Guest Editorial: Critical Vélomobilities

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Journal of Transport Geography

The papers in this collection were inspired by a series of special sessions of the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG). Sponsored by the Transport Geography Specialty Group of the AAG, these sessions were organized to address an observed gap in cycling research. Though academics have known that mobilities lie "at the center of constellations of power, the creation of identities and the microgeographies of everyday life" (Cresswell, 2011, 551) since the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences in the late 1980s, a more critical gaze had yet to be adequately adopted in cycling research. Therefore, the purpose of this special issue is to bring together research on "Critical Vélomobilities", i.e., research that situates the bicycle in social life, and situates people and places within the world of cycling.

Preparations for the sessions and this special issue began well before the global COVID-19 pandemic and in advance of the most recent justifiable outrage and groundswell of public action centred on anti-Black racism, particularly in the U.S. In other words, the historical context within which this issue was conceived and ultimately published reflects a time prior to pandemic (re)actions; prior to the more intensive investment and rapid rollout of supportive, temporary or permanent, cycling infrastructure we have observed in some cities; prior to supply chain disruption in a cycling industry struggling to meet arguably unparalleled explosive growth in the demand for cycles. Our work on the sessions and this issue was also set in a time of broader complacency surrounding policy brutality and anti-Black racism. However, the events that spawned more recent outrage (i.e., the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor) are not unique to this moment in time. We are taking the opportunity then, to use this editorial to briefly consider more recent activity in cycling communities centred on the aforementioned issues, and how it fits into the theme Critical Vélomobilities.

In terms of the pandemic response, restricting mobility has been a key tool used to prevent the spread of the virus: globally citizens have been encouraged to stay home and to only leave for essential travel. Social and economic discrepancies in who can work from the safety of their homes, as well as who has the means to travel in a physically distanced way for those essential trips, quickly became apparent (Deng et al., 2020). The World Health Organization guidance for moving around during the pandemic instructed "whenever feasible, consider riding bicycles or

walking" (WHO, 2020). These modes emerged as affordable and safe travel options, both in terms of virus transmission and as a way to engage in physical activity when other options were not available (i.e., organized team sports, gymnasiums, and workout classes). There was a consequent bike boom in many cities worldwide. In Toronto, for instance, many bike shops saw a surge in sales and repairs, the bike share system experienced a spike in ridership, and the city council quickly approved twenty-five kilometres of temporary bike lanes (Farooqui, 2020). Alongside these cycling-specific initiatives, planners and political actors put in place ways to give residents space to safely enjoy being outdoors, such as quiet shared streets and closing streets to car traffic (Fischer & Winters, in press). A question remains as to whether these initiatives will fundamentally change the philosophy of how we design streets, or will wane as the public health crisis subsides.

In regard to cycling and racism, the reaction of the cycling industry has been interesting to observe. In the presence of the groundswell of broader public attention given to anti-Black racism, the industry has been back pedaling to rapidly attempt to embrace "diversity", working quickly to re-cast itself as a place with diversity. While its actions can be read in different ways, we note how the conversation has or should force a revision of thinking about the relationship between cycling and "freedom". Cycles have long been cast as "freedom machines", liberating some women from socio-spatial and sartorial confinement during the 19th century, and affording the user an ability to travel anywhere under their own steam (Garvey, 1995; Kossuth & Wamsley, 2003; Mackintosh & Norcliffe, 2007; Strange & Brown, 2002). However, the stark reality is that static, fixed forms of racism, sexism, and misogynistic beliefs and actions translate quite readily into the mobile realm. For instance, like many others (see: Lubitow, 2019), all authors of this editorial have experienced some form of gendered harassment while cycling, be it getting cat-called[1], shamed for cycling while pregnant, or called homophobic terms. Further, we have seen images of police in the U.S. using their Trek bicycles as tools to control or threaten Black Lives Matter protestors (Cycling News, 2010; Rosen, 2020)—and although the militarization of cycling is as old as the cycle itself, this particular application is relatively unique (Rosen, 2020). While Trek reacted, following external pressure, to condemn such actions, the bicycle remains a tool that has been militarized by police.

[1] Though we have experienced cat-calling while cycling, we also see cycling as a way to escape harassment such as groping (e.g.,, on crowded public transit), being followed, or having to deal with other unwanted male attention (e.g., being engaged in conversation while, say, waiting for transit).

Legacy cycling periodicals like "Bicycling" magazine, and "BikeMAG" magazine have also recently provided fora for conversations about race and cycling (Bicycling, 2020; Olzer, 2020a). In her brilliant multipart series for BikeMAG, "Why Representation Matters", cyclist Rachel Olzer (she/her, they/them), the co-founder of @pedal2thepeople, discusses the role of cycling in BIPOC communities, the absence of Black people in cycling and outdoor recreation communities, and the flipside of this: —the historical dominance of cycling by white men, and more recently white women. In the third part of the series, she argues that unlike the relationship between whiteness and cycling, the act of cycling among Black cyclists cannot be separated from sociopolitical life. In this regard, she raises two key questions that we reproduce here, as a mechanism to generate conversation among the readers of this issue: "How can Black and brown people ever feel safe riding around a city with such rampant police violence?" and "When will people understand that riding a bike is intimately connected to state-sanctioned violence?" (Olzer, 2020b). We would add a third question: How can cycling equal freedom when, in the words of Rachel Olzer, "the threat of death lurks around every corner?" (Olzer, 2020b). She wrote those words in reference to the police murders of Jamar Clark in 2015 and Philando Castille in 2016 (like George Floyd, these murders also occurred in Minneapolis). She also emphasizes how the death of Dijon Kizzee by Los Angeles police following an alleged cycling violation draws into focus precisely the relationship between Blackness, policing, and violence (Olzer, 2020b). These cases serve to remind us again that the events of recent months are not a new occurrence.

Although none of the papers in this Critical Vélomobilities special issue engage deeply with cycling and policing[2], this special issue offers critical standpoints on cycling safety. Bonham, Johnson and Haworth (2020) examine the ways in which cyclists are constructed as 'hazards' in Australia. Specifically, the study reports the results of a discourse analysis completed on Australian road safety literature published between 1900 and 2017. In the mid-twentieth century, they identify a shift in this literature where drivers stopped being identified as 'hazards' and instead became perceivers of 'hazards'. Here, cyclists began being commonly listed as the 'hazards' to drivers. Ravensbergen, Buliung, & Laliberté (2020) offer a critical analysis of cyclist safety as well, this time by providing an in-depth exploration of the fears reported by new cyclists. They find that these fears change over time, across place, and are shaped by axes of social difference. Notably,

[2] Some participants in Ravensbergen, Buliung & Laliberte (2020) shared their fear of getting in trouble with law enforcement, but the topic was not a major theme of the study

they explore the ways in which women's fear of personal safety and injury can be produced by patriarchal power relations. Gadsby et al. (2021) also examine cycling safety, this time by focusing on cyclists' stated stress. This mixed-methods study explores the interactions of attitudes, percieved stress levels, and sensor data in two contrasting cities: Atlanta, Georgia, USA, and Delft, the Netherlands. Like Ravensbergen et al. (2020), results support the importance of motor vehicle interaction on stress, but also points to other significant sources, in this case pavement conditions. Cycling stress is also discussed in van Lierop et al. (2020) which explores the wayfinding experiences of people using e-bikes, an emergent cycling technology, on cycle highways. They used a combination of qualitative methods including ride-along videos, field observations, and semi-structured interviews to explore whether current wayfinding design standards are appropriate on these new infrastructures and technologies. The authors identify specific improvements that can be made to improve cyclists' navigation, comfort, and stress.

Numerous papers in this special issue explore the politics of creating bikeable places. Wilson and Mitra (2020) examine these politics at the municipal scale through the analysis of interviews with municipal planners and engineers working in the field of cycling in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. They identify principal strategies used to gain political support for cycling infrastructure projects, and argue that the dominance of automobility in the region, and Western culture more broadly, is the ultimate barrier to political support for the cycling city. Soliz (2021) takes an ethnographic approach to exploring the politics of the transportation space within the state of Aguascalientes, Mexico, characterizing 'divergent infrastructure'—the temporary bridges, improvised technologies, and alternative pathways—that people who cycle are required to construct when they live in low-income communities widely excluded from cycling investment and subject to systemic mobility injustices. Scott (2020) also considers the politics of cycling, this time at scale of the nation. Drawing on a national survey, Scott (2020) examines how respondents in different Canadian provinces perceive cycling as a common good. Results indicate that this support varied widely across Canadian regions, and these differences are put in conversation with the country's regionalized political cultures, including their histories, ideologies, and relationships with fossil fuels.

Several of the articles in this special issue explicitly focused on equity—highly relevant in the context of 2020. Doran, El-Geneidy, and Manaugh. (2021) foreground equity in the planning and creating of bikeable places, querying if and how equity is considered in transportation plans in

Canadian cities. Their in-depth analysis of plans from 16 Canadian cities found that, with few exceptions, city plans engaged in addressing or operationalizing equity in a limited capacity. Their article proposes recommendations to advance the pursuit of cycling equity in planning practices, focusing on process, engagement, and strengthening partnerships between researchers and practitioners to enhance tools and evaluations incorporating equity considerations. Lachapelle et al (2021) consider equity by focusing on an understudied, high-risk cycling population: commercial cyclists. This growing group, comprised of food delivery workers, moving companies, and couriers, has garnered much attention in 2020, widely acknowledged as a group of essential workers with few safety protections (Toronto Star, 2020). Lachapelle et al's work, based on interviews conducted in 2016 and 2017, highlights foundational health and safety issues that even preceded additional pressures and risks COVID-19 has introduced. Vietinghoff (in press)'s qualitative research on cycling and equity identifies barriers to cycling in marginalized communities in Grenoble, France. Key barriers to cycling included racism, financial precarity, a lack of accessible information about services, and spatial inequalities. Their results point to ways in which the city can consider inclusivity in their cycling programs and policies, something current lacking both at the municipal and national scale.

Finally, two of the articles examine linkages *between* individual cycling behaviour and planning/politics using Shove and colleagues' (2012) social practice theory to bridge individuals, social structure, and the intricacies of daily life. Both Bruno & Nikolaeva (2020) and Sersli et al. (2020) apply social practice theory to understand everyday mobility as embedded in socio-material conditions and other life practices, which can make mobility practices difficult to shift, even when individual attitudes toward bicycling are positive. The paper by Sersli et al. (2020) focuses on the bicycling experiences of mothers and their caregiving responsibilities, thus addressing a notable gap in bicycling research despite the well-known bicycling gender disparity. Bruno & Nikolaeva (2020) compare two national bicycling policies enacted in the Netherlands. In theDutch context, the authors propose that policy focusing on existing cyclists can be as effective as targeting prospective cyclists (in this case, drivers) to start cycling.

Thinking reflexively and critically about the content of this issue, while cycling experiences across axes of social difference was a topic discussed (e.g., see Sersli et al. (2020) and Ravensbergen et al. (2020) on gender and cycling), only Vietinghoff (in press) and Doran et al. (2021) discuss cycling experiences in racialized communities. Therefore, cycling and race, or

cycling and Blackness, did not emerge as a major theme within our sessions and many not be adequately represented in this issue, despite our desire to engage in a critical reading of cycling as a contemporary phenomenon. Returning to cycling and transport research more broadly, we argue that more work is needed to de-center "whiteness" in cycle planning and scholarship. With important exceptions (e.g., Barajas, 2018, Hylton, 2017, Lubitow et al., 2019, and Steinbach et al., 2011 on race/ethnicity and cycling, or Hoffman, 2016, Lugo, 2018, and Stehlin, 2019 on cycling and gentrification), the cycling "canon" has largely been dominated by historical writing about invention and innovation, the liberating potential of cycles for the privileged (white) class, the benefits of active transportation infrastructure for health and urban life, cycling safety, and supporting more people to cycle. As we move forward from 2020, there is still an urgent need to engage with Critical Vélomobilities; to continue deeply reflecting on questions of unequal mobile power relations, and ultimately on how to plan for cycling in ways that support and represent everyone.

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