Introduction

Cycling and Society

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What do most people think about cycling, if they think about it at all? Do they think about:

- the state of the roads, and how they would not dare ride, or let their children ride, on them;
- the Tour de France, an exhausting, drug-ravaged annual sporting event;
- an expensive and exclusive mode of mobility which is out-of-reach;
- an occasional day out in the countryside, if the weather is fine;
- an activity that is good for the planet;
- Olympic medals won through pedalling furiously around a steeply banked track;
- a sea of bicycles carrying people to work;
- adventurous once-in-a-lifetime sponsored rides for a charitable cause;
- a slowly rusting machine marooned somewhere at the back of the shed;
- a life-enhancing piece of equipment that means they no longer have to walk miles to carry out basic tasks;
- the hazard which cyclists present to other modes of mobility;
- occasional good intentions to get active, fit and healthy;
- nostalgia for a time now gone, ‘when there weren’t so many cars’;
- despair at the continuation of such backward technology in our modern world;
- a simple, straightforward and sensible means of everyday mobility?

We are surrounded by cycling, and people seem to like talking about it, often from their own direct experiences. Many people have cycling anecdotes, stories, fears and theories. But cycling’s universality is also one reason for its very complexity,
diversity and, therefore, mystery.\(^1\) We live in societies in which bicycles and cycling are ubiquitous, yet - from social science perspectives - remarkably unthought. The origins in the latter part of the nineteenth century of the bicycle as we know it today are contemporaneous with the emergence of sociology as a discipline, but rarely has the academic glance been cast across at this hugely influential technology.

Although we often speak of cycling in the singular, there are many different kinds of cycling. The term ‘cycling’ tends to homogenise a remarkable plurality of lifeworlds, histories, structures and cultures, and a vast range of sometimes parallel and sometimes interwoven activities. This collection amply demonstrates cycling’s diversity. In the pages which follow are to be found social scientific accounts of racing cycling (Simpson), utility and commuter cycling (Spinney; Parkin, Ryley and Jones; Rosen and Skinner; Horton), leisure cycling (Mackintosh and Norcliffe, cycle messengers (Fincham) and unusual cycling technologies (Cox and Van De Walle). Other kinds of cycling include cycle touring, children's cycling and mountain biking. And of course, there is tremendous diversity even within each of these different cyclings. Thinking globally, how much variation must there be even in people's experiences of cycling as 'simply' a means of stitching together the different domains of everyday life? In the words of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 209-11), 'it would be naïve to suppose that all practitioners of the same sport (or any other practice) confer the same meaning on their practice or even, strictly speaking, that they are practising the same practice'.

**Cycling and Space**

\(^1\) For a taste of this diversity, visit the beautiful website of photographer Bruno Sananes; www.world-of-bicycles.com, last accessed 31/1/07.
As a practice, cycling exists almost everywhere; it is global. Yet there are clear concentrations of cycling, at all spatial scales. In some places (and times) the practice of cycling is easier than in other places (and times). As the contributions which follow also demonstrate, different cycling practices are either encouraged or discouraged by variously favourable and unfavourable conditions (although precise identification of which particular conditions are acting to stimulate or to inhibit those different cycling practices is never simple; Parkin, Ryley and Jones, this volume). Within any town, cyclists tend to favour some routes over others. Within a region, some towns are considered more cycle-friendly than others, which may nonetheless still be identified with cycles and cycling through, for example, association with long-established cycle races. At a national level, some countries have strong cycling cultures; others do not.

Let us look first at the level of the town or city. Here, specific places often excel at cycling. Around 40 per cent of journeys in Beijing, China, are made by bike.\(^2\) Cycling accounts for over 30 per cent of all trips in Ferrara, Italy (European Commission 2000: 28). In the UK, the cities of Oxford and York are relatively ‘velomobilised’,\(^3\) and in Cambridge, 27 per cent of all journeys are made by cycle

\(^2\) Whilst we provide figures for cycling levels, because they are indicative of the relative state of cycling across time and space, we must also note how such figures often seem remarkably slippery and tend to vary according to source, albeit usually within a range sufficiently narrow for them to retain some degree of credibility. Our use of such figures in this introductory chapter should therefore be taken as suggestive rather than definitive (on the difficulties of measuring levels of cycling, see Parkin, Ryley and Jones, this volume).

\(^3\) There is growing social scientific interest in all kinds of mobilities (Urry 2000). Much recent work has recognised and explored the importance of the car, the practice of driving and systems of automobility to contemporary societies (Featherstone, Thrift and Urry 2004; Miller 2001; Sheller and Urry 2000; Urry 2004). We make use of the term ‘velomobility’ to signal the parallels and connections
(European Commission 2000: 27; Rogers and Power 2000: 121). About one half of all journeys in some Dutch towns, such as Delft and Groningen, are made by cycle.

At the national scale, we have reasonably reliable and recent figures for the world’s most economically rich societies. Here, the proportion of all trips made by cycle varies, from very low (regularly reported as below a few per cent in Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, Spain, the UK and USA), to low (between 5 and 10 per cent in Austria, Finland and Germany), to moderate (above 10 per cent in Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland), to relatively high (around 26 per cent of all journeys in the Netherlands (De La Fuente Layos 2005: 4)).

Certain parts of the world are seen as especially good for cycling. Northern Europe is generally regarded as the world’s most cycle-friendly region (and cycling advocates elsewhere strive constantly to learn from its experiences of promoting cycling, see for example Pucher and Dijkstra 2003). The other main cycling region is Asia, and especially China. In contrast to northern Europe and Asia, the massively automobilised world regions of north America and Australia/New Zealand are often seen as especially hostile to cycling.

**Cycling and Space/Time**

Of course, levels of cycling change. So what are the important overall global trends in cycling? In a world in which more and more people are more and more mobile, the total amount of cycling is probably on the rise, but the proportion of all journeys made by bike is almost certainly in decline. Cycling in Britain has fallen

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between our interests and those of researchers into 'automobility', but also to distinguish our specific concern for the materialities of cycling technologies, the practices of cycling, and the systems which constitute and are constituted by those materialities and practices.
from accounting for some 37 per cent of all journeys in 1949, to one per cent of all journeys today (Department for Transport 2002), and two of the world’s currently most velomobilised societies, China and India, appear to be following the same path, with the proportion of journeys made by cycle constituting an ever declining proportion of all journeys in these increasingly automobilised societies. We have seen that cycling accounts for some 40 per cent of journeys in Beijing, but a decade ago this figure was 60 per cent (Larsen 2002: 132; de Boom et al. 2001). In Beijing and also Shanghai, city authorities are taking action to ban cycles - including increasingly popular electric bicycles - from parts of the city. Across most of the world, cycling is often perceived to be getting in automobility’s way, and is therefore to be discouraged (on, for example, cycling in Nicaragua, see Grengs 2001). But in the near future we will almost certainly see many 'mobility battles' as massive pressures towards automobility continue to conflict with entrenched patterns of land use, behaviour and affordability. It certainly seems inconceivable that China, with currently around two cars for every hundred people, could ever attain levels of car ownership now found in the USA (some 78 cars per hundred people) (for more details about cycling in China, see de Boom et al. 2001; Smith 1995).

In terms of production, there are more cycles made and sold than ever before. Globally the volume of cycles produced, owned and ridden vastly outnumbers cars (Huwer 2000). In 2000, over 100 million cycles were produced globally, against about 40 million cars (Larsen 2002: 129; Worldwatch Institute 2002: 17).\(^4\) Given the

\(^4\) However, we need to be careful about making any direct link between figures for cycle sales and actual use of those cycles. The USA has very low levels of cycling, yet 'with over 43 million cyclists [it] is the world's largest bicycle export market' (Larsen 2002: 129).
huge difference in affordability, most of the planet’s people remain much more likely
to move by pedal cycle than by motor car.

If in societies with few cars people are today being encouraged to drive, in
societies with many cars people are increasingly encouraged to cycle. If Asia is the
cycling region in decline, northern Europe is the cycling region on the rise. Where
powerful interests in the economically least affluent societies tend to see cycling as
archaic and aspire to the car (Newman 1999: 189; see also Cox and Van De Walle, this
volume), the economically most affluent societies are starting to ride in the other
direction. Towns and cities across the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany have
achieved major increases in cycling over the last generation through active interventions
in mobility planning. For example, the proportion of all journeys made by cycle in the
Danish capital, Copenhagen, has grown dramatically over the past two or three decades,
and is currently around one third and rising. The town of Freiburg, Germany, has
managed to double its cycling levels, to more than 20 per cent of all journeys, in a
relatively short space of time (see Larsen 2002; Melia 2006/7; Newman 1999). In the
UK, as in most high consumption societies, cycling is now routinely promoted in
government policy; however, the only place in the UK to have achieved a recent
substantial growth in cycling has been London, especially since the introduction of
and 2005 (Transport for London 2005), and in the City of London finance district
cycling now accounts for over 10 per cent of journeys (www.citycyclists.org.uk, accessed
27/6/06).

Cycling and Time
Where, temporally-speaking, is cycling located? Is cycling of the past, the present or the future? The answer of course, is confused, and depends on where and who you are, as well as when. The bicycle has been in the past, and is perhaps still in some places today, understood as both a product and a carrier of modernity (Norcliffe 2001; Oddy this volume). The bicycle can also be seen as belonging to the past and something to be left behind in the rush to greater mobility and affluence, a narrative challenged by Cox and Van De Walle in Chapter 6. But as we have already mentioned, the most mobile and affluent societies today appear increasingly willing to re-embrace the bicycle. Furthermore, significant resistance to the pervasiveness of automobility is also beginning to emerge as a focus of grassroots ‘alternative’ development activity. In post-colonial societies where the urge to mimic the ultra-modernity of former rulers is seen to lead to increasing levels of social and economic inequality, the cycle and the cycle-rickshaw are being reworked into symbols of a ‘post-modern’ resistance, a means of more efficient, egalitarian and sustainable urban mobility (Dubey 2006). To reclaim ‘the archaic’ is directly to challenge the thrust of externally imposed, ‘top-down’ patterns of development. Moreover, cycling resonates with the themes of autonomy and self-sufficiency and with environmental, social and economic sustainability that are the hallmarks of alternative development models (for a classic formulation, see Illich 1974). Indicating that declarations of the bicycle’s obsolescence are premature, partnerships are now being forged between civil society organisations in the economically least affluent societies, and infrastructure planners and advocates in Europe and north America. For example, the ‘Locomotives’ partnership scheme of I-CE (Interface for Cycling Expertise) is now working in over 30 cities, sharing best practice and moving towards more cycle-friendly cities (www.i-ce.info). The sustainability agenda to which development planning is today
subject suggests that the links between cycling promotion and poverty alleviation in development are now recognised and increasingly important to bodies such as the World Health Organisation and World Bank, as indicated by their attendance at the major cycle planning conference, Velo Mondial 2006 in Cape Town, South Africa (www.velomondial2006.com). In the economically rich world, too, cycling-related projects have been found to promote social inclusion in areas of deprivation, from empowering young disenfranchised people through cycle maintenance training to integrating communities by establishing cycle delivery services on deprived housing estates (Elster 2000).

Cycling certainly has a future as well as a present and a past. Nevertheless, in most of today’s massively automobilised societies it is hard to imagine what the once more velomobilised society was like, and what velomobilised societies elsewhere look, feel, sound, smell and taste like. Some people in these societies may have seen - perhaps in a museum of transport - black and white images of a time when cycling was a major mode of mobility, when bicycles ‘crowded the racks outside factories and, at lunchtimes and the ends of shifts, sudden bell-ringing torrents of cloth-capped workers came cycling out of factory gates’ (McGurn 1999: 155). Cycling professionals and enthusiasts may make trips to centres of cycling excellence (usually, we have already noted, the Netherlands, but also sometimes China and elsewhere), in order to see what large-scale velomobility looks like, to learn how it is possible, and to fuel their cycle-friendly imaginations. But many of us have no direct experiences of such velomobilised societies. Yet it is of course only relatively recently that the bicycle was so important. In Berlin in 1930, bicycle travel constituted 60 per cent of all trips, and as late as 1950 more than half of all trips there were still made by bike (Maddox 2001: 44-45). For many of us today such velomobility seems a world away.
Cycling and Society

So cycling is many things, varying according to both time and place. At the global level, it is in some places one answer to the problems of too much automobility, whilst in other places it is a mode of mobility to be banished in the pursuit of ‘progress’ and greater automobility; in others still it remains a mode of mobility beyond economic reach. Where some people are abandoning cars for bikes (at least for some journeys), others are abandoning bikes for cars (often for all journeys), whilst many are still struggling - due to excessive cost and/or cultural prohibitions - to cycle any journey (Huwer 2000; Rwebangira 2001). Within Europe, in some societies cycling is simultaneously a national sport arousing great passions but a relatively uncommon practice (Italy, Spain, France), whilst in others it is a rather ordinary, and major, means of moving around (Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden).

But even within a specific society at a particular time, there are of course major cycling inequalities. Both levels of cycling and attitudes to cycling tend to vary, often quite dramatically, according to gender, class, ethnicity and age. So for example, in many societies, cycling is understood and practised differently by men than by women (who may in some societies not cycle at all). In societies with globally high levels of cycling, as many women cycle as men. In societies with much lower cycling levels, such as the UK, men tend to cycle at least twice as much as women (Department for Transport 2002: 1, 11; 2007; Stridwick 2004).

The socially variable character of cycling can be confused, and confusing. For example, whilst cycling levels are typically assumed to be higher among people without access to cars, in the UK recent evidence suggests that car-owning households are more likely to generate cycling trips than households without cars
And the cycling societies of the Netherlands and Denmark also have very high levels of motorised vehicle ownership. If, in some places, cycling is understood as a practice of the poor, in others it is increasingly a practice of the rich. Similarly, cycling is typically understood as requiring physical and mental fitness; yet cycling is often adopted as a beneficial practice among those labelled as ‘disabled’ (Bartley 2005). Indeed, one way of viewing the social landscape of mobility justice is that excessive automobility denies people the ‘right’ to cycle, with its many pleasures and benefits.

Pleasure appears to be one of the principal motivations for cycling, and one which remains remarkably durable across time and space. Although of course they are written by enthusiasts, the earliest accounts of cycling convey the thrill of people embracing a novel technology (for example, Ward 1896; Willard 1895), and many more recent accounts describe a kind of love affair with the bike and the cycling life (for example, Hilton 2005; Seaton 2002). We do not want to romanticise cycling, and certainly do not want to suggest that for vast numbers of people across time and space cycling was/is not primarily a necessity, and no doubt often a grim one. Indeed, talk of pleasure brings out an important and under-researched tension, between cycling as an enforced and as an elective practice; it is presumably much easier to enjoy cycling when it is chosen, rather than when circumstances impel it.

But we do want to note how the more aesthetic dimensions of the cycling experience often seem at risk of ‘capture’ by the latest moral and/or political discourse, so that at any particular time and place people are instructed to cycle for some reasons more than others; because cycling is good for you, healthy, environmentally-friendly, combats pollution and congestion, and so on. We will see some of these ‘framings’ of cycling played out in the chapters which follow. Moral discourses (both official and
unofficial) also speak of the benefits of cycling more generally. So cycling benefits individuals, but it also benefits organisations that do not have to spend as much on car parking (Rosen and Skinner, this volume), it benefits governments and health insurers whose healthcare bills can be reduced by having a fitter population (Hillman 1993), it benefits the city through a kind of civilising process (Mackintosh and Norcliffe, this volume), and it benefits the planet (Horton 2006).

Although not necessarily so (Oddy, this volume), the bicycle can be an object of conspicuous consumption (Mackintosh and Norcliffe, this volume). Even when the rise of specialised facilities and paths is taken into account, cycling takes place in public space, subject to the public gaze. As all the chapters in this collection in their different ways attest, both the bicycle and the act of riding a bicycle unavoidably convey status. This status is never fixed, varying greatly according to time and place, and depending on attitudes held by both the rider and observers. Sometimes cycling conveys high status; sometimes it is stigmatised; sometimes it depends on what the person riding looks like, what they wear and the machine they ride. Even different groups of cyclists regard each other with widely variable attitudes, and build their own value-hierarchies (Cox 2006). It is always important to think about cycling’s status in seeking to understand unequal levels of cycling across different social groups.

The bicycle and cycling need always and everywhere to be understood in relationship to the societies in which they exist. Many people cycle in China, but the cycle-tourist is an unusual sight. On a Sunday in Spain, many people can be seen cycling out from the towns and cities on expensive machines and clothed in specialist gear, but on a Monday morning the streets might be conspicuously absent of commuter cyclists. Conventional use of the bicycle reflects and reproduces social
norms. But people also use cycles and cycling in new ways, and thus contribute to processes of social change. In this volume, for instance, we see how Victorian ladies (Mackintosh and Norcliffe), women racing cyclists at the end of the nineteenth century (Simpson), and today’s bike messengers (Fincham) have all in different ways made their mark on society. Cycling is effected by, but also effects, wider society.

Historically, geographically, sociologically and culturally, cycling is a complex and diverse practice. Yet it is increasingly promoted by national governments across the rich world as a simple, straightforward mode of mobility with a variety of beneficial effects. Across Europe, governments demonstrate increasing commitment to cycling as a sustainable mode of mobility (European Conference of Ministers of Transport 2004). The UK government regards cycling as one appropriate response to a range of contemporary problems; congestion, pollution, climate change, (un)sustainability, quality-of-life, neighbourhood decline, health and disease (Department for Transport 2004). We do not uncritically celebrate cycling technologies and practices, and we strongly believe in the need for more research into cycling, partly to improve our understandings of its potential limitations and possibilities with regards to policy-making; however, on the available evidence we also tend to agree that cycling is worth promoting, and with many of the reasons often cited for its promotion. We think of cycling as a practice epitomising the economist Manfred Max-Neef's concept of a 'multiple satisfier' (Max-Neef 1990), able to help fulfil many valuable human needs simultaneously. But we also believe attempts to promote cycling could be much more effective if they incorporated greater understanding of cycling’s complexity and diversity, even within a single society. We hope this collection is one contribution towards such greater understanding.
And despite some goodwill towards cycling, there is also much hostility. Whilst in some places cycling is increasingly constructed as a practice enabling ‘sustainable development’, in many places it seems mired in cultural, political and economic conditions which construct it as a practice impeding development, and thus to be discouraged. So the futures of cycling currently seem highly uncertain, perhaps impossible to predict, both locally and globally. How prominent a role might cycling play in tomorrow’s societies? How much might this depend on where we live, and who we are? To what extent might cycling be shaped by wider forces, and to what extent might cycling contribute to shaping change? We hope that the chapters which follow might encourage reflection on such questions, and contribute to further consideration of the possible roles which cycling might play across time.

For now we simply note how the tensions between the radically different prospects potentially inherent within cycling are even embodied in this book. On the one hand, the presence of this volume demonstrates rising interest in and commitment to the practice and potential of cycling. On the other hand, research with a focus on cycling remains a tiny drop in the ocean of research generally, even within the fields of transport studies and mobility studies (Rosen 2003). Indeed, the lack of much analysis of cycling across the social sciences was part of the motivation for establishing the symposium on ‘Cycling and the Social Sciences’ that led to this book.

**Cycling in the Academy**

Although the literature is relatively sparse, this book is not the first to focus academic attention on cycling. Here, by way of a brief overview of the field, we divide previous work into four main areas.
First, cycling has perhaps been explored most comprehensively from historical perspectives (examples include Alderson 1972; Herlihy 2004; Lloyd-Jones and Lewis 2000; McGurn 1999; Norcliffe 2001; Ritchie 1975; 1996; Simpson 2001; Thompson 2002; Tobin 1974). Indeed, historical interest in cycling spans enthusiast, amateur and academic historians, who gather for regular international cycling history conferences focused on topics including cycle technology and its manufacturers, cycle sport and cycling innovators. Three of this volume's chapters, those by Simpson, Oddy, and Mackintosh and Norcliffe, make valuable contributions to this existing body of cycling research. Second, and sometimes related to historical approaches to cycling, sociologists of sport have also taken an interest in cycling (Albert 1991; 1999; Butryn and Masucci 2003; Palmer 2000; Wieting 2000). Such studies obviously focus on the diverse world of cycle sport (which includes the more traditional sports of road racing, track racing, time-trialling and cyclo-cross, as well as more recent sporting developments such as triathlon and mountain biking). Third, attention to cycling has come from engineering, design and planning perspectives. The majority of studies in this area are specifically concerned with how to increase levels of cycling as a mode of urban transport (for example, Cope et al. 2003; Horton and Salkeld 2006; Hudson 1982; McClintock 1992; McClintock 2002; Ryley 2001; Tolley 1990). A distinct subgroup within the engineering literature is comprised of studies which focus on the specific design aspects of the bicycle itself, rather than the facilities around it (Wilson and Papdopolous 2004; Burrows 2004). Then fourth, there are a range of medical approaches to cycling. These tend to focus on the positive health effects of cycling (British Medical Association 1992; Hillman 1993; Pucher and Dijkstra 2003), as well as analysis of accident data, health promotion, and especially controversial issues such as the claims and counterclaims over the benefits of cycle helmets (for recent
commentary on helmets, see Hagel et al. 2006; Hewson 2005; Robinson 2006, 2007; for an idea of just how much research this one issue generates, see the website of the Bicycle Helmet Research Foundation at cyclehelmets.org; last accessed 30/1/07).

Outside these four main areas, academic interest in cycling feels much more piecemeal and disjointed, with no strong sense of contributing to a wider stock of knowledge. But we must recognise attention to the bicycle and cycling from some sociologists of science and technology (Bijker 1995; Rosen 2002). We are also beginning to see an interest in the embodied experience of cycling from social and cultural geography (Horton and Spinney 2006; Jones 2005; Spinney 2006; this volume). And finally, there is a broad and varied concern with the politics of the bicycle and cycling (Batterbury 2003; Blickstein and Hanson 2001; Carlsson 2002; Ferrell 2001; Horton 2006; Lowe 1989).

With its interdisciplinary breadth and ambition, we believe this book to be unlike any that has come before, and hopefully to herald a new dawn for studies of cycling. Our aim is for it to launch a committed, concerted intellectual push to figure the bicycle as a vehicle of the future as much as of the past, as about progress and development more than nostalgia. The book’s life began at a symposium of social scientific research into cycling, hosted by the Centre for Mobilities Research at Lancaster University in June 2004, an event that has led to a research network, the Cycling and Society Research Group, and an ongoing series of symposia. The impetus for that first symposium was the mutual discovery of each other by a number of previously unconnected researchers of cycling and a resulting impatience to push cycling studies firmly onto, and up, the intellectual agenda. By providing a diverse range of social scientifically informed perspectives on cycling, we hope to open up
fresh and timely intellectual spaces for consideration of cycling in particular, and ‘sustainable mobilities’ in general.

This collection brings together thinkers from different disciplines and different continents who share a research interest in cycling. Aside from their common focus on cycling, the chapters ahead are very diverse. But rather than seek to impose order on them, as editors we have consciously decided to throw them together rather haphazardly. Our rationale in doing so is a belief that we need to start thinking about cycling differently, in new ways. To contain cycling according to pre-existing conventions, so that for example, the history of cycling is seen as separate from empirically grounded accounts of contemporary cycling, would be merely to perpetuate one of the problems we are seeking to overcome. Although of course different readers will take different things from this book, and approach it in their own ways, we want to encourage rather than discourage unusual juxtapositions. We hope to inspire and tempt the reader to think differently about cycling, or should we say 'cyclings'?

As we have already indicated, the time is ripe for sustained scholarly interest in cycling. Cycling is profoundly relevant to a whole range of important contemporary debates, about how we move around and with what consequences, about the appropriate pace and scale of everyday life, about how we treat our bodies, our communities and our planet, about the very viability of human futures. There is a growing international impetus to assemble pro-cycling policies. In this context, we must be sure not to neglect, but to recognise and attend to, careful reflections and discussions on cycling and society.

The Papers
Mobility is often treated as merely about moving from A to B. But movement is always more meaningful than such an approach to transport implies (Peters 2005), and our experiences of movement demand greater analysis. Outside of literary accounts (for example, Humphreys 2006; Kimmage 1990; Krabbé 2002; Woods, 2002), we do not know very much about how people bodily experience cycling. In the first chapter, Justin Spinney provides an innovative and fascinating analysis of urban cycling, in which he explores the embodied experiences of cyclists as they negotiate the streets of London. Representing his data as an ethnographic fiction, Spinney is able to illuminate a series of processes and events whose experiential dimensions are ill-served by abstracted rationalisation and conventional linguistic accounts. Perhaps the best parallel to Spinney’s work is Paul Fournel’s Besoin de Vélo (2001) in which the author writes simply in order to convey a sensual experience of what is known in France (and increasingly beyond) as ‘sportive’ riding. However, Spinney’s account is rooted in the urban and has a very different flavour to those focused on cycling as a leisure or sporting pursuit. His fictive journey casts the reader into the kinaesthetics of the everyday, far from the romanticised mix of pain, passion and pleasure in narratives of racing endeavour (and a break from his own previous work exploring cyclists' experiences of riding the legendary Mt Ventoux in France, see Spinney 2006). What Spinney provides, then, is the kind of description and analysis of urban utility cycling that has been sorely lacking. His attention to the journey demonstrates how rich and full is the experience of cycling the city. He gives us much needed detail of the hitherto far-too-empty category of 'the urban utility cycling trip', and very usefully supplements the findings of the later chapter by Parkin, Ryley and Jones.

The emergence of the safety bicycle in the 1890s produced massive effects across industrialising societies such as the USA, France and Britain. The second half
of the nineteenth century had already seen a major development in organised sports (Walvin 1978: Ch. 7). New institutions, officials and publications formed part of this new sports infrastructure. James Walvin describes English society at the end of the nineteenth century as undergoing a ‘leisure revolution’ (Walvin, 1978). As a novel mobile technology, the bicycle quickly became the latest craze (Herlihy 2004), ‘a national obsession’ (Walvin 1978: 93). The new machine correspondingly entered into the dramas of a period characterised both by the rise of leisure (Veblen 1899), and by women’s push for new freedoms, including greater participation in the public sphere (Simpson 2001). During this period the bicycle contributed to the commodification of leisure and entertainment, and cycling became a major spectator sport. The emergence of the Tour de France has been well documented (for example, Wheatcroft 2003), but that event was not conceived until 1903. Before then, cycling as a hugely popular spectator sport was already well established.

Clare Simpson, in Chapter 2, provides a fascinating and unprecedented glimpse into women’s cycle racing at the end of the nineteenth century. By going beneath the sensationalism that often accompanies representations of women’s participation in professional and public sporting enterprises she reveals the complexity of the social and economic relations that both enabled women’s sport to exist but also confined it within a certain public imaginary. Just as the interwoven social structures of race and class shaped the career of the better known track racer Major Taylor during the same period (Ritchie 1996), here both opportunities and constraints are shaped by the structures of gender and class.

The women's racing that Simpson highlights comes at a particularly interesting time. The tensions between cycling as primarily a participant or spectator sport, and the fragmentation of cycle sport into an array of categories (amateur,
professional, road, track) has left a legacy that is still with us today. Intriguingly, cycling's 'identity crisis' (sport or pastime? elite or mass?) and the fragmentation of cycle sport occurs at the same moment of post-cycling boom that Nicholas Oddy, in Chapter 5, indicates as the start of the period of cycle history often disregarded by historians focused upon visible changes in the bicycle itself. The use of the bicycle in sporting endeavours of all sorts is further complicated by the regional and national favours and biases expressed by the various (self-)appointed governing bodies. In Britain, the National Cycle Union had resolved in 1888 to ban all competitive road racing. This set Britain on a separate course from other European nations, where cycle racing remained an enthusiastically supported spectacle on both track and road (Woodland 2005: 22). Indeed, in France, cycle racing regained ascendancy as a spectator sport subsequent to the banning of the Paris-Madrid motor race after its first stage in 1903, which left eight people dead and more than 20 injured, proved publicly unacceptable (Gaboriau 2003: 57). There is clearly much more to be learnt about this period.

Simpson’s work alerts us to both the gendered nature of writing on cycling, and the way in which cycling itself is a gendered activity. The divergent forms of ‘gentlemen’s’ and ‘ladies’ bicycle frames are reflected at childhood level by distinctly gender-segregated boys' and girls' bikes and accessories (see Oddy 1990). The manner in which cycling is marketed as a gendered activity links to a number of later chapters, most obviously Mackintosh and Norcliffe’s analysis of class and gender at the end of the nineteenth century. But we should also be alerted to the impact of gendered experience and expectations in understanding current attitudes towards cycling, and the effects of those attitudes on cycling behaviours and identities, an issue examined by Rosen and Skinner in Chapter 4.
Even within a single society, it is remarkably difficult to ascertain whether levels of cycling are going up, static, or going down, and among which groups and for what reasons. Furthermore, and especially in societies with low levels of cycling, the reasons why someone does (or does not) cycle are often opaque. A complex combination of multiple factors either produces, or fails to produce, cycling behaviours. In recent years, the emergence of the complexity sciences as a way of understanding social processes has also made us more aware that social change is extremely tricky to effect in predictable ways (see Byrne 1998; Urry 2004). Nevertheless, many of us understandably want to know 'what works', what gets more 'bums on saddles'. And no matter how difficult the task of promoting cycling in a world full of unintended consequences (see Horton, this volume), pro-cycling policy ought to be based on the best available empirically-derived evidence of what is likely to be effective.

Here, we can set out and describe the various factors likely to be involved in decisions to cycle or not cycle, and provide some analysis of their relative, and changing, importance. These factors vary across scales; from the most general, cultural, level (government policies and institutional(ised) ideologies and attitudes, large-scale automobility, increasing distances, increased concerns with health and the environment), to the smaller scale (hills, weather, road conditions, cycling facilities, local and workplace cultures), and the biographical level (gender, stage of life course, economic wealth, personality type).

In Chapter 3, John Parkin, Tim Ryley and Tim Jones examine the UK context in such detail, in an effort to unravel what is going on, and they provide us with some very important findings. By taking a meta-analysis, Parkin, Ryley and Jones are able to identify factors that should be key policy drivers, but which are not necessarily
taken into account by those tasked with implementation of cycle planning measures. In a wider sense, their chapter highlights the growing recognition of the need to conjoin quantitative and qualitative approaches to data gathering and analysis. Too often in social science these have been considered as alien species, perhaps needing to co-exist but always uneasily, even though the mutual suspicion evident even in the little cycling research that exists has been shown to be unfounded (Rosen 2003). Parkin, Ryley and Jones demonstrate the value of finding appropriate ways to assess - in terms translatable into policy measures - those barriers to cycling previously seen as intangibles: quantitative measures of qualitative judgements.

In Chapter 4, Paul Rosen and David Skinner examine the ways in which employees of various organisations based around Cambridge, England, talk about themselves and others as more or less competent cyclists and motorists. The specific focus of the research which forms the basis of their chapter should be of great interest to cycle promotion practitioners, who generally regard the journey to work as particularly significant. Rosen and Skinner note the importance of a cycle-friendly organisational culture - one which invites employees to cycle. But beyond this, their chapter represents a significant contribution to our understandings of issues to do with identity and representation. The empirical evidence Rosen and Skinner present makes plain that the identity ‘cyclist’ is not homogeneous, and that cycling workers can feel as alienated from the category ‘cyclist’ as much as, if not more than, the category ‘motorist’. As such, their discussion bears on later chapters by both Horton and Fincham, which also focus on the behaviours and representations of cyclists.

Rosen and Skinner detail how people who cycle to work feel alienated by (their perceptions of) the behaviours and attitudes of other cyclists (something with which any cycle user who despairs at the ‘red light jumping’ and various other illegal
manoeuvres of other cyclists will be able readily to identify). It is, though, perhaps illustrative of how homogeneous the category ‘cyclist’ has become when people who cycle themselves feel called upon to condemn and distance themselves from the behaviours of other people who cycle. Perhaps one moral of the tale is that there ought to be no inherent obligation or need for cyclists to identify with other cyclists; indeed, one sign of a healthy cycling culture might be that cyclists are so numerous and diverse that mutual identification is neither expected nor desired, and consequently perhaps, the ‘poor’ cycling conduct of others does not feel like an accusation against oneself as a member of that cycling group.

Is ‘cyclist’ even the correct term for all bike riders? Certainly, the declared aims of Cycling England, the body that currently oversees government-financed cycle promotion in England, call for 'more people cycling, more safely, more often' (see http://www.cyclingengland.co.uk/); the term ‘cyclist’ is almost conspicuously absent from its promotional material. We think that more research into the complex issues surrounding cycling and identity would be very worthwhile. In the meantime, cycling promotion might well benefit from close examination of the attitudes and self-understandings of those who already use cycles as part of their regular transport regime, and reported by both Rosen and Skinner here, and Spinney earlier on.

In a forceful demonstration of how cycling history does not end with the closing of the nineteenth century, Nicholas Oddy in Chapter 5 opens up the early decades of the twentieth century to pioneering sociohistorical analysis. Oddy explores the reasons behind the stability of the bicycle’s appearance through the first third of the twentieth century. He takes this stability as something requiring explanation, given the bicycle’s relative novelty and the reasonable expectation that technological developments and market competition among producers could have continued to
produce changes in the bicycle’s form. Oddy argues that falling prices and mass uptake of the bicycle by the working class contributed, during this era, to a decline in the previously high status of the bicycle, and thus to a climate hostile to innovation in the cycling industry.

Both this and the following chapter by Peter Cox and Frederik Van De Walle are concerned in different ways with historiographical issues. The diachronic ordering of narratives has in-built expectations that change is the only factor worthy of historical analysis. Focused on the machine itself, this has led to intense analysis of those periods when a profusion of very visible changes are apparent, and an underexamination of the longer periods marked by stability of form. Hence bicycle history is largely artefactual rather than social, sometimes even when its concern is with the social construction of the technologies under scrutiny (Rosen 2002).

It is very easy to see cycling as somehow preceding, and being replaced by, motoring. Among the affluent classes in the most advanced industrialised societies such as the United States, Britain and France, the emergence of the automobile at the end of the nineteenth century quickly began to eclipse and overtake the fascination with cycling. Whenever and wherever it is available, the car apparently overtakes the bicycle as a status-signalling object of consumption, and driving replaces cycling as an exclusive leisure practice. Moreover, it is certainly true that in many crucial respects the bicycle paved the way for a motorised age (Aronson 1968; Hamer 1987). The early cycle industry innovated interchangeability of parts, large-scale factory production and the integration and spatial organisation of supply chain relationships that later provided the grounding for mass assembly-line production in the car industry – as well as providing early training for many of the key personnel who later established car manufacture (see Hounshell 1984; Norcliffe 1997). The bicycle’s
popularity was instrumental in the development of infrastructures later utilised by the car – repair shops, street lighting and improved road surfaces (Oakley 1977). The bicycle also contributed to changing conceptions of space and popular expectations of mobility (Norcliffe 2001); it ‘democratised’ mobility by, for example, making ‘the countryside’ more accessible, and enabling greater distances between various aspects of everyday life, especially work and home. Bicycles also democratised the idea and appeal of flexible, individual, private mobility (McGurn 1999; Pooley et al. 2005).

Beyond its being intellectually flimsy, as evidenced by the body of work collected here, there is a danger in uncritically reproducing a story of the bicycle as being replaced by the motor car. Such a story implies that, once people leap enthusiastically into cars, bicycles are ‘left behind’ on the transport scrap heap, an anachronistic remnant of movements in mobility, the preserve of the nostalgic and those who cannot or will not fit. The bicycle and cycling, then, become rubbish. This conception of cycling as inevitably giving way to other modes of mobility is examined and critiqued by Cox and Van De Walle in Chapter 6. Given that the dominant evoliner narrative of change in personalised transport technologies consigns cycling to the past, it ought to be challenged. After all, there is nothing inevitable about such a positioning. We need only think of indigenous minority languages, and their revival in many parts of the world (Hourigan 2003), to realise the contingent and political character of things consigned to history, but which need not belong or stay only there. Cycling will always have (revisable) histories, but it also has (multiple) futures.

If Oddy’s account demonstrates how historical conditions can encourage technological stability, Cox and Van De Walle nicely illuminate how the cycle is never a ‘closed’ technology. They explore and illustrate the velomobile as a cycling
technology which confuses ordinary, taken for granted understandings of what ‘a cycle’ is and what it is for. Bringing together the apparently divergent perspectives of a social scientist working in community and development studies and a practical engineer, the authors emphasise the need to think beyond conventional meanings of what is a ‘cycle’, what is a ‘car’ and what lies in-between, by considering the relations between different types of transport possibilities. Their chapter considers not just how to reorganise and reorder the velomobile’s place in currently dominant orderings of personal transport technologies, but also how to raise the status of all those alternative transport technologies currently marginalised by the hegemony of the conventional automobile; both are necessary if the social acceptability and uptake of currently marginal cycle technologies such as velomobiles are to grow.

Cox and Van De Walle demonstrate how thinking about barriers to cycling could be much broader and more complex than at present. Discussions of barriers to cycling typically concentrate on those issues examined by Parkin, Ryley and Jones in Chapter 3. When thinking about the reasons as to why people do not cycle, we tend to concentrate on hills, rain, fear of traffic and the long and complicated journeys which people nowadays seem to undertake. But Cox and Van De Walle make it clear that our very conceptions of different modes of mobility, and especially the static, apparently ‘timeless’ character of those conceptions, thwart innovation and development, the capacity to think and so also to move, differently.

In Chapter 7, Dave Horton identifies more barriers to cycling, this time located at the ideological, discursive level. Horton concentrates on the much noted pervasive fear of cycling. But his approach to this fear of cycling is unusual. Instead of either dismissing such fear as resulting from false perceptions, or endorsing it as an accurate response to real conditions, he explores how such fear is routinely, banally
constructed. Horton identifies three ways in which, he claims, cycling is constructed as dangerous through - ironically enough - attempts to render it safe: road safety education; campaigns to promote helmet use; and the growing provision of off-road cycle routes. He thinks we should be cautious about what goes under the label ‘cycling promotion’, because some of what currently passes for cycling promotion is actually more likely to be detrimental to cycling's prospects. At a more general level, Horton’s analysis reminds anyone attempting to promote cycling that there is always the possibility for unintended consequences of their efforts; this is not a cue to do nothing, but to think and work better.

Horton also makes connections between the seemingly widespread and oft-noted fear of cycling and a much less commented upon fear of the cyclist. He wonders why, when cycling is apparently such a sane thing to do, so many people - at least in the UK - not only do not cycle, but also seem to feel discomforted or even antagonised by the cyclist’s very presence. The popular press, in the UK in particular, seems to regard cyclists as a breed apart, regularly featuring articles expressing hostility towards a stereotypical urban cyclist (often labelled the ‘lycra lout’). Horton argues that these mass media representations have the effect of ‘othering’ the cyclist, and so make it much more difficult for non/future cyclists to identify with the practice and the kind of person they imagine the cyclist to be; indeed, he argues that people will fear becoming such a figure. Like Ben Fincham in Chapter 9, Horton thus alerts us to the importance of representations of cycling to actual practices of cycling.

Themes of self-identity and social construction are also evident in the concerns of Phillip Mackintosh and Glen Norcliffe in Chapter 8. These Canadian geographers attempt to unravel the complexities of cycling and gender at the end of the nineteenth century. Existing accounts of cycling in this period tend to emphasise cycling among
women as symbolising opposition and resistance to patriarchy, as about the quest for women’s emancipation (Holt 1989: 121-4; Simpson 2001). Such accounts note how women’s use of the bicycle enabled progressive change in, for example, standards of dress, conduct and mobility. Mackintosh and Norcliffe challenge such accounts. They see women’s cycling at the end of the nineteenth century as about conformity and containment rather than conflict and emancipation. For Mackintosh and Norcliffe, bourgeois north American women in the fin de siècle were striving to domesticate the public sphere - to ‘civilise’ it according to conservative, Christian feminised values. So there is a feminisation of the city going on, but this proceeds not so much via overt political critique of women’s marginality as via domestication of the public sphere by bringing feminine qualities to bear on it. Something which Mackintosh and Norcliffe’s analysis importantly illuminates is how different groups often use the bicycle in an effort to achieve particular ends; their account of women at the end of the nineteenth century striving to domesticate the city by cycling certainly brings to mind both today’s environmentalists attempting to ‘green’ the city via their use of bicycles (Horton 2006), and contemporary anarchists seeking to subvert the city and its dominant automobilised rhythms through their cycle protests (Carlsson 2002; Ferrell 2001).

Mackintosh and Norcliffe, like Simpson in Chapter 2, recognise that cycle manufacturers had an interest in promoting cycling to women. Both Oddy in Chapter 5 and Cox and Van De Walle in Chapter 6 also demonstrate, in different ways, the importance of the production side to the worlds of the bicycle and cycling. Another clear economic dimension of cycling is its role in supply and delivery. Here, despite its significance, cycling’s key and continuing role in keeping people and goods on the
move has barely been recognised in academic work (exceptions include studies of rickshaw economies in Dhaka (Gallagher 1992) and Delhi (Ravi 2006)).

Across the world, cycles continue to provide vast numbers of people with a livelihood. In the UK, throughout the twentieth century, cycling technologies were used in a range of commercial tasks - for example, in delivering groceries and letters. In Chapter 9, Ben Fincham provides us with an account of probably the best known and most notorious example of contemporary cycling workers, bike messengers. Fincham explores, understands and then explains the meanings, motivations and moralities central to messengers and messenger culture. The strength of his account highlights a weakness of current cycling research; for all our interest in cycling and promoting cycling, we actually know very little about what motivates different kinds of cyclist. This seems a real gap in our current understandings of cycling; if we do not really know what enthuses existing cyclists to cycle and to keep cycling, how can we expect to tailor messages which appeal effectively to would-be cyclists? What makes people cycle? What enables different groups of people to ride bikes? Can we learn, through exploring the cultures of groups of people who do cycle, how better to encourage cycling among other groups of people who currently do not cycle? Such questions are worth contemplating as we move cycling studies into the future.

Fincham demonstrates how bike messengers are subject to multiple representations, which all converge around difference and deviance. As Fincham himself notes, the four-fold categorisation he develops to analyse different representations of messengers and their culture has wider applicability, and can be used to explore cycling more generally. Following Fincham, there are:

- ‘positive-inside’ representations of cycling - the kinds of reasons ‘insiders’ give themselves for cycling and continuing to cycle;
• ‘negative-inside’ representations - which lead some cyclists to campaign for improvements to cycling conditions, others presumably to give up cycling altogether if their perceptions of the negatives of cycling grow too great, and cycling cultures in general to utilise them in the formation of strong cycling identities (on, for example, riders embracing the risks of racing cycling, see Albert 1999);

• ‘positive-outside’ representations of cycling, which are what policy-makers and cycling promotion professionals tend to emphasise in their efforts to encourage cycling; and

• ‘negative-outside’ representations - all the reasons people cite for why they do not and would not cycle.

These different representations constitute the stories which individually and culturally we tell ourselves about cycling, and which exert powerful effects over what cycling is and could be, to us as individuals and collectively, as societies. Such representations are therefore really important. Cycling simultaneously inhabits different worlds of representation; it is consequently contested, and revisable.

Returning to consideration of Fincham’s chapter, the deviant cyclist in Mackintosh and Norcliffe’s account of cycling a century ago is the irresponsible, speeding ‘scorcher’. Today’s deviant cyclist, similarly vilified by both ‘respectable cyclists’ (because, as Rosen and Skinner found, ‘they give all cyclists a bad name’) and society in general is Fincham’s bike messenger. Concern with cyclists’ behaviour - and particularly their propensity towards ‘incivility’ - seems stable across time. But messengers seem to relish the maverick, outlaw connotations of their identity. Fincham notes how media representations of bike messengers and their work and lifestyle contribute to the ‘othering’ of messengers, and messengers utilise the deviant identities foisted upon them by media accounts to reproduce a distinctive, and valued, subculture. However, such media portrayals have a negative impact on cycling in general, because they tend to construct it as a risky practice pursued by risky people. As Horton argues, the risk of such representations is that cycling correspondingly becomes a practice which ‘normal’ people will be less likely to want to do.
Of course we must note the intense and bitter irony of representations of cycling as an uncivil practice in an era of mass (some say ‘murderous’) automobility and deep (even ‘pathological’?) acceptance (or ‘repression’?) of automobility’s many negative consequences. But overall, this book is not committed to chronicling and commiserating over the persecution, scapegoating, stigmatisation, harassment and discrimination of cyclists and cycling. To the contrary, its goal is to think cycling into bright, socially and ecologically liberated futures.

**Cycling Futures and the Futures of Cycling Research**

John Urry (2004) believes we are moving towards a ‘post-car’ age, in which the steel-and-petroleum car together with the current systems of automobility which sustain it will come to be seen as dinosaurs of mobility. So what role cycling in the ‘post-car’ future? What will future cyclings look like? To what kind of lives and societies will those cyclings contribute? In some parts of the world many people have not yet climbed onto bicycles, much less into cars or planes. But elsewhere cycling is a generally local and localising practice. So how prominent a part can it play in an increasingly global, increasingly mobile world? Perhaps the continuing emergence of information and communication technologies can contribute to the replacement of many longer-distance corporeal mobilities with virtual mobilities, and thus bring about a maintenance or return (depending on who and where you are) of bodily mobility to the local and everyday, the terrain on which cycling excels?

Certainly cycling is currently tied up with a whole array of unfolding processes, whose unknown and highly contingent outcomes will contribute to tomorrow’s mobile lives. Those processes we can reasonably predict to effect how people move around in the future include, for example: oil prices; policy initiatives,
such as road pricing; political and media framings of climate change; the fortunes of critical discourses against accelerating automobilities in major emerging economies, especially China and India; the extent to which different information and communication technologies embed or change existing patterns of interaction and travel; cultural changes in attitudes and practices to do with the ‘local’ and ‘global’, the ‘body’, the ‘environment’ and speed. There is much we do not know. There is much that requires scientific research. And there is almost certainly an important place for cycling in sustainable global mobility futures, and for cycling research in understanding and positively contributing to those futures.

Together, the diverse chapters assembled in this collection stimulate many questions relevant to the futures of cycling, and thus also to the futures of our increasingly mobile societies. Cycling is very much part of society; it has contributed significantly to today’s societies, and it continues to contribute to societies in-the-making. Cycling is present at the levels of both practice and representation, in the urban and the rural, in work and leisure, in the past, present and future. Our aim with this book is to contribute to thinking about how best to promote cycling futures, to provoke some new conversations, and to help develop an active agenda for social scientific research into cycling. Our hope is it inspires more research into cycling, and in its own small way also contributes to a renaissance of cycling, a practice seemingly made for sustainability.

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