Velo-mobile atmospheres: capturing and representing the multi-sensual cycling experience

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A study to understand cycling among the older population in the UK and how this affects independence, health and wellbeing.

Develop a better understanding of how the design of our towns and cities, and bicycle technology, is shaping older people’s experience of cycling

Create a toolkit for policy makers and practitioners to support and promote older cycling
Mixed Methods

“The complexity of our research problems calls for answers beyond simple numbers in a quantitative sense or words in a qualitative sense. A combination of both forms of data provides the most complete analysis of problems. Researchers situate numbers in the contexts and words of participants, and they frame the words of participants with numbers, trends, and statistical results. Both forms of data are necessary today.”

Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research
The Mobility Turn & Velomobilities

Mobilities Turn

Disillusionment with narrow range of methods

Traditional methods divorced from context

Focus on the instrumental and lack of attention to the experiential

Failure to register the corporeal, embodied aspects of mobility e.g. kinaesthetic & sensory aspects and less animated passive mobilities.

“New mobilities paradigm’ places mobile practices and cultures at the centre of social processes and to explore mobile bodies in mobile contexts requires a range of approaches that diverge from traditional methodological approaches.”

Sheller and Urry (2006a, 2006b)

“Mobility not just merely movement between point A and B. Mobility is inscribed with meaning by those who interpret and make sense of it. Constructed through different contexts and positions.”

(Cresswell, 2006)
“My discipline [Cultural Anthropology] has not, in fact, taken the bicycle seriously.”

Luis A. Vivanco (2013) Reconsidering the Bicycle: An Anthropological Perspective on a New (Old) Thing.

“…a call to take the experience of cycling seriously in urban design. This involves moving beyond a concern with safe and convenient facilities and complete networks to a more substantial interest in the experience of the environment from a cyclist’s point of view.”

Forsyth & Klizek (2013) Urban Design: is there a Distinctive View from the Bicycle? J Urban Design 16:4
Grasping Velomobile Atmospheres

Interest in the situatedness and contextual nature of the lived experience.

Go-along/shadowing vs talking through practices as they happen.

Difficulties riding with in urban contexts in the UK.

Follow-along - observation and VEI: See what they do & see what they say they do.

Grasping Visual Atmosphere

“...while images should not necessarily replace words as the dominant mode of research or representation, they should be regarded as equally meaningful element of ethnographic work.”

Visual anthropologist Sarah Pink (2007; pp4-5)
Grasping Acoustic Atmosphere

Attunement to ‘soundcycling’ as per established practice of ‘soundwalking’

(e.g. Hall et al. (2008) Sound and the Everyday in Qualitative Research Qualitative Inquiry 14:6)

“’Reality Audio’...the unconditionally true presentation of the sound that we hear.”
Stan Meyer

http://stanmeyer.com/blog/2670/becoming‐binaural/

Representing Urban Atmospheres

Enmeshing quantitative with qualitative approaches & techniques to ‘enable bodies to speak for themselves’.

Mobile Video Ethnography (MVE) in combination with bio-sensing to elicit more detailed and more pre-personal intensities of feeling.

Create new narratives around intensity of affects in relation to other phenomena.

Representing Affective Velomobile Atmospheres

Velomobilities – Field Equipment

**Researcher:**
- Lapel microphone for commentary
- Forward-facing action camera

**Participant:**
- Binaural microphones inside windjammers
- Portable EEG device
- Smartphone to record EEG
- Forward facing action camera
- GPS
- Proximity sensor
Post-ride Video Elicitation Interview

Strategies and tactics:
- route choice
- road position manoeuvres
- transgressions
- infrastructure
- environment

Experience:
- sensory
- affective
- social

Traces: Spatiality and temporality of atmospheres

Sheryl: Shopping
Cecil: Social visit
James: Exercise
Conceptualising Velomobile Atmospheres

Jensen’s Staging Mobilities
Cyclescapes and atmospheric attunement

“An atmosphere is not an inert context but a force field in which people find themselves.”


Thinking about ‘cyclescapes’ using Humphry Osmond’s concepts from Socio-architecture/Environmental Psychology.

‘Sociofugal’ - push people away.

‘Sociopetal’ - draw people and activities in.

Velomobile Atmospheres
Cases
Journey from Work City to suburbs 15 years ‘Steady & skilled’
Sean’s Route Rationale
Different atmospheres and response:

Attentiveness versus ‘Vegging out’
Sociality: ‘Cycle Socializing’
Performativity: ‘Normality of cycling’
Materiality: Buildings
Affect & wellbeing – difficulty in articulating.
Vivien’s account highlights...

- an attempt to create own atmosphere through space (and time);
- that this is achievable up to a point,
- but is relational - configured by other moving bodies/things; and,
- conditioned by norms of behaviour [e.g. wearing earphones - contrast this with in-car atmospheres].
Cycling Atmosphere bound up in ‘System of Automobility’

“People inhabit congestion, jams, temporal uncertainties and health-threatening city environments, as a consequence of being encapsulated in a domestic, cocooned, moving capsule.” (page 28)

“...the body of the car provides an extension of the human body, surrounding the fragile, soft and vulnerable human skin with a new steel skin, albeit one that can scratch, crumple and rupture once it encounters other cars in a crash (see Brottman, 2001, on ‘car crash culture’). Within the private cocoon of glass and metal intense emotions are released in forms otherwise unacceptable (see Michael, 1988, on road rage).” (page 31)

Atmosphere requiring ‘Affective Capacities’

On cycling in London...

“There is a general lesson here. From outside perspective, cycling in London appears very dangerous, but people that cycle daily acquire the required affective capacities to be relatively safe in a[n] otherwise cycling hostile environment.”

Atmosphere Conditions Identity

Cyclists’ identities and practices have been shaped by acclimatizing to current hostile cycling conditions to the extent that they sometimes struggle to understand why more people don’t cycle. In so doing, they inadvertently perpetuate their identity as part of a ‘velomobile elite’.

Reshaping Velomobile Atmospheres

The Hovenring is a suspended bicycle path roundabout on the border between Eindhoven and Velthoven in the Netherlands. It is the first suspended bicycle roundabout in the world.

“Travelling is traditionally considered an unfortunate necessity, a ‘waste of time’ to be minimized. Yet recreational travel is widespread, and ordinary routes could be designed to make travelling a delight, and not just an necessity.”

Kevin Lynch, City Sense and City Design (1996, p170)
Thank you!

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