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DRAFT:

1. Introduction. Power in life, death and other bodily cycles



Figure 1: (eveningstandard.co.uk)

It's the things spilled out on the floor. It's the bike, left abandoned. Mainly it's the things, once neatly in a bag, on a body, in panniers...now spread onto a pavement. They aren't meant to be there. Like a metaphor for the blood - that's censored out of our screens - but the things are shown. I feel the vulnerability of the body in those things. The split apartness of the body and its things, the materials left behind on the street. The body "left behind" somewhere in a morgue. The transfer between 'life' and 'death' - the consciousness that is now gone, when the body's bits disperse - now no longer vibrant, no longer pulsating, no longer mobile [at least, in that particular configuration].

(Author's notes, 6th November 2013, [later comments]*).*

Beginning with the dramatic image of a dead cyclist's personal effects strewn across a London road allows me, paradoxically, to introduce the ends of this project. More than simply mobilizing the reader to feel affected in a particular way, this image introduces the ways in which urban cycling practices, the various bodies engaged in them, the meanings and concepts associated, and things that are, or aren't there, or aren't meant to be there - *matter* powerfully. Importantly, they matter in ways that go beyond

the individual cyclist's body and towards the various cycles (of ideas, materials, energy) of which this particular body is a part.

In this way, focusing on a dramatic end, is also to highlight the *biopower* (Foucault, 2008) – or relations of power - surrounding the regulation and distribution of materials, risks, life, death and human survival intertwined in discussions of urban cycling. Cycling practices are, however, also imbricated in discussions and cycles of 'life and death' on a level far removed from the individual cyclist's body. We are in a contemporary context heralded as the Anthropocene (e.g. Lorimer, 2012; Yusoff, 2013). This is an era characterized by humans acting as a geological force capable of changing and threatening - through effects such as climate change - the very earth processes on which human survival depends. Cycling, as a form of transport[1] powered through energy in muscles derived from food rather than direct burning of fossil fuels, is increasingly promoted as sustainable, healthy and socially equitable.

A recent UN Habitat report, for example, highlights shifts from personal car use towards non-motorized travel as a pathway towards "creating more equitable, healthy and productive urban living environments that benefit both people and the planet" (UN-Habitat, 2013). Similarly, in the UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand, in particular, the last 10 years has seen a flourishing of academic, advocacy and policy work promoting cycling as part of sustainable 'behaviour change', public health promotion and carbon emission reductions. There are increasing efforts to create and maintain the conditions for cities as places in which cycling is a safe, prevalent and "normal" part of urban mobility (e.g. Pooley et al., 2013).

However, the ways in which cycling is considered normal or deviant and the characteristics of an average cyclist (e.g. body size, gender, age, class, ethicity) varies considerably in different contexts. The three countries – India, the Netherlands and the UK – selected as primary sites for this project, illustrate some of these differences. In Indian cities, rates of cycling are thought to range between 7-21% of journeys in cities (Tiwari, Arora, & Jain, 2008), with some cities, such as Ahmedabad and Pune, seeing

[1] I will focus on the term cycling, rather than "bicycling" to be inclusive of forms of cycling such as electronic-bikes (e-bikes), tricycles and rickshaws, which exceed the term "bicycle".

cycling rates of up to 40% of journeys (Tiwari, 2011). In Delhi alone there are thought to be 600,000 cycle rickshaws (Baviskar, 2008). Prevalence of cycling has declined sharply in the last twenty years, with cyclists largely being described as 'captive users' – those who cannot afford alternative means of transport in urban contexts increasingly dominated by motorized vehicles (Tiwari et al., 2008).

In the Netherlands, there is a similar prevalence of cycling as in some Indian cities, with 30% of journeys undertaken by bicycle (Dutch Cycling Council, 2009). However these similar figures belie a very different context. Cycling is relatively evenly distributed across socio-economic groups and genders (John Pucher & Buehler, 2008). Thus, rather than being restricted largely to 'captive users', cycling is in many cities, considered a "normally selected means of travel"[2] (Pooley et al., 2013).

In the United Kingdom, despite a government commitment to "bring about a step change in levels of cycling right across the country" (Department for Transport, 2013a, p. 5), cycling for daily transport remains a minority activity with 3.1% of English and Welsh commuters in 2011 using the cycle as their main commuting mode (Goodman, 2013). This statistic hides outliers cities such as Cambridge where approximately 18% of people cycling to work (Department for Transport, 2013b). However, in cities such as London, where cycling is less prevalent, there is a perception that cycle commuting is the preserve of MAMILs (middle-aged men in Lycra) with a London-based study showing cyclists are more likely to describe themselves as white, male and middle class (Steinbach, Green, Datta, & Edwards, 2011).

In a brief discussion of the literature context (**section 2**) I will explore some of the research that has explored divergence in rates of cycling across contexts (e.g. J. Pucher & Buehler, 2006); analyzed cycling practices through its impacts on carbon emissions, health and wellbeing (J Pucher & Buehler, 2010); and investigated the roles of cycling infrastructures, urban planning interventions, cycle training and social marketing.

[2] However, despite these claims, in needs to be emphasized that driving remains dominant in the Netherlands, with public expenditure reflecting this: While approximately 487 million is invested annually in cycling (Fietsberaad (Dutch Cycling Council), 2010) in 2011, 2.6 billion was spent on highways (Stichting BOVAG-RAI Mobiliteit, 2013).

However, in this project I am interested in going beyond asking what particular interventions might help in "promoting cycling and walking" (Pooley et al., 2013) or making cycling normal, to ask how "normal" practices are constituted. How are bodies and practices of cycling considered more normal or desirable in some places and in others relegated to the potholed gutters[3]? In what ways do power relations[4] infuse daily practices; their inherent normative assumptions[5], the materialities of bodies, cycles and city spaces and the interactions between them (what I will call urban body-ecologies) - differently in different contexts? I will outline these questions more fully in **section 3.**

The implications of the 'mundane' acts of who cycles, where, why, how and with what kinds of effects – bodily, environmentally, socially and economically – are, at the heart of it, questions of justice. This is where critical social theory[6] offers insights as it assumes a normative focus[7]. The project of 'world changing' seems quite apparent - if sometimes implicit - in projects to promote cycling and sustainable transport. However, the normative assumptions of the types of bodies, societies and cities presupposed as desirable, by whom, under what power relations and with what effects, are questions critical theory can add to discussions of urban cycling. In particular I will draw on feminist materialist, post-colonial and queer critical theories, not because I am exclusively interested in how categories such as 'women', 'the postcolonial' or the 'LGBTQI[8] community' experience cycling practices but, rather, for what these

[3] Abjection – is an exclusion that renders parts of the population as "represented from the outside with disgust as the dregs of the people, populace and gutter"? (Bataille, 1993 [1934],: 9)

[4] By power, I mean both the forms of power alluded to above; relations of power that, in social or political terms, could be seen as a propensity to enact change (or maintain the status quo), and equally, in more bio- or geo-physical or material terms, the rate of doing work or using energy. As (Barad, 2003) has pointed out; "Crucial to understanding the workings of power is an understanding of the nature of power in the fullness of its materiality" (pg. 810).

[5] In this sense I mean "normative assumptions" both in terms of what kinds of bodies, mobilities and cities are considered "desirable", as well as what constitutes "normal" cycling practice in different contexts.

[6] Critical theories are theories that attempt not so much to understand or explain phenomena, but to provide concepts and thinking that seek to change the world in emancipatory ways (Horkheimer, 1982).

[7] as Marx famously has put it; "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (Marx, 1969)

[8] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex.

perspectives are able to say about difference, power, and the relations between bodies, technologies and environments.

As I will discuss further in **section four**, the methodological approach I take draws on traditions within feminist social theory, critical anthropology and philosophy of science where ethnographic methods are blended with critical social theory[9]. Specifically I will use a multi-site ethnography, focusing on divergent cycling practices in each of India, the UK and the Netherlands. Rather than conducting a traditional comparative study, I will explore differences and consider cross-linkages in the constructions of urban cycling practices. Using participative video methods, I will aim also to act as a link and repository for sharing experience across contexts, in order also to consider the ways in which these differences themselves are constructed, perceived, interpreted and incorporated.

[9] This breaks down the binary between theory and praxis, as Howie has put it (on feminism): "bring[ing] together the somatic, living and experiencing body with critical social science" (Howie, 2010, p. 3).

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