The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities

The twenty-first century seems to be on the move, perhaps even more so than the last, with cheap travel and more than two billion cars projected worldwide for 2030. And yet, all this mobility is happening incredibly unevenly, at different paces and intensities, with varying impacts and consequences, to the extent that life on the move might be actually quite difficult to sustain environmentally, socially and ethically. As a result 'mobility' has become a keyword of the social sciences, delineating a new domain of concepts, approaches, methodologies and techniques which seek to understand the character and quality of these trends.

This Handbook explores and critically evaluates the debates, approaches, controversies and methodologies inherent to this rapidly expanding discipline. It brings together leading specialists from a range of backgrounds and geographical regions to provide an authoritative and comprehensive overview of this field, conveying cutting-edge research in an accessible way whilst giving detailed grounding in the evolution of past debates on mobilities. It illustrates disciplinary trends and pathways, from migration studies and transport history to communications research, featuring methodological innovations and developments and conceptual histories – from feminist theory to tourist studies. It explores the dominant figures of mobility, from children to soldiers and the mobility impaired; the disparate materialities of mobility such as flows of water and waste to the vectors of viruses; key infrastructures such as logistics systems to the informal services of megacity slums; and the important mobility events around which our world turns, from going on vacation to the commute, to the catastrophic disruption of mobility systems.

The text is forward-thinking, projecting the future of mobilities as they might be lived, transformed and studied, and possibly, brought to an end. International in focus, the book transcends disciplinary and national boundaries to explore mobilities as they are understood from different perspectives, different fields, countries and standpoints.

This is an invaluable resource for all those with an interest in mobility across disciplinary boundaries and areas of study.

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Introduction

On February 23, 2006, employees at each of Brooklyn Industries' four designer clothing stores in New York City arrived at work to find a message inscribed in etching fluid across their front display windows: "BIKE CULTURE NOT 4 SALE." The juxtaposition of the drippy phrase with the "tall bikes" featured prominently in the display cases must have seemed quite odd, if not totally confusing, to people passing by. In the weeks before the New York City alternative weekly newspaper, *Village Voice*, widely publicized the incident (Tucker, 2006), bike enthusiasts and critics were already immersed in online forums debating how and why the store's display of bicycles – handmade machines welded two-frames high, hence "tall" – sparked such a strong reaction. Suspicions were immediately cast on members of New York City's various bicycle gangs: groups known for transforming junked bicycles and scavenged parts into hand-welded mobile masterpieces known variously as "mutant bikes" or "freak bikes." People familiar with the inner workings of bike gangs like Chunk 666 or the Black Label Bicycle Club brought some interesting perspectives to bear on the Brooklyn Industries debacle. In particular, a handful of cyclists posting on blogs touched on the issue of cultural commodification, highlighting the manner in which Brooklyn Industries essentially co-opted an icon of anti-consumerism as a cheap marketing ploy (Seelie, 2006). Some commentators disagreed entirely and condemned the response as an act of subcultural elitism and misplaced aggression. Others were clearly just trying to get an answer to the question that non-bike-riders were undoubtedly asking themselves: just what the hell is *bike culture* and what does it have to do with these weird-looking machines?

While the graffiti and the ensuing media squabbles may not provide any definitive answer to the latter question, they undoubtedly hint at some of the ways in which the representation of bicycling and the uses of bicycles themselves are increasingly seen as issues worth debating and struggling over. Indeed, the junk-welding architects spotlighted by the Brooklyn Industries incident are just one part of a variegated network of bicycling enthusiasts that have been formulating new cultural practices and identities around urban cycling, and actively forging passionate counternarratives of mobility that seek to re-define the meaning of bicycle transportation. Among this group are sizeable numbers of punk rockers who, in recent decades,

generated grassroots support for bike riding that substantively influenced cycling trends and aesthetics in the US. In this chapter I call specific attention to the relationship between biking and punk culture because, as a constellation of geographically localized scenes, subcultural enclaves, ethics, and media texts, punk does some interesting and rather unique work in terms of orienting people toward a critical and often politicized engagement with both the bicycle and the norms of automobility. Along with a notable number of punks and ex-punks who have since become bicycling advocates, educators, builders, mechanics, and industry professionals, the set of practices and dispositions fostered through DIY punk have at times been explicitly pronounced across a range of urban cycling cultures. In what follows, I highlight some of the prominent narratives and practices that punks (and fellow DIY travellers) connected to bicycle transportation in the late 1990s and early 2000s in order to consider one of the ways in which cycling is made meaningful as a cultural practice. However, I want to begin by more clearly situating this essay within a theoretical framework informed by recent scholarship on bicycling and mobilities.

Bicycling and Mobilities Research

In addition to its function as a transportation technology, the bicycle – like the automobile – is an object that becomes meaningful through its relationships to an entire field of cultural practices, discourses, and social forces. These linkages, or what some cultural theorists call *articulations*, are not naturally occurring, nor are they due to the essence of the bicycle itself. Rather, people actively construct and modify these connections. Along with the act of cycling, communication is central to the process of making and unmaking of meaning around, and through, the bicycle. First and foremost, the bicycle itself can rightly be seen as a communications technology; it has historically served as a material link in a communications networks as well as a vehicle with which a cyclist can send the most basic 'message' of his or her own body. But more than that, cycling enthusiasts, bicycle manufacturers, and political activists are among those who have long imbued bicycles with symbolic meaning, whether as icons of women's liberation, symbols of environmentalism and radical politics, or even markers of one's cache as an urban 'hipster.' In conjunction with trade publications devoted to cycling, scholars have started to play a distinct role in this process by drawing attention to the ways in which cycling affects people's experience of space and place, their identities, their daily rhythms, and quite often, their political opinions about transportation and urban planning.

Through this emerging discourse bicycling is rendered visible as a practice that can be used to radically rethink not only the ensemble of materialities, temporalities, socialities, and geographies that co-constitute 'car culture,' but also the prevailing cultural common sense that sees automobility as either unproblematic, inherently desirable, or more often than not, as an incontrovertible fact of life: an almost 'natural' phenomenon. As Dave Horton writes, "the bicycle is not a mere appendage to 'business as usual,' but a vehicle which helps to re-evaluate, restructure and reorganize everyday life in contemporary societies" (2006: 51). In this same vein, Ben Fincham suggests that bicycling is a "potential resolution" to the tension between the idea of automobility (e.g. independence, freedom of movement) and the "the impossibilities of the car system" that often inhibit the very autonomy and efficient mobility thought to be guaranteed by and through the act of driving (2006: 209–210). The notion that bicycling can, in fact, play some role in delivering on the "broken promises of the automobile" (Hagman, 2006) has long animated the project of bike advocacy and infiltrated the common sense of bicycle workers and commuters alike. But in recent years this idea has become more apparent to a wider range of urban planning scholars, transportation historians,

and researchers situated in the interdisciplinary field of mobilities (Sheller, 2011). Indeed, as both an extension of and complement to the range of critical work on automobility and driving (Böhm, *et al.*, 2006), the burgeoning body of scholarship devoted to *vélomobility* speaks to some of the profound personal, sociocultural, and political dimensions of riding a bicycle, whether for everyday transportation or leisure (Vivanco, 2013; Furness, 2010; Horton *et al.*, 2007).

Mobilities researchers have rightfully rejected the notion of bicycling as an exclusively "rationalized and instrumental practice" (Spinney, 2009: 818), and have sought instead to interrogate the psychological, affective, and embodied aspects of cycling that, among other things, play a role in the formation of cycling subcultures and identities (Fincham, 2007). With the acknowledgement that bicyclists do not have a uniform set of needs that are "determined by the shared objective reality of being 'cyclists'" (Cox, 2005: 2), critical scholars recognize the importance of understanding some of the nuanced ways in which bike riders conceptualize their practice, articulate their desires, and make sense of the social and cultural dimensions of mobility. Ethnography has been an effective tool for producing such knowledge, but it has thus far been limited in its capacity to reflect upon the diverse and otherwise constitutive roles that communication actually plays in framing the image of the bicycle in both popular culture and in the everyday lives of bike riders. Without diminishing its value as a necessary research tool, I would simply argue that the discourses of cyclists and bike advocates need to be brought to the fore because they are as crucial to the project of envisioning a more sustainable future as they are invaluable to those of us interested in understanding how bicycling can also be a means for imagining "potential *presents*" (Aldred and Jungnickel, 2012: 536). Yet, with few notable exceptions (Furness, 2010; Pesses, 2010), there is little substantive engagement with the ever-growing archive of contemporary media produced by, for, and about cyclists.

By not taking seriously forms of communication that extend beyond select cycle advocacy campaigns, corporate news coverage of bicycling, and statements limited to those recorded by ethnographers, scholars end up implicitly (though perhaps unwittingly) trivializing the role that cultural production plays in the production of culture and cultural identity. That is to say, they not only ignore the pantheon of media through which cyclists creatively and meaningfully express ideas about cycling; they also, by default, promote a deceivingly uncomplicated view of the process of representation itself. In direct contrast, I would argue that whether one seeks to theorize the social role of vélomobility or is focused on changing its image, it is imperative to critically analyze such processes, as well as the specific instances in which this cultural work is done.

Up the Bikes

"Riding your bike is punk," writes Kim Nolan in the debut issue of the now defunct publication *Punk Planet* (1994: 13). Her proclamation in the mid-1990s now reads somewhat prophetically, since bicycling emerged in the US as the punk mode of transportation de rigueur by 2001–2002, or at the very least, the preferred mode of urban mobility within the loose-knit Do-it-Yourself (DIY) punk scene: the vestige of punk's counterculture that could best be characterized by its scrappy aesthetics, anti-corporate politics, anarchist leanings, and passionate support for independent media production and participatory institutions. Bikes are popular amongst this crowd in part because they are cheap, easy to fix, fun to ride, and allow for a great deal of autonomy: they are the DIY solution to everyday transportation. Yet bicycling also resonates with the ethics, feelings, lifestyle choices, and politics that inform not only people's

identities as punks but also the music, writing, art, and indeed the entire set of practices that co-constitute punk as a cultural formation. At the risk of over-generalizing, people who ride bikes and identify as punks tend to see distinct analogies between alternative transportation, alternative media production, and modes of cultural resistance rooted in the rejection of dominant social norms and consumerist values. The Dutch Provo, who aligned themselves with anarchists, antiwar activists, beatniks, freaks, and the like, actually articulated this 'punk' disposition as far back as the 1960s when describing their allies as a worldwide "Provotariat," who dwell in "carbon-monoxide-poisoned asphalt jungles": they are the people who "don't want a career, who lead irregular lives, *who feel like cyclists on a motorway*" (1966). While an apt metaphor, this sentiment is also a truism for many contemporary dissidents who, like the Provo, actually *are* the cyclists on the motorway. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the DIY punk underground has spawned an array of politicized (if not politically disorganized) cyclists who are passionate about car-free living, technical skill sharing, and the idea of gaining some independence from both the auto and oil industries. Indeed, within certain punk scenes, bikes are as integral to punk culture as seven-inch records, tattoos, and weird haircuts.

DIY punk has a long history of advocating alternatives to the dominant norms of consumer culture, whether in the form of protest and direct action, or more often, through practices that could be best described as politically motivated or aspirational. That is to say, while the object of radical transformation may be structural in nature, punk politics are often focused first and foremost on the transformation of oneself, in terms of grappling with one's position as a political subject and a social actor. In this context, biking is a comfortable fit with a disposition that sees 'the personal' and 'the political' as a dialectic that begins at the corporeal level. "The body," artist Jimmy Baker notes, "has always been central to punk culture," and he describes the pro-bicycle stance of his former band, the Awakening, as a way of "creating a resistant energy against the fog of subscribing to a petroleum answer" (2008). One can similarly see this personal-as-political-as-bodily sentiment in songs composed by other pro-bicycle punk bands, such as the UK's Red Monkey: "It could be so much better on our wheels, on our axles/Our fuel . . . so renewable/Our muscles . . . so sustainable! (1999). Biking, in this sense, is seen as an extension of the DIY ethos – a way of asserting oneself by making one less reliant on "bosses, mechanics, and oil companies" (Boerer, 2007).

While punk politics tend to stress the role of individual autonomy, it is part of a paradigm that, despite its contradictions and limitations, is intricately tied up with both an egalitarian sensibility and a broader desire for social change. Indeed, in roughly fifty interviews I conducted with bike-riding punks between 2003 and 2008, the vast majority connected bicycling to both the politics espoused within DIY punk culture and to a broader set of political issues including environmental pollution, US oil wars (at the time, in Iraq), and capitalism itself. Whether biking became or is now an authentically 'punk' or 'subcultural' activity is hardly my concern, but what *is* interesting is that an 'eco-friendly' mode of transportation somehow became normalized in pockets of a van-propelled subculture once steeped in anti-hippie rhetoric and an alienated sense of 'No Future.'

Bikes in Punk Music and Zines

Beginning in the late 1990s, bike riding and bicycles became prevalent themes in the lyrics and imagery of dozens of DIY punk bands in the US, such as Fifteen, RAMBO, Dead Things, Latterman, Japanther, and This Bike is a Pipe Bomb – a band whose stickers still adorn many bicycles throughout the country and occasionally prompt irrational, if not amusing, responses from police departments and bomb squads. Self-styled "bike

punks" in the US, the UK, and beyond were not the first to pay homage to bicycles in song, but their melodies and lyrics have a markedly different tone than Queen's operatic "Bicycle Race" or Syd Barrett's psychedelic musings on Pink Floyd's "Bike." For example, Divide & Conquer was one of the many hardcore (punk) bands to convey a radical environmentalist critique of automobility that, while slightly tongue-in-cheek, is a sincere response to the everyday frustrations of being a bike rider in a car culture, both literally and metaphorically:

> Trash the El Camino because the kids are ready to ride
> Go two-wheeled disaster! Shout it out: Bike Pride!
> Pissing every car off, we'll call them nasty names
> Extend the middle finger and ride in every lane
> Bike Punx!
> With freedom on our minds and wrenches in our hands
> Fuck highway construction, let's go take the land
> We'll peddle through the cities, this war cry we will send
> When internal combustion meets the bitter end
> Bike Punx!
>
> *(1996)*

Whether in earnest or as part of symbolic fantasies that see bike riders navigating post-apocalyptic/post-automobile landscapes (The Awakening, 2003; RAMBO, 2002), smelting millions of cars into bicycles (Fifteen, 1996), or calling for the head of Henry Ford (Divide & Conquer, 1999), the articulation of bicycling to a resistance identity – a punk ethos – is one of the means by which cyclists validate their personal experiences and opinions by "authorizing themselves to speak" and by "making public" their voices (Atton, 2002: 67–68). As Chris Atton notes, political dissidents frequently utilize independent, 'alternative' media to construct a resistance identity for themselves, but in most of the bike-centric media produced within the DIY punk scene the emphasis is placed more squarely on how the practice of cycling, rather than bicyclists' singular identities, is that which is "marginalized, devalued or stigmatized by dominant forces" (2002: 68). Like Divide & Conquer, the Philadelphia hardcore band RAMBO similarly articulated a resistance identity – a punk ethos – to anarchist politics and bicycle transportation. One of their self-described odes to bike militancy is a song called "U-Lock Justice" that includes the lines "For every time I hear them say/'Get the fuck out of the way,' / I will defend my right of way / That heap of steel I'm gonna slay" (2000).

Punk music can clearly serve as an outlet for venting pent-up aggression, as well as a forum for expressing radical perspectives on biking and car culture, albeit in brief stanzas, short bursts of energy, and with more than a little irony. But bands professing an interest in bikes also vary significantly in terms of their musical styles, the kind of songs they write, and the aspects of DIY punk culture to which they explicitly or tacitly connect cycling. That is to say, while a dissonant hardcore band like Zegota makes a political plea for humanity to "pedal away from global decay" (1999), other punks have penned upbeat songs about bike lanes (Dead Things, 2002), vagabond bicycle treks with friends (The Blank Fight, 2002), and the unique and sometimes contradictory perspectives that cycling lends to the experience of a city. Aaron Elliot, a veteran punk drummer, conveys this sensibility in his lyrics to "West Side Highway":

> As I ride, I can feel the street
> Like a river, it flows rapidly

Through the city, it propels
Me towards a tragic, bloody crash, oh well
An inch from death seems to be
The only place to find some peace
The only place to ride a bike and
Feel alive and find a sense of pride
And dignity.

(Pinhead Gunpowder, 2008)

Like Elliot, who is probably most well-known as the self-published author of *Cometbus*, many of the people involved in DIY punk similarly express themselves through (and are also the audiences for) fanzines, or 'zines': homemade, photocopy-produced publications that are either sold for a small fee, given away, or traded between zine writers. Prior to the development of both interactive online publishing and social media, zines were – and in many cases still are – a means of communication for bicyclists who either lack the resources, ability, or desire to publish articles through mass media outlets. Unlike the truncated format of song lyrics, bike zines published throughout the last two decades provide a venue in which to construct a more complex narrative about both the individual and cultural aspects of bicycling. Specifically, riders often explore entirely different dimensions of bicycling and car culture than one would typically find in US media, most notably that of adults using bicycles for creative, fun, utilitarian and/or humanitarian purposes. Whether as venues for documenting advocacy (Biel, 2008) or spaces for analyzing the gendered dynamics of bike culture (Blue, 2010; Jackson, 2007), zines fill an important void for adults who ride bicycles but may not identify as 'cyclists' in the conventional sense. At the same time, the subjective, personalized qualities of zines – much like the plethora of bike blogs that now dot the Internet – highlight the benefits of bicycle transportation in ways that bring it squarely within the framework of everyday life. These mediated spaces serve a distinctly pedagogical function and they can also open up channels of communication through which new communities of cyclists are constituted (Carlsson, 2008: 117–118).

Re-Writing/Riding the City

Despite the variety of ways in which bicycling has been and continues to be connected with countercultural ethics and politics, one of the strongest thematic commonalities between punk songs, zines, and a range of media produced in DIY bike culture (e.g. blogs, cartoons, poster art, and documentary films) is the emphasis on bicycling as a tool for rethinking urban mobility, space, and place. Alternative media prove a fertile ground for mapping the emotional and cognitive geographies of bicycling; one can look to these texts to better understand the how bicycling – especially using a bike for everyday transportation – produces a unique urban subjectivity and facilitates a heightened awareness of one's habitat. For the everyday rider, one's world often becomes re-articulated around and through one's bicycle as spaces become instinctively mapped in terms of their bikeability:

Anywhere you want to go in Gainesville, you can probably get there from the intersection of university and main on bike in 20 minutes. From my house it's fifteen minutes to Ward's grocery, fifteen to No Idea, eight to Wayward Council Records, ten to school, twelve to my friends at the ranch.

(Scenery and Fristoe, 2001: 82–83)

DIY media constitute a small but productive symbolic space in which cyclists reflect upon, and make meaning of, their own relationships to the city. Significantly, these narratives construct "shadow maps" (Duncombe, 1997: 59) of cities that document the amalgam of routes, flows, and spaces performed by cyclists both within, and outside of, the purview of automobility. This dialectic of bicycling and representation engenders an acute experience of place, inasmuch as it fosters localized knowledge(s) and personal connections to specific neighborhoods, and at times, entire cities. Erik Ruin, a printmaker and author of the *Trouble in Mind* zine, writes:

> There's a way of knowing a city that's very particular to biking through it. The slowness allows you to really see things, even to stop and look. The speed gives you some safety and a distance that's really conducive to fluid thought.

In their song "Bikes and Bridges," the band Defiance, Ohio speaks to the emotional/affective aspects of this dynamic:

> Even Columbus looks better on the back seat of a bike
> All my fears get washed away in a stream of blinking lights
> And the concrete strip below seems less like a noose
> And more like a tie that binds or at least a tourniquet.
>
> *(2004)*

One could argue that the process of re-thinking the city through the bicycle is as much discursive as it is physically performative: it takes place through the production and dissemination of songs, films, online communiqués, zines, and artwork in which people reflect on the ways in which bicycling shapes their experience of urban life. Lee Williams gestures toward this bicycle–city reciprocity in *Cranked*, a zine devoted to bike culture in the Northwest:

> As urban cyclists we are intimately engaged with our city's neighborhoods in a way automobile commuters may never experience . . . For the cyclist, these myriad aspects of the city are immediate and tactile, not concealed behind steel and glass.
>
> *(n.d.: 46)*

While admittedly a highly romanticized view of bicycling, Williams expresses the sentiments of cyclists who see biking not simply as a transportation choice but a way to radically realign perception and one's entire way of seeing. Bicycling, in the simplest terms, transforms 'out there' to 'right here,' inasmuch as it disarticulates autonomous mobility from the privatized experience of the automobile and rearticulates it to a more visceral experience of the urban. This process does not always foster a more 'authentic' engagement with the city, as so many cyclists would have it, but it necessarily forces a different kind of engagement. In this sense, bicycling is also a social experiment that can cultivate not only a keen awareness of one's 'right to the city' but also one's right to *experience* the city:

> I feel about this city [New Orleans] the way one dreams of feeling about the perfect love affair. I feel connected, forgiving, in full admiration and acceptance for its beauty and its shortcomings. I never thought I could feel this way about a place . . . it struck me that the things I love about this city are things I may not have noticed or appreciated enough if it weren't for my mode of transportation, my lovely bicycle.
>
> *(Jackson, 2007: 1)*

Unlike some of the well-documented frustrations that cyclists endure while adjusting to the rhythms and flows of auto traffic, the larger process of conforming one's mobility, as well as one's cognitive map to the contours of the urban landscape can be a fascinating experience. Somewhere within this process of *performing the city* (Jones, 2005) bike riders find their own rhythms and flows, and create news ways to both explore and celebrate the ludic qualities of cycling as well.

Conclusion

While there is much more one could say about the urban narratives and perspectives on space and place documented in alternative cycling media, I draw attention to this specific theme because it brings into focus several points that I want to make about the significance of bicycling and DIY punk culture more broadly. First, as I argued from the outset of this essay, scholars interested in analyzing bicycling as a sociocultural form of mobility need to start taking seriously the discourses and media produced by cyclists, and to try and better understand how they are interconnected to/with cycling practices in specific cultural contexts. In this regard, the excerpted zines and lyrics in the last section provide some distinct observations that bike riders make about urban mobility, whether in describing how they see and interpret cities from a different vantage point than drivers – through the "wrong lens," as Spinney puts it (2007: 30) – or by revealing some of the nuanced ways in which bicycling functions as a form of negotiation where "social norms, cultures of interaction, and identity" (Jensen, 2010: 401) are produced through peoples' engagement with their environments. That is to say, even within this small sample of narratives one finds insights about the importance of urban space/place in subcultural cycling discourses that are not only valuable unto themselves, but also significantly engaged with some of the same issues that researchers take pains to highlight when analyzing the cultural dimensions of mobilities (Furness, 2007).

But more specifically, one does not have to look very hard to find abundant examples of punk bands and zine writers that give voice to the affective dimensions of cycling that are, to date, under-appreciated and under-examined. In the examples above, I wanted to briefly show how within DIY punk culture bicycling becomes meaningful as part of a "network of empowerment," or what Lawrence Grossberg calls an *affective alliance*: "an organization of concrete material practices and events, cultural forms and social experience which both opens up and structures the space of our affective investments in the world" (1984: 227). DIY punk culture, as I have tried to illustrate here, creates the conditions of possibility in which biking not only 'makes sense' (politically, socially, financially) to punks, but more importantly, is seen as a desirable and exciting practice that strongly resonates with DIY ethics, attitudes, and orientations; for example, punk's celebration of localism, place, and the 'nitty gritty' details that make cities feel like home.

The articulation of bicycle transportation to DIY punk ethics is significant not only for how it positions biking as a way of "Doing Mobility Yourself" but also for the way it offers an alternative to the dominant representational strategies of formal bike advocacy, both in terms of production and distribution (grassroots circulation vs. strategic marketing campaigns). Furthermore, punks' appropriation of bicycling offers a useful example for understanding some of the ways in which cultural narratives and practices not only shape transportation habits and identities, but can also point people toward more substantive engagements with issues that are by no means reducible to transportation alone. One can certainly debate the impact of such efforts, but one of the main points is that it is impossible to draw such conclusions without considering how and in what ways bicycling is represented

and made meaningful. Critical researchers must attend to these discourses dialectically in order to understand the ways in which they fit into a web of articulations and affective alliances that provide foundations upon which cycling identities, knowledges, and practices are constructed and transformed in everyday life.

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