

Around the World on a Bike
Meanings and practices when cycling long distances

A contribution to the session *Re-using Clues*

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When the so-called safety bike was introduced in the late 19th century several cyclists undertook long distance journeys with the bike as their only tool. The covering of countless miles on the bike, through continents, countries and cultures became the subject for books and reportage.

Such projects did not aim to explore the world, but rather to discover human capacities. What was possible to achieve with only the human body and the bicycle? How many kilometres could an individual cover day after day with just a mechanical tool? Such questions were obviously important to answer in the early days of modern bicycling.

However, these tours could also be seen as a kind of metaphorical colonial conquering. The western society came literally rolling with a strong individual in the saddle, an individual on his or her way to exceed him- or herself, breaking the boundaries for the human capacity and making him- or herself a public name, a career, a future.

The aim of the paper is to investigate and analyse the meaning of cycling long distances, the gaze of the cyclists and their meaningful observations. What were these observations? How did the cyclists meet and understand their global experiences? Through the search of clues and details in the margins of the different stories the paper aims, in more general terms, to get hold of western, modern perspectives on, especially, oriental and far east cultures, and on the modern human being.

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