques the weaknesses of Florida's arguments on the role of cultural creative, and notes the degree to which bicycling has been identified as a primary signifier of the creative class. Yet in doing so, she also underlines the particularities of cycling's entanglements with inequalities of race, class and gender. The strength of the micro-level studies reviewed in this essay is that they locate the issues of power inequalities within the specificities of historic-geographical legacies. Similarly, therefore, the precise formations of racism, classism and displacement that Hoffmann identifies in her study reflect particular conjunctions of historically embedded racism, together with federal funding resources and city governance regimes. That is not to say that similar issues do not occur elsewhere: racism, classism and excluded communities exist almost everywhere, but it is to stress that both critique and necessary responses and solutions must also be specific to the precise situation with its attendant history.

So this is where the works conjoin. To understand policy questions today requires a sensitive and honest appraisal of their historical background and of the forces that shape prior events. Each of the books here contributes to the depth of understanding of given local and national spaces. The obverse of this localisation is that it can miss the transnational dimensions of cycling practices, especially given the contributions of cycle sport to the imagery of the bicycle, and from which other uses of the bicycle for leisure and transport are far from immune. This was as true in the 1890s as it is today, as the historical studies make clear.

The consequent impossibility of producing a universalised history of cycling is taken as a starting point by Paul Smethurst in his carefully titled *The Bicycle: towards a global history*. Rather than fall into a chronological straightjacket, Smethurst organises his reflections around four thematic chapters in which he explores bicycles and cycling as socio-cultural phenomena. Deliberately engaging with a large range of existing scholarship, and melding it

with his own insights from cultural histories of travel, Smethurst is not shy in wading into some longstanding disputes with his own evaluations of the discussions. By focusing on the shifting cultural meanings of the bicycle, he is able to juxtapose a wide variety of ideas and information and produces a fascinating and engaging study. Its deep and thoughtful exploration of cultural imagery is highly commendable and a joy to read. Yet while global in its outlook, and wide in its sources, there are some noticeable gaps. Particularly curious is the lack of direct engagement with material from transport history scholarship. Although he writes a global history of cycling as a practice, it appears disconnected from the wider contexts of mobility practices. As the gaze is for the most part on the significance of this artefact, and the practices surrounding it, this is not a problem.

However, in the fourth theme, *Trends and Trajectories: the global future of the bicycle* the very breadth of outlook problematizes his approach. Where previously, specific case studies allow Smethurst to expand his analyses into more generalised thematic observations, illuminating other parallel contexts, this extrapolatory method is less successful in describing current practices. For example, his discussion of Critical Mass (and of cycle advocacy more widely) in the final pages is not consistent with the attention to detail present elsewhere. The history of European cycle campaigning and its role in the continuance of cycling as a transport mode since the 1970s should not be so easily glossed over. A sharp contrast can be drawn between this summary and the detailed comparative work in Oldenziel et alii's recent collection *Cycling Cities: The European Experience*. Similarly, the relationship between academic analyses of cycling practices and the development of cycling policy, which Oosterhuis has so carefully studied, would suggest a reframing of some claims made in this section. Again, it is the connection of an historical study to analysis of the contemporary situation that, as in other texts here, proves most problematic.

Between them, these works contribute substantially to the scholarship on cycling mobilities. They jointly highlight not just the diverse practices and practitioners but also how meanings are constructed around a variety of practices. They point to the inseparability of mobilities studies from questions of power, and for the vital role of historical study in the framing of contemporary policy and advocacy work. However, they also point to the disjuncture between historical research and policy discussion. To become more clearly relevant to policy, transport history needs to do more than bolt on insights as lessons to be learned, but policy likewise needs to be less reductive in its attempted appropriation of the past.

In terms of a broader discussion of historiography, the arrival of local and national studies is important to provide grounds for comparative analysis. Ebert's ground-breaking comparative studies still demand further follow up. To do so, though, it is necessary to disentangle

histories of cycling practices from the universal and generalised claims that are frequently associated with histories of technologies, even when those histories are deliberately separated from social contexts of use, as Hadland and Lessing do in their indispensable study *Cycle Design*. Technological histories are immensely valuable in their own right, and social construction of technology approaches have profoundly reshaped technical histories. Yet many of these accounts, by disengaging from the social and cultural circumstances of use and from the localised political and economic factors of deployment, are unable to account for the forces that shape technological innovation or perhaps more valuably, non-innovation. Conversely, the engagement of cultural historians (such as Smethurst) into the discussion allows differing insights into the various social practices of cycling and, their emergence and degrees of continuity.

One example of this valuable crossover is Hugh Dauncey's work on the place of cycling in French social and cultural history. This provides a valuable marker against which to draw contrasts with other geographical contexts. Recognising simultaneously the transnational nature of cycling activities, (both riding and the trade and industry that underpin cycle use) we can nevertheless understand how practices are bound to very localised conditions. With specific reference to cycling histories, while transport studies have largely eschewed consideration of cycle sport, the ubiquity and adaptability of the bicycle as an object, and the performance of cycle sport (except track racing) on public roads means that cycle sport has necessarily consistently impinged on public perceptions of cycling. And it is precisely such public perceptions that these North American studies deem crucial. Friss' conclusion (cited above) on the foundational imagery of cycling as middle class leisure might be further connected with the degree to which sporting cycling in the US became almost synonymous with professional track racing in the early 20th century (as suggested by Peter Nye). Neither practice concretises the image of the bicycle as a means of quotidian transport, or as a vehicle that fully belongs on the roads. Dauncey's argument is that the very presence of the Tour de France (and, by implication, other European road cycle races identified strongly with place and nation) necessarily provides a narrative of the bicycle as part of national identity, an identification that spills over into a variety of uses. Comparative national and histories can reveal how locales strive to "own" both cycling and the bicycle, as these studies each do. What the volumes under review here reveal, collectively and implicitly, is that while the bicycle may have been deeply embraced locally and within specific sectorial narratives of identity in the USA, no lasting collective identification with cycling is visible. However, even though the French identification of cycling and nation has historically been filtered through sport, this has been sufficient ground to interpret transport cycling as something that 'belongs', even though public policy did not recognise the bicycle as a transport mode even

as recently as the 1980s (see Papon's intervention on this). Perhaps we should not be surprised that a sector of sport specifically identified as *road racing* should have the potential to shape perceptions of other uses of the road by similar technologies. Certainly, to frame discussions in terms of mobility practices rather than specifically as transport has the advantage of ducking the problematic search for distinctions between leisure and utility, and asking which travel practices qualify as valid by "necessity" or "choice".

This discussion then brings us on to questions of modality. Returning to Oosterhuis' observation at the opening of this essay, the question dominating much current research on cycling – and the appropriation of historical perspectives as part of its justification – is how to promote a transportation modal shift to cycling, preferably from the motor car. The indebtedness of current cycling studies to previous traditions of technological and user-organisation cycling histories supports this concentration on an almost segregated modal analysis. Yet the contributions of national studies (including those reviewed here) suggest that modal share is as much a function of specific external local factors and circumstances as it is of universal patterns of use and disuse. This would suggest cycling histories could profit by turning away from attempts to map exclusive histories of bicycle use and increasing analysis of local capacities and visions for transport governance, the role of co-ordination, legacies of cultural identifications, governance of public spaces of mobility (roads and paths) and questions of citizenship and its relation to the state. These latter points reflect the tensions that exist between the historical reality of the bicycle as a purely individualised and privatised mode (very recent innovations in public bikes aside) against the public provision of infrastructural space required for (safe and enjoyable?) operation.

Allied to this question of varying types of bicycle use, is that of the appropriate unit of analysis. Should it be city, state, nation or region? How does varying the focus alter what is revealed in any given study? If governance is a significant factor in understanding the formation of cycling as transport then how might differing competencies of cities, states and nations affect outcomes? In pressing for localised histories, the volumes reviewed here highlight the how local demography, topography and traffic conditions are important for understanding everyday cycle use. However, in relation to sport, a much wider set of connections is also immediately visible. In sport, national, international and transnational organisations and networks are shown as vitally important, as is the degree of travel by participants and the degree to which specific nations sporting associations engage in international competition and integrate (or not) into transnational networks. The connections between sport and transport, when they potentially take place using the same technologies in the same spaces, still need further exploration. Investigation of historical differences in

practice, and the integration of these forms of cultural connectivity may prove a useful direction for future researchers.

The relative strengths of these volumes reflect their capacity to integrate the bicycle within broader socio-historical narratives and thus to provide the basis of stronger comparative studies which have the capacity to challenge oversimplified and universalised narratives of cycling that continue to promote a colonialist approach to historical writing. Through recognition of the specificities of local and national histories we are able to create the possibility of deeper understandings and to recognise the international interplays that local differences make possible. The history of cycling as transport has come a long way from assumptions that it is simply a precursor to motor travel. Studying cycling histories has, as Mom rightly pointed out, has produced a set of analyses that are more than just a modal subfield of transport history, but has allied historical researches to an emancipatory mode of thinking. The danger of this is the potential, as Hoffmann notes, of less than properly critical studies. Alternatively, the search for relevance may lead to making connections between current and past practices without sufficient analysis of differences in context, or of disconnection of cycling as a mode from broader mobility contexts and practices. Nevertheless, the health of cycling research is that it is producing innovative studies such as these that prompt such questions and concerns.

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