

Rethinking Bicycle Histories

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Chapter Abstract

Bicycle history and historiography is currently undergoing significant reassessment. Historical studies on bicycles and bicycle mobility have been dominated by the legacy of chronologically organised accounts of the bicycle as artefact. While valuable, this approach has had a tendency to elide significant differences between specific histories of the place of the bicycle as a component of broader mobility systems in varying geographical locations. New areas of social and cultural history are combining with colonial and post-colonial analyses to understand both the Eurocentric nature of dominant accounts and the hidden possibilities of multiple and plural narratives. Moving away from an artefactual bicycle history, this study embraces recent developments in the study of technology and draws on use-pattern approaches to the study of bicycle technology.

Shifting focus to a use-centred account and comparing experiences across geographical and other boundaries reveals substantial differences in patterns and timescales of user experiences of cycles and cycling beyond its function as mass mobility. The chapter therefore explores bicycle historiography and historiology, examining in particular the implications of oversimplified periodization and schematic linear histories of bicycle development. Subjecting these narratives to critical scrutiny, the chapter considers how they serve both to continue to render the bicycle invisible, even within dramatically changing mobility scenarios, and to limit understanding of the potential of bicycles and other human-powered and hybrid human-motor vehicles to sustainable mobility futures.

Author Biography

*Peter's first degree was in interdisciplinary research at the University of Lancaster. Prior to re-entering academia, Peter ran his own cycle business and was involved in a range of cycle campaigning and community organising projects. His doctoral thesis (Liverpool, 2002) explored the links between Gandhian theory and practice, post-development and the political ecology of sustainability. Since then he has taught in the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Chester, specialising in the area of social change and sustainability and of the processes and impacts of globalisation. His primary area of research is in sustainable transport, especially the vital contribution of cycling and its importance for social justice. A founder member of the Cycling and Society Research Group, he co-edited (with Dave Horton and Paul Rosen) *Cycling and Society* (Ashgate 2007) as an outcome of this group's work. More recently he has written *Moving People: Sustainable Transport Development* (Zed 2010) and is editor of *Cycling Cultures* (University of Chester Press 2015) and during 2014/5 was Leverhulme International Academic Fellow working at the Rachel Carson Center in Munich.*

Introduction

As studies of the bicycle and cycling come to international recognition as legitimate subjects of academic inquiry in transport studies and beyond, cycling historiography has emerged as a significant theme for discussion. Panels and special sessions at conferences on the history of technology, transport history, and within the broader field of mobilities study all reflect growing cross-disciplinary interest in bicycle history, and consequently pose questions as to the form and argument of its historiography and historiology.¹ Yet all of these studies are relative latecomers to a pre-existing interest in bicycling history outside of the academy.

As with the study of other mobility technologies such as railways and aviation; popular histories, enthusiast publications and academic studies sit side by side to comprise a varied body of literature in the UK.² Similarly, historical accounts appear as part of a vibrant user culture.³ For example, the Veteran Cycle Club (founded 1955 as the Southern Veteran Cycle Club) set out not only to conserve and ride old cycles but also to exchange information on the history of cycles and cycling, a task which it continues today through its various publications.⁴ The publishing of cycle histories in mass distribution book form has understandably coincided with periods of general public interest in cycling in its many forms. These vary according to whether the interest is in the general social culture of the bicycle, its technological aspects or in cycle sport. The task of this chapter is not to present an overview of the literature, but to examine some of the underlying narratives (re)produced by the ways that histories of cycles and cycling are written.⁵

Book length studies of cycling history are relatively few in number but dominated by accounts of the 19th century, exploring developments up to the construction of the safety bicycle in its recognizable 'modern' form.⁶ Consequently, 20th century bicycle history is rather less explored, except partially via the new wave of 'coffee table' picture books on bicycle design, and these have little or no consideration of cycling practices.⁷ In fact, the very term 'bicycle history' creates its own narrative of

¹ See for example 'The Invisible Bicycle' panel (from which this volume is derived) at the 40th Symposium of the International Committee for the History of Technology, ICOHTEC, Manchester, July 22-28, 2013; roundtable on 'Cycling History and Cycling Policies' at 'History and Future of Intermodal Mobilities' the 10th annual conference of the International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T2M) in Madrid, November 15-18, 2012; sessions on 'Velomobilities' and 'Cycling Futures' at Networked Urban Mobilities; Cosmobilities Network 10th Anniversary Conference, Copenhagen, November 5-8, 2014.

² Given limitations of space, this chapter is largely confined to detailed use of English language sources. Broader issues of historiography are however international, and the international dissemination of much English language material through study networks means that significant historiographical issues cross boundaries.

³ Some of this is reflected in regular historical accounts and articles appearing in newsstand magazines such as *Rouleur* and *Cycling Plus*.

⁴ See its website <http://www.v-cc.org.uk/> for an extensive range of activities and publications.

⁵ For an overview of the literature, see the online *Cycling History Bibliography* compiled and maintained by Manuel Stoffers <http://fasos-research.nl/cycling-history-bibliography/>.

⁶ Andrew Ritchie, *King of the Road an Illustrated History of Cycling* (London: Wildwood House 1974); Jim McGurn, *On Your Bicycle: The illustrated Story of Cycling* (London: John Murray, 1987); David V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History* (Yale University Press, 2004). Publishers' demands on 19th century cycle historians to provide a complete and universal narrative are partly responsible for this tendency.

⁷ For example, Gerard Brown and Graeme Fife, *The Elite Bicycle: Portraits of great marques, makers and designers* (London: Bloomsbury Sport, 2013); Michael Embacher, *Cyclepedia: A Tour of Iconic Bicycle Designs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011). An even bigger selection of similar works concentrates

the technology separate from use and users. As academic research in cycling has grown in recent years, assumptions concerning cycling and bicycle history emerge, reflecting and reiterating approaches dating “to the 1970s and 1980s, when the hopes and wishes of cycling advocates inspired cycling historiography”.⁸ Despite the prefigurative work of enthusiast networks, cycle and cycling historiography is deeply bound to the political spaces inhabited by cycling - especially in light of the growth of counter-culture environmentalism in the 1970s and of subsequent discourses of sustainability from the late 1980s. This “new master narrative” of cycling history identified by Stoffers and Ebert is very much framed by a declensionist history: dominated by a narrative focused on reductions across Europe in cycling as everyday transport in the 1950s, followed by a partial renaissance from the 1970s.⁹

The argument of this chapter is not to refute these accounts of changing patterns of cycle use, but to consider how the writing of cycling histories constructs norms, how these dominant narratives obscure other stories, and to consider the impact of these underlying discourses on our understanding of cycles and cycling. To do this, I will first consider some of the practical and theoretical issues - both constraints and opportunities - confronting academic research on the topic. Subsequently, the problems of two identifiable patterns in cycling historiography are examined. First the constraints produced by periodization, where time periods are characterized by particular patterns of use, are confronted. Second, taking a parallel example from environmental history, the place of declensionist narratives are questioned for their inevitability and necessity. The final parts of the chapter re-examine cycling in the UK 1950-1970, to illustrate how different emphases might present alternative perspectives on the period.

Issues of Theory in Cycling Research

One of the first problems encountered when we come to study the bicycle or cycling is that the actual subject itself is often obscure. Although the bicycle appears to be a self-evident object it nevertheless has layers of use and meaning that are not always apparent.¹⁰ Even the act of riding a bicycle (or tricycle, or...) can mean very different things to different participatory constituencies: transport, sport, play. This diversity is also constantly value-laden, reflecting social diversity by class, age, gender and many other markers.¹¹ Hence the potential schools of academic study and theoretical perspectives within these that may relevantly be brought to bear on the subject are many and diverse. To study cycling history as history we can choose from a range of approaches informed by, for example, social studies in technology, transport history, economic history, environmental history, sports history and the sociology of sport together with disciplines as diverse as engineering, sociology or film studies. The emergence of mobilities as a field of study in its own right provides a further layer of complexity.¹² While some mobilities scholarship has been criticised for the weakness of its historical perspectives it is clear that historical dimensions have become both a vital and lively aspect of current mobilities analysis, and a significant amount of current cycling history operates

exclusively on racing bikes e.g. Richard Moore and Daniel Benson, *Bike! A Tribute to the World's Greatest Cycling Designers* (London: Aurum Press, 2012).

⁸ Manuel Stoffers and Anne-Katrin Ebert, “New Directions in Cycling Research. A report on the Cycling History Roundtable at T2M Madrid,” *Mobility In History* 5 (2014): 9-19, 13

⁹ Stoffers and Ebert, “New Directions,” 13.

¹⁰ Luis Vivanco, *Reconsidering the Bicycle. An Anthropological Perspective on a New (Old) Thing* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

¹¹ Peter Cox (ed.) *Cycling Cultures* (Chester: University of Chester Press, 2015).

¹² See Mimi Sheller, “The New Mobilities Paradigm for a live sociology,” *Current Sociology* 62:6 (2014):

within networks of mobilities study.¹³ The advantage of framing research into cycling and the bicycle within a mobilities perspective is that it brings with it an inherent expectation of an interdisciplinary approach to study.¹⁴

One set of difficulties in both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary studies is that each academic tradition has its own legacy and bias, shaping the particularities of its narrative forms, deployment of sources and expectations. How do we navigate between these and which are prioritised at any given time? Moreover, as academics we must be aware that each school has its own disciplinary demands and norms to uphold, and sometimes reputations to defend.¹⁵ Since studies of cycling can potentially be framed within such a myriad of academic perspectives, it can be hard to correlate studies from differing backgrounds. Further, we need also acknowledge that whatever discipline(s) and tradition(s) we as academics bring to organise our analysis, the majority of research and publication in bicycle history has been contributed by dedicated amateurs outside of the academy.¹⁶ Before examining the case studies themselves, it is worth thinking about some of the recent trends in the study of cycling, starting with those from social studies in technology.

Through the work of Bijker and Pinch's work, the bicycle has emerged as an archetypal motif in understanding the social construction of technology (SCOT).¹⁷ Although a major aim of SCOT analyses has been to place technologies within a context of use and users and to challenge or overturn heroic and linear narratives of invention and dissemination, rescuing them from technological determinism, it has had paradoxical effects in relation to thinking about cycling.¹⁸ First, it has emphasized the bicycle over its users and the spaces and contexts of its use, and second, despite Rosen's work on reframing, the socio-technical 'stabilisation' of the safety bicycle is taken up in non-academic accounts as an assumption of the end of any meaningful historical development of the machine. To complement and counter this tendency, a clearly cultural turn in bicycle studies has begun to reconsider bicycle history in relation to transport history, drawing on studies of power, of social class, gender and other pertinent factors of social inclusion/exclusion and social and political capital in operation.¹⁹

¹³ For example: Stoffers and Ebert, "New Directions"; Ester Anaya and Santiago Gorostiza, "The Historiography of Cycling mobility in Spain the Twentieth Century," *Mobility in History* 5 (2014): 37-42

¹⁴ Sheller, "The New Mobilities Paradigm"; Gijs Mom, "The Crisis of Transport History: A Critique, and a Vista," *Mobility In History* 6 (2015): 7-19; Peter Merriman, "Mobilities, Crises and Turns Some Comments on Dissensus, Comparative Studies, and Spatial Histories," *Mobility In History* 6 (2015): 20-34

¹⁵ For parallels see Robert Emmet and Frank Zelco (eds.) *Minding the Gap. Working across Disciplines in Environmental Studies* Rachel Carson Center Perspectives 2014/2; Johan Galtung *Launching Peace Studies: The First Prio Years. Strategies Findings Implications* (Transcend University Press, 2008)

¹⁶ A similar pattern is discernable with railways, other diverse forms of road transport, and aviation.

¹⁷ Trevor J. Pinch and Wiebe E. Bijker, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artefacts: Or How the Sociology of Science and the Sociology of Technology Might Benefit Each Other", *Social Studies of Science*, 14(3), (1984): 399-441; also Weibe Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites, and bulbs: toward a theory of sociotechnical change* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995); Paul Rosen, *Framing Production: Technology Culture and Change in the British Bicycle Industry* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press 2002).

¹⁸ These were clearly not in the intentions of the authors, but occur in popular dissemination of their work.

¹⁹ Manuel Stoffers, Harry Oosterhuis and Peter Cox, "Bicycle History as Transport History: the Cultural Turn," in *Mobility in History: Themes in Transport* (T2M Yearbook 2011) ed. Gijs Mom et al (Neuchatel: Alphil, 2010), 265-274.

The turn in studies of technology from a focus on producers (with a distinct bias towards economic history), to a more cultural approach (in which users come to the fore), has been mirrored in cycling studies. A rapid rise in ethnographic accounts of cycling practices has assisted engagement with the policy and politics of bicycling.²⁰ Similarly we are beginning to see the emergence of historical studies that also focus on user accounts and experiences.²¹ Schot and Albert de la Bruhèze note the need for a conjunction of production-oriented and consumer-oriented studies for understanding technology and employ the two poles of user- and producer- influence to map the agency at work in the social construction of technology.²² In relation to the cycling and the (bi)cycle we need also observe a third and very important factor at work. The bicycle is especially dependent upon the space in which to use it and the surfaces on which it is to be used. Just as the bicycle and rider combine to make a machinic combination, this combine cannot exist without terrain to traverse.²³

Because the bicycle is a technology that operates in and consumes public space, it is constrained within webs of interaction, social and physical. It is also therefore reliant on the infrastructure of public space and the legal governance of that public space in civil society, and of the public interest. Variations in national legislation pertaining to highways and routeways, their classification, access and use-rights shape relations between traveller and travel. These histories reflect existing power relations of land ownership and the mobility expectations accorded to relative class positions. If we consider mobility as a market, then the forces of production and consumption are joined by, and mediated by the political and legal regulation of that market. The historiography of the bicycle and of cycling must therefore address the distinction of political differences across a range of territories.

In sum, a comparative use-centred study of cycling is a conjunction of consumer-, producer- and politico-oriented studies. Each of these is a complex of multiple levels of differentiation, and requires us to take into account the classic distinctions of class, gender and ethnicity as they bear of the practice, alongside their divergent forms as they related to national and regional distinctions. To summarise, there is a pressing need to go beyond simple narrative accounts of cycling and turn our gaze outward from the bicycle to engage more deeply with the broader contexts in which cycling takes place and the multiplicity of forms that cycling takes, not only as transport. From this perspective cycling history becomes a very difficult terrain to negotiate. Simplifications inevitably have to be made in producing coherent narrative. Nevertheless we need to distinguish between forms of simplification that produce heuristic clarity, and those which may serve either to traduce the events they describe or to introduce misleading models.

Mapping recent bicycle research

²⁰ See Justin Spinney, "A place of sense: a kinaesthetic ethnography of cyclists on Mont Ventoux," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24:5 (2006): 709-732; Rachel Aldred and Katrina Jungnickel Constructing mobile places between 'leisure' and 'transport': a case study of two group cycle rides, *Sociology* 46:3 (2012): 523-539.

²¹ See for example Bernhard Hachleitner, Matthias Marschik, Rudolf Müllner & Michael Zappe (eds.), *Motor Bin Ich Selbst: 200 Jahre radfahren in Wien* (Vienna: Metroverlag & Wienbibliothek im Rathaus, 2013).

²² Johan W. Schot and Adri .A. Albert de la Bruhèze, "The Mediated Design of Products, Consumption and Consumers in the Twentieth Century", in *How Users Matter: The Co-Construction of Users and Technology*, ed. Nellie Oudshoorn and Trevor Pinch, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003): 228-245.

²³ In Deleuzian terms, the bicycle rider machine connects with the road/path machine. See Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze* (London: Routledge 2002), 56f.

In his extensive survey of recent trends in the rapidly expanding field of bicycle research, Harry Oosterhuis identifies an emergent central research question: “why people use or don’t use the bicycle for utilitarian purposes and, consequently, how cycling can be promoted”.²⁴ Policy and practice linked research not only has a high profile but is also connected to wider dissemination networks through international conferences and national and international lobbying networks.²⁵

A dominant motif behind this central research question is recognition of the rapid post-Second World War decline in European bicycle transport, vividly mapped in the groundbreaking work of Bruheze and Veraart and Oldenziel and Bruheze.²⁶ Indeed, Oosterhuis begins his analysis by commenting that “the bicycle was surpassed by the car as the dominant mode of individual transport”.²⁷ He argues that there is an explicit reliance on historical analysis within the policy orientation of current research, but specifically historical studies that could be used for the compilation of comparative analysis and to produce long-duree perspectives remain relatively thin on the ground. For example, Aldred’s overview of postwar British cycling activism is in no sense an inaccurate portrayal of events, yet the very clarity of its simplification obscures some of the more nuanced debates and tensions that might lie beneath the surface of the events described, and the complex processes that led to the development of positions and controversies cited.²⁸ But this is due to the lack of available published primary histories, rather than any omission on the part of the author.

The International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility (T2M) has consistently sought to support studies of this nature and to identify the research gaps.²⁹ However, this work is focused on utilitarian cycling. Oosterhuis concludes “Research into utilitarian cycling would benefit from a new approach that attends to national historical trajectories and national bicycle habitus”.³⁰ However, taking this Bourdeusian approach thoroughly, I would add that to understand a national bicycle habitus one will have to attend to all of the uses and practices of the bicycle of which it is comprised, alongside the elements of doxa that inform actions and conceptualizations in relation to cycles and cycling. Concentration on utilitarian purposes alone disconnects transport uses of bicycles from other potentialities and practices. Little connection is made with cycling studies in the history of sport, or in leisure research. The public imagination of cycling may be profoundly influenced by these non-transport images.³¹

²⁴ Harry Oosterhuis, “Bicycle Research between Bicycle Policies and Bicycle Culture,” *Mobility in History* 5 (2014): 20-36.

²⁵ For example, the ECF (European Cyclists’ Federation) with its own Velo-City and Velo-City Global series and Scientists for Cycling network, [<http://www.ecf.com/>], or the grassroots led World Bicycle Forum [<http://www.fmb4.org/en/home/>].

²⁶ Adri Albert de la Bruhèze en Frank C.A. Veraart, *Fietsverkeer in praktijk en beleid in de 20^e Eeuw: Overeenkomsten en verschillen in het fietsgebruik te Amsterdam, Eindhoven, Enschede, Zuid-Oost Limburg, Antwerpen, Manchester, Kopenhagen, Hannover en Basel*. (Den Haag: Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, 1999); Ruth Oldenziel and Adri A. de la Bruhèze, “Contested Spaces: Bicycle Lanes in Urban Europe, 1900-1995.” *Transfers* 1:2 (2011): 31-49.

²⁷ Oosterhuis, “Bicycle Research,” 20.

²⁸ Rachel Aldred, “The Role of Advocacy and Activism,” in *Cycling and Sustainability* [Transport and Sustainability Volume 1] ed. John Parkin (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2012): 83-100

²⁹ See, for example, Francis Papon, “Historiographical needs in the Study of Bicycling Mobility in France,” *Mobility In History* 5, (2014): 43-48; Evan Friss, “Writing Bicycles: the Historiography of Cycling in the United States,” *Mobility In History* 6 (2015): 127-133

³⁰ Oosterhuis, “Bicycle Research,” 35

³¹ TfL (Transport for London), *Exploring the relationship between Leisure and commuter cycling* (Policy Analysis Research Summary, October 2011).

To go even further, perhaps, in this analysis we might need to interrogate even the divisions of cycling into rigid categories of activity (leisure, sport, utility) and more closely consider the multiple meanings and identities attached to diverse practices: to think of heterogeneous and complex 'cyclings', rather than 'cycling'.³² In this way, we can deconstruct the categories, understanding how they are differently defined and understood across a variety of social and geographic locations, and how they overlap and interact.

Specific research in cycling history as a discrete field of interest, as mentioned above, is dominated by an international enthusiast-led network, and connected through a well-established annual *International Cycling History Conference* series.³³ Since its first meeting in 1980 and through annual publication of conference proceedings, the ICHC draws together scholarship on bicycle history across international boundaries, time periods and from individual, national networks of study on the bicycle. This wealth of information, however, remains largely focused around micro-level studies. Invaluable though detailed histories of marques, specific events, groups, clubs and organizations; they are only incidentally connected to wider issues of social change. Studies of cycling separated from other mobilities or from other historical factors can be difficult to connect with broader themes or to integrate into macro-level analyses. These lacunae are also visible in the production of general circulation histories of the bicycle and cycling, as discussed below. Early contributions to specialist bicycle history were drawn largely from outside academia. However, the ICHC series has insisted on raising the standard of scholarship and challenged populist assumptions, providing a constant source of detailed knowledge and important correctives to widely circulating myths in bicycle history. The conference today serves as a forum for a diverse range of perspectives and opinions, across backgrounds and disciplines.

In overview, therefore although the field of cycling research is lively and growing, historical dimensions are relatively under-researched. Moreover, cycle and cycling histories suffer from fragmentation. The dominance of policy-related research has produced a reliance on summary historical understandings and it is the problems arising from the simplification of the history of cycling and the bicycle to which we now turn our attention.

Writing bicycle history: Periodization

For any historian faced with writing an account of cycle and cycling history, the challenge of making a complex narrative comprehensible is a stern one. Two primary techniques stand out as obvious means by which the complexities may be rendered into a coherent narrative - thematic and chronological. Thematic studies identify organizing themes and construct a narrative around these. For example Andrew Ritchie's seminal *King of the Road* (1974) is organized around the following chapter headings: Bicycle Archaeology; Amateur Mechanics, Velocipedomania; The Cult of the Ordinary; Tricycle and 'Sociable' Cycling; the Search for Safety; Women's Liberation; A fact of everyday Life. These titles illustrate two key points. First and most obvious is the dominance of the 19th century. Second, is the clearly thematic organization of the work. While the first three chapters chart a chronological development of patterns of invention, the next four map a series of diverse activities and themes that occur synchronically. The obvious advantage of this approach is that it

³² I am grateful to Tiina Männistö-Funk for making this point. See also contributions to Peter Cox (ed.) *Cycling Cultures* for illustration, especially Angela van der Kloof, "Lessons learned through training immigrant women in the Netherlands to Cycle," 78-105

³³ <http://www.cycling-history.org/>

allows both diachronic and synchronic accounts to be incorporated. Multiple synchronic narratives allow elucidation of diverse experiences.

A second general approach may be to organize the entire study chronologically: there are obvious reasons to adopt a generally chronological approach, especially when addressing a non-specialist audience. Within this there are also logical reasons to divide time into relevant blocks, if only for the very justifiable purpose of creating readable chapters. Chronologies allow easy navigation through changes, perhaps at the risk of linearizing the histories.

Problems arise, however, when the two methods are conjoined. In brief, combining delineated time blocks with specific themes results in a periodized history, divided into separate eras in which, for each chronological period, one specific narrative identity or set of processes is identified as archetypal. Not only do specific time periods become reduced to single narrative motifs, but the overall image is of a unified, linear history constructed from the unitary narratives of each successive era. Plurality of experience and practice becomes subsumed in the formation of a monolithic and singular history.

To illustrate we can take a relatively recent publication, *Voyages à vélo, du vélocipède au Vélib*, produced to accompany an exhibition of the same name in Paris 13 May-14 August 2011.³⁴ Lavishly illustrated, with text by the noted historian Catherine Bertho Lavenir, and with a preface by Paul Fournel, author of *Besoin de Vélo*, one of the few works to reflect seriously on the experience of riding. The text is ordered into five chapters: L'âge du vélocipède 1812-1880; La bicyclette et le loisir bourgeois 1880-1914; La culture populaire du vélo 1918-1945; La bicyclette au temps de l'automobile 1945-80; and Renouveau du cyclisme 1980-2010. The text itself provides as complex and insightful analysis of bicycle use across the centuries as could be hoped for from a brief (122 page) guidebook for a general audience. And yet the structure in which the illustrations and discussion sit is problematic on a number of levels.

While a periodized history may be an effective communication device, especially in the context of narratives written for a non-specialist audience, or even as the basis of a single study, this device makes an awkward foundation for writing long perspectives on cycling history. In this latter role, it serves to conflate and to oversimplify: sometimes misleadingly, sometimes dangerously erasing significant elements, particularly those of geography, space and power. Additionally, this simplification can re-introduce a sense of historical determinism. Changes in cycling and cycle use become almost inevitable products of the passing of time, irrespective of the forces mobilized around processes of historical change. In the case of bicycle historiography, an overarching discourse emerges through oversimplified summary accounts and which then serves as a master narrative to distort existing events, and to erase the operations of power. The contributions that cycle use has made to historical change become invisible, cycling becomes a passive object shaped by circumstance. Given that cycling research has such close links with bicycle policy today, these erasures are potentially deeply troubling.

³⁴ Catherine Bertho Lavenir, *Voyages à vélo, du vélocipède au Vélib* (Paris: Paris Bibliothèques, 2011).

At the broadest conceptual level, periodization naturalizes processes of historical change.³⁵ One era, characterized by a single motif, gives way to another with little indication of the forces and process involved in change. Ascribing specific dates to a particular theme is a necessarily arbitrary process. Moreover, the date of a changing pattern in one country may not be the same as another. Even relatively small time delays between different territories where similar patterns are discernible can reveal also the roles of price control mechanisms, wage differentials across social classes, the relative power of retail markets and capital investment in different territories, for example. Although *Voyages a Velo* is a specifically French history, its territorial specificity is lost in the broad sweep of the themes. Similar universalism is to be seen even more explicitly in other accounts, where images and examples are drawn from a range of national origins. Events lose their originating geography and become reported as universal trends. Conversely in an explicitly periodized history, narratives from a range of particular places and times become simplified into a general trend.

By becoming more geographically specific in our analyses, we can produce stronger comparative studies. It may be that through these we can discern particular typologies, and relate them to other social, political or economic patterns. However, the idea of a singular 'bicycle' history, assuming the universality of the technology acts only to elide territorial differences. A comparative stance also would enable more serious engagement with non-European histories of cycling, which while tied in through international trade and travel, produce distinct narratives in different territories, reflecting individual national fortunes and international relations. International trade patterns, the role of tariffs and imperial/colonial imperatives are accompanied by more cultural factors of use patterns practices and imagery, and demand transnational studies as well.³⁶ Pluralism is a necessary dimension in the production of cycling histories.

Another valuable form of comparative study is to examine cycles and cycling in relation to other technologies and practices. This does not only apply to relations to other *transport* technologies, but in a broader socio-historical framework. As mentioned above, current interest in policy-relevant research stresses cycling as transport, but this leads to a relative lack of examination of the leisure/sport nexus and the parallels with other forms of mobile leisure. Rethinking bicycle historiography we might ask why particular uses, occurrences, events and user groups are more privileged than others in the accounts we weave. What political agendas might be hidden within this selectivity? To take two examples raised in other chapters in this volume, how does emphasis on the nineteenth century bicycle affect the way we see riding today? Or how does the proliferation of writing on cycle sport impact upon an agenda of inclusivity and mundane riding to replace car-use? As Timo Myllyntaus has written of environmental history "studying history means making choices, defining and framing topics".³⁷ Writing histories requires transparency in our choices of subject, approach and significance and it is the evidence of these processes of structuration that remain problematic when narratives imply a singular history of cycles and cycling.

The predominance of interest in the nineteenth century, especially in overview studies, also has the unintended consequence of inscribing invention and novelty as being the most important aspects of

³⁵ This insight is at the heart of much postcolonial critique of historiography. Key examples are to be found in the work of Ashis Nandy, see e.g. Vinay Lal (ed.) *Dissenting Knowledges, Open Futures. The multiple selves and strange destinations of Ashis Nandy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press 2000)

³⁶ I am grateful to Ruth Oldenziel for this point.

³⁷ Timo Myllyntaus, "Methods in Environmental History," in *Thinking Through The Environment: Green Approaches to Environmental History* ed. Myllyntaus, (Cambridge: White Horse Press 2011): 2.

bicycle history. Cycling history, that is the history of the *use* of cycles in all their myriad forms, thus becomes separated from the history of the object itself. Confining interest in design innovation principally to the nineteenth century facilitates simplification into a linearized history, which, in turn fits into models of product lifecycle. The Rogers' model of the diffusion of innovation, with its bell curve distribution of product innovation and adoption has become a truism of popular assumptions about technologies.³⁸ When cycle design is projected into this model, the long-term fate of the bicycle is assumed to mimic other modern consumer products. Invention, adoption and spread will ultimately be followed by obsolescence and decline as the next innovation product comes on stream.³⁹ Despite the insistence of historians of technology that this is a flawed way of thinking about technology, bicycle history exhibits a tendency towards teleological narratives, often organized in relation to the narrative of declining European use in the 1950s. It is to this framework that we now turn our attention.

Declensionist narratives and cycling historiography

The combination of an emphasis in studies on nineteenth century innovation and the decline in cycle use in Europe in the 1950s, coupled with bell curve models of innovation produces a powerful, if unintended declensionist dimension into cycling studies. That is, cycling histories must cope with a structural history of progressive decline. Consequently, there is also a powerful impulse in cycling studies to curb this tendency towards pessimism by an overemphasis on positive narratives.

If we turn our attention away from cycling historiography to consider the field of environmental history, similarities are striking. One of the first issues that environmental history struggled with was its relationship to policy. As Opie, put it back in 1983 "environmental history is dogged by the spectre of advocacy" an observation for which Oosterhuis's observation on bicycling history (above) could be seen as a rephrasing.⁴⁰ Even more revealing than the struggle with advocacy however are the discussions that have necessitated its reconsiderations of historiography. William Cronon's 1992 article, *A Place for Stories: Nature, History, Narrative* provided a set of arguments that allowed environmental history to reconsider the shaping of narratives.⁴¹ Briefly put, he argued that every story that historians tell is necessarily a selective process, an exercise of power in choosing which elements to recount for the reader.⁴² But more than noting the necessary selection of events, Cronon pointed to common narratives in environmental histories, depicting an historic Edenic period later destroyed by particular interventions - even though the specificities and politics of their narratives, and the blamed interventions vary.

Although he was critiquing histories of Great Plains, we might think of how histories of bicycling are framed by similar conceptual frameworks, however covert. A golden age of riding at the dawn of the twentieth century is gradually eroded by the growth of motor traffic, and cycling is finally brought to

³⁸ Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, [5th Edition] (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003)

³⁹ It is worth noting the degree to which recent publications on racing manufacture depend on an evocation of nostalgia and the celebration of 'classic' styling (see Oddy, this volume)

⁴⁰ John Opie, "Environmental History: Pitfalls and Opportunities," *Environmental History Review* 7(1), (1983): 8-16, 10.

⁴¹ William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78(4) (1992), 1347-1376.

⁴² Cronon's argument foreshadows Deegan's discussion of the production of cycling maps, which constantly show processes of power and politics in the choice of what should be shown or not and which elements stressed. Brian Deegan, "Mapping everyday cycling in London," in *Cycling Cultures*, ed. Cox, (University of Chester Press, 2015).

an entirely marginal state by the inevitable growth of the private car, a situation from which it must be redeemed, by some means. Stories, as Cronon argues “are intrinsically teleological forms, in which an event is explained by the prior events or causes that lead up to it.”⁴³ In other words, once the storyline is established, changes do not need explanation, they are merely the unfolding of inevitably predestined narrative arcs. The mythic story takes precedence over material histories. It is this inevitability that we challenge here. The echoes of Edenic foundation and subsequent Fall lurking in the background of the stories of cycling are not simply teleological but eschatological in their mimicry of the theological narratives of Christian tradition. Fascinatingly, they then covertly pose the question of how this current fallen state might be redeemed.⁴⁴ What form might the intervention take that will restore the lost paradise - is it infrastructure? Is it a new bicycle technology? This may be all far too fanciful, but nevertheless it remains important to understand the power of the (hi)stories that we tell and the manner in which these connect with those nonreflexive understandings with which we culturally operate.

Although declensionist environmental histories can provoke progressive change, as can the opposing impulse of a corrective emphasis on positive narratives, Carolyn Merchant argues that both positions can be too simplistic. Instead, she argues for a dialectic environmental history, emphasizing the excavation of material and power dimensions in the formation of events.⁴⁵ Such an approach moves away from the tendency towards teleology noted above, and reinstates the politics of change, including their dimensions of class, gender and other social distinctions. Encouragingly, this shift is visible in recent writing on cycling. For cycling history to inform policy, rather than focusing on the decline of bicycle use for transport we might look to include other factors involved in modal shift. Broader perspectives enable clarity on the degree to which the fortunes of any technology are rarely inherent qualities of the technology itself, whether in its rise or decline. Even more, we need to unpick what exactly is going on in times of change to understand the complexities of changes in any given period. Acknowledging the existence of multiple ‘cyclings’ requires us to rediscover multiple histories.

Responding to this consideration to rethinking histories in this manner, the final part of this paper revisits a selection of events between 1951 and 1971 that perhaps enable another way of thinking about cycling in the UK during this period.

Decline, rise or just change? Cycling in the UK 1951-1971

The absolute decrease in reported numbers of miles travelled by bicycle between the 1950s and the end of the 1960s in the UK is obvious and undeniable (figure 1). Similarly, changes in CTC (Cyclists’ Touring Club) membership from a peak of 53,374 in 1950 to a low of 18,564 in 1971 might be taken as a proxy for this decline. However, headline numbers can be misleading. This section will argue that while recorded bicycle mileage declines, we also need to understand other narratives in order to better interpret changes in quotidian transport during this period, and to take note of other stories of cycles and cycling to provide a thicker description of the changing national bicycle habitus. Displacement of cycling from everyday transport is one function of a number of changes within

⁴³ Cronon, “A Place,” 1370.

⁴⁴ Compare Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental Histories and the ecological imagination* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993).

⁴⁵ Carolyn Merchant, Preface to the Second Edition of *Ecological Revolutions: Nature Gender and Science in New England* Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010 xiii-xxi

British society and of the specific engineering of other changes in local and national transport provision.

[insert figure 1 near here]

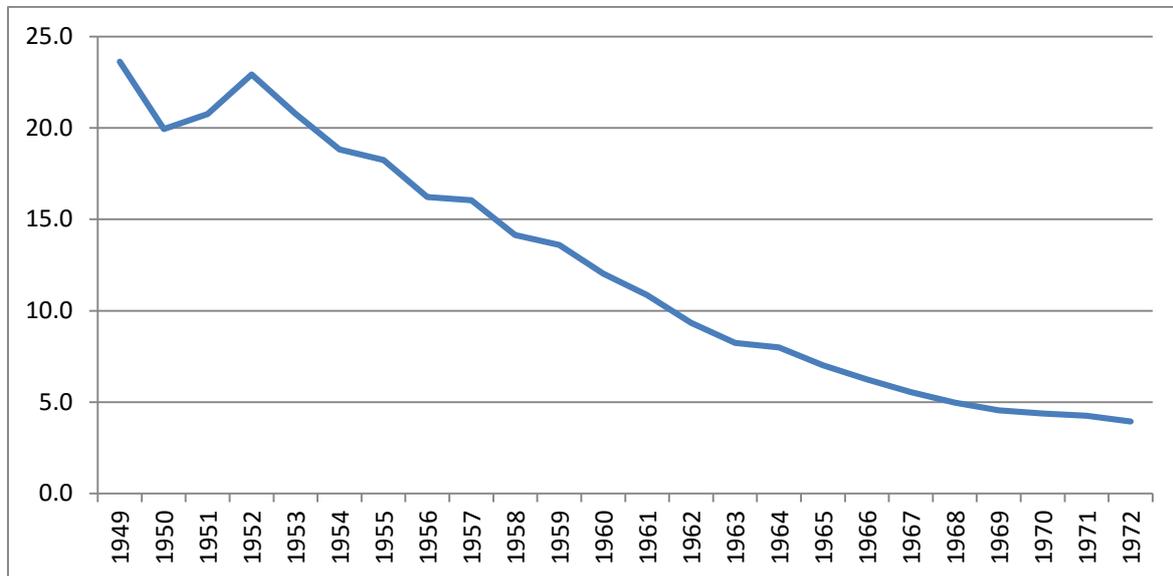


Figure 1 Distances Cycled in the UK by year (billion km) Source DfT

In 1948 the anonymous author of *The Cycling Manual* was able to state boldly that, despite current shortages and unavailability of many items and components during these times of austerity, “a new era of cycling history is upon us”.⁴⁶ Certainly, the 23.6 billion kilometers of reported in cycle travel (compared with a total for all motor vehicle of 46.5bn Km) indicated that the bicycle accounted for more than the travel distance covered by motor cars and taxis and motor cycles combined.⁴⁷ This figure, which corresponds to some 2,500km per cyclist per annum, suggests that the majority of this travel must be made on a quotidian basis.⁴⁸ Similarly, the dramatic decline in distances travelled suggests that it is this regular use that disappears. When coupled with the dramatic rise in motor vehicle numbers (from approximately 4million to 13million) and total distances travelled by motor vehicle, both for drivers and passengers during this period, we see not simply substitution, but a considerable increase in new journeys and longer distance journeys. Entirely new mobility patterns are emerging, not just changes in modes of transport for existing journeys.

Yet what we see here is that this sort of everyday distance strongly suggests the bicycle used as a means to get to everyday employment: and in 1950’s Britain, this is a deeply gendered activity.⁴⁹ During 1951-1971 the percentage of households with access to a car rose from 14% to 52%. But this is also gendered: even in 1975, only 29% of women in the UK had a driving license.⁵⁰ Four fifths of the

⁴⁶ Cycling, *Cycling manual* [second edition] 1948 p.xii

⁴⁷ Department of Transport *Road Traffic and Speeds* [Table TRS9901] (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/roads/traffic>)

⁴⁸ Estimate calculated from Department of Transport recorded mileage data and parliamentary estimates of cyclists numbers *Hansard HL Deb 21 December 1954 vol 190 cc590-644*

⁴⁹ Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

⁵⁰ Department of Transport, NTS0201

population had no exclusive access to a car in 1971, and the majority of these were women. The decline in cycling is not necessarily a general phenomenon, but a stripping out of a significant male group of employees. A secondary reinforcement of this analysis comes from examination of the growth in motorcycle traffic (including scooters, mopeds and associated vehicles) through the 1950s (table 2). It almost exactly replicates the fall in cycling journeys.

[Insert fig 2 near here]

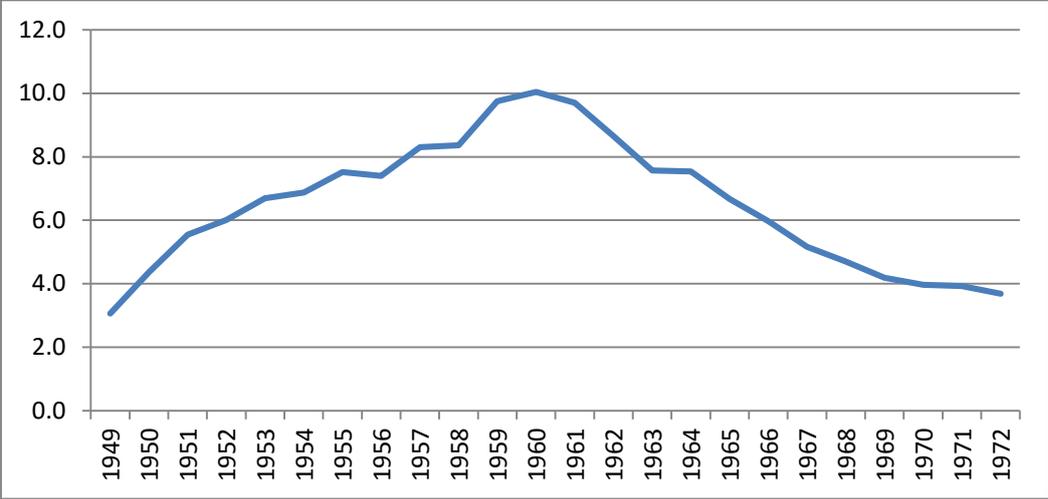


Figure 2: Distances travelled per year in the UK by powered two wheeler (billion km) Source: DfT

We may reasonably hypothesize much of the decline in cycling to work during the 1950s to substitution by motorcycle journey for the largely male fulltime workforce, with the growth in car use in the 1960s taking away from both commuting modes.⁵¹ The importance of the scooter was that it ushered in a new model of mobility as a an object of consumption, as manufacturers set out “not just to make a new category of machines but a new category of consumer ... and the conversion of consumption into lifestyle”.⁵² In other words, as choices became available for affordable and reliable motor cycles and scooters, as in Italy and France, they were taken. Cycling to work had not been a matter of choice but of necessity. The British public image of the bicycle as the poor man’s transport narrated from the 1930s onwards, had some material basis in this period In the 1960s the car was presented not only as just one other transport possibility, but as the essential ingredient for participation in a rapidly modernizing society. Hence, the double modal shift visible in the Department for Transport data. One must also therefore consider what simultaneous changes in demographic distributions, employment patterns in relation to dwelling location occur during this period, as well as changes going on in a wider analysis of transport.

Road transport is only one part of the mobility equation, however. Railway closures had been in operation prior to the Beeching report of 1964 which recommended complete rationalization of the

⁵¹ Although women accounted for 45.9% of the overall workforce in 1955 their wages (and only partly because of the much larger proportion of women in part-time work) were approximately 50% of men’s during this period. See Stephen Brooke, “Gender and Working class Identity in Britain during the 1950s.” *Journal of Social history* 34:4 (2001): 773-796.

⁵² Dick Hebdige, “Object as Image: The Italian Scooter Cycle,” in Victor Buchli (ed.) *Material Culture [Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences Volume 2]* ed. Victor Buchli (London: Routledge, 2004): 121-160. 139

national rail assets: 2,363 stations to be closed, 266 services withdrawn, 71 modified.⁵³ . An earlier programme of closures had been initiated almost immediately after nationalization in 1948, and over 1000 miles of track closed in the first 5 years.⁵⁴ Taking the 1955-71 period overall (as highlighted in the 1974 Independent Commission on Transport), this relatively short period saw a 39% reduction in track mileage open to passenger traffic, a 56% cut in the number of stations and 54% reduction in passenger capacity.⁵⁵ In total, the passenger network contracted by 8,000 miles between 1948 and 1973, the number of stations from over 6,500 to 2,355.⁵⁶ The Beeching plan, *The Reshaping of British Railways* (1963) commissioned by Transport Minister Ernest Marples and named after its author, initiated a strategic re-organisation of the railways with a series of closures of rural and cross country lines that made the system less of a network.⁵⁷ Ostensibly, this was done in order to rationalize, modernize and save money. In retrospect, an ideological agenda hostile to rail transport can be discerned.⁵⁸ As Christian Wolmar puts it: “ The Beeching report had been commissioned in order to demonstrate that minor railway lines were fundamentally economic and it was hardly surprising that this was its conclusion”.⁵⁹ Even lines that still ran after the cutbacks might not have stations near communities. The closure of passenger stations in particular, removed the possibility of alternatives to road travel for numerous communities. Without the clear substitution of other public transport provision - plans to provide bus services for former rural rail link (substitution) notoriously failed to materialise in any meaningful form - the only practical option for many was to invest in a private car. As branch lines closed and the network became less dense, communities became increasingly isolated, or saw rail travel become increasingly inconvenient, requiring secondary transport to get to the nearest station. In many cases the car was the only viable option for this as well. That rail travel remained relatively static in this period is remarkable and only comprehensible through the overall increase in travel arising from demographic shift.

The Beeching plan was actually the second major intervention arising from the initiative of Ernest Marples, the Conservative Transport Minister appointed in 1959.⁶⁰ Addressing his Party Conference in 1960, he declared that, “we have to rebuild our cities. We have to come to terms with the car”, neatly foreshadowing the conclusions to be reached three years later by Colin Buchanan’s report *Traffic in Towns*, which Marples had recently commissioned. Such was *Traffic in Towns’* impact that a shortened edition was published the following year as a mass-market paperback.⁶¹ In the preface to the shortened volume, Sir Geoffrey Crowther, former editor and chairman of *The Economist*, wrote that,

⁵³ Charles Loft, *Last Trains: Dr Beeching and the death of Rural England* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2013)

⁵⁴ Ruud Filarski in conjunction with Gijs Mom, *Shaping Transport Policy* (Den Haag: SDU Uitgevers, 2011)

⁵⁵ *Changing Directions: The report of the Independent Commission on Transport* (London: Hodder, 1974): 30

⁵⁶ Loft, *Last Trains*.

⁵⁷ A second report *The Development of the Major Railway Trunk Routes* (1965) recommended rationalisation to only 3,000 miles of key routes for future development. Loft, *Last Trains*.

⁵⁸ David Henshaw, *The Great Railway Conspiracy* [revised edition], (Dorchester, UK: A to B Books 2013)

⁵⁹ Christian Wolmar, *Fire and Steam* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007 p. 284)

⁶⁰ Marples, owner of 64,000 of the 80,000 shares in Marples Ridgeway, a specialist road-building firm, narrowly avoided scandal for appearing to benefit from government subsidized road construction contracts. See Mick Hamer, *Wheels within wheels: a study of the road lobby* (London: John Murray, 1987)

⁶¹ *Traffic In Towns* HMSO 1963; *Traffic in Towns: the specially shortened edition of the Buchanan Report* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

“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.”⁶²

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 confine the motorist. Instead, we must learn to cope with the motor car and care for the motorist”.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ Transport modal shift towards the car was a clear political priority, a deliberate reorientation of the transport system and economy (table 3). If motor scooters and cycles had allowed greater numbers of working class men to replace the bicycle journey to work in the 1950s with one deliberately constructed as more glamorous, as well as opening up the possibility of greater distances between home and work, the restructuring of the 1960s ensured that car ownership became enshrined as a primary means through which participation in newly modernizing Britain was understood.

[Insert figure 3 near here]

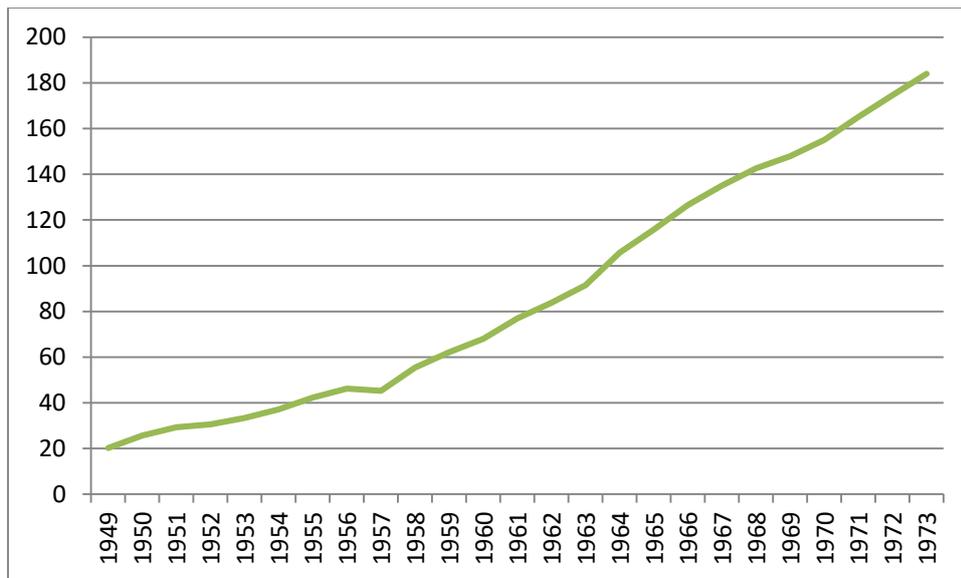


Figure 3: Car and Taxi distance travelled in the UK by year (billion km) Source: DfT

Unlike provision of rail transport or bus services, government investment in the road network was justified as a public good providing for both private motoring and road goods haulage in the 1960s. What we see is not simply growth in the long-distance road network but also a much broader changes in the mobility structures of the UK. As distance travelled multiplies in this period, and longer journeys become normalized through demographic changes and urban restructuring so the bicycle becomes less of an appropriate tool. Social housing policy in the post-war years, especially the rapid growth of construction of public housing schemes, frequently built on cheaply and quickly available greenfield sites in order “to build the maximum number of houses in the shortest possible

⁶² Crowther: *Preface to Traffic in Towns shortened* pp.14-15

⁶³ Rivers, *Restless Generation* p.40

⁶⁴ Ministry of Transport, *Roads for the Future: The New Inter-Urban Plan for Transport*, Cmnd. 4369, May 1970: 6-7.

time”, had the effect of disrupting and resettling existing urban communities.⁶⁵ Although important in improving living standards, this served to break assumptions of immediate proximity between housing and employment.

Only with the 1968 Transport Act did the idea pass into legislative policy that transport was a function of the public good, might legitimately be subject to state subsidy and “that subsidies might be used as an instrument of wider transport policy”.⁶⁶ This was despite years of practical subsidy by government to make up losses in the rail system. Nevertheless, the greater picture of British transport legislation is that it had remained as a bastion of laissez-faire policy.⁶⁷ Yet laissez-faire is not simply a non-interventionist instrument in a neutral, ‘natural’ environment. It is an ideological tool as much as its opposite, defining particular understandings of the relationship between citizen and state, and concerning the management of inequalities of power and wealth. And any pretence that motoring was the subject of laissez-faire is solidly undermined by the evidence.

Other cycling stories: Sport and industry

If transport cycling in the post war years was depicted as the poor man’s necessity, in both scooter and car promotion, we should also be aware that it was only one competing image of cycling in the 1950s. For British cycle sport the picture looks quite different. During the late 1940s, sport cycling in the UK was in something of a turmoil. The pastime had many thousands of adherents, belonging to cycle clubs throughout the country, but since 1890 the governing body the National Cyclists Union had banned mass start racing on public highways, depriving Britain of the spectacle of road-racing and riders the opportunity to participate in mass events, excepting those run on closed circuits such as airfields and parks. Instead, the main participant racing activity was time trialling: individually against the clock on distances from 10 miles to 100 miles, plus events of 12 and 24 hours run by a separate governing body (RTTC Road Time Trials Council). The early 1950s, with little traffic on the roads is remembered by many participants as a golden age for this activity.⁶⁸ However, in 1942, with circuit racing courses in short supply and minimal private traffic on the roads, police permission was obtained for a one off road race from Llangollen to Wolverhampton and participants, suspended from the NCU, formed a breakaway association (the British League of Racing Cyclists - BLRC), which continued to organize road races, with considerable public spectator support. Although club affiliation to the BLRC meant a ban from the other two associations, sufficient national support was gained to result in the first ‘Tour of Britain’ - the *Daily Express Round Britain Cycle Race*, in 1951. The sponsorship shows the level of interest and the race rapidly became an annual fixture, the Milk Marketing board taking over sponsorship from 1958.

BLRC teams took part in international cycle sport as well, including sending a team to the Tour de France in 1955. Professional riders, whether on road or track - like Reg Harris, Olympic medal winner

⁶⁵ Glasgow Corporation mission statement, cited in David Kynaston *Family Britain 1951-1957* (London Bloomsbury, 2009 p.275) See also Tim Butler and Chris Hamnett “Social Geographic Interpretations of Housing spaces in David Clapham, William Clark and Kenneth Gibb (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Housing studies* (London: Sage, 2012) pp.147-162. The classic contemporary study of community change is Michael Young and Peter Wilmott *Family and Kinship in East London* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1957).

⁶⁶ *Changing Directions* 144

⁶⁷ William Plowden, *The Motor Car and Politics 1896-1970* (London: Bodley Head, 1972)

⁶⁸ See e.g. Dave Moulton, <http://davesbikeblog.squarespace.com/blog/2010/7/29/once-upon-a-time-britain-had-a-bike-culture.html>. This perspective has been confirmed over a number of years through personal communication from members of various cycle clubs.

and 1954 world sprint champion - became household names, alongside their amateur compatriots, with significant coverage in print and newsreel. Road racing became both spectator and participant sport: to the point where the NCU gave in and amalgamated with the BLRC in 1959 as the British Cycling Federation. Through the 1960s, the number of events grew, alongside emergent (Pro) stars such as Tom Simpson or later Barry Hoban, while Beryl Burton dominated amateur women's racing, not just in Britain but internationally.⁶⁹

For the sporting cyclist in Britain, the period from 1950-1970 was far from a straightforward picture of decline. Rather the reverse. It saw the growth and establishment of the sport, overcoming divisions so that from 1959 onwards riders could compete in any type of event, while thousands turned out to watch top riders at the annual Tours of Britain or in local circuit races.⁷⁰ New images of the bicycle and cycling were being forged in this period. If we are considering the ways in which a national bicycle habitus is formed, then the growth of sports cycling's image in this era may not be entirely irrelevant to the peculiarity of rising interest in cycling as a sport - spectator and participant - in the UK since 2008. There is certainly precedent, even though the relationship between leisure and utility riding practices is ambiguous.⁷¹

From the perspective of the industry also, the period was one of tremendous change. Falling sales of utility roadsters in particular - the core machines of the everyday working travel being usurped by other travel possibilities or necessities, required industry to change both production and presentation of the act of cycling. In total, UK bicycle production fell by about one third between 1950 and 1960.⁷² However, this stabilized in the mid-1960s, despite the continuing fall in distances travelled.⁷³ The Moulton bicycle, which came onto the market at the beginning of 1963, reengineered the bicycle.⁷⁴ With its small wheels and single frame size design, it was no longer a strictly gendered design product, constructed in Ladies or Gent's models, but a unisex vehicle which, with one simple adjustment to a quick release seatpost, could suit a wide range of different riders. The familiar ubiquity of this feature in today's small wheeled and folding cycles is apt to obscure the degree to which it represented a revolutionary re-imagining of the bicycle. It was followed rapidly by small wheeled designs from Raleigh (at the time accounting for over 75% of UK cycle production) and other manufacturers. To counter the success of Moulton, Raleigh embarked on an unprecedented marketing drive in which the bicycle was forged in a new image, that of a lifestyle product.⁷⁵ While leisure had always been a major part of imagery of bicycle sales material, this was a

⁶⁹ Burton was 5 times world pursuit champion, twice world road race champion and domestic British Best all rounder (a combined distance time trialling competition) for 25 consecutive years from 1959. Beryl Burton *Personal Best* (Horsham: Springfield Press, 1986).

⁷⁰ Seaside towns such as Morecambe would hold them on the promenade for maximum visibility.

⁷¹ Jillian Anable and Birgitta Gatersleben, "All work and no Play, The role of instrumental and affective factors in work and leisure journey by different modes," *Transportation Research A* 39 (2005): 163-181

⁷² Paul Rosen, *Framing Production: Technology, Culture and Change in the British Bicycle Industry* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002) p.73. 1950 3,528,000; 1955 3,526,000; 1960 2,278,000. Rosen's analysis of Raleigh is crucial to understanding the challenges to industry at this time.

⁷³ Tony Hadland *The Moulton Bicycle* [2nd Revised edition] (Hadland Books, 2000)

⁷⁴ Alex Moulton was initially inspired by the manner in which scooters had transformed the way in which motorcycles were understood and presented. See Hadland *Moulton*.

⁷⁵ Bruce Epperson, "A New Class of Cyclists: Banham's Bicycle and the Two-Wheeled World it didn't Create," *Mobilities* 8:2 (2013): 238-251

significantly different approach - the new sales material repositioned bicycle as “consumer goods, not bits of light engineering”.⁷⁶

Even if pressed into adaptation by necessity, the changes made and the reconfigurations embarked upon were successful enough in reframing the bicycle in consumer focus for it to become a new product in successive decades with the rise of BMX and then Mountain Biking. These and subsequent re-imaginings of the bicycle, its place and use can arguably be traced back to the interpretive flexibility initiated in this period.⁷⁷ That they have had insignificant impact in the use of bicycles as road transport should not overshadow their dramatic importance for histories of cycles and cycling. Traditional road traffic surveys and travel surveys may convey little of the uses for which such cycles may be employed, but that is a problem for metrics. Re-examining the cycles and cycling in the UK 1950-1970 we can see that the picture is a complex one. A profound decline in the numbers of everyday bicycle commuting, certainly. Simultaneously, however, other uses and meanings of cycles and cycling were growing or being established.

When we consider the growth of car ownership and its emergence as primary transport mode, the emphasis placed on it in UK government policy through the 1960s suggest that car use was not just demand driven, but that demand was created through concerted efforts to reconfigure travel around the private motor vehicle. This despite the fact that it remained available to a minority of households and an even smaller proportion of individuals - largely male - within these households across the whole period. Bicycle sales declined during the same period, but by nowhere near the same proportion as the mileage decreases in cycling.

What changed most were the uses of the bicycle. By the early 1970s a much stronger narrative of the cycle as a means of fashionable leisure was beginning to be written. Bicycles had become consumer products and production was diversified as was design, opening the way for the boom years for the industry in the later 1970s. The image of the bicycle - an essential part of the national habitus of the bicycle - could potentially change from a utilitarian necessity to an object of lifestyle choice, projecting any one of a number of different meanings and messages of identity. Whether one views this as a positive or a negative accomplishment is a separate value judgment. However, the narrative of the bicycle as the ‘poor man’s’ transport did persist (and still does). Sports and leisure uses of the bicycle in Britain are significantly less pejoratively viewed and today, images of these activities are used by advertisers to signify freedom and desirable lifestyle choice.

Conclusions

The chapter set out to critically engage with the historiography of cycles and cycling. I have argued that the unintentional impact of certain frequently occurring devices in practices of writing and presenting cycling histories have had unintended consequences, despite the best efforts of their authors. The relationship of current interest in cycling studies to the world of advocacy provides both opportunities for research and danger in relating to historical precedents. I have argued that metanarratives are distinctly problematic and need to be carefully interrogated to establish what elements of diversity, multiplicity and counternarratives they may conceal. Finally, I have examined one period of UK history, usually depicted as one of general cycling decline and considered the extent to which that narrative might actually be confined to one very specific group of cycle users.

⁷⁶ Peter Seales, head of Raleigh Marketing in 1973, cited in Rosen *Framing Production*, 102.

⁷⁷ Rosen *Framing Production*, chapter 1

Further the chapter looked at how those changes were manipulated as part of a broader political strategy. Finally, attention was given to some of the other forms of change, and counter-narratives from other cycling activities. Overall, therefore, the argument is for more pluralized histories of cycling, socially and geographically diverse.

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Appendix (almost certainly not required but source of data in figures)

7.1 Road traffic by type of vehicle: 1949-2008

For greater detail for the years 1998-2008 see Table 7.2

| Year | Billion vehicle kilometres | | | | | | |
|------|----------------------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| | Cars and taxis | Motor cycles etc | Larger buses & coaches | Light vans ¹ | Goods vehicles ² | All motor vehicles | Pedal cycles |
| 1949 | 20,3 | 3,1 | 4,1 | 6,5 | 12,5 | 46,5 | 23,6 |
| 1950 | 25,6 | 4,4 | 4,1 | 7,8 | 11,2 | 53,1 | 19,9 |
| 1951 | 29,3 | 5,6 | 4,2 | 8,2 | 11,7 | 58,9 | 20,8 |
| 1952 | 30,6 | 6,0 | 4,2 | 8,7 | 11,3 | 60,8 | 22,9 |
| 1953 | 33,4 | 6,7 | 4,2 | 9,1 | 11,5 | 64,9 | 20,8 |
| 1954 | 37,2 | 6,9 | 4,2 | 9,3 | 12,2 | 69,7 | 18,8 |
| 1955 | 42,3 | 7,5 | 4,2 | 9,8 | 13,2 | 77,0 | 18,2 |
| 1956 | 46,2 | 7,4 | 4,2 | 10,0 | 13,0 | 80,8 | 16,2 |
| 1957 | 45,2 | 8,3 | 4,0 | 10,3 | 12,5 | 80,3 | 16,1 |
| 1958 | 55,4 | 8,4 | 3,9 | 11,9 | 13,5 | 93,0 | 14,1 |
| 1959 | 62,2 | 9,8 | 4,0 | 13,7 | 14,6 | 104,2 | 13,6 |
| 1960 | 68,0 | 10,0 | 3,9 | 15,0 | 15,3 | 112,3 | 12,0 |
| 1961 | 76,9 | 9,7 | 4,0 | 16,4 | 15,5 | 122,4 | 10,9 |
| 1962 | 83,7 | 8,7 | 4,0 | 16,6 | 15,4 | 128,3 | 9,3 |
| 1963 | 91,4 | 7,6 | 4,0 | 17,6 | 15,7 | 136,3 | 8,2 |
| 1964 | 105,7 | 7,5 | 4,0 | 17,7 | 17,4 | 152,3 | 8,0 |
| 1965 | 115,8 | 6,7 | 3,9 | 19,0 | 17,3 | 162,7 | 7,0 |
| 1966 | 126,5 | 6,0 | 3,9 | 19,0 | 17,5 | 172,9 | 6,3 |
| 1967 | 135,1 | 5,2 | 3,8 | 18,7 | 17,2 | 180,0 | 5,6 |
| 1968 | 142,7 | 4,7 | 3,8 | 18,9 | 17,6 | 187,7 | 5,0 |
| 1969 | 147,9 | 4,2 | 3,8 | 19,3 | 17,4 | 192,5 | 4,6 |
| 1970 | 155,0 | 4,0 | 3,6 | 20,3 | 17,6 | 200,5 | 4,4 |
| 1971 | 165,1 | 3,9 | 3,6 | 21,3 | 18,1 | 212,0 | 4,3 |