

BIKEurious: A Transportation Reorientation

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Abstract (Art)

Since a young age, I have been interested in bicycling as a form of fun and fanciful recreation, but it wasn't until the summer of 2011 that a serious shift occurred in my understanding of the bike as more than a mere machine. A spontaneous 700-mile journey redefined my relationship with travel, transcended my notions of transportation, and enabled me to better mediate myself within my environment. In writing about these experiences, I hope to offer some insight into how American culture currently frames transportation and how I hope the construction of a bike positive culture can instill social, environmental, and political change. Concurrently, I created a pin-up style bicycle calendar featuring enthusiasts from the Claremont Colleges to foster a sense of community around bicycling and inspire riders and non-riders alike to further explore their 'bicyxuality'. Intermingling this nonfiction piece with a thoughtful reflection on the *BIKEurious* calendar project, this paper serves to explain my creative undertakings and, ultimately, call into question the hierarchy of transportation in America today.

Chapter 1. On Being Young and Becoming One (With the Bicycle)

At the tender age of three, I lost two teeth to the concrete. My oft-mischievous brother had removed the training wheels from my bicycle, unexpectedly sending me spilling face first from my ride onto our patio. A few dental surgeries later, I was a regular at the best pediatric dentist in town. It was in 1999 on one of our long drives to the dentist; my mom suddenly stopped the station wagon to ogle an old man's garage sale across the street. She stepped out of the car, exchanged a few words with the man, and on we drove. A few hours later with freshly fluoridated teeth and a wooden nickel, we

returned to the sale. Even at a young age, I dabbled in retro, so when Mama told me the particular vintage swag of this magenta Murray banana seat bicycle, I was certainly sold. Next I knew, I was shining the chrome fenders, circling the streets of Ravenswood from stop sign to stop sign in style. I attached a Slinky pinwheel and a flowery basket to the back and grew my hair long and straight. I felt straight out of 1976 and it felt groovy. This was my first true love.

In 2002, we left Indianapolis and moved to a tiny town northwest of Chicago. I abandoned all my belongings including my beloved bicycle. I pined for a ride so sweet as my Murray but settled on a cheap lime green cruiser from the '70s. For the next few years, I was known as the girl with the weird green bike. My neighbors in Fox River Grove were named Pat and John. They never smiled at me and were obsessed with mowing their lawn. One day, a bicycle showed up in their trash heap alongside a mountain of grass clippings. After all this time riding banana seat bikes, my teenage years yearned for something more grown up, and this was just the bike for me. I ran outside, and despite Pat's suspicious stares from behind the lawnmower, I straddled the too-tall frame and took it around the block. It was a 1980 Schwinn World Tourist in maroon and certainly an upgrade from my single-speed tweenage two-wheeler. One day, I rode past John standing in the driveway and, for the first time in years, he shouted out to me.

"Hey! Nice bike! Where'd ya get it?" It was a condescending question followed by a cackle.

"Your trash, duh!" I called back.

"Ha! Why would you want to ride that piece of trash?"

I had it sent to California in a cardboard box the size of a small canoe. Seven years later, I still ride that piece of trash.



I was 18 and silly and a little bit boy crazy, I must admit. It was summertime in Chicago: those rare few months of pleasant weather ripe for festivals, food and fun. I was out on Division Street dancing with lots of people looking fresh and drunk. A sheep-shaped basket dangled from a third story window. There was a note attached:

SEE A SHEEP TRICK: \$2 ... 3 for \$5

Naturally curiously bored, I put five dollars in the basket and rang the bell. Up it went and down it came, three cans of Pabst Blue Ribbon and all. I was with a girl named Molly and, little did I realize, Molly was a bit boy crazy herself. She disappeared during the concert and came back with three dapper dudes from Logan Square under her arms. “Come back to our apartment...we’ll dance to some records and drink some wine!” I was only slightly convinced, but Molly was gung-ho going for it and next I knew we were walking to a bike rack down the block.

“We brought our bikes...do you want to ride on the handlebars?”

Never in my life have I felt so reckless in such a good way: weaving between taxi cabs, whirring through city streets, bumping over bridges, breezing past the lake. The record wasn’t very good and the wine was sub par, but being the belle on a stranger’s bicycle made me fall in love with fun that summer; nothing could compare to that breeze in my hair as I was whisked away on a bicycle built for one.



I was trying to plan my third summer of college. The first summer I had spent in the suburbs sullenly serving pizza from an SUV. The second summer, I decided to escape suburbia and journey from coast-to-coast on the Greyhound bus. Ideas of adventure were accumulating in my brain, but all of them were stunted by limitations both mental and monetary. My roommate Sam suggested that I take a bicycle trip, but I laughed, using my lack of experience and smoker status to suppress the thought.

“I’ve never biked more than 15 miles at a time,” I replied.

He had an unmatched ability to make me feel silly, so when I shrugged it off so casually he came back with,

“So what? Start... Oh, and stop smoking.”



Jane and I were obsessed with the beach, or at least the idea of the beach. Perhaps I secretly hated the beach with its sandy sand and salty sea, but something felt synchronic about standing there and staring out into the Pacific and saying, “Yes, I live in Southern California and here I am.” We liked to go as often as possible, but being in Los Angeles, anything felt impossible without a car, and thus we went hardly at all. One day in a frenzy of beach-depravity and a sudden need to stand at the edge of the earth, we decided to suck it up and ride our bicycles. Perhaps Sam was right. Sure, I’d never ridden more than 15 miles at a time and certainly the idea of biking nearly sixty seemed out of reach, yet somehow the shore called my name so I saddled up, grabbed an apple, and hit the road. After 40 miles, my legs were numb, my rump was raw, and a man with blood

covering his face was growling at me and shaking his arms. We rode past industrial landscapes, llama farms, horseback riders, kids with guns, dams, dirt, the concrete bed of the Los Angeles River, and finally, after an impossibly difficult and trying ride, we arrived at Newport Beach. I locked my bike to the base of a palm tree, dipped my feet in the water, and collapsed in the sand. With nothing more than a bicycle, a body, and a bowl of cereal, I had carried myself to the edge of America. The culmination of the ride was a cacophony of emotions; all at once I felt self-sufficient, strong, and able-bodied. The sense of independence was overwhelming as I became acutely aware of the bicycle's pedal power.

“Hey Jane...do you want to take a bike trip this summer?”

Chapter Two: Highway 61, Visited

That night, we went on the internet and bought bicycle maps and trail passes for the state of Wisconsin. I've never been sure why Wisconsin was the destination of choice, but somehow it just felt right. I knew approximately five things about Wisconsin prior to our trip:

1. Cheese.
2. Beer.
3. Sausage.
4. Bikes.
5. Cheese.

In hindsight, there isn't much more I would add to this list, except perhaps smoked fish, aging hippies, and large lakes.



She and I played a game on the road where we'd ask one another an oddly-specific personal question. The asker would always have to answer first. *What's the fugliest haircut you've ever had? What is your earliest memory? What is the best time you've ever had with someone that you knew you would never see again?* I knew I would never see the bike again, or at least that was the plan. We wanted something nice, but not too nice...cheap, but not too cheap...girly, but not too girly. Craigslist seemed too unreliable but bike shops too expensive. We googled "bicycle collectives in Chicago" and found a wonderful database of creepy warehouses which supposedly sold refurbished bikes for low prices. For a whole day we bussed around the city seeking our steeds, but everyone we encountered simply smirked. "Two girls? No experience? Have you trained? Do you know what you're doing? Are you insane?" Despite the discouragement, we wandered onward to Working Bikes, one of the last bicycle co-ops in the city. Operating out of an ancient brick building adjacent to a bar called "The Watering Hole: Soul Food, Karaoke, & Beer", Working Bikes was an amazing circus of cycles, the quintessential ringmaster being a rat-tailed, jumpsuited dude named Mechanic Mike. Mike was the first person not to treat us like Beavis and Butthead when we mentioned the bike trip.

"Not many people realize how easy it is to do a bike tour. Anyone can do it as long as they can ride a bike, fix a flat, and are willing to sleep somewhere weird once in a while."

Working Bikes held sales on Sunday mornings: first-come, first-serve. We were outside at 8:30am waiting to scope out the stock. When we finally got inside, it seemed there was nothing quite roadworthy, sizeable, or affordable for us. Eventually, Jane found a little black beauty just her size: the Trek Antelope. I was still searching when suddenly

she emerged: the Bianchi Osprey. She had horns on the handlebars, index shifting, nice 26” rims, and *oh baby*, plenty of room for a rack on the back. I often think I’ll never have a bicycle so nice in my life. I gave it a test ride around the block and all seemed well. I was ready to commit; I overviewed the “plan” in my head. *Jane is here in Chicago... there is no turning back. Okay. I will buy this bike now and sell it later... in Duluth, Minnesota...in two months ... after bicycling for 700 miles.* Oh how unreal that rolled off the tongue. Oh how really it rolled out on the calendar, each day just as the day we said it would be, of course, what could go wrong? What would go wrong? Of course, no expectations, we were only all expectations, we expected nothing concrete, we received much more than rubber meets concrete but an experience. We experienced. The land, the wind, the sound, the people, the cheese, the me, the you, the bike, the trees, the cows, the breeze, the birds, the smells, everything. I didn’t know it then, but this bicycle would become more than a mere machine in the next several weeks; we would be frenemies and companions. We would be one body in the middle of nothingness. This bike would be my only home.

We set off from my driveway on the 1st of June. My mom was standing in the window waving as we were quavering under the weight of our panniers. We must’ve looked like penguins trying to fly or little girls in heels or turtles flipped onto their backs: awkward, endearing, clunky, and sincere. I hated day one. Everything that could have gone wrong went wrong. Our panniers broke our spokes within five miles. The hills killed our thighs and our spirits. We couldn’t escape the suburbs by lunchtime. A chain snapped, a tire went flat, our sleeping bags went flying down the highway, and passing bicyclists laughed at us as evening struck. When we were welcomed to Wisconsin, we

went to a Dog-n-Suds drive-in to eat a hot dog and a root beer float. Finally, come 9pm, we arrived in Genoa City (“city”). Our first couchsurfing host, Aran, rolled up on a banana-colored bicycle next to the general store and took us down a windy rural highway to her home. She lived in a one-room house on a hill in which everything was miniaturized and/or plastered in Virgin Mary iconography and thrift store art. We slept in her Murphy bed, ate beans from a can, and listened to a Billie Holiday record. It was all very bizarre. I wasn’t sure why I was here; all I knew was that my bicycle carried me to this place, and somewhere 30 miles away my mother was worrying about me. Reason seemed irrelevant, so I honed in on the important information: there I was, here I am, there I go. The only thing I could do was continue to ride my bike each and every day without question; somehow, that made the most sense.



A man in a pick-up truck had stopped us on day two and yelled at us to “GET OFF THE ROAD. I AM A COP. THIS IS DANGEROUS. THIS IS ILLEGAL. YOU ARE A HAZARD. YOU WILL GET HIT. YOU. WILL. GET. KILLED.” This perspective arose often in our journey; somehow people found it unbelievable that a bicycle would be allowed out on the open road. We tried to explain the legitimacy and legality of bicycling to such folk, but were often met with confusion and hostility. The most frequent questions we received on the road were:

“Why?”

“Who does that?”

“Do you need money?”

“Do you need a ride?”

“Do you have parents?”

I became acutely aware of the culture we have constructed around long-distance transportation in America. For most, it seems unbelievable that traveling by bicycle could be a conscious choice over the automobile. It seems unreasonable for travel to be so leisurely and slow, intentional and enduring. The automobile redefined travel as a means of getting from one destination to the other with no consideration for the in-between; our culture devalues that in-between space, deeming it arduous or insignificant. Time spent in a car is empty and non-existent; there is no journey, only distraction. The bicycle forced me to confront the space through which I was traveling. No longer could I safely splice myself out of my environment; instead, I had to engage with the people and places I passed through. I felt like a true traveler, traversing tiny towns and understanding the landscape on a microcosmic level. I felt the topography of each and every hillside. The cracks in the pavement became dancesteps for me and my bicycle. I barely breached most hills but coasted so coolly down them. The birds chirped music to my ears, the semi trucks made me jump with fear, and the residents of Neenah and Wonewoc and Lake Koshkonong knew me by name. I conquered the mighty Mississippi by bridge and the Baraboo bluff conquered me. The bicycle was a means through which I could connect with the landscape, and in doing so come closer to understanding myself within it. I learned to foster an intimate connection between my actions and my experiences. Each push of the pedal carried me millimiles towards the next destination and the beat of my own heart became my speedometer. There I was, truly in each place, and just as the little

dots on our map had predicted, we were slowly but surely making our way through Wisconsin.



Somehow we made it to Madison in a matter of days. Intermittently, we learned several crucial repairs from eHow print-outs and helpful people along the highway. The city itself is built on an isthmus between two large lakes, nestled within some sizable hills. We climbed a consecutive three miles before catching a glimpse of the capitol building. By the time I got to the top, I thought my bones were going to break, and when we hit the horizon line, we were silent and still. The rest of the ride was downhill straight into the city center. I went recklessly fast, feeling the winds from the lakes reddening my cheeks and feeling nothing but pure, concentrated joy.

“Sometimes I wish that the whole ride was just downhill. Wouldn’t that be some much fun?”

“No way, dude. It’s the uphill that make the downhill great.”

We fried spinach on the beach and called Lily, our local host. I believe there was a certain cosmically charged force which brought Lily into our lives. A world traveler who based her life on zero-impact travel, she has spent years sailing the seas and bicycling around the globe. She and her partner, Charlie, had met in Amsterdam while on simultaneous world bike tours. They were planning a commitment ceremony in August in which the guests were to ride a fleet of hand-built tandem bikes to the ceremony. She taught us everything we might need to know about basic repairs and bicycle survival while sharing with us her beautiful local community. I was surprised to find that Madison, Wisconsin is one of the most bikeable cities in America; there are bikeways

connecting every end of the city, and many residents commute by bicycle even through the harsh Wisconsin winter. There is a strong sense of community and culture surrounding the bike, and Lily seemed to be the crux of it. Leaving Madison, I felt a surge of inspiration; sustainability was integral to their local community, but it wasn't inherent. Such interest arose simply because they fostered a culture of pride around it. By vocalizing and localizing a passionate bicycling community, Madison had created a city built for the bicyclist.



There wasn't much development between Madison and La Crosse; a few small towns sprinkled here and there, littered with little shops of great impracticality and gimmick. We mostly traveled via the rail-to-trail system: bicycle trails which were converted from decommissioned rail lines. Primarily these paths were made of dirt and gravel and wound their way through forests and fields and prairies and farms. My knees began to creak but there were no real towns to speak of so I rode on without a care. After bicycling through an intensely treed forest for more than 30 miles, we encountered a series of ancient tunnels. They had been hollowed out with dynamite in the 1800s and were each nearly 1 mile in length. There was no form of illumination save the pinpoints of light at either end which never seemed to grow bigger. (So much for the 'light at the end of the tunnel' metaphor!) It was as if I was merely a mind floating in a cavernous, infinite darkness for nearly 20 minutes. I heard nothing but the dripping of water and the slosh of my bicycle tires and the sea of thoughts swimming 'round in my head. I was in an abyss known only by my fellow cyclists. Only the bicycle could have brought me here, but here was nowhere but my own being and the vague feeling of handlebars. I was in a place so

inaccessible, yet it was only one of so many inaccessible places and landscapes. The bicycle was the means by which I'd arrived here, and the means by which I would escape. It was a means to enter the self and a means to propel the self forward. Suddenly, this machine meant everything to me. Eventually, we emerged, only to find that it had begun to rain.



The creak in my knees got worse in Wonewoc. I avoided my own medical savvy and pretended my way through the pain. In Bangor, Wisconsin, I collapsed in a gas station and cried and slathered my body in Bengay. We were desperate and immobile; we sat at the gas station and asked passerbys for rides to La Crosse. Three men in a minivan took pity on us, but unfortunately they were there to pick up a television and wouldn't have room for our bicycles. Lo and behold, the karmic connection kicked in and the television was too big; twenty minutes later our new friends reappeared with a change of heart and an empty van. It was my first time in a car since the trip had begun. To think that these miles were melting away so carelessly was a shock to the system; what would have taken us several hours on a bicycle breezed by in a mere 20 minutes. Being on busy highways had made me resentful of cars, yet in an ironic twist of fate it was a car which inevitably saved me from a one-legged life in Bangor. Here I had a revelation; perhaps automobiles weren't all bad all the time. Sometimes we need to get from place to place quickly, or sometimes we aren't so fortunate in our physicality to be able to bicycle! It isn't that we need to eliminate cars from our culture or eradicate freeways and fast travel, it's that we need to moderate ourselves and assess the place of these machines in our daily lives. The automobile is not inherently wrong; it is our overuse and abuse of the car

which we need to reevaluate. Rather than condemning the car, I began to understand it as a functional tool for modern society. I envisioned a world in which the bicycle and the car could coexist in harmony, constructed on a culture which emphasizes sustainable awareness and conscious decision-making. I was thankful for the invention of the auto, but still, I wanted nothing more than to be able to bicycle again. Our heroes flipped us a token for a free sandwich at the local shoppe and dropped us off at our host's abode: a green, towering Victorian home housing 8 bicycle enthusiasts and a lot of cats. Even though I couldn't bike, life was good.



I spent a couple weeks recovering at a dairy goat farm in Minnesota. We worked with 3 elderly women and a surly old man named Earl. They thought we were bonkers to travel by bicycle and encouraged us to reconsider the trip. Still, after 14 strange days herding goats with brooms, we were more than ready to hit the road. We bicycled along the Mississippi River, alternating between Minnesota and Wisconsin on the famous Highway 61. One can feel quite lonely being isolated on a bicycle. You see the ghosts of people riding past or those standing on the side of the highway. Bob Dylan wrote an album all about this place and there he is, hitchhiking like a teen cowboy and smiling at you coyly...or is that just a crow? As the pine trees loom and tower and quiver in the wind, you can only imagine how wintry it gets, how lonesome this highway will be come January. You whistle and hum a tune to keep the mood bright, to keep your feet in time, attune to the beat of your very own heart, you are moving forth and whistling, the lyrics come convolutedly from chest to shoes, rolled over on the pavement, brought in through your lungs and out through your mouth. Are you singing to your self or singing to the

birds? Daydreaming of a love far gone or wooing your bicycle with a little melody? Ah yes, what better form of flattery than imitation? The creaky rickety crackles of the chain squeaking out through your mouth, and it goes a little something like this:

♪ *Ooooh, you're an itty bitty speckle on this world*
But you're mine
(mine
mine) ♪

♪ *Ooooh, you're an itty bitty pebble on the shore*
But you shine
(shine
shine) ♪

♪ *Ooooh, you're an itty bitty precious little pearl*
But you're fine
(fine
fine) ♪

♪ *It's like when you have a piece of pie*
Like no other piece of pie
Oh you've never had such pie
You're the apple of my eye
Now I'm not sayin' I love you
I'm just sayin' how d'you do
But my darlin' what is true
Is that you-u-u-u oh oo-oo-oo oh oo-oo-oo
Are mine ♪

I sing that song today and it sounds like a love song. It is a love song, of sorts, but one sung to a bicycle. “Do others love their bikes like I love mine?” I wonder.

As planned, we arrived in Minneapolis for the 4th of July. Like Madison, Minneapolis is a city built for bikes. Lily had told us tall tales of a bicycle superhighway 6 lanes across; what seemed like a dream was a reality called the Greenway. The Greenway connected one end of the city to the other and was modeled after our modern

freeway system with exits and passing lanes and rest stops. This was certainly a city I could see myself in someday, if only for the intricate bicycle culture established here. Again, I began to wonder how I could bring such a culture to my own community. What was it about these cities which fostered such a bike positive atmosphere? I couldn't accept that the people were simply more interested in bicycles in these Midwestern cities; it had to do with how the transportation paradigm was portrayed. If there was such a way to bring together bike lovers in my community, perhaps I could instill this same sort of bike pride and revolutionize transportation on a small scale. It was Independence Day and I felt free. America felt fluid, less like a solid state and more of an ever-changing organism of which I was a part. There I was, here I am, ready to live the life I so strongly felt and make the change I so strongly believed.



We were in Harris, MN. We could have biked farther, but we had the phone number of a mysterious “Bill and Mary” from warmshowers.org and craved a comfortable bed. We stopped on the side of the highway and dialed the digits.

“Hi, is this the home of Bill and Mary? We’re calling from warmshowers and we were wondering if you had a place to stay for the night?”

“This is Mary. My husband Bill just passed away last month.”

“Oh. I’m very sorry to hear that, I didn’t realize...If this is a bad time...”

“No, please. I insist. I live by the baseball fields in town. Bill would have loved to have you girls. Come over.”

Mary and Bill had bicycled over 10,000 miles together since retiring as schoolteachers. They rode a tandem recumbent bicycle that Bill had built himself. Mary

fed us a delicious dinner and showed us photographs of her and her husband. After living a quiet life in a tiny town, bicycling had brought them together, toughened them up, and taught them all about travel. She believed that bicycling was the reason for her good health and mental well-being, and was inspired by our youthful passion and sense of adventure. Though Mary was obviously troubled by the recent death of her husband, his presence in the house came as a comfort to us. At the age of 55, bicycles had entered his life and revolutionized it; they brought him closer to his wife, his community, and the world around him. We had reminded Mary fondly of her husband; she was one of the first adults who had acknowledged and encouraged the trip.

“I only wish you guys didn’t eat oatmeal every day.”

There was a mutual exchange of joy and inspiration between us that I shall never forget. We were a little more than 100 miles from our final destination of Duluth, MN. At our usual pace, this would have taken us at least two days to complete. Unfortunately, the forecasts filled the upcoming week with thunderstorms, and there were no real towns between here and there. “I bet you can do it in one day. Bill and I once did a 200 mile day trip and were back home in time for dinner.” Our host in Minneapolis, Corey, had bragged to us about the time he had done a 100-mile ride in one day (called a *century*) and ridden from Minneapolis to Duluth in only two. We had to show him up.

Mary sent us off at 5am the next morning with \$40 (which we tried to refuse but she snuck into our bags!), a trucker-sized breakfast, and the courage to face 110 miles. After 30 miles of swatting off horseflies, I felt tired. After 50 miles, I felt delirious. After 70, I felt like a mobile blob. One of the few sights to see was a sausage shop with a bench which read, “Mahtowa: You’ve Never Sausage A Place!” The last 30 miles took us

through Jay Cooke State Park, a mini-Yosemite-esque treasure of coastal Minnesota. The state government had shut down that summer, so the park was essentially abandoned. I was merely a delirious blob bicycling past majestic waterfalls as night fell. Out of nowhere, the bike trail stopped existing. "TRAIL CLOSED." It was nothing but a thin strip of dirt with two canyons hollowed out on either side. There was no choice: risk falling to my death and camping in an abandoned state park and potentially walk for the next 20 miles until the trail reappeared, or turn around and bike 80 miles back to the non-existent alternate route. Naturally, we walked on the precarious dirt path until, several miles later, the trail was once more paved and we were on our way.

Duluth is a port city on the brink of Lake Superior; a summer in Duluth is like a winter anywhere else. They have hills like San Francisco and snow like Alaska. The city is largely inhabited by alcoholic would-be artists and ex-sailors with eye patches and wooden legs. Still, bicycling through the blanket of white fog mid-forest and emerging into this city felt like being born again. The sheer physical strain of the ride caused a disassociation between my mind and body. I was no longer riding a bike, but mindlessly motioning in the only way that made sense. The first person we saw in Duluth was wearing a full military outfit and an astronaut helmet, bicycling down the street carrying ice cream and a fake machine gun.

"Sail on, ladies! The flight is almost over!"

It made a lot of sense that Bob Dylan grew up here.

We spent the \$40 Mary gave us on a nice dinner downtown, eating delicious local fish and drinking local beers. We sat watching the barges creep into the ports as lightning ripped across the sky.

“I bet those barges are from all around the world... they use this port as their entry into Middle America.”

“And here we are all the way from Chicago...how did this even just happen?”

“I dunno, dude. Bikes and shit.”

“Yep.”



We spent our remaining two weeks working on an organic farm, picking berries and taxi tomatoes, swimming in Lake Superior, and watching the Ancient Aliens series on the History channel. It felt strange to be grounded. We were in a home and we were stationary and there was no destination. We sold our bikes and watched them drive away in pick-up trucks down the driveway. My bike went to a woman named Melody who had tattoos of various leaves sleeving both her arms. She seemed extremely excited to get such a great bike at such a great price. I told her of the bike’s journey and all that it had meant to me those last two months. She promised to take good care of it; she planned to go on family bike rides with her three children. It was a bittersweet goodbye, and for those next few days I was in disbelief that the trip had finally come to its conclusion. However, despite my bike’s departure, I knew that the trip would stay with me forever. Though I had formed a dear relationship with my little Osprey, it wasn’t the bike which mattered to me most; it was the *idea* of the bike that was important. Whereas my previous experience with the bicycle had been casual and recreational, the bicycle became a mechanism for independence, social change, inter- and intrapersonal connection, environmental well-being, and an assertion of autonomy and power in a sometimes seemingly oppressive and constricting culture. For the first time in my life, I felt

empowered to change the world in a meaningful and genuine way. By riding bicycles and doing so with passionate intent, I believe bike lovers can shape their communities into more bike positive spaces and, in doing so, create a cleaner and safer world in which to live. The people that I encountered on the way (many of whom were not enumerated in this story) proved to me that living with intent and pride in one's beliefs is enough to inspire and change the world. With or without the Osprey or Wisconsin or the fancy fish or the bike superhighways, I was determined to make 2012 the Year of the Bicycle.

Chapter 3: Moving Through, or, How I Came to Conceptualize

Bicycuality

Like all good ideas, BIKEurious was dreamed up during my daily bicycle commute on a rather subtle upward slope. In my opinion, a gradual hill is much more terrifying than a monstrous incline; its silent-but-deadly quality makes it much more arduous and surprising. That's why, when faced with continuous uphill bicycling, I resort to creative escapism, inventing projects and fictions and daydreams that take me outside of my own body. Unlike my daily downhill cruise which involves a lot of whistling and casual ditty inventing, bicycling uphill involves heavy breathing and heavy thinking.

I had been reflecting on my summer that autumn; the sensations and stories had stuck with me and weighed on my consciousness. The bike trip had changed my perspective on life; no longer could I idly bike by without contextualizing its cultural significance. Bicycling became less of a hobby and more of a habit. I couldn't shake the acrimony of car culture nor the inspiration satelliting from all my acquaintances and experiences. It felt like taking someone out to lunch, yet they've already eaten lunch and

politely decline your invitation to try the soup. Somehow you cannot feel satisfied until they at least taste a spoonful of the soup and tell you how delicious it is! I wanted to inspire those around me to investigate their bikelove potential and reevaluate their relationship with the bike. Forced soup always tastes forced, however, and I was unsure of how I could inspire people to love their bikes without blatantly preaching my bicycle gospel. Thinking about the people who had inspired me over the summer, I realized that seeing the different kinds of passion different kinds of people possessed for bicycling was what made the community so unique and interesting. I had met worldwide bicycle tourists, mountain bikers, small-town cruisers, casual city cyclists, commuters, bike mechanics, children, fashionable females, and more, who all admired their bike lives and wanted to share that passion with me. It struck me suddenly like a truck in a bike lane: People love what people love, and what better way to make people love their bikes than to show people people who love their bikes? Bicycling was beyond a personal passion but a culture worthy of documentation and celebration which possessed the potential for community change! I needed to bring bike lovers together and showcase the bountiful beauty of the bicycle; thus began *BIKEurious*.

For the project, I chose to create a pin-up style calendar initially to satirize the glamorization of the automobile in American culture. The traditionally auto-centric erotic calendars often isolate the women themselves from the cars, making it a fusion of erotica and car-worship. Instead of having scantily clad women simply posing with their bicycles, *BIKEurious* portrays people actively engaged with them, emphasizing the extremely personal relationships one can develop with their bike. I wanted to expose the mythic iconography of the car as the ideal; America's car-centric culture creates

infrastructure at once physical, political, and social for the auto, inhibiting and oppressing the expansion of bicycling. The calendar aims to redefine the duality of transportation in order to rebuild it's infrastructure by creating a sense of pride and excitement around the local bicycling community. I not only wanted to share the joy and liberation found in bicycling; I wanted to show people that it was possible to rethink transportation on a large scale through small action. Though the project began so simply, *BIKEurious* became more than fashion fodder or mere motorcar mockery; what started as a satire of auto-lover's cultural iconography transformed into a commemorative collection celebrating the cycling community of the 21st century. No matter the reasons to ride, bike lovers everywhere must come together as a community and celebrate the beauty and joy of the bicycle as more than a mere transportative mechanism and instead as a mechanism for social and environmental change.

The calendar format itself provides a lens through which we can rethink our culture through time. It's not a piece you look at once and forget about; it is present throughout the entire year, defining one's present and future. Owning the calendar is a commitment of sorts; *BIKEurious* strives to be the omnipresent New Year's resolution to make 2012 the Year of the Bicycle. The participatory nature of the project reinforces our need to actively engage in our own realities and not to take for granted the power we are given as people.

The title is a clever infusion of sexuality and the bicycle, hinting at the erotic nature of the calendar, the sensual structure of the bicycling body, and the unspoken, closeted bikelove which the project exposes in its text. It is commonly said that 'sex sells'; by selling the idea of the bicycle as a positive force in the lives of others and

paralleling it with sexuality, *BIKEurious* works to “turn people on” to their own “bicycuality” in a humorous yet influential way. Bicycuality emphasizes the intimate relationships we often possess with our bicycles and the way our bodies play such a large role in riding. This very physical relationship is one of the many reasons to ride; it brings us closer to our physical selves and introduces us to the movements of our bodies and their potential energies. By sharing one’s physical self so intimately with the bike, we are also awakening our spiritual and personal selves and infusing them with the bike. The photographs marry the body with the bike and thus allow us to integrate ourselves into the world around us. My experience over the summer helped me find myself through a physical experience of my body and space; this infusion is something which I wanted to share. This “reorientation” shifts one’s perception of the bicycle as inferior by redefining the traditional transportation hierarchy. Lastly, women still often feel left out of the cycling world. In part, *BIKEurious* is about beautifying the bicycle and defying a male-dominated world with a lot of sexy females taking charge of their rides. Historically, bicycling has been a defiant act of womanhood and independence – *BIKEurious* reinforces this subversion and renews the feminine side of cycling.

Chapter IV: Photographing, Printing, Pedaling: The Process

“Do U Luv Yr BICYCLE?! <3 --- 9/16/11 --- I’m creating a super flashy, trashy, semi-erotic bicycle calendar. If you love your bike, I need you.”

After only one publicized advertisement, I received more than 35 email responses from eager bikelovers itching to participate in the *BIKEurious* project. Such unexpected enthusiasm reinforced the power of such an undertaking; there was a serious community of bike lovers and it was my goal to bring them together. Of the interested parties, I chose the 15 most enthusiastic participants to be photographed and interviewed. It was the first

project I've done that was entirely collaborative in nature. Handing over the creative control was certainly a learning experience; the content of the calendar was subject to the desires, ideas, and aesthetics of the participants. I learned that even when I didn't necessarily understand someone's artistic choice or personal statement, the melding of many minds always churned out a more interesting and diverse product than something I could have made myself. Given that the overall project was still under my direction but factored in the ideas of others, it still maintained its cohesive projecthood; This participatory nature mirrors the ultimate goal of creating a bicycle community based on the multitude of interests and perspectives of the pedaling people and certainly shone through in the finished product.

Initially, most models would modestly hand creative control to me, staking claim in my "artistic vision", but with a little prompting and perusal of their closets (and underwear drawers), the excitement would inspire them to take the reins. We would collaborate on locations and schemes for the shoot, generally choosing locations where one might not normally find a bicycle. With the Inland Empire's plethora of derelict or autocentric spaces, there was no shortage of strange sprawling landscapes a la abandoned lots, empty parking lots, desert gardens in the medians, parking garages, liquors store on the side of the highway, etc. During the photoshoots, I would interview the models about their relationships with their bicycles: the reasons to ride, how they felt a part of a cyclists community, and their motivation for doing the calendar. This was in part to gain an understanding of the local bicycle community as a whole, but also to encourage the models themselves to consider why it was they chose to bike in the hopes that they would become more comfortable and natural in the photographs. "The world doesn't feel

friendly to me and my bike...yet,” said one model. In interviewing a person whose bike had recently been stolen, he said, “It’s nice to have a bike just to have a bike. It’s like, ‘Guess what, world? I’ve got a bike.’ And that feels good.” After an awkward initial stage, most models opened up and embraced the intimate connection between themselves and their ride, allowing their confidence to exude throughout the photographs.

Having essentially no formal training, *BIKEurious* was an excellent opportunity for me to fine tune my photographic skills and develop a relationship between my ideas and my art. By placing a mechanism between myself and the subject, I was forced to manifest my ideas into a physical form and then reinvent them through a creative (and literal) lens. Capturing the subtleties of interaction between the subject and their bicycle took many nuances in angle, lighting, pose, and setting; pushing my boundaries of skill outside of my level of comfort made *BIKEurious* a true exploration of my abilities to formalize an artistic idea and gave me the courage to explore future projects.

I chose to draw the majority of the calendar by hand to give it a personal, DIY aesthetic. I felt that an overly computerized or digitalized product would remove the human quality; the project is about our capacity as individuals in communities to enact change, so I wanted to have that essence present. I then juxtaposed personal statements up against the photographs of each model to personalize and showcase why they were “turned on” to bicycles.

After the calendars were assembled, formatted, and printed, I held an event entitled *BIKEurious* in the south campus parking structure on Pomona’s campus. Alongside an exhibition of the calendars was a slideshow of outtake photographs projected on a wall, a bicycle bedazzling booth, a helmet decoration station, bicycle

rides, and a giveaway of the calendars. The calendars were displayed using recycled bicycle tubes suspended from two poles; in doing so, the calendars were the foreground of one's vision while cars in the garage became the backdrop, bringing bicycles to the forefront. At the end of the display, I had viewers proclaim and pledge their own bicyclicity to spur enthusiasm and introspection about one's own relationship with transportation. Not only was the event meant as a fun way to showcase the calendars, but more so was a bike pride celebration to reinforce the community bikelovers share and to invite those who may only be "*bikeurious*" to explore their bicyclicity. I held the event in a parking garage to subvert a car-centric space and redefine and reclaim this space for bicycles. Though we certainly got a lot of strange looks from drivers and passerbys, the atmosphere was the perfect accompaniment to the calendars in creating and sustaining a bike positive culture in the community. Most participants walked away with a calendar and I received a lot of positive feedback from attendees who believe "there need to be more bike events on campus."

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of *BIKEurious* was to prompt discussion around transportation issues and bring together a community of bikelovers in solidarity and subversion of our car-centric culture. Drawing from my experiences over the summer, I realized that the American adoration of the automobile stems from a cultural idealism of transportation rather than a necessity. The calendar showcases the enthusiasm and passion surrounding bicycling, reinforcing the positive people power of a tight-knit community. I created an engaging and fun beacon of bicycle love to celebrate and assert the presence of bicycling in American culture as a mainstay; perhaps 2012 will indeed be the Year of the Bicycle.

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