

‘Our most popular means of transportation’: Dutch bicycle historiography in an international perspective

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The Netherlands has long been viewed as a bicycling country. People from abroad will consider the prevalence of bicycles in this country as characteristic of Dutch culture as tulips, polders and windmills. In this respect the familiar photo of the Dutch queen riding a bicycle is a telling illustration. It only helps to underscore that there are good reasons for this image of the Netherlands as a bicycling country. While after the Second World War the use of bicycles strongly declined in most Western countries, it continued to be high in the Netherlands. The annual ‘transport performance’ of the bicycle, or the number of kilometers traveled per bicyclist, was surpassed in this country by the automobile only in 1960, but it continued to be comparatively high afterward, and until 1990 even higher than that of the train.¹ In the decade after the Second World War the Netherlands developed the largest bicycle density in the world.² The special position of the bicycle as an everyday means of transportation, however, is not reflected by the research on modern Dutch mobility history. For instance, in the long awaited handbooks on national transportation and mobility history after 1800, written by Ruud Filarski and Gijs Mom and published in late 2008, the millions of Dutch bicyclists came off badly. From a total of nearly 1000 pages the authors devoted less than five consecutive pages to the bicycle (as well as a large number of remarks scattered throughout the book).³ Evidently, in their coverage of the twentieth century these authors have decided to put the automobile center-stage.

Also more generally Dutch researchers seem to have had little interest in the history of bicycling and the bicycle. Since 1990 the annual *International Cycling History Conference* (ICHC) has been organized by and for an international community of experts, including more and more academic researchers. In 1999 this symposium in fact took place in the Netherlands, organized by the Velorama bicycle museum in Nijmegen. However, from over 370 conference contributions during the past twenty years only fifteen have come from Dutch contributors, of which only two had an academic background. Until recently it was impossible to find ICHC conference

¹ A.A. Albert de la Bruhèze and F.C.A. Veraart, *Fietsverkeer in praktijk en beleid in de twintigste eeuw* (The Hague 1999) 50.

² In 1939 Denmark still had a higher density than the Netherlands; see P.E. Staal, *Automobilisme in Nederland. Een geschiedenis van gebruik, misbruik en nut* (Zutphen 2003) 115.

³ G. Mom and R. Filarski, *De mobiliteitsexplosie, 1895-2005. Van transport naar mobiliteit 2* (Zutphen 2008) 55-59.

proceedings in major Dutch libraries, while the same holds true for many other international publications on the history of the bicycle.

While in countries such as France, Germany, Great-Britain, the United States and Canada there is academic interest in the history of bicycling, the subject appears hardly of interest to Dutch historians. Also the increased attention for national history and national heritage has not yet generated an interest in bicycles as a neglected aspect of Dutch cultural heritage. If the French series on *lieux de mémoire* contains an essay about the *Tour de France*, it is difficult to find traces of bicycles in Dutch *memory sites*. The Velorama ‘national bicycling museum’, set up in 1981, has a sizable and representative collection and documentation center, but it is a private initiative that is little known, receives no government funding, and is hardly recognized within Dutch academic circles. Bicycles, it seems, are too everyday and too uncontested in the Netherlands to serve as a topic of academic historical research. As a result, it continues to be ignored that this particular and characteristic bicycling tradition is the product of a specific historical development, rather than a self-evident matter. Moreover, as a growing number of foreign studies have shown, the rise and spread of bicycling involves a subject that throws much light on major aspects of modernity, including technological innovation, mobility and tourism, body culture and mass sports, nature and environmental awareness, democratic citizenship, emancipation and nationalism.

The basic aim of this article is to provide an overview of Dutch publications on the history of bicycles and bicycling. We arrange the topics addressed as falling into four main historical categories: technology and transportation history, economic and business history, sports history and social-cultural history. In our discussion we will juxtapose Dutch work on Dutch bicycle history with studies in these fields performed in other countries. At first sight, the field of Dutch bicycle history comes across as rather fertile. There are a few general and local histories of bicycles and bicycling; there are publications on the sector’s trade and special interest organizations (RAI (Bicycle and Automobile Industry), ANWB (General Dutch Bicyclists Association), and Fietsersbond (Bicyclists Association)); on bicycles and early women’s emancipation; on several major Dutch bicycle manufacturers; on bicycle taxes; on cycling as a sports; and, yes, even on the origin of the Dutch word for ‘bicycle’: *fiets*. Although most of these publications suggest a fascination for bicycles and bicycling, we will argue that they rarely start from specific scholarly concerns, systematic research or a critical processing of insights from international scholarship. Nor does most of this work show much attention for the historical relevance and the social-cultural context of bicycling. In fact, nearly all Dutch publications on bicycling are marked by a journalistic or popular history approach and their quality is generally much lower than that of a growing number of foreign studies, which do cover issues such as the historical importance and social meanings of bicycles. This is why this article, apart from offering an overview, also argues for more sustained historical research of what already in 1917 was characterized as ‘our most popular means of transportation.’

1. The beginnings of Dutch bicycle historiography

Those in search of sources on the history of bicycles and bicycling in the Netherlands will inevitably encounter the work of J.M. Fuchs and W.J. Simons. In a series of popular-historical publications from the 1960s until the 1980s this Amsterdam-based writers’ duo has definitely put the history of the bicycle in the Netherlands on the map. In 1946 Fuchs had written a dissertation, supervised by economic historian N.W.

Posthumus, on the history of ‘regular transportation’ on water and land between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the precursor of public transportation.⁴ Book trader and literary publisher Simons had a more literary interest and published, for instance, an anthology from Dutch poetry on bicycles.⁵ As professional writers, in 1964 Fuchs and Simons started to write for *Stichting Fiets!*, a bicycle sector lobby foundation.⁶

Fuchs and Simons built on several older publications. One of the major ones is *Veertig jaar*, a commemorative book issued in 1923 by the ANWB in which the then editor of the association’s journal *De Kampioen*, W.J. Lugard, described in detail the various activities of this major Dutch bicyclists and tourists association set up in 1883.⁷ In particular the campaigns for road construction, signposting and national traffic regulation are covered extensively here, but not in a very structured way.⁸ A second major source was the pioneering work from 1917 by the journalist George J.M. Hogenkamp, *Een halve eeuw wielersport*. This chronicle of over 700 pages on the emergence of bicycles and bicycling in the period 1867-1917 contains detailed annual overviews of Dutch (and foreign) cycling between 1883 and 1917 and an extensive list of brief biographies of Dutch participants in bicycle races. Moreover, based on observations from the first bicyclists, Hogenkamp described the introduction of the French Michaux velocipede in the Netherlands and the earliest spread of the bicycle, or, as he put it, ‘our most popular means of transportation.’⁹

As said, Fuchs and Simons heavily relied on the ANWB commemorative volume from 1923 and the work of Hogenkamp, but they also added elements of their own. Their most substantial publication on the history of bicycling appeared in 1968: *Voort in ‘t zadel kameraden! Een eeuw fietsen in Nederland*. In their description of the earliest known users, sellers and manufacturers of the velocipede in the Netherlands they closely followed the work of Hogenkamp, even if they did not acknowledge him as source. Further, they devoted chapters to the establishment and organization of bicycle schools (1869-1898, notably in Amsterdam), and they sketched the emergence of local bicycle clubs in the 1870s and 1880s, as well as the beginnings of the Nederlandsche Velocipèdisten-Bond in 1883 (renamed in 1885 as Algemeene Nederlandsche Wielrijders-Bond, or ANWB, and from 1900/1905 as ‘ANWB Toeristenbond voor Nederland’). They also discussed the development of cycling as a sports, the popularity of ‘artistic cycling’ and indoor cycling, and the topic of ‘women (clothing) and bicycles’ around 1900. Fuchs’ particular interest in transportation regulation is evidenced by his major attention for bicycles and government policy as a theme: the book addresses regulation by local and national governments from 1869 until the enactment of the 1905 Motor and Bicycle Act, but also the bicycle taxes of the years 1898-1919 and 1924-1941,¹⁰ the establishment of bicycle paths (1885-1933),

⁴ J.M. Fuchs, *Beurt- en wagenveren* (dissertation, University of Amsterdam 1946).

⁵ W.J. Simons (ed.), *De fiets: een bloemlezing* (Baarn 1980).

⁶ According to the following webpage, written in part by Simons’ daughter: nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wim_Simons, retrieved on 2 February 2009.

⁷ W.J. L[ugard] (ed.), *Veertig Jaar [ANWB]* (The Hague [1923]).

⁸ A second commemorative book in the popular history mode appeared in 1983, without source or literature references: D. Schaap, *Een eeuw wijzer 1883-1983: 100 jaar Koninklijke Nederlandse Toeristenbond ANWB* (The Hague, Utrecht 1983). See also C. Versteeg, *Honderd jaar ANWB-bewegwijzering* (The Hague 1994) and Wolfgang Lierz, ‘Van fiets tot auto. Een eeuw wegenkaarten voor fietsers’, *Caert-thresoor* 11 (1992) 61-66.

⁹ G.J.M. Hogenkamp, *Een halve eeuw wielersport* (Amsterdam 1916 [actually 1917]) 25; see also: idem, *De geschiedenis van Burgers Deventer is de geschiedenis van de fiets* (Deventer 1939) and idem, *De geschiedenis der zesdaagsche wielervedstrijden* (n.p. 1932).

¹⁰ Several other booklets would appear on this later on, the last one being: F.H.M. Grapperhaus, *Over de loden last van het koperen fietsplaatje: de Nederlandse rijwielbelasting 1924-1941* (Franeker 2006).

and experiments with bicycles in the army (1885-1907)¹¹ and in various government agencies, such as the state telegraph system (from 1868), postal services (1890), fire department (1891), state police (1895) and local police (1897).

Fuchs and Simons probably identified the first reference from 1826 to Karl van Draais' dandy horse (draisine) in the Netherlands. Other topics involved the discourse about bicycles in instruction manuals for bicycling and in medical treatises, the development of the two Dutch terms 'rijwiel' and 'fiets',¹² and the emergence of the bicycle in popular songs and jokes from the late nineteenth century. One of their nice finds was the 'Bicycle song' ('Fietslied') from the comedy *De Operette-Koningin* (Operetta Queen) by August Reyding (1896), a song that became so popular that forty years later it was thought to be an anonymous street song. In this song a soloist asks 'What put the Netherlands on top of all nations, dear Michael?', to which the choir replies: 'The bicycle! The bicycle! The bicycle!'

Fuchs and Simons published more historical books about bicycles, but these books hardly include original information.¹³ Most new data can still be found in *Allemaal op de fiets in Amsterdam* (1978), the only book publication in Dutch on local cycling history.¹⁴ In this study the authors address in detail not only the capital's various bicycle companies, but also reactions from foreigners to the local bicycle culture, the establishment in 1893 of trade organization 'De Rijwiel-Industrie' (Bicycle Industry, or RI, which in 1900 was changed into RAI: Rijwiel- en Automobiël-Industrie), the bicycle requisitioning by the Germans in the Second World War, the Provo 'white bicycles plan' of the 1960s and the development of a comprehensive bicycle policy in the 1970s.

It is easy to dismiss the work of Fuchs en Simons as amateurish. It is marked by compilation of a large number, often quite extensive quotations from contemporary sources, as well as by a narrative and anecdotal structure and the absence of source references. They hardly develop analysis, critical sense, argument or contextualization and barely address the changing social-cultural meanings and relevance of bicycling. Their books are more like collections of curiosities 'from granny's days', as the subtitle of one of their publications puts it, and it treats bicycles as part of a national folklore that should be cherished.¹⁵ Still, their work offers a good starting-point for historical research of many topics related to bicycling in the Netherlands. Moreover, their work fulfilled an important social function in the years when bicycle use seemed headed for an all-time low and the bicycle lobby was looking for ways to reverse this trend. In anti-modernist or 'alternative' modernist countercultures within the emerging environmental movement since the 1960s, bicycles have acquired the status of ideal means of transportation, an unmatched example of 'suitable technology' and of

¹¹ See also G.D. Cornelissen de Beer, 'Invoering en gebruik van het rijwiel bij de Europese legers in de 19e eeuw', *Armamentaria. Jaarboek Legermuseum* 19 (1984-1985) 60-87. The collections of the former Dutch Bicyclists Regiment (Nederlandse Regiment Wielrijders) are housed in the Infantry Museum in Harskamp.

¹² On this the most extensive source is: E. Sanders, *Fiets: de geschiedenis van een vulgair jongenswoord* (The Hague 1997).

¹³ They published a very extensive summary of *Voort in 't zadel* – supplemented with new data – in 1977: J.M. Fuchs and W.J. Simons, 'Fiets en fietser, toepassing van een uitvinding', in: T. Berlage (ed.), *De fiets* (Rotterdam 1977) 11-61. Another publication worth mentioning is their commemorative volume on *75 jaar Gazelle* (Amsterdam 1967).

¹⁴ J. M. Fuchs and W.J. Simons, *Allemaal op de fiets in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam 1978).

¹⁵ The same effect was created by the popular anthology of edited reports from *De Kampioen* by Leonard de Vries and Ilonka van Amstel, *De dolle entree van automobiël en velocipee* (Bussum 1973).

energy- and environmentally-conscious application of ‘human power’.¹⁶ From 1970, this engaged perspective has constituted an important stimulus for research of the history of bicycling in other countries, at universities as well as outside of them.¹⁷ It is telling of the Dutch pragmatism regarding bicycles that Dutch bicycling history was cultivated not so much by bicycle activists, but by the bicycle sector that through its ‘Stichting Fiets!’ hired Fuchs and Simons to promote bicycling.

2. Technology and transportation history

In the 1990s two developments converged that gave Dutch bicycle history a first academic boost: studies of technology began to adopt a stronger sociological and historical focus, and, second, the government stimulated the attention for the history of bicycle use by pursuing a more assertive bicycle policy.

The Maastricht sociologist of technology Wiebe Bijker has been one of the most influential advocates of a sociological turn in technology studies. In his 1990 dissertation, published in English in 1995 as *Of bicycles, bakelites, and bulbs. Toward a theory of sociotechnical change*, Bijker deals with three case-studies, one of which concerns the history of the development of the bicycle. Through his analysis of the development of the high-wheeler into the ‘safety’ bicycle with a diamond-shaped frame and pneumatic tires, he sought to demonstrate that an ‘artifact’ such as the high-wheeler was no unambiguous technological object, but a socially determined construction marked by ‘interpretative flexibility’. This implies that the high-wheeler had different meanings for different ‘relevant social groups’: for women and seniors this bicycle was another object than for young, ‘macho men’. Bijker argues that after the safety bicycle with pneumatic tires proved faster in cycling races than the high-wheeler, causing the former to become attractive to ‘macho men’ as well, slowly a general consensus emerged (which he calls ‘closure’) on the meaning and the optimal shape of the bicycle. Consequently, the bicycle’s ‘interpretative flexibility’ diminished while at the same time its actual construction ‘stabilized’ into a single dominant basic shape.¹⁸ Bijker’s approach differs from earlier (and partly still fairly recent) literature on the history of bicycles,¹⁹ in which the bicycle’s nineteenth-century technological development and the actors involved are center-stage. In this literature the changing use of bicycles is explained largely as the result of an assumed linear progression of bicycle technology.

Bijker provided no contribution to the study of the history of bicycles in the Netherlands, as his main concern pertained to the design of a theoretical model for sociological analysis of technology development. Still, his dissertation provided a

¹⁶ See, for example, P. Rosen, ‘Up the Vélorution: Appropriating the Bicycle and the Politics of Technology’, in: R. Eglash et al. (eds.), *Appropriating Technology* (Minneapolis 2004), 365-389; Z. M. Furness, ‘*Put the fun between your legs!*’: *the politics and counterculture of the bicycle* (PhD University of Pittsburgh 2005). On the Netherlands: N. Pas, *Imaazje! De verbeelding van Provo (1965-1967)* (Amsterdam 2003), esp. 109-116, and B. Duizer, ‘*In het nut van actie moet je geloven!*’: *dertig jaar actievoeren door de Fietsersbond* (Utrecht 2005).

¹⁷ This applies to excellent popular-historical overviews such as Andrew Ritchie, *King of the road: an illustrated history of cycling* (London 1975); Jim McGurn, *On your bicycle: an illustrated history of cycling* (London 1987); Pryor Dodge, *The bicycle* (Paris 1996); but also for the more recent academic study by P. Cox, D. Horton and P. Rosen (eds.), *Cycling and Society* (Aldershot 2007).

¹⁸ W.E. Bijker, *Of bicycles, bakelites and bulbs: towards a theory of sociotechnical change* (London 1995), notably 19-100. It should be added that already from 1983 Bijker has used his case-study of the bicycle in various other publications.

¹⁹ A recent example is the excellent overview by D.V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: the history* (New Haven, CT etc. 2004).

major stimulus to bicycle historiography, most of all because of the empirical critique his case description elicited from historians in other countries (Dutch historians did not work on this topic yet).²⁰ It was also valuable that Bijker's model explicitly called attention to the divergent meanings of the bicycle for various 'relevant social groups'. For many social-historical analyses of the bicycle his perspective has become paradigmatic, even if his overall theoretical model is not adopted in all its details.²¹

The interest in social analysis of technology in the 1980s and 1990s also meant a stimulus for technology *history*. In particular at the Technological University in Eindhoven, a technology history center evolved, which, under the leadership of Harry Lintsen and Johan Schot, initiated two large research projects devoted to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century history of technology in the Netherlands (known as TIN19, published in 1992-1995, and TIN20, published in 1998-2003). It was in this context that in 1995 Frank Veraart wrote an MA thesis on the early history of the bicycle in the Netherlands.²² Although most factual data Veraart presented had been published elsewhere already, he brought all this material together and organized it systematically based on a focused concern: the issue of the development and persistence of the bicycle as a means of mass transportation in the Netherlands. Veraart included many statistical data and arranged his material by concentrating for each sub-period on the role of four 'relevant social actors': bicycle trade and industry, bicycle users, the ANWB and the government. His analysis revealed, among other things, the important role of the ANWB during that early stage in defending the interests of bicyclists and the large significance of the First World War for the Dutch bicycle industry's development.²³ However, Veraart did not offer a political or cultural-historical analysis, nor did he address relationships between the bicycle and other means of transportation.

Veraart followed up on this research with a study, conducted a few years later together with Adri Albert de la Bruhèze, who was also involved in the TIN20 project. In the context of the *Masterplan Fiets*, a sizable bicycle stimulation program of the national government from the 1990s, the Dutch Ministry of Transportation and Water Management asked them to study the influence of long-term factors on bicycle use.²⁴

²⁰ See, for example, the discussion in *Technology & Culture* 43 (2002) 351-373.

²¹ The development of both the mountain bike and the velomobile were studied by others with the help of Bijker's theory. See: P. Rosen, 'The Social Construction of Mountain Bikes', *Social Studies of Science* 23 (1993) 479-513; F. van de Walle, *The velomobile as a vehicle for more sustainable transportation. Reshaping the social construction of cycling technology* (Stockholm 2004); P. Cox, and F. Van de Walle, 'Bicycles don't evolve – velomobiles and the modelling of transport technologies', in: Cox, Horton and Rosen, *Cycling and Society*, 113-131.

²² F.C.A. Veraart, *Geschiedenis van de fiets in Nederland 1870-1940: van sportmiddel naar massavervoermiddel* (Graduation report, Technical University Eindhoven, 1995). For the sake of completeness we also mention the popular-historical contribution on the high-wheeler by TIN project leader Harry Lintsen, 'Hoog in het macho-zadel', in: M. Bakker et al. (eds.), *Techniek maakt geschiedenis* (The Hague, Zeist 1987) 59-62.

²³ Veraart based his conclusions about the ANWB in part on the dissertation by M.F.A. Linders-Rooijendijk, *Gebaande wegen voor mobiliteit en vrijetijdsbesteding [I]: de ANWB als vrijwillige associatie 1883-1937* (Tilburg: Catholic University Brabant 1989) – followed in 1992 by a second volume on the years 1937-1983. This dissertation, written from the angle of the sociology of social clubs and leisure, contains much information on the members, the organization and the activities of the ANWB, but it hardly addresses the bicycle or bicycling itself. See also: M.F.A. Linders-Rooijendijk, 'De invloed van de ANWB op de vrijetijdsbesteding', in: K. P. C. de Leeuw, M.F.A. Linders-Rooijendijk and P.J.M. Martens (eds.), *Van ontspanning en inspanning: aspecten van de geschiedenis van de vrije tijd* (Tilburg 1995) 87-99.

²⁴ See T. Welleman, *The Dutch bicycle master plan: description and evaluation in an historical context* (The Hague 1999).

In response Bruhèze and Veraart set up a unique comparative study of the development of bicycle use and policy during the twentieth century in nine European cities (including four Dutch).²⁵ Unlike Veraart's MA thesis, this project did not so much consider the bicycle industry and the ANWB, but it looked at the interrelations between developments in utilitarian bicycle use on the one hand and local and national bicycle policies on the other. The views and experiences of bicyclists themselves were largely unconsidered, as prevailing ideas about bicycling were derived from policy documents. The study's policy-oriented, social-science character was reflected not only in the many statistical sources used by the authors, but also in the fact that they presented a 'general explanatory model of historical bicycle use'. [Figure 1 here]

Bruhèze and Veraart slightly modified the image of exceptional high Dutch bicycle use, not only by pointing to large local differences within the country, but also by arguing that before the Second World War some foreign cities (such as Hanover) had a similar high bicycle density. After the 1950s a sharp decline in bicycle use would ensue in all countries, followed by stabilization or an increase from the 1970s. A striking conclusion was that differences in bicycle use at the close of the twentieth century could largely be traced back to the long-term effects of local traffic circulation policies implemented decades earlier. Moreover, the authors also noted a strong interrelationship between policies implemented and local public images of bicycle use.

Because of the international comparative character, the archival research of local bicycle policies and the interrelated public images, the study by Bruhèze and Veraart is the most original Dutch bicycle history publication, one that also has no equivalent elsewhere. However, it is telling that this study was prompted by a query from the government, rather than from concerns arising within academic circles. There was no follow-up by other Dutch technology or transport historians. If recent studies on twentieth-century Dutch transportation history pay attention to bicycles, they do so exclusively in the context of and as overture to the emergence of motorized individual transport.²⁶

As indicated, this is also true of the new handbook by Ruud Filarski and Gijs Mom on the history of transportation and mobility since 1800, which appeared in 2008. The absence of the bicycle in their account of the nineteenth century is perhaps justifiable from the angle of the limited social scope of the dandy horse, velocipede and high-wheeler – even if it implies disregard of an interesting cultural-historical theme. But their minimal attention for bicycles in their account of the twentieth century and their explicit decision to put the auto center-stage are in fact quite odd. Not only because the history of automobilism in the Netherlands had meanwhile been treated in a series of other publications already, but also and in particular given the

²⁵ Albert de la Bruhèze and Veraart, *Fietsverkeer*; A. A. Albert de la Bruhèze and F.C.A. Veraart, 'Fietsen en verkeersbeleid. Het fietsgebruik in negen West-Europese steden in de twintigste eeuw', *NEHA-jaarboek voor economische, bedrijfs- en techniekgeschiedenis* 62 (1999) 138-170; F.C.A. Veraart and A.A. Albert de la Bruhèze, 'Fietsen in de Nederlandse bergen. Achterblijvend fietsgebruik in het zuiden van Limburg in historisch perspectief', *Jaarboek van het Sociaal Historisch Centrum van Limburg XLV* (2001) 133-157.

²⁶ See J.W. Schot et al. (eds.), *Techniek in Nederland in de twintigste eeuw*, vol. V, *Transport, communicatie* (Zutphen 2003) 23-27; G. Mom, *Geschiedenis van de auto van morgen. Cultuur en techniek van de elektrische auto* (Deventer 1997), esp. 79-87; V. van der Vinne, 'Ondernemers in mobiliteit. De introductie van fiets, auto en vliegtuig in Nederland', in: A. Bos, H. van Groningen and G. Mom (eds.), *Het paardloze voertuig: de auto in Nederland een eeuw geleden* (Deventer 1996) 103-145; V. van der Vinne, *Eysink: van fiets tot motorfiets. Ondernemen tijdens de opkomst van het gemotoriseerd verkeer* (Amsterdam 2001); V. van der Vinne, *De trage verbreiding van de auto in Nederland 1896-1939* (Amsterdam 2007); P.-E. Staal, *Automobilisme in Nederland*.

large significance of bicycles for the mobility of the Dutch in the twentieth century, notably before 1960, but also afterward. The authors themselves in fact have noted this much. Their own data confirm not only that the dominance of the car started only in the 1960s, but also that in local traffic bicycles still prevail – a phenomenon that Mom addresses again at the end as one of the specific features of Dutch mobility.²⁷ In fact, precisely Mom has repeatedly criticized the minimal attention for bicycles in the older transportation history and economy while also pointing out that the Netherlands is lagging behind other countries when it comes to pursuing the history of bicycle culture.²⁸

That bicycles nevertheless remain underexposed in the new handbook can be partly explained by the fact that the expertise of Mom is mainly in the area of the history of automobiles, whereas Filarski as a traditional transportation historian has been preoccupied mainly with shipping and railroads. By the same token, it is impossible to ignore the link between the preference for the automobile as object of study and the finalism that colors much technology and transportation history. From this perspective bicycles will at best be discussed as ‘precursor of the auto’ that in response to the latter’s rise lose their historical importance, a way of representation that was criticized on good grounds by the Swiss historian of technology Monika Burri in 1998 already.²⁹ The effect of such a view on the history of mobility is a perspectival shortening, as it were, of historical realities: it makes it seem as if in the course of the twentieth century the bicycle gave way to the automobile more and more rapidly than in fact happened. Moreover, this logic leaves no room in historical accounts for the specific features of bicycles vis-à-vis autos, such as their being clean, silent and light; their being faster in cities and slower on long distances; their requiring physical activity on the part of the rider and their being unshielded from the elements. That this is unjustified already shows from the fact that when the auto was introduced, those in circles of the ANWB precisely indicated the complementary nature of both means of mobility.³⁰ The history of the relationship between bicycles and automobiles in the Netherlands, as well as of the bicycle as a characteristic Dutch means of mass transportation, still has to be written from the perspective of the users.³¹

3. Economic and business history

While in England and France already in the nineteenth century regionally concentrated bicycle industries emerged that could build on the sewing machine and weapons industry, bicycle production in the Netherlands long continued to be small-scale and scattered throughout the country, probably in part through the absence of a strong

²⁷ Mom & Filarski, *De mobiliteitsexplosie*, 264 and 397.

²⁸ See G. Mom, ‘What kind of transport history did we get? Half a century of the JTH and the future of the field’, *Journal of Transport History* 24 (2003), 121-138, q.v. 130-131; Mom and Filarski, *De mobiliteitsexplosie*, 29 and 56.

²⁹ M. Burri, *Das Fahrrad: Wegbereiter oder überrolltes Leitbild? Eine Fussnote zur Technikgeschichte des Automobils* (Zurich 1998), retrieved online on 17 March 2009:

www.tg.ethz.ch/dokumente/pdf_Preprints/Preprint5.pdf. A similar criticism is voiced by Cox and Van de Walle, ‘Bicycles don’t evolve’.

³⁰ See A.-K. Ebert, ‘Cycling towards the nation: the use of the bicycle in Germany and the Netherlands, 1880-1940’, *European Review of History* 11 (2004) 347-364, q.v. 361-362

³¹ This was pursued in a preliminary fashion for Britain by C.G. Pooley, J. Turnbull and M. Adams, *A mobile century? Changes in everyday mobility in Britain in the twentieth century* (Aldershot 2005).

industrial tradition. In many instances bicycle factories originated in local smithies.³² In 1896 the Dutch bicycle industry produced not quite one percent of the global production, which at that point was dominated by the United States, Great-Britain and Germany.³³ Still, after 1869, when the ‘First Dutch Bicycle Factory’ of Burgers was set up in Deventer, a varied bicycle sector would develop. In 1930 there were as many as 84 bicycle manufacturers in the Netherlands.³⁴ Although many of them have meanwhile vanished, in recent years new companies have cropped up as well, many of which focus on recumbent bicycles, working bicycles or other alternative bicycle designs.³⁵ In addition, some large established bicycle producers, such as Gazelle and Batavus, continued to grow partly by taking over weaker rivals.³⁶

After the initial dominance of mainly English, German and American brands, from World War One Dutch bicycle producers have managed to control the domestic market for a long time.³⁷ This has had probably much to do with the high level of cartel formation within the Dutch bicycle sector, an issue that from the 1970s has regularly met with criticism from national governments and the European Union. From 1919 agreements between RAI (bicycle industry organization) and the Dutch Association of Bicycle Traders and Repair Shops (Bond van Rijwielherstellers en – Handelaars, 1903) were sealed by the Central Agency for Bicycle Trade (Centraal Bureau Rijwielhandel, CBR).³⁸ Partly as an effect of the prolonged protection of the Dutch bicycle sector from foreign rivals, a specific bicycle design could become dominant, one that was adjusted to the flat landscape, wet climate, daily use and dominant standards of decency.³⁹ The *Hollandrad*, as the Germans refer to this type of bicycle, is marked by the vertical and unsportsmanlike posture of the rider, by the artifact’s sturdiness and large weight, and by its standard package of accessories such as a luggage carrier, chain guard, dress-guards and lighting. It is also striking perhaps that Dutch producers have played no significant role in the invention and innovation of the bicycle: the dandy horse came from Germany, the velocipede from France and the high-wheeler and safety bicycle from England. Also in later innovations such as the touring bicycle, the recumbent bicycle or the mountain bike, Dutch bicycle producers have been followers rather than trendsetters.

Several publications have appeared on the various players in the Dutch bicycle sector. Aside from the history of the RAI (1968), (commemorative) books were published on bicycle manufacturers Burgers (1939), Gazelle (1967), Eysink (2001) and Union (2004).⁴⁰ Amateur-historians around the journal entitled *De oude fiets* not

³² See H. Kuner, ‘Fahrräder und Fahrradindustrie in den Niederlanden (Teil 1+2)’, *Knochenschüttler* 31 (2004) 2–5 and 32 (2004), 7–12 (available online: www.rijwiel.net/hollradd.htm).

³³ Veraart, *Geschiedenis van de fiets*, 54

³⁴ Veraart, *Geschiedenis van de fiets*, 101.

³⁵ The genesis of many small recumbent bicycle companies was addressed in a series of articles by Henk Zwols, published in the journal *HPV Nieuws/Ligfiets&* (1998-2002).

³⁶ See Kuner, ‘Fahrräder und Fahrradindustrie’.

³⁷ Veraart, *Geschiedenis van de fiets*, 101. After World War One the domestic market share of Dutch bicycles grew rapidly, reaching 99% in 1929, according to Van der Vinne, *De trage verbreiding*, 178.

³⁸ See Kuner, ‘Fahrräder und Fahrradindustrie’.

³⁹ See A.-K. Ebert, ‘Het “paard der democratie”: fatsoenlijk fietsen in Nederland 1900-1920’, in: C. Smit (ed.), *Fatsoenlijk vertier. Deugdzame ontspanning voor arbeiders na 1870* (Amsterdam 2008) 209-237, q.v. 223-224. In bourgeois circles around 1900 forward-leaning bicycles were seen as improper; see: C.S. Thompson, ‘Corps, sexe et bicyclette’, in: C. Bertho-Lavenir and O. Vallet (eds.), *La bicyclette* (Paris 1998) 59-67, q.v. 60-61; A.-K. Ebert, ‘Zwischen Radreiten und Kraftmaschine. Der bürgerliche Radsport am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts’, *WerkstattGeschichte* 44 (2007), 27-45.

⁴⁰ Hogenkamp, *De geschiedenis van Burgers*; H.G.J. Wichers, *Burgers, ga toch fietsen! De eerste Nederlandsche Rijwielabriek H. Burgers Deventer 1896-1961* (Deventer 1996); Fuchs and Simons, 75

only published a series of articles on smaller bicycle brands but also several relevant special issues on Gazelle, Fongers and Batavus (by Jos Rietveld) and on the Utrecht bicycle trade (by Herbert Kuner). Right now the best accessible general information on the development of the Dutch bicycle industry is found in Veraart's MA thesis discussed above and in an article of Herbert Kuner from 2004 in the German journal on bicycling history, *Der Knochenschüttler*.⁴¹ All these publications contribute relevant materials and contain information on major actors and data, as well as on output and bicycle models. In many cases, however, sources of data are not acknowledged in great detail, while in commemorative books there is usually no distance with respect to the commissioning party. Moreover, a broader historical context or embedding in other historical literature is commonly absent. Some of these publications are specifically written for collectors of historical bicycles as a tool for identifying collector's items. All in all, there is no solid historical study of a major Dutch bicycle producer, nor is there one of the Dutch bicycle sector in general.

By contrast, international historical scholarship on the bicycle industry and trade, in particular from Great-Britain and the United States, has amply demonstrated what is possible in this field. For example, in 2000 British historians published an exemplary company history of Raleigh between 1870 and 1960, whereby they systematically linked up developments within this company with those within the British bicycle sector and the industry in general.⁴² Another British researcher, Paul Rosen, selected Raleigh as a case for studying the effects of worldwide changes in economy and culture on the design and production modes of bicycles between the 1930s and 1990s.⁴³ In the United States economic-historical research has concentrated in particular on the collapse of the American bicycle market after the *bicycle boom* of the 1890s. From this perspective, Bruce Epperson, among others, has analyzed the marketing and business strategies in the early American bicycle industry, while in 2005 Thomas Burr wrote a dissertation in which he compared the French and American bicycle markets from around 1900.⁴⁴ Ross D. Petty has argued that in the United States the bicycle was the first luxury consumer item that was sold with the help of new mass marketing techniques: ads, posters, sponsoring and exhibitions.⁴⁵ From an economic angle, the initially expensive bicycle, only available to those of means, was one of the first modern consumer products that their proud owners wanted to be seen with – a typical example of *conspicuous consumption* that evolved as part of the cosmopolitan culture of the fin-de-siècle. Bicycle producers constantly introduced new models and accessories that should lure consumers into buying the newest and latest as a way to show off. Also for this reason the public image

jaar Gazelle; S. de Jong, *Geschiedenis eener Nederlandsche Vereeniging: RAI 1893-1968* (Bussum 1968); Van der Vinne, *Eysink*; N.B.E. Timmerman, *Rijwielfabriek Union: 'Een eeuw in beweging'* (Eindhoven 2004).

⁴¹ Kuner, 'Fahrräder und Fahrradindustrie'.

⁴² R. Lloyd-Jones, M.J. Lewis and M. Eason, *Raleigh and the British bicycle industry: an economic and business history, 1870-1960* (Aldershot etc. 2000)

⁴³ P. Rosen, *Framing production: technology, culture, and change in the British bicycle industry* (Cambridge, Mass. 2002).

⁴⁴ Bruce Epperson, 'Failed Colossus: Strategic Error at the Pope Manufacturing Company, 1878-1900', *Technology and Culture* 41 (2000) 300-320; T. Burr, *The Cycle of Commerce: Producers and Consumers in the French and U.S. Bicycle Markets, 1875-1910* (PhD, University of California, Davis 2005).

⁴⁵ R.D. Petty, 'Peddling the Bicycle in the 1890s: Mass Marketing Shifts into High Gear', *Journal of Macromarketing* 15 (1995) 32-46.

development around bicycles is interesting. In this respect, French and German historians in particular have dealt with bicycle posters several times already.⁴⁶

4. Sports history

The move from business history to sports history is but a small one in the history of bicycling. Business sponsoring was prominent in cycling much earlier than in other sports: bicycle manufacturers organized races to prove the superiority of their product. Cycling, initially indoors but after 1900 increasingly outdoors, was the first modern sports to evolve into a mass 'spectator sport'.⁴⁷ Estimates suggest that in 1919 almost one third of all French followed the Tour de France from the roadside.⁴⁸ To involve the public in cycling, newspapers (later also radio and TV) and their reporting on races served as an indispensable *Dritte im Bunde*. Against the backdrop of the modern quest for and fascination with spectacle, speed and distance records, the triad of media, industry and sports was forged earlier and more tightly in cycling than in any other sport.⁴⁹

The history of cycling is closely entwined with the evolution of modern society not just because of the large role of mass media and marketing; sports history studies have also uncovered relationships between the rise of modern mass sports, which were characterized by regulation, competition and achievement measurements, and developments in society, culture and politics. The growing popularity of sports was tied not only to the loss of traditional community entertainment and the rise of urban club life based on individual membership and social status, but also to the emergence of stricter working rhythms and the increase of office work and to growing prosperity, literacy and leisure. Moreover, new ideas about the body as a machine that needs to be 'kept up', social-Darwinist views on the nation's vitality and a new trust in the perfectibility of individual and public health played a role as well.⁵⁰

Abroad, this ensemble of themes has drawn attention from several professional historians who have addressed the history of bicycling as sports activity. Already in the 1980s the British historian Richard Holt analyzed the rise of cycling as mass spectator sports in France. The Tour de France has been a regular subject of professional historical research both within and outside of France. The preliminary highlight is the much-praised cultural-historical study from 2006 by the American historian C.S. Thompson, who paid much attention to the political culture in which the Tour took on national significance.⁵¹ Rüdiger Rabenstein studied the cultural-historical background of sportive bicycling in Germany between 1867 and 1914, the social resistance against it and the processes of social acceptance and adaptation that

⁴⁶ The only contribution in Dutch is a gender study by the Flemish Antje Reyniers, 'De vrouw in de rijwielreclame', *Spiegel Historiae* 20 (1985) 348-353. See also, eg., M. Jansing (ed.), *Gegenwind. Zur Geschichte des Radfahrens* (Bielefeld 1995) 67-73; V. Briese, W. Matthies and G. Renda (eds.), *Wegbereiter des Fahrrads* (Bielefeld 1997) 85-97; N. Besse (ed.), *Voici des ailes: affiches de cycles* (Paris 2002).

⁴⁷ See Richard Holt, *Sport and society in modern France* (London, Oxford 1981), notably 81-103.

⁴⁸ Holt, *Sport and society*, 99.

⁴⁹ This is a main subject for the Dutch sociologist Benjo Maso, *Het zweet der goden. Legende van de wielersport* (Amsterdam 1990, revised edition 2003). In Maso's book, *Wij waren allemaal goden: de Tour van 1948* (Amsterdam 2003), anecdotes from sports prevail.

⁵⁰ See Holt, *Sport and society*, 1-12; E. Hobsbawm, 'Mass-producing traditions: Europe, 1870-1914', in: E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, New York 1983) 263-307, on sports: 288-291 and 298-303; E. Weber, *France, fin de siècle* (Cambridge, MA etc. 1986) 213-23; D. Marchesini, *L'Italia del Giro d'Italia* (Bologna 1996) 17-23.

⁵¹ C.S. Thompson, *The Tour de France: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, CA 2006).

followed.⁵² For Italy the historians Stefano Pivato and Daniele Marchesini, among others, have studied the political implications of cycling.⁵³

In the Netherlands little similar work has been done. If others have noted a general 'lagging behind' of sports history writing in this country when compared to other countries, this is also true with respect to cycling in general.⁵⁴ Almost without exception the many Dutch publications on cycling are of a journalistic or popular-historical nature and they pay no attention to themes that render cycling into a major topic of historical study also outside the circle of cycle racing devotees.⁵⁵ The best overview is *Een eeuw Nederlandse wielersport* (1980) by sports journalist Wim van Eyle.⁵⁶ Academic sports historical research of cycling in the Netherlands is virtually absent, with the exception of several brief articles by Theo Stevens, a professor of sports history, and the contributions discussed below by historian Jacoba Steendijk-Kuypers on women in sports.⁵⁷ Dries Vanysacker, a lecturer at Leuven University in Belgium, has written much on the history of cycling and promotes its study, but as of yet he has no counterpart at any of the universities in the Netherlands.⁵⁸

In this limited attention for cycling among Dutch academic historians the issue of the availability of source materials can hardly have been a factor, however. Dutch cyclists have been fairly successful from the very beginnings of cycling as a sport. And in the period 1965-1994 the number of professional cyclists from the Netherlands directly followed that from France, Italy, Belgium and Spain.⁵⁹ Still, in the Netherlands, unlike in France or Flanders, a connection between cycling and national identity never materialized. One reason is that up to the Second World War the number of road cycling races remained quite limited in the Netherlands as a result of prohibitive rules in the 1905 Motor and Bicycle Act. While in the first half of the twentieth century road races such as the Tour de France, Italy's *Giro* and the Tour of Flanders acquired their classic popular status, cycling in the Netherlands was largely limited at that time to indoor races in so-called Velodromes. Moreover, traditionally

⁵² R. Rabenstein, *Radsport und Gesellschaft: ihre sozialgeschichtlichen Zusammenhänge in der Zeit von 1867 bis 1914* (Hildesheim, Munich, Zurich, 2nd ed. 1995).

⁵³ S. Pivato, 'The bicycle as a political symbol: Italy, 1885-1955', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 7 (1990) 172-187; S. Pivato, 'Italian cycling and the creation of a Catholic hero: the Bartali myth', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13 (1996), 128-138; for work by Daniele Marchesini, see, for example, 'Giro d'Italia', in: S. Luzzatto and V. D. Grazia (eds.), *Dizionario del fascismo* (Turin 2002), I, 605-607.

⁵⁴ See M. van Bottenburg, 'Historiografie van de Nederlandse sportgeschiedenis', in: W. van Buuren and T. Stevens (eds.), *Sportgeschiedenis in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1998) 13-30; T. Stevens, 'Inleiding', in: W. van Buuren and P.-J. Mol (eds.), *In het spoor van de sport: hoofdlijnen uit de Nederlandse sportgeschiedenis* (Haarlem 2000) 7-16.

⁵⁵ For a bibliographical overview, see: Wim van Eyle, *Nederlandse en Vlaamse wielersport 1894-1990* (Amsterdam 1991) and the website of Harrie Heinen: www.wielersportboeken.nl. See also W. van Buuren, P. Los and N. van Horn, *Bibliografisch apparaat voor de Nederlandse sportgeschiedenis* (Nieuwegein 2006) numbers 1103-1238.

⁵⁶ W. van Eyle, *Een eeuw Nederlandse wielersport: van Jaap Eden tot Joop Zoetemelk* (Utrecht etc. 1980). See also Tjeerd Roosjen, *De geografie van de wielersport* (MA thesis, University of Utrecht 1995) and the work of journalists Hogenkamp, *Een halve eeuw*, and M.J. Adriani Engels, *Van Jaap Eden tot Jan Derksen: de wielersport in Nederland gedurende tachtig jaar* (Amsterdam 1947).

⁵⁷ T. Stevens, 'The Short and Remarkable Career of Mathieu Cordang', *Cycle History* 10 (1999) 90-97; idem, 'The Elitist Character of Early Dutch Cycling', *Cycle History* 12 (2001) 125-129; idem, 'Jaap Eden (1873-1925): The Tragic Life of a Sportsman', *Cycle History* 12 (2001) 130-133.

⁵⁸ One of his recent sports-history publications is D. Vanysacker, 'Le cyclisme en Wallonie jusqu'à la Seconde Guerre mondiale: une histoire sociale comparable à celle des Flandriens (1860-1945)', in: L. Courtois et al. (eds.), *Images et paysages mentaux des 19e et 20e siècles, de la Wallonie à l'outre-mer* (Louvain-la-Neuve 2007) 147-172.

⁵⁹ See Roosjen, *Geografie van de wielersport*, 84.

there appears to have been a cultural schism across the Netherlands regarding cycling. Cycling has taken on the image of being a ‘Catholic sports’, a judgment that seems confirmed by the overrepresentation of the predominantly Catholic province of North-Brabant in the number of cycling clubs and organized road races since 1954.⁶⁰ But a social and cultural history of Dutch cycling in which the ‘pillarized’ structure of Dutch society is taken into account as a major factor still needs to be written. Although there has not been a lack of sources for historical study of local cycling clubs in the Netherlands, so far there has been a lack of interest on the part of academic researchers to study them.⁶¹

5. Social-cultural history: bicycles and modernization

In recent international historical work on cycle racing the emphasis is on the social, cultural and political aspects of this sport in a modernizing society. The same social-cultural approach is characteristic of many recent and also some older foreign historical studies of bicycling in general.⁶² The transition between sports history and general bicycle history is fluid here because especially before 1890 cycling was mainly viewed as a sporty activity, also when it did not involve a competitive or racing element.⁶³

In social-cultural history writing the bicycle is center-stage as both product and instrument of social innovation in the decades around 1900. Bicycles are thereby afforded a leading role in the ‘ride to modernity’, as the Canadian scholar Glen Norcliffe called his study about the introduction of the bicycle in Canada.⁶⁴ The subjects treated under this common denominator are quite varied and range from the role of the bicycle as promoter of democracy and means of transportation of the masses,⁶⁵ to the bicycle as ‘an object of modernity’ – as a favorite object of Dadaists, Surrealists and other avant-garde movements, it being an early example of both modernist *Leichtbaukonstruktion* and a modern ‘aesthetic of the ephemeral’.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Roosjen, *Geografie van de wielersport*, 45, 48, 50; according to sports journalist Ron Couwenhoven, *De pioniers van de wielersport* (Baarn 2006), this was a matter of diffusion from nearby Flanders.

⁶¹ See, for example, N. van Zutphen, ‘Sociale geschiedenis van het fietsen in Leuven, 1880-1900’, *Arca Lovaniensis artes atque historiae reserans documenta. Jaarboek 8* (Leuven 1981) 11-257, q.v. 165-194; L. Bowerman, ‘Clubs – Their Part in the Study of Cycle and Cycling History’, *Cycle History 5* (1994) 133-138; A. Poyer, *Les premiers temps des veloce-clubs: apparition et diffusion du cyclisme associatif français entre 1867 et 1914* (Paris 2003); G. Norcliffe, ‘Associations, modernity and the insider-citizens of a Victorian Highwheel Bicycle Club’, *Journal of Historical Sociology 19* (2006), 121-150; N. Stellner, *Radfahrervereine in der bayerischen Provinz, Raum Mühldorf/Altötting 1882-1994* (Regensburg 2000). According to Ebert, ‘Cycling towards the nation’, note 10, there are many archival materials on local bicycle clubs in the ANWB archive in The Hague.

⁶² See, for instance, Sidney H. Aronson, ‘The sociology of the bicycle’, *Social forces 30* (1952) 305-312 and R.A. Smith, *A social history of the bicycle: its early life and times in America* (New York 1972).

⁶³ See Rabenstein, *Radsport und Gesellschaft*, 6-7; Ebert, ‘Zwischen Radreiten und Kraftmaschine’.

⁶⁴ G. Norcliffe, *The ride to modernity: the bicycle in Canada, 1869-1900* (Toronto etc. 2001).

⁶⁵ For workers and the bicycle, see, for instance, Rabenstein, *Radsport und Gesellschaft*, 178-198; Pivato, ‘Bicycle as a political symbol’, 177-181; R. Beduhn and J. Klocksinn (eds.), *Rad-Kultur-Bewegung. 100 Jahre rund um’s Rad: Rad- und Kraftfahrerbund Solidarität* (Essen 1995).

⁶⁶ See, for example, N. Besse (ed.), *The velocipede as object of modernity* (Saint-Étienne 2008); J. Krausse, ‘Versuch, auf’s Fahrrad zu kommen. Zur Technik und Ästhetik der Velo-Evolution’, in: H.J. Neyer (ed.), *Zwischen Fahrrad und Fließband. Absolut modern sein: culture technique in Frankreich 1889-1937* (Berlin 1986) 59-74; and the contributions of K. Riha and M. Pötzsch in: Jansing, *Gegenwind*, 10-33 and 91-98. The most elaborate collection of ‘bicycle art’, with a short introduction by E. Langui, can be found in a Dutch publication: Berlage, *De fiets*, 95-193.

The first, bourgeois bicyclists espoused a progressive attitude of life and sung the bicycle's praise as a masterly technological innovation and a 'freedom machine'.⁶⁷ This association with progress turned the bicycle already in the days of the velocipede and the high-wheeler into more than just a toy or 'adventure machine' for young men to demonstrate their virility. The bicycle facilitated individual mobility and a speed that up to then was unprecedented, and as such it brought along a new experience of time and space. This is evidenced most strikingly in the remarkably high number of long trips and world journeys that prior to 1900 were undertaken by bicycle, even already in the days of the high-wheeler. Western bicyclists explored the interior of Asia, Africa, Australia or America not just in the late twentieth century; they did so already in the heyday of globalization around 1900.⁶⁸

Bicycling reflected and promoted a new body experience, as several international studies have revealed. The first bicyclists experienced the bicycle not only as an instrument of liberation and a widened horizon, but also as the perfect symbiosis of man and machine. As opposed to trains, whereby the individual depended on the railroad system, bicyclists were their own master and in charge of their 'machine': they simultaneously were its rider, engine and passenger. Influenced by thermodynamics, the physiology of work and the idea of the human body as an engine, the bicycle gained the status of an especially efficient machine for converting human energy into mobility. Bicycling would not only cost energy; it also generated new vitality, thus forming an ideal therapy against nervous disorders, in particular neurasthenia, the modern 'civilization disease'. In the medical debate on the drawbacks and benefits of bicycling the image emerged of the bicycle as a training and compensation machine for counterbalancing the effects of high-paced modern life. On a bicycle citizens could realize the ideal of 'tranquility in mobility' and they would experience themselves in both physical and mental respects as, in the words of Anne-Katrin Ebert, a 'Meister der Moderne'.⁶⁹

Because of the values linked up with bicycling such as progress, mobility, a widening of one's horizon, individual liberty and self-autonomy, around 1900 the bicycle was an attractive means of transportation for bourgeois women who pursued emancipation. From the outset the bicycle's significance for women's emancipation was hotly debated, and subsequently it also became a subject of much historical study. A much quoted phrase is the claim by the American feminist Susan B. Anthony from 1896 that 'cycling [...] has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world.'⁷⁰ Because of the increased physical mobility, the bicycle would have significantly enlarged women's freedom, independence and habit of going out, thus breaking down their social isolation. Moreover, the new vehicle would have contributed not only to women's liberation from constrictive dress codes, but also to improving their health and to more informal forms of interaction, notably between the sexes. In recent studies, however, the contribution of bicycles to women's

⁶⁷ Pinkerton, J. (1997). Who Put the Working Man on a Bicycle? *Cycle History* 8, 101-106, q.v. 101.

⁶⁸ See Rabenstein, *Radspport und Gesellschaft*, 10-102, and the chronological list of travel accounts (in English) published by the American historian D.R. Jamieson, 'Bicycle travel and touring resources', available online at <http://personal.ashland.edu/djamieso/>

⁶⁹ Ebert, 'Zwischen Radreiten und Kraftmaschine'; J. Radkau, 'Das Fahrrad in den Technikvisionen der Jahrhundertwende, oder: das Erlebnis in der Technikgeschichte', in: V. Briese, W. Matthies and G. Renda (eds.), *Wege zur Fahrradgeschichte* (Bielefeld 1995) 9-32, q.v. 14-28; Thompson, 'Corps, sexe et bicyclette'.

⁷⁰ Cited in Dodge, *The bicycle*, 130; a series of other contemporary statements with a similar content can be found in D. Bleckmann, *Wehe wenn sie losgelassen! Über die Anfänge des Frauenradfahrens in Deutschland* (Gera-Leipzig 1999) 140-144.

emancipation has been qualified. It is indicated, for example, that women were pressured to develop a specific feminine style of bicycling that met bourgeois standards of decency. Bicycling by women broke down the prevailing gender role patterns only to a limited extent and was often adjusted to prevailing normative views on female conduct.⁷¹

Also in the Netherlands the history of bicycling has been studied from a gender perspective. For example, historian Jacoba Steendijk-Kuypers, in her study on sports practices by women in the years 1880-1928, has devoted a chapter to bicycling, while Annemarie Opmeer, as part of a project commissioned by the Fietsersbond, has written an MA thesis on bicycling by women in the period from the end of the nineteenth century to 1940.⁷² Both detailed studies suggest that bicycling women became gradually accepted in the Netherlands because they adapted their bicycling style to the prevailing norms regarding femininity. They generally moved away, for instance, from the provocative image to which bicycling women abroad sometimes gave rise. Notably in France and England some bicycling women would attract attention for their liberated attitude and daring outfit such as *bloomers* and pantskirts that shocked the ordinary man in the street. In general, Dutch female cyclists did everything to avoid such fuss and they exercised caution and moderation. Opmeer argues, then, that the social acceptance of bicycling by women occurred within the contexts of 'a new, adapted form of femininity with its own limits.'⁷³

Steendijk-Kuypers and Opmeer hardly found any evidence of a direct link between feminism and bicycling in the Netherlands. Although bicycling by women received substantial attention in feminist circles (for instance, at the National Exhibition of Female Labor in 1898 the usefulness of the bicycle as practical means of transportation was stressed), the women's movement did not explicitly deploy the bicycle as a tool in its emancipation struggle. The right to vote and the right to paid labor had priority over free and independent mobility. If feminists drew a link between bicycling and liberation at all, it pertained primarily to a widening of the dress codes rather than to increased autonomy in terms of mobility. Within the women's movement there was quite some resistance against sports activity by women in general and cycling in particular. Even though several well-known feminists, such as Aletta Jacobs, were fervent cyclists, this did not mean there was a causal link between the striving for equal rights for women and this leisure activity.⁷⁴ That people associated

⁷¹ Aside from Bleckmann, *Wehe wenn sie losgelassen*, see, for example, P. Marks, *Bicycles, bangs, and bloomers: the new woman in the popular press* (Lexington, KY 1990), notably 175-203; E. Gruber Garvey, *The adman in the parlor: magazines and the gendering of consumer culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York 1996), notably 106-134; B. Edwards, 'The cycling New Woman. The representation of the cycling New Woman in the English popular press 1895-1897', *Cycle History* 8 (1997), 67-74; C. Simpson, 'Capitalising on curiosity: women's professional cycling in the late 19th century', in Cox, Horton and Rosen, *Cycling and Society*, 47-65; P.G. Mackintosh and G. Norcliffe, 'Men, women and the bicycle: gender and social geography of cycling in the late 19th century', in: *ibid.*, 153-177.

⁷² A. Opmeer, *Wat men ook zegt, zij fietsen toch': de betekenis van de fiets op het gebied van sport, vervoer, recreatie en emancipatie voor de Nederlandse vrouw tot 1940* (Utrecht 2004); J. Steendijk-Kuypers, *Vrouwen-beweging: medische en culturele aspecten van vrouwen in de sport, gezien in het kader van de sporthistorie (1880-1928)* (Rotterdam 1999), esp. 175-213; idem, 'Freedom on the Bicycle: Women's Choice', *Cycle History* 10 (1999), 127-132; idem, 'De entree van vrouwen in de sportwereld', in: Van Buuren and Mol, *In het spoor van de sport*, 80-107. Steendijk-Kuypers also published various articles in *De oude fiets*. In addition, several MA theses are devoted to this theme.

⁷³ Opmeer, 'Wat men ook zegt', 54.

⁷⁴ See M. Bosch, 'Parallele levens op de fiets: het (wielrijders)verbond van Aletta Jacobs en Carel Gerritsen', in: C. van Eijl (ed.), *Parallele levens. Jaarboek vrouwengeschiedenis* 18 (Amsterdam 1998) 59-78.

women on a bicycle with feminism, including the interrelated fear of women becoming more manly, was perhaps rather a matter of public image, one that was fostered in particular by opponents of women's emancipation, and the sometimes satirical way in which the media exaggerated this image.⁷⁵

In recent literature from a social-cultural perspective scholars have paid attention to the link between bicycles and progressive thought, a new body culture and women's emancipation around 1900, but scholars also study the role of the bicycle in the emergence of mass tourism and the interrelated contribution of the bicycle to the changing dynamic between city and countryside and the formation of national unity and identity. Bicycling was not only a product of modern times, but was (and is) also deployed to counter its supposedly harmful and unhealthy sides. The bicycle provided middle-class citizens with sufficient time, energy and money – and later on also more and more workers – the opportunity to escape (albeit temporarily) the urban bustle, the polluting and noisy industry, as well as the monotonous routines of daily (office) work, which increasingly involved sitting all day.⁷⁶ The bicycle also enabled a longer distance between home and work and contributed to the emergence of suburbanization. Middle-class bicycle tourists glamorized the purity of nature and the simplicity of rural life, but thereby they tended to value predictability, urban comforts and also safety, given that rural folk would sometimes respond with hostility to cycling strangers. In time the spread of facilities such as hotels, inns, (youth) hostels, cafés, information points and repair shops along popular routes gave rise to 'urban corridors' in the countryside.⁷⁷ Despite the idolization of the countryside's unblemished 'nature', bicycling thus contributed to its urbanization.

Bicycle tourism also strengthened national unity and identity, as various authors have shown.⁷⁸ Associations such as the ANWB and its English, American, French and Italian counterparts (set up between 1878 and 1894) linked up bicycling with specific nationalist and middle-class ideals of civilization. As special interest organizations for bicycle tourists they propagated the discovery of regional landscapes, the assumed unspoiled countryside and national heritage. The bridging of the gap between city and country and between different regions, brought about by bicycle touring, would reinforce national unification. Furthermore, the first bicycle organizations promoted particular national ideals of civilization and citizenship, which centered on achieving a balance between individual liberty, self-control and social responsibility. The latter was expressed, for instance, in pleas for standardized and uniform traffic rules on a national scale, whereby bicyclists were presented as decent traffic participants with the same rights as others.

With respect to the Netherlands, Henk te Velde, in his dissertation from 1992, has pointed to the large importance of the ANWB (which after 1900 restyled itself as

⁷⁵ Edwards, 'The cycling new woman', 69.

⁷⁶ See R. Holt, 'The bicycle, the bourgeoisie and the discovery of rural France, 1880-1914', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 2 (1985), 127-139; C. Bertho-Lavenir, *La Roue et le stylo. Comment nous sommes devenus touristes* (Paris 1999).

⁷⁷ See G.A. Tobin, 'The Bicycle Boom of the 1890s: The Development of Private Transportation and the Birth of the Modern Tourist', *Journal of Popular Culture* 7 (1974), 838-849.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Bertho-Lavenir, 'L'échappée belle', in: idem and Vallet, *La bicyclette*, 117-129; idem, *La Roue et le stylo*, 102-103, 130; R.J.B. Bosworth, 'The Touring Club Italiano and the nationalisation of the Italian bourgeoisie', *European History Quarterly* 27 (1997), 371-410; P. Gaboriau, 'The Tour de France and cycling's Belle Epoque', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 20 (2003), 57-78; David Rubinstein, 'Cycling in the 1890s', *Victorian Studies* 21 (1977), 47-71; Rabenstein, *Radspport und Gesellschaft*, 200-223.

leading ‘tourists association’) for this country’s liberal and cultural nationalism.⁷⁹ This perspective has been adopted by the German historian Anne-Katrin Ebert, who wrote a dissertation about the history of bicycling in the period between 1870 and 1940 in Germany and the Netherlands. Based on her comparative research also three articles have appeared, two of which belong to the most interesting studies ever published on Dutch bicycle culture.⁸⁰ Ebert offers a surprising explanation for the status of the Netherlands as a preeminent bicycling country. The *common sense* view holds that the high number of bicycles and bicyclists has been advanced by favorable geographical and spatial conditions: the virtual absence of differences in altitude, the short distances and the high level of urbanization. However, Ebert shifts the accent towards a social-cultural explanation: ‘The large success of the bicycle in the Netherlands can at least in part be explained by the specific ways in which the bicycle is constructed and viewed as promoter of Dutch identity.’⁸¹ She points out that already in the interwar period the Netherlands was seen as a bicycle country par excellence by Dutch and foreigners alike, even though at that time large-scale bicycle use was common in more European countries.⁸² In particular the liberal-minded and national-minded bourgeois citizens who were in charge of the ANWB would have established this connection between bicycling and national identity. In public expressions and events the ANWB systematically linked up bicycling with ‘traditional’ Dutch virtues, such as independence, self-control and stability. It also actively associated the bicycle with the national past and with the interconnectedness of various regions, by organizing, among other things, the big ‘bicycle parade’ as part of the coronation ceremony of Queen Wilhelmina in 1898, where bicyclists were dressed in historical and regional costumes. The later publicity around bicycling queens tied in with an already widely spread view of bicycling as a characteristic element of Dutch identity.

The liberal-bourgeois ANWB defended the bicycle, after some hesitation, as ‘pulling-power of democracy’, as a means of transportation that would bring progress for all classes of the population. While in Germany the workers movement deployed the bicycle as instrument of (radical) political and social change, in the Netherlands in particular the image of the bicycle as vehicle of national unity and as civilizing tool prevailed, thanks to the ANWB. It advocated the diffusion of the bicycle among workers as a way to elevate them to the level of respectable citizens and integrate them in the nation.⁸³ This civilizing offensive of the ANWB was, according to Ebert, in part a reason for the 1905 legal prohibition on road cycling races.⁸⁴ Unlike in Germany, in the Netherlands the workers movement developed no powerful ideological bond with bicycles.⁸⁵ Consequently, the increasing use of bicycles by the working classes did not lead to a social status decline of bicycling, causing the bourgeoisie to turn its back on this vehicle, which in fact happened in Germany. Because automobiles could not be conceived as civilizing tool for the masses to the same extent, in the interwar period the ANWB continued to defend powerfully the interests of bicyclists and automobilists side by side.⁸⁶ In this respect, the cultural-historical work of Ebert

⁷⁹ Henk te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbesef: liberalisme en nationalisme in Nederland, 1870-1918* (The Hague 1992) 207-212.

⁸⁰ Ebert, ‘Cycling towards the nation’; idem, ‘Het paard der democratie’; Ebert, ‘Zwischen Radreiten und Kraftmaschine’, is exclusively about Germany.

⁸¹ Ebert, ‘Cycling towards the nation’, 364.

⁸² Ebert, ‘Cycling towards the nation’, 348.

⁸³ Ebert, ‘Het paard der democratie’, 221-226.

⁸⁴ Ebert, ‘Cycling towards the nation’, 359-360.

⁸⁵ Ebert, ‘Het paard der democratie’, 226-234; Ebert, ‘Cycling towards the nation’, 359.

⁸⁶ Ebert, ‘Cycling towards the nation’, 361-362.

suggests not only an explanation for the absence of a national cycling mythology, for the bicycle's public image as national means of transportation and for its sustained dominance vis-à-vis other means of transportation, but also for the remarkably slow diffusion of cars in the Netherlands, as argued by car historians.⁸⁷ Ebert's study also makes one wonder whether the popularity of the bicycle or the specific style of bicycling in the Netherlands has anything to do with this country's fairly egalitarian social relations and its cultivation of particular values tied to respectable citizenship.

6. Conclusion: catching up with international scholarship on bicycling

When drawing up the balance of bicycle historiography in the Netherlands and elsewhere, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that in the past few decades there has been a revival of bicycle history in other countries that has not reverberated in the Netherlands. With the exception of Ebert's cultural-historical work and the technology-sociological studies of Bijker, academic research of Dutch bicycle history remains limited to the transport historical research of Bruhèze and Veraart and the gender history contributions of Steendijk-Kuypers and Opmeer. There is not a single serious local-historical study of bicycling, as has been conducted in an exemplary manner for the Belgian town of Leuven.⁸⁸ In the field of economic and business history, as well as that of sports history, no substantial research has been performed in the Netherlands that can compete with international publications. A history of the geographical and social diffusion of the bicycle in this country is absent. In the field of the history of mobility and transportation, Dutch scholars have concentrated on automobiles and other motorized vehicles, rather than on bicycles. The history of bicycle tourism, which has made inroads abroad, is uncharted territory in the Netherlands, with the exception of work on the role of the ANWB. There has been no study of the representation of bicycling in, for instance, ads or on posters, or in literary works and popular culture. Other neglected subjects include the introduction of the draisine and velocipede in the Netherlands, the history of local cycling clubs from the nineteenth century and the rise of bicycle activism since the 1960s Provo movement.

Various explanations can be given as to why the Dutch are lagging behind in this field. Unlike Germany, France and England, the Netherlands did not have any major inventors or inventions that could give rise to particular commemorations or bicycle histories. Due to its weak industrial tradition, no large industry and technology museums have emerged in the Netherlands, a cultural infrastructure that in other countries has certainly stimulated historical research of bicycling. The limited development of academic sports history in the Netherlands also has repercussions for national cycling history. While elsewhere academics have concentrated on bicycles and bicycling to gain both a scholarly and political-ideological distinction, to Dutch intellectuals the everyday nature of bicycles has basically rendered them into a *non-issue*. After all, they do not need to defend the bicycle's practical usefulness for getting from A to B through historical examples or political-ideological arguments. It is characteristic of the pragmatic Dutch attitude regarding bicycling that the research of bicycling is dominated here by engineers and mobility experts, who are interested in particular in technological and infrastructural problems and solutions, and show little regard for cultural meanings of bicycling or its historical experience and dimensions.

⁸⁷ See in particular Van der Vinne, *De trage verbreiding van de auto in Nederland*.

⁸⁸ Van Zutphen, 'Sociale geschiedenis van het fietsen in Leuven'.

If international scholarship suggests new concerns and approaches for Dutch research, it also leaves particular issues unaddressed. Apart from several studies of the earliest history of the bicycle in the days of the draisine and velocipede, the majority of the international publications focus on the period around 1900. The bicycle history of the interwar period has been studied much less already and this applies even more to the second half of the twentieth century. One reason is that the modernization perspective prominent in the international literature is harder to apply to this more recent twentieth-century history. After all, in the course of the previous century it was motorized traffic, automobiles in particular, that would embody modernity in transportation. The issue of the relationship between the rise of the bicycle and that of the automobile is answered variously, however. Did the bicycle pave the way for the automobile, both in terms of production and technology as well as in terms of use and public image? Many historians who draw a connection between the bicycle and modernity do so against the backdrop of the rapid rise of motorized traffic in countries such as the United States and Germany. Whether an intrinsic continuity is involved, however, seems questionable. In fact, Dutch mobility history in the twentieth century precisely underscores that regarding bicycles and automobiles there was no straightforward changing of the guard.

Obviously, historical study of bicycles and bicycling in the Netherlands would significantly enrich our understanding of the national past. As is exemplified by studies on other countries and also by the work of Ebert, the history of bicycling may provide a substantial and diverse contribution to our knowledge of the modernization of the Netherlands. Moreover, the Dutch case offers an interesting perspective on the historical development of the dynamic between bicycle traffic and car traffic. And, finally, a better grasp of the history of 'our most popular means of transportation' will also elucidate an internationally distinctive feature of modern Dutch culture.