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Book review

City Cycling, J. Pucher, R. Buehler. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2012). £19.95 (pbk), ISBN: 978-0-262-51781-2

I have been cycling for more than three decades. My relationship with cycles and cycling began during a childhood located within a Canadian post World War Two (WWII) suburban neighbourhood. This early experience was followed by utilitarian cycling to/from highschool and university, a great deal of time spent mountain biking in the 1990s, and more recently, utilitarian and road cycling in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada and its nearby exurban and rural spaces. My journey with cycles and cycling began just after the first OPEC oil crisis, and so much of my early formative experience with and on two wheels intersected nicely, and unknowingly at the time, with a pivotal moment in the production and sale of cycles, thinking in the West around energy security, and a nascent, yet geographically uneven introspection regarding transport that would ultimately produce, in certain spheres, some interest in managing rather than just producing and facilitating travel demand. On the whole, in North America in particular, I would say, that when I reflect on the history and geography of development and transport in my lifetime, we've made a real mess of it – yet we press on.

And so we arrive at this moment in time and the edited volume called "City Cycling" which examines, "the cycling renaissance underway in most countries of the western, industrialized world" (Pucher and Buehler 2012: 2). The editors indicate their purpose is to elucidate trends while exposing measures to increase utilitarian cycling. They indicate a focus, "on promoting daily cycling in cities for utilitarian purposes" (Pucher and Buehler 2012: 2). Utilitarian or utility cycling refers to cycling for transport, rather than for discretionary or other purposes (e.g., racing) (Herlihy, 2004). I used City Cycling as the core text in my graduate seminar course this year. In that course we studied the history and geography of cycles and cycling. The course was designed to examine several themes first within the recent contemporary period. The second half of the course reflected on the same themes, tracing them back to the mid modern period where we can locate the origins of cycling technology and a "bike boom" that would arrive just prior to the turn of the last century. Beyond describing structure and content, I will focus my remarks mainly on thematic intersections between the text and my graduate course; namely, technological innovation, gender, childhood, health and safety, and infrastructure (politics and planning).

City cycling includes fifteen often data rich comprehensive chapters written by some of transport's most notable scholars located across academic posts largely spanning the Global North. The text begins with a fine overview of the book's structure and themes covered within ensuing chapters. International trends are examined in Chapter 2, a chapter that is later complemented by others (Chapters 12–14) that unpack cycles and cycling across urban contexts, from small cities to megacities such as London, Paris and New York. Within these overview pieces, the authors usually offered some caveats regarding the comparability of the difficult to compare – i.e., cycle rates drafted from within occasionally very different political, economic, institutional, epistemological contexts. The book's main themes, listed here in the order in which they appear as chapters in the volume, include: health; effective speed; a chapter on equipment that includes wonderful hand drawn illustrations by the principal author; infrastructure; safety; cycle-transit multi-modality; bikesharing; women and cycling; children; cycling in small to big, to megacities; and a final summary chapter. From the outset the authors do not shy away from the possibilities for cycle promotion offered by the opportunity to develop the text and so I, along with my students, noted an advocacy tone throughout.

The conveyed cycle geography is biased toward the Global North. Notably absent was a chapter explicitly focused on cycling and/or non-motorized travel (NMT) more broadly within the Global South, although Pucher and his colleagues have written about cycling in that part of the world (e.g., Pucher et al., 2005, 2007). There are always themes left behind in such volumes, the committed reader will find stories from the South in other chapters, but a piece focused perhaps on the tensions between NMT and automobility in the Global South, for example, could have been a nice addition. With regard to the South, in Chapter 9, Shaheen and colleagues describe bikesharing across the globe and spend some time looking into Asia, with necessary attention given to places such as Hangzhou, China – host to the largest such system. Although the bikeshare chapter does a fine job of enumerating systems, and describing technologies, a more critical lens – particularly focused on the political economy of bikesharing is justifiable. To be fair, recent problems within some North American systems became a matter of public knowledge after City Cycling became a project. As an update, consider that the Bixi bike-sharing systems in Toronto and Montreal, Canada are financially troubled; raising questions regarding what should and does motivate the development and ongoing operation of such systems. I happen to think we need bikesharing, but that we have not yet figured out how to make such systems work within a neoliberal context bogged down by break-even/profit generation criteria for measuring the success or failure of both legacy and nascent transport systems.

Infrastructure, gender, childhood and health are core themes within the text, and within my course. With regard to infrastructure, and complementing Furth's fine chapter on the subject, we asked quite simply – were the cycling centres of Europe always like this? We located a piece by Oldenziel and de la Bruheze (2011) where we discovered a fascinating interwar period in Germany and the Netherlands, followed later by a post WWII reconstruction period wrought with "anti-cycling sentiments and pro-car attitudes" (Oldenziel and de la Bruheze, 2011: 38) that would profoundly impact the built environment, transport, and transport related injury for several decades. We also discussed and challenged the gender binary, transforming the chapter on "Women" and cycling into a discussion about gender, sexuality, identity

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and cycling. In doing so, we also – and borrowing from Hanson's challenge to have us take on a more meaningful study and contemplation of context, examined the life and politics of Frances Willard (Hanson, 2010). Here we discovered that while Willard offers a key historical and ethnographic account on the liberating, empowering virtues of cycling in her text, "A Wheel within a Wheel", she also internalized and publically communicated a complex racial politics with regard to the expansion of citizenship to blacks following Civil War Reconstruction (Parker, 2008). And so we would later discover Kitty Knox, a mixed race bicycle racer from Boston who would challenge the League of American Wheelmen for membership status, and race and win against many male "scorchers" in the 1890s.

In Noreen McDonald's chapter we learned that, "the formal study of children's cycling is limited" (page 236). The best we can often do is look at children and their use of active transport for school trips and then we often have trouble unpacking the use of active modes across places and possibilities. Working against childhood cycling are many contextual issues, parental time pressures (perceived or otherwise), the media and expert construction of a gendered risk narrative, and the gendered mobility and risk experiences of adults (Murray, 2009). Moreover, and perhaps in contrast to the near ubiquitous access to cycles suggested at several locations in the text, cycles are problematic for some households for economic reasons, storage reasons, and for children living with certain types of disability. McDonald covers the available territory with her chapter and in my opinion her chapter, and the challenges involved in its construction, indicate an area of much needed additional research. These early childhood experiences with transport may affect a lifetime of decisions that have health and economic impacts that scale up and back. More attention should be given to children's transport and mobility issues, particularly where they intersect with class, race/ethnicity, socio-cultural practices, and gender.

Chapters 3 and 7 on health and safety respectively really should be read in tandem. Both chapters do a fine job of enumerating much of the literature. A more detailed, visible, discussion on gender, cycling, health and risk would have been useful additions to both, although much of that conversation occurs later in Chapter 10, "Women and Cycling". Perhaps being mindful of the promotional positioning of the volume, in Chapter 3 Garrard espouses cycling's virtues relative to the automobile. For the most part, and as an exercise in relativism the claims ring true. However, and although the act of cycling is, "a zero-emission form of transportation" (p. 45), cycles materialize from within global production networks (GPNs) that stitch together a complex web of resources and labour (Gao et al., 2012). Beyond their primary material purpose, GPNs produce fascinating geographies of health and inequality – i.e., a growing possibility for equality in and through mobility in an industrialized North and West traded against externalities and inequality elsewhere. The sense of liberation, freedom, efficiency, subjective well-being, improved health status we experience from cycles and cycling in the industrialized world comes at a cost – as the locus of production shifts toward Asia, and as workers in the bicycle-manufacturing sector there, in some places, labour under conditions likely to produce injury or ill-health over the medium to longer term.

In the end we valued the book's optimistic tone, the richness of the included data, the vast and practically exhaustive lists of references that often provided candidate pieces for future discussion in seminar, and the breadth of themes. The editors never intended for the book to offer a critical appraisal of cycles and cycling through any particular theoretical lens. But to my liking, and within the context that I used it, the text stimulated much critical discourse about places and moments of intersection between cycles, cycling, gender, health, infrastructure, technology, and childhood. The chapters that we touched on served as an essential core around which we constructed our own stories, often narrowing or expanding the sociological, historical, and/or geographical scope to suite our needs. As a scholar and avid cyclist I was intrigued early on in my reading by the editors' "renaissance" hypothesis. My anecdotal experience tells me that we are not there yet, where I live. But my students, who are typically more optimistic, tell me that in some places, some of the time, there are more bikes than cars on the road in Toronto. As a transport geographer and cyclist that observation pleased me – and so we press on. There is much that the book does very well, and I will use it again. Cycle Cities can also usefully serve as an essential comprehensive resource for the transfer of knowledge about cycling from transport research into other domains including injury epidemiology and public health.

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