

# Out For a Spin: The Flâneur on Wheels

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Glen Norcliffe

WHAT WERE CYCLISTS DOING in the 1890s when they went out for a spin? I am not talking here about athletes whose aim was to win races, nor commuters pedalling to and from work, nor even delivery boys who used bicycles to transport telegrams, comestibles, and inedible things, too. I want to exclude from the discussion all those who used the bicycle for overtly utilitarian purposes. I am talking about the cyclists who went out on their bicycles for a spin.

Now this may seem a self-evident question, indeed hardly a question at all; they went out in the morning or the afternoon to pedal around. It was fun and they enjoyed it. But at an ontological level we do have a significant question. The very fact that the late Victorian bourgeoisie went out cycling in large numbers, especially during the 1895–97 bicycle boom, and then dropped the activity like a hot potato, indicates that something bigger was going on. After all, if it was simply a matter that pedalling was fun, and people did it for its own sake, then they would have carried on doing it. But only a minority of the upper classes remained passionate cyclists after the end of the boom as bicycling lost its social cachet, and other interests and pastimes became the vogue.

To attempt an answer to this question, it is necessary to connect the bicycle with broader social developments. More specifically, the approach I have adopted is to view the bicycle as a small part of a vast cultural movement called *modernity*. This movement has its roots in the Enlightenment that occurred in the first half of the eighteenth century as several philosophers laid out the arguments for a scientific form of inquiry intended to provide a basis

Fig. 12.1  
The Cyclists' Parade, Hyde Park (*Cycling World Illustrated*, 15 April 1896).



Since the author could not attend the conference in person, this paper was read to the Conference by Nicholas Oddy.

for rational progress. It boiled down to a belief that substantial strides could be made in science, medicine, urban planning, industry, and many other spheres of life if logical principles were applied. And so we saw new forms of industrial mass production, new methods of intensive farming, and new forms of governance with the French and American Revolutions. Modernity brought with it a belief in rational progress, and in the virtue of chucking out the old and replacing it with the new. As de Bolla notes, it also inaugurated a more visual civilization: "the philosophical project of the modern, that is, enlightenment, is intimately caught up with and deeply implicated in the conceptual field of the visual" (1996: p.65). In the process, the Enlightenment created a world very different from medieval times when kings and cardinals, master craftsmen and generals insisted on unquestioning acceptance of their authority, and when there was decidedly less interest in the visuality of "the new."

The city was the wellspring of modernity, the place where modern life was most visibly pioneered. During the nineteenth century no city achieved more visibility than Paris, the City of Light. There, a new class of urbanites appeared whose life was very much caught up in the project of modernity. These people invested in new industry, commerce, transport, and urban development; they were in the avant-garde of new fashions, and the first to participate in new activities like hot air ballooning, vacationing at the seaside, and *flânerie*. In Charles Baudelaire's narratives set in mid-nineteenth century Paris, *flânerie*—strolling and looking on the boulevards of the metropolis—is considered to be a particularly important aspect of modernity. I want to extend this argument to the nineteenth century cyclist out for a spin who, I argue, was practising "flânerie on wheels;" he or she, flâneur or flâneuse, was actively caught up in the pursuit of "modern life." As far as I know, this is a new argument, and possibly one that is controversial both for bicycle historians and for cultural historians.

In order to develop my argument, I will proceed in two stages. First, I will present a brief synopsis of what *flânerie* is all about, explaining why, according to many cultural historians, *flânerie* ceased long before the end of the nineteenth century. And second, I will describe *flânerie* on bicycles, interpreting it as an extension of the activity in a very particular setting. I draw on various examples to illustrate the argument.

## The Flâneur

The flâneur was a person who went out strolling on the streets of the metropolis, not in a laid-back way, wandering around with his brain in remote, but rather as a passionate observer of the world around him. Charles Baudelaire, the French author of the seminal essay of 1863, "The Painter of Modern Life," was quite explicit about it. *He* (Baudelaire is emphatic about the gender identity of the flâneur) went out in the crowd, observing people and places:

The crowd is his domain, just as air is the bird's, and water that of the fish. His passion and his profession is to merge with the crowd.

The flâneur was a man *of* the crowd rather than a man *in* the crowd. By this, Baudelaire meant that he was not simply another lemming flowing along with the throng, but rather an intelligent and thoughtful agent of the crowd, who at times might lead the crowd in new directions; thus he was both reactive and proactive. He was the hero of modernity, being continually dissatisfied with the present which could unquestionably be improved upon, yet simultaneously satisfied that he was searching for something better. It was an agreeable activity; it was not a duty, but a source of pleasure voluntarily entered in to. Baudelaire makes it clear that the flâneur found it rewarding to be *doing* rather than just *being*. He is seen as the hero of modernity precisely because he is an active doer.

Where did the flâneur follow his calling? Tester suggests: "Originally, the figure of the flâneur was tied to a specific time and place: Paris, the capital of the nineteenth century," (1994: p. 1) and continues "The flâneur is the secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city." (1994: p. 7) Note that the flâneur was observing the fleeting and transitory, as Paris went through a series of transformations to lay claim to the title "the City of Light." Baron Haussmann, above all others, transformed Paris by tearing down the decaying medieval city and replacing it with wide sunlight boulevards and bold new building projects. In consequence, the rebuilt inner city was captured by the bourgeois, with many workers obliged to move out to the new industrial suburbs. These changes exemplify the humming-bird mentality of Parisian modernists as they engaged in the search for new ideas, in so doing repeatedly casting away the old.

*Flânerie* was a form of leisure that took place at times when Paris was not at work. It was rarely done in the morning hours, when tradesmen were busy on

the streets plying their trade. In any case, the boulevardiers were absent at that time of day. By late afternoon, when the crowd was out on the boulevards, flânerie was in order. But above all, the Sunday was devoted to this activity with its fleeting encounters with acquaintances and constant circulation amongst the crowd on the boulevards.

Baudelaire and other writers saw the flâneur as a species unique to Paris. There seems to be a degree of Gallic jingoism here; they seem to imply that only in Paris was there sufficient visual and social stimulus to make the activity possible. However, Musil, in his novel *The Man Without Qualities*, sets his flâneur in Vienna, another great city of the nineteenth century. Moreover Tester (1994: p. 11) argues that Musil uses Vienna simply as a model of “the universal and the general issues of metropolitan existence.” This I find a helpful generalisation, since I wish to argue that the bicycling flâneur could be found in most modern metropolitan cities. I accept that Paris was particularly important to several innovation waves and, moreover, seems to have been the city in which the velocipede first saw the light of day; but the essence of modernity was its universality. Thus in cities like New York, Montreal, London, and Prague, the flâneur could also be found—at least seasonally. In these cities, too, people went out to gaze on the urban spectacle, to mingle with the crowd, to have chance encounters with nodding acquaintances, to see what was new, and to be seen “dressed and shod” correctly like all modern persons. Musil sums up his archetypal metropolis as follows:

Like all big cities it consisted of irregularity, change, sliding forward, not keeping in step, collisions of things and affairs ... of paved ways and wilderness, of one great rhythmic throb and the perpetual discord and dislocation ... a vessel consisting of the solid materials of buildings, laws, regulations and historical traditions (1954: 4).

Janet Wolff (1994) has generalised the activity in another way: she asked us to consider the *flâneuse*, a woman engaged in “detached and aimless strolling,” (1994: p. 125) although Wolff is of the opinion that even in the early twentieth century flânerie was still very much a male-dominated activity. Here, in contrast, it is suggested that bicycling in the 1890s provided women with numerous opportunities to engage in flânerie.

## The End of Flânerie

Benjamin (1983) makes it clear that the flâneur is a bygone figure. His time has long passed. Women may go window-shopping and the youth of today may hot-rod up and down the main drag of the modern town, but these wanderings are an entirely different outdoor activity, they are too purposeful to count as flânerie. Ferguson writes:

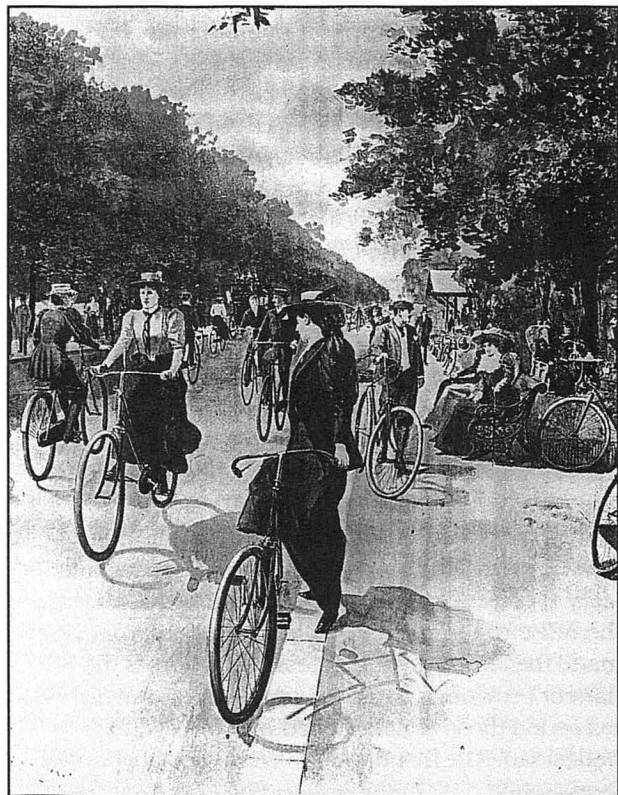
By the time the Académie Française gives its approbation to the term in 1879 ... the flâneur had already lost most of his social distinction. (1994: p. 32)

Three factors account for the demise of the flâneur:

- The growth of city traffic made it increasingly difficult to practice;
- The city progressively lost its mystery as its progressively Cartesian order reduced the randomness of flânerie; and

Fig. 12.2

A Sunny Morning in Battersea Park (*The Cycling World*, 18 March 1896).



- Some cities began to take on a new form with the building of commuter suburbs; this transformed the social structure of the late Victorian city as the *haute bourgeoisie* in such cities began to migrate to the suburbs.

The growth of city traffic not only increased street noise (which reduced the satisfaction gained from strolling), physically it posed a danger to flâneurs. Symbolically, the speeding up of traffic was just one manifestation of the general speeding up of modern life as telecommunications, transport and ideas themselves were circulated more and more rapidly. Flânerie is associated not with the later frenetic stage of modernity that has become increasingly destructive, but with the slower, more considered phase of nineteenth-century modernity. Several decades later, the cycling flâneur was able to avoid much of this city traffic by riding in the parks—Hyde Park, the Bois de Boulogne, and Central Park—and by heading out of the city to the surrounding countryside where there was little traffic.

As the nineteenth century progressed, so the city was increasingly modernized such that the surviving mysteries of the older civilisations were slowly erased. Planners and investors set about constructing the modern city, with its sewers and subways, boulevards and apartments, department stores, office buildings, factories, and opera. Although the flâneur was caught up in the project of modernity, his pleasure was to explore both new and old as if to heighten the achievements of the modern city by comparing them with vestiges of the pre-modern city. Meanwhile, practices such as the numbering of houses made the city increasingly Cartesian; urban space was progressively classified and ordered (Benjamin, 1983). The cycling flâneur was able to rediscover these contrasts of new and old, not by strolling through urban quarters of different ages, but by pedalling from the modern city to the countryside and parks where tradition, bygone ways, and nature were still in evidence.

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the city was taking on a new form. Streetcar suburbs and commercial cores held little interest for the flâneur. Beyond the city boundary lay traditional market towns and verdant countryside; along the leafy avenues of parks, respite could be found from the noise of the city. For the pedestrian, distance made the countryside inaccessible, whereas the flâneur on wheels could cover distances that far exceeded those contemplated by a bourgeois pedestrian. The first bicyclists were mostly younger men—often club members—riding high bicycles in

almost military formations. This was much too organized and dangerous an activity to merit the term flânerie, although a case might be made that the gentler sport of tricycling began to attract the flâneur. But the development of the safety bicycle in the late 1880s, followed by the acceptance of the pneumatic tyre in the early 1890s, created a riding machine that was fairly light, reliable, and very much a novelty. Their price tag meant that only the more affluent bourgeois could afford them. And they could cover ten miles in an hour, which meant that a new form of flânerie that escaped the confines of city streets was now possible. This development briefly placed the bicycle in the forefront of social modernity.

### The Flâneur on Wheels

The progress of modernity was not halted by the decline of flânerie on the boulevards of Paris in the 1870s. The unquenchable energies of the proponents of modernity flowed into innumerable new schemes such as ocean liners, electric lighting, industrial expositions, Montgolfiers, the new art, and the bicycle. Even in the 1870s, the bicycle had become a significant artefact in the pursuit of *technological modernity*, with tremendous effort being directed into improving the machine, especially to make it go faster in races. Low-resistance wheel bearings, rubber tyres, lighter butted metal spokes, hollow rims, more effective brakes, lighter and stronger tubing, and better gearing and steering led to rapid improvements in the efficiency of the machine, witness the succession of speed records that were broken at this time. By the 1880s, these technical breakthroughs made it possible to apply *industrial modernity* to the mass-production of both bicycles and tricycles, and to making a wide range of cycling accessories. It was the advent of the safety bicycle, coupled with the smoother ride of the pneumatic tyre, that briefly placed the bicycle in the forefront of *social modernity* in the 1890s as the Victorian equivalent to the chattering class took to bicycling.

Modernity was a many-headed monster, simultaneously advancing along fronts in industry, agriculture, transport, literature and art, society and politics. Modern industry was, of itself, not always very visible, but its fruits in the form of consumer goods most certainly were. The modern consumer needed free time and public spaces where she and he could parade their new possessions. Here the bicycle really came into its own; not only was it a modern artefact in its own right, not only did it come with assorted bells and whistles that marked the rider

out as a social innovator, not only did it command the attention of bystanders on the street with its noise-makers and alarms, but also it could be used to parade other innovations—new styles of clothing, hats and footwear, new parasols, new accessories, and even new cameras. Whereas the sidewalk could at times become crowded, and make the flâneur rather invisible, a cyclist on the roadway could not easily be crowded out. She or he could pedal at a low speed (not much faster than a pedestrian, if necessary), but could also scorch along as fast as a galloping horse if that was the desired impression.

Descriptions, engravings and photographs confirm that, like the classic flâneur, these cyclists usually formed a crowd. There were, of course, athletic individuals who rode singly or in pairs to train hard, but most cyclists rode in groups on a social outing, or at least met up with other cyclists to form groups during their ride. New bicycle clubs appeared in all major towns. In Toronto, for instance, then a relatively small city of about 180,000 persons, eight bicycle clubs were operating by 1892 and several more were founded by the mid 1890s. The Hamilton Bicycle Club, which for over a decade had been engaged in racing competitions with neighbouring clubs, in 1895 became exclusively a touring club—that is, one focused on what I would classify as flânerie. The club purchased hotels in St. Catherines and Niagara Falls, and club members went off in quite large groups on rides through the countryside.

These Canadian cyclists were country-cousins compared to the more sophisticated cyclists of London and Paris, but even in Canada cyclists were elegantly clothed and drawn from the wealthier classes. People belonging to the clerical and working classes did not form part of the “bicycle crowd” until the late 1890s: not only were bicycles quite costly (their prices plummeted only in the final year or two of the century), but cycling clubs vetted their new members, admitting only those who were socially acceptable. The Montreal Bicycle Club, for instance, remained an Anglo-Saxon bastion with very few French-Canadian and Jewish members even though Montreal was a cosmopolitan city with a Francophone majority by this time. The Toronto Bicycle Club revelled in its high social status; in 1890 it boasted recruiting the youngest daughter of Timothy Eaton, Canada’s leading merchant prince at that time. It is, however, in Britain where I find the most persuasive evidence that flânerie underwent a renaissance during the bicycle boom of the mid-nineties.

The most valuable insights into flânerie on wheels that I have found to date are contained in the first 26 issues of *The Cycling World Illustrated*, which were published bi-weekly between 18 March 1896 and 9 September 1896. Both the text and the illustrations provide supportive evidence.

The most immediate impact of this journal is its front cover. Each one takes the form of a full page photograph (or engraving in one or two instances) of a “distinguished lady cyclist.” The personalities involved represent the cream of British society, and testify to the interest of the haute bourgeoisie in cycling at this time. All but three of the personalities are titled, and it is clear that the three “commoners” were very well connected (see Table 1). All but one of the front cover personalities are women (for some reason the Right Honourable A. J. Balfour M.P., then President of the National Cycling Union, and later Prime Minister, appears on the front cover of issue No. 12). Distinguished gentlemen cyclists appear as full page illustrations on inner pages. With patrons such as the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duke of York, and H.R.H Princess Maud, it would be impossible to reach higher in society. There was, therefore, a conscious sales pitch by the magazine to both men and women of the upper class. Thus flânerie on wheels, like the original movement 30 years earlier in Paris, was spearheaded by the upper classes.

It was not the whole of the upper class that was the target of *The Cycling World Illustrated*, but mainly the younger members thereof. The Prince of Wales was the wrong side of 40 years, but most other enthusiasts were not. In other words, it was the vigorous younger members of the aristocratic class that were targeted, and not the older fossils. And unlike the original flâneur, who was explicitly male, both women and men featured equally in the cycling version. Symbolically, *Cycling World Illustrated* chose a ladyfront tandem as its masthead.

Among the many illustrations presented in this magazine, I have selected two that provide superb images of flânerie on wheels. In “The Cyclists’ Parade, Hyde Park” by Barnard Davis (Figure 12.1), bicycles mix with carriages inside Hyde Park Gate. In the foreground an elegant young lady cyclist wearing a most fashionable dress with a pinched waist, leg of mutton sleeves, wide lappels, a discreet veil, and a large floral hat, chats with a top-hatted gentleman; there is a hint of a romantic interest. In the middle ground half a dozen cyclists, both male and female, all in different but equally stylish outfits, pedal past. These are classic flâneurs out for a spin, going where their fancy takes them, active, observant, engaging in

fleeting encounters and then pressing on with their ride. They are obviously not at work, but neither are they absently-mindedly loafing. They are part of the crowd on the cutting edge of leisure and fashion, exponents of social modernity in 1896.

The second image, "A Sunny Morning in Battersea Park," is populated by an even greater number of cyclists (Figure 12.2). Rows of bicycles are lined up against park benches as their riders stop to chat with acquaintances before pressing on. Once again, both men and women are participating, and most are young—presumably in their twenties and thirties. Elegance prevails; the lower classes are nowhere in evidence. And in contrast to the French, the British flâneur often made his or her appearance before noon, at least on a hot summer day.

Similar images appear in abundance in other cycling magazines during the same period. For instance, the issue of *Cycling* that appeared on 22 June 1895 (page 374) has an illustration of "An Early Morning Scene in Battersea Park:" three cyclists, two women and one man, chat with two seemingly older couples seated in a carriage. The message is clear—the older set are carriage-bound traditionalists, while the modern young set go riding on two wheels. Note also that, although the couples in the carriage are obviously drawn from the upper crust, they are perfectly at ease chatting with the cycling flâneurs.

The commentaries found in cycling magazines published during this period also provide evidence of flânerie on wheels. I will proceed by identifying a theme relating to flânerie, and then citing a text selected to illustrate that theme. Although the texts contain overlapping ideas, each one is chosen to highlight a different theme.

The geography of flânerie was changed quite dramatically by the bicycle. Whereas the flâneur of Paris in the 1860s rarely transgressed the city's boulevards and inner city parks, and would wander at most only a few kilometres from his home base, bicyclists could comfortably cover fifteen kilometres in an hour, so that excursions of much greater distance were feasible. The cycling flâneur might even spend a night away on an excursion, mixing the act of flânerie with tourism. For example, in *Cycling* of 20 April 1895, page 222, the following was reported under the heading "The Old Capital:"

Winchester was crowded with London cyclists on Sunday and Monday, and one was continually meeting friends every few yards. The Stanley, North Road, and Anerley [bicycle clubs] were well represented, and it was a sight to see the crowds of

riders of all clubs and no clubs leaving the town on Monday morning for the long fight with the wind to London.

On an Easter Sunday, large numbers of London's cyclists had headed down England's most renowned cycling road through Ditton, Ripley and Guildford the 65 miles to Winchester to spend the night. The commentator twice uses the word "crowd," which is an essential element of flânerie.

Winchester's distance from London necessitated either a long weekend for riding, or travel one way by train. But the places passed through en route, notable Ditton and Ripley, were enormously popular destinations for London cyclists on their Sunday outings. G. Lacy Hillier's description in *Cycling World Illustrated* of 18 March 1896, p. 5–6 hardly needs any commentary.

There is probably no section of highway in her Majesty's dominions ... which is more frequented by the votaries of the wheel than the short ten miles from "The Angel" at Ditton to "The Anchor" at Ripley. The latter hostelry ... was most felicitously dubbed by the late Earl of Albermarle "The Mecca of all Good Cyclists" ... Sunday morning at Ditton! What a wonderful sight it is? Well may a writer on cycling have dubbed Ditton the Cyclists' Rialto. The latter-day cyclist asks "Did you hear anything at Ditton?"—and he asks the question for the same reason, all the news of the cycling world is to be learnt—where wheelmen most do congregate—at Ditton, and the man who seeks, or bears news is careful not to miss the morning muster. The latest information, the very newest rumour, the results of Saturday's racing on path or road, are all to be heard at Giggshill, by those who wish to hear them.

Thus discovering the latest news, that obsession of modern people, was as much a part of the programme of the cycling flâneur as it was of the flâneur on the streets of Paris.

Flânerie by bicycle also took on a seasonal dimension. During the mild English winter, cycling was quite feasible, provided that one made some modifications to clothing, and accepted a modicum of mud splattering. Thus we find a report in *Cycling* on 9th February 1895, page 60:

... both from the point of view of enjoyment, as well as that of health, Winter riding often equals and sometimes surpasses anything summer cycling has to show ... The enjoyments of Winter cycling are robust health, the joys of overcoming, the tastes of victory

over mud, snow, head-winds and rough roads; and, perhaps most of all, the pleasures of congenial society; for it is in winter, when racing does not keep men away, and when the state of the roads usually bars disorganising speed bursts, that friendly parties can best be collected and kept together, and the rare delight of a quiet ride with one's friends enjoyed. Congenial society for winter rides is a pressing requirement.

It is also clear that there were leaders in the crowd of flâneurs, generally persons of high social standing. Other flâneurs were intelligent imitators. One such leader was the Countess of Warwick who was described in *Cycling* on 15 June 1895 as follows:

The Countess of Warwick was amongst the first ladies of rank who caught that rabid disease commonly known as cyclomania. Her first machine was a convertible bicycle-tricycle, with which she used to cycle along the broad paths of Easton Park. So enthusiastic a devotee did Lady Warwick become of the pastime of cycling that, on leaving Warwick Castle, to spend some weeks in Easton, her horses and carriages were left in solitude, while she was to be seen gaily devoting herself to that marvellously wrought toy of steel. However we may look at it, it must, indeed be considered a very high compliment for a lady, so fond as Lady Warwick is of driving spirited horses, to fall in love with the cycle.

Consistent with his or her social standing, the flâneur or flâneuse had to maintain his or her dignity at all times. One's status would be compromised by a loss of dignity. When a correspondent of *Cycling World Illustrated* asked the actress Miss Lily Hanbury, whether riding in London streets was compatible with the dignity and safety of the average woman cyclist, she replied:

I would never advise even the most expert to traverse crowded thoroughfares, like Regent Street, Picadilly or the Strand; but in many of the suburban districts, Kensington, and St. John's Wood, for example, women can ride without danger and with perfect propriety. The Parks are so much frequented that one must always be on the alert... My sister and I seldom ride in the Parks, but when at intervals we are attacked by the cycle fever, we have our machines conveyed to a convenient station, go for a few miles out of town, and enjoy the full benefit of country lanes in all the beauty of the different seasons (6 May 1896, pp. 169–70).

Thus the cyclist enjoyed the company of the crowd—provided it was not too crowded. A throng of horse-drawn and other vehicles was not welcome, and distracted the cyclist from enjoying her or his flânerie.

Reports from Paris suggest that broadly similar riding patterns were in fashion there at the same time. In an interview with *The Cycling World Illustrated* for their 25th March 1896 issue (page 29) Mademoiselle Lefebre of Paris stated:

... when I took to riding in the Bois de Boulogne [three years ago] there were comparatively few ladies doing so. Now, as you know, there are literally battalions... There are the almost level routes of the Bois, and the level roads leading to St. Cloud, Longchamps and other places within what a fairly good rider would call an easy distance... My longest continuous ride was a delightful tour with a small party in Normandy and Brittany.

Finally, we find that the flâneur on wheels was as ephemeral a figure as the original flâneur. A particularly perceptive piece appeared in *Cycling* on 17 July 1897, towards the end of the bicycle boom. Entitled "The Passing of the New Woman," it takes the form of an allegorical conversation between the New Woman and an Interviewer:

The New Woman smiled as I recounted a few of her triumphs.

"I have done more than that," she said proudly. "I have served in the army, acted as a constable, spent a few weeks in gaol on various charges, suffered from

Fig. 12.3  
The Novice in Hyde Park (*The Cycling World Illustrated*, 13 May 1896).



severe attacks of kleptomania, driven a hansom, organized clubs, instituted dress reform, permanently disabled some of my children by hygienic treatment, and openly defied the recognised laws of decency and order. In fact, if it had not been for that d... cycle..."

"The cycle has surely been your greatest ally," I interposed.

"Ah," she sighed. "Those were the days—three or four years ago when I was the only woman who dared to ride! ... I lived for it. That's what is killing me now, the lack of notoriety ... I was born to be a pioneer of unknown ways—not a Cook's tourist, doing a recognised road ... can't [you] see that doing something quite different to everyone else is necessary to my existence."

## Postscript

A recurring pattern in the project called "modernity" is the way it sows the seeds of its own destruction. The quest for things new never lets up, so that nothing remains modern for long. Just as the original flâneur patrolling the streets of Paris became outmoded, so the bicycling flâneur was overtaken by events as new activities were taken up by the pioneers of social modernity. By the end of the

summer of 1897, one of the most perceptive of commentators on the social scene was reported in *Cycling* on 18 September, 1897 (page 204) as follows: "Max Beerbohn says that fashion is weary of the bicycle. That, we suppose, settles it; there can be no appeal against such a judgement."

In the next few years, hordes of new riders were recruited to the cycling movement, but they were not part of the well-connected leisure class who formed the vanguard of social modernity. As bicycles fell in price, and more and more second-hand machines became available, so the clerical and working classes began to take up cycling. In H. G. Wells' novel *The Wheels of Chance*, even by 1895 a draper's assistant called Hoopdriver has taken up cycling, although on an older cross-framed machine that he purchased second-hand. Hoopdriver rescues a "New Woman"—the well-connected Jessie Mergle—from seduction, in a rare cycling link-up between persons of different class. Tellingly, the novel ends with the two protagonists returning to their separate social worlds. Bicycling became a popular pastime of the working classes in the final years of the decade, while flâneurs and flâneuses moved on to new activities that marked the cutting edge of modernity. And so flânerie on wheels ended, a passing phase in the self-consuming project of cultural modernity.

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