

Utopias of fast and slow cycling

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Summary

- ▶ Various utopian representations of cycling worlds, from the past, the present and the future
- ▶ The concept of utopia; 3 ways to think about utopia: according to content, form and function (Levitas 2010)
- ▶ Across history: both fast and slow utopias of mobilities, production and consumption
- ▶ Biketopias: in artistic creations, everyday practices, cycling development plans or aspirations of 'becoming modern'

3 distinctive biketopias

- ▶ First: the fast cycling utopias of late 19th century
- ▶ Second: the fast biketopias of the last 2 decades
- ▶ Third: the slow biketopias enabled by ecological and anarchist movements

Bike boom 1890s. The safety bicycle



Fig. 2. Bicycle (Hochrad) von 1880.

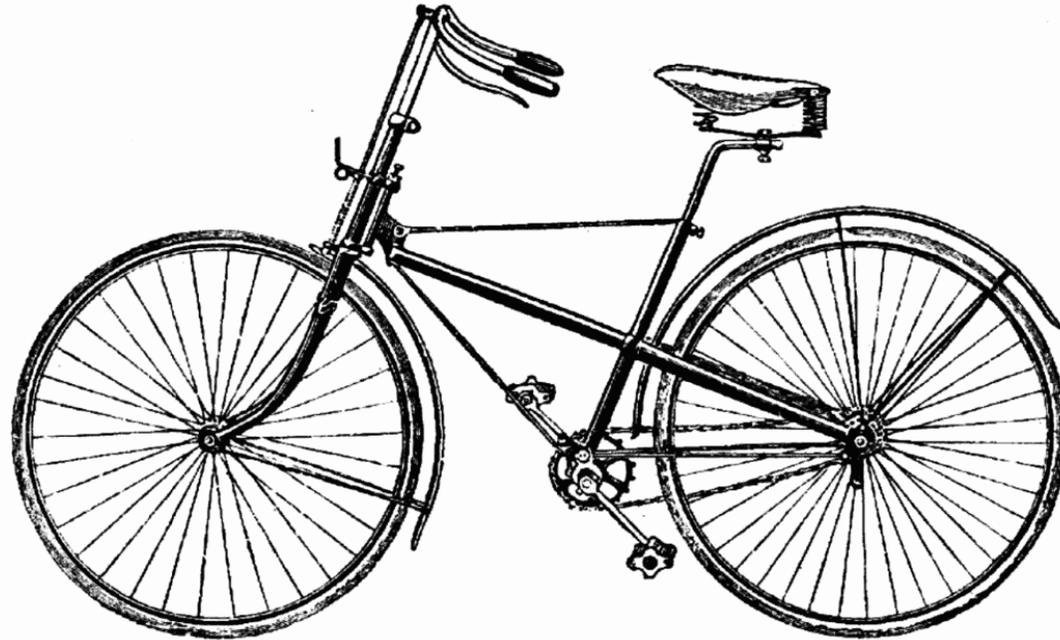


Fig. 3. Rover (Niederrad) von 1886.

Bike boom 1890s. The safety bicycle

- ▶ ‘The constant innovation made cycling very attractive, with frequent launches of new products that improved - or claimed to improve - on earlier models making them lighter and faster’ (Reid 2017).

Bike boom 1890s. Perfecting advertising



Bike boom 1890s. Perfecting advertising

- ▶ ‘The bicycle advanced the practice of advertising by developing competitive content, using images in posters, developing research techniques to determine effectiveness, and supporting an emerging media platform: magazines’ (Petty 1995).
- ▶ ‘The construction of a mobile subjectivity, the development of an entire meaning system around personal transportation, and the disciplining of bodies and the environment in service of autonomous mobility’ (Furness 2010).

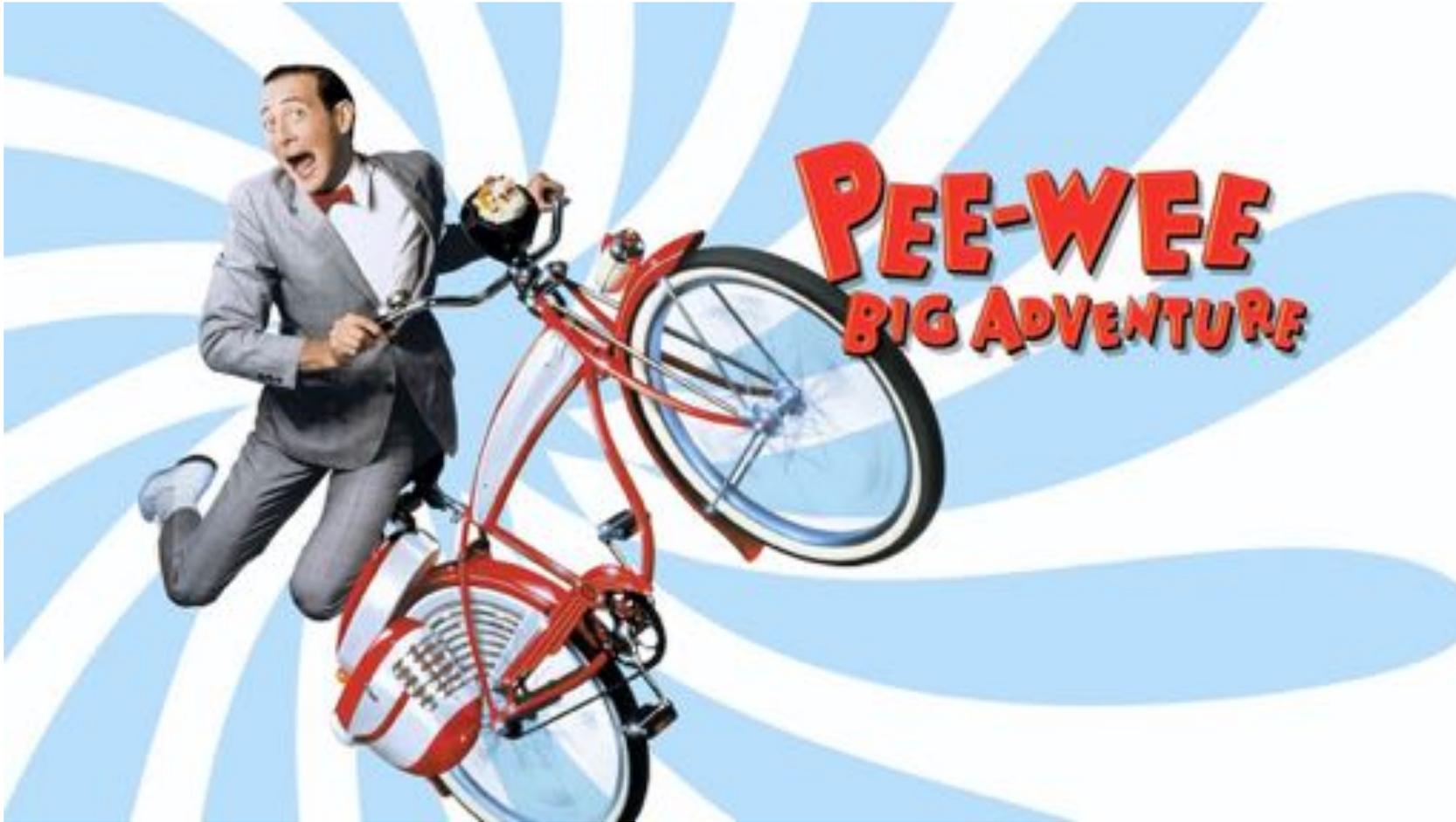
Bike boom 1890s. Campaigning for better roads



Bike boom 1890s. Campaigning for better roads

- ▶ ‘The road is that physical sign or symbol by which you will understand any age or people. If they have no roads they are savages for the road is the creation of man and a type of civilized society’ (League of American Wheelmen 1889).

Post-war period. Cycling as deviant



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Post-war period. Cycling as deviant

- ▶ Cyclists represented as ‘as boyish misfits and/or sexually “deviant”’ (Furness 2010).

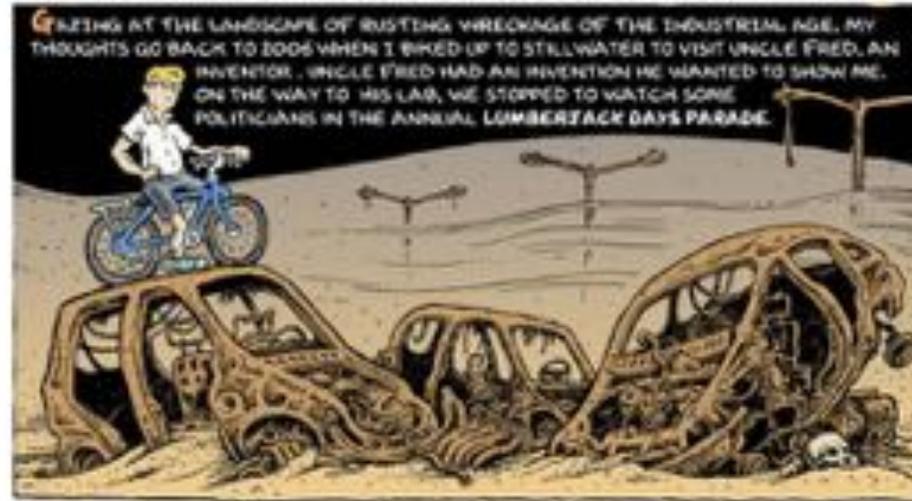
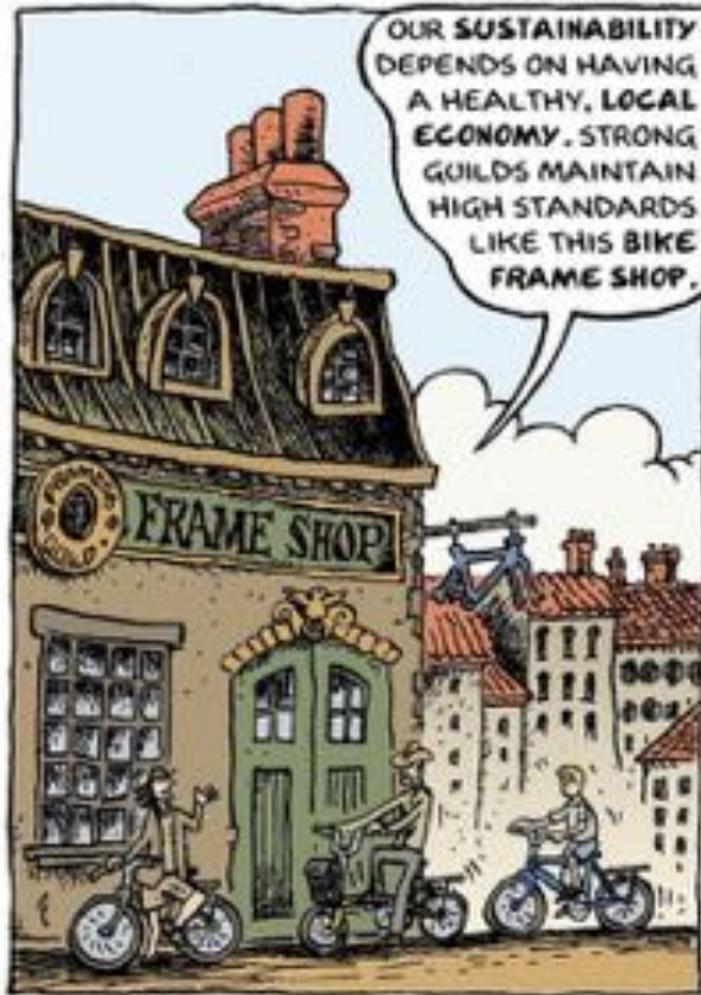
Future visions of cycle superhighways



Future visions of cycle superhighways

- ▶ ‘A bike is faster than a car over short urban distances (5 km and even more in the case of traffic jams)’ (European Commission).
- ▶ ‘Cyclists visit a neighbourhood’s shops more often than drivers or public transport users, and spend more overall. Cyclists travel shorter distances to shop than drivers. Cycling can help save precious, but endangered, pubs and small shops’ (Greater London Authority 2013)

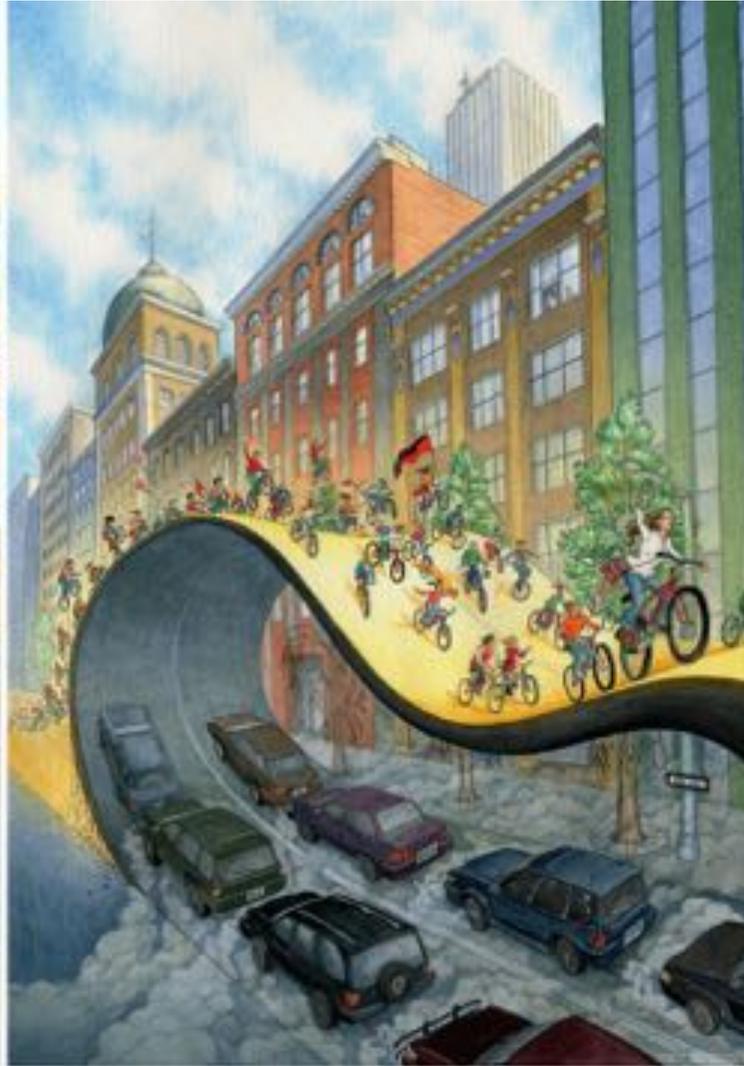
Post-apocalyptic biketopias



Post-apocalyptic biketopias

- ▶ Ken Avidor (2015) imagines a post-apocalyptic world where the bicycle remains the only option for transportation through the landscape of rusting wreckage of the industrial age, which is narrated through the eyes of a contemporary time traveller to a biketopia placed sometime after 2050
- ▶ ‘In the not-so-distant future, when gasoline is no longer available, humans turn to two-wheeled vehicles to transport goods, seek glory, and defend their remaining communities’ (Blue 2015).

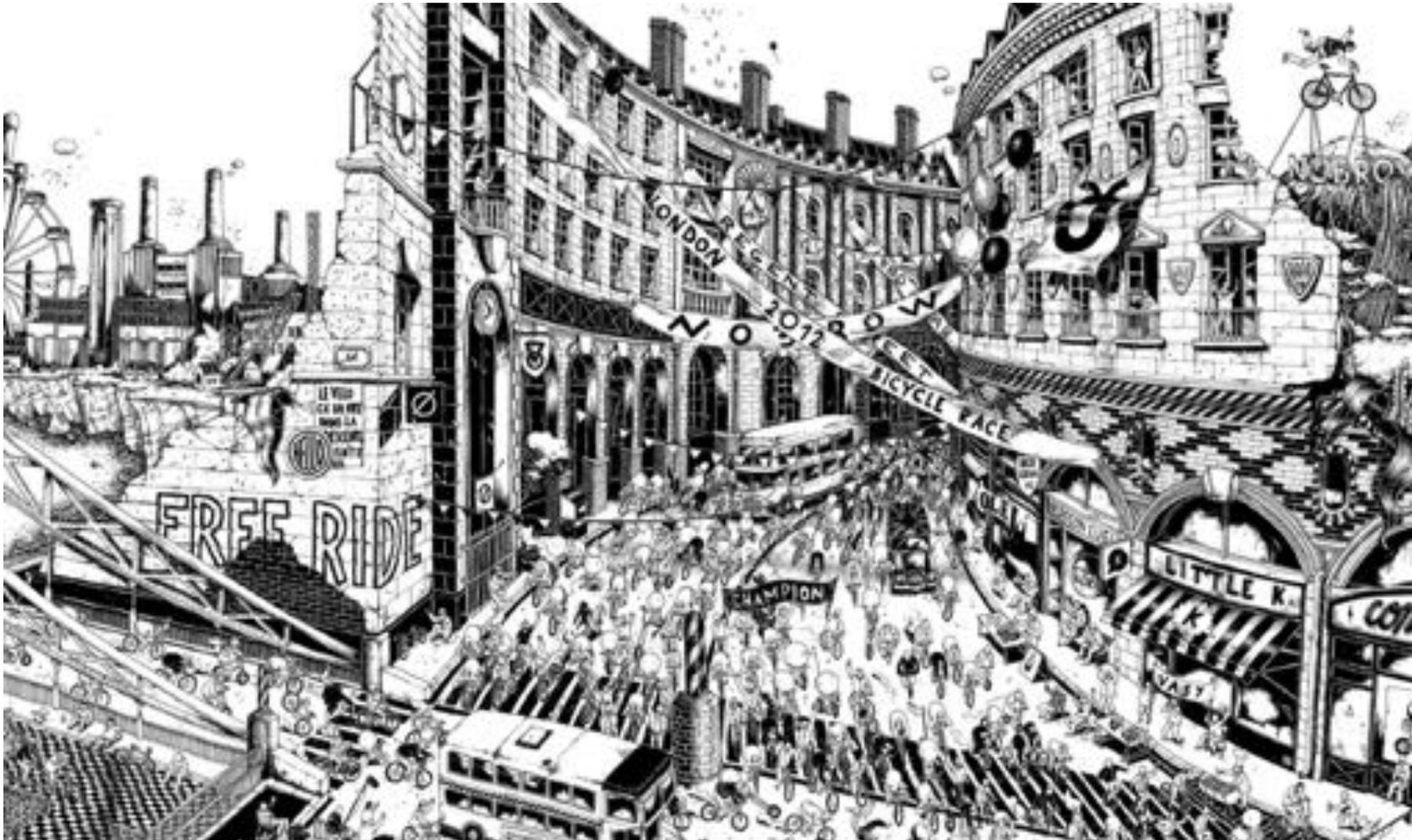
Convivial biketopias



Convivial biketopias

- ▶ H.G. Wells ‘never associates bicycles with an unhealthy mastery of space or a dangerous shrinking of distance ... The bicycle is, instead, an ideal form of transportation that provides its users with enough access to places like the restorative countryside surrounding cities but that does not promote people of different nationalities and regions coming into excessive, dangerous contact with one another’ (Withers 2016).

Convivial biketopias



Convivial biketopias

- ▶ ‘I really wanted to put in bold all the aspects of the cyclists - elite athletes to cycle couriers, commuters, bankers, delivery boys, mums with kids, youths on stolen mountain bikes to fashionistas and hipsters on fixed gear bikes’ (Gattoni 2012).

Conclusions

- ▶ The utopias of fast cycling seem to suggest that no other mobile futures are available.
- ▶ Futures can be different, and the utopias of slow cycling represent such reasons for hope.
- ▶ Change is not only desirable, but sometimes it is possible.

Thank you!



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