**The Myth of the Repack Group: Some Problems and Provocations from an Actor-Network Perspective.**

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**Abstract**

This chapter problematises heroic models of innovation which advocate the definitive, isolated and anthropocentric origins of the mountain bike. It argues that such heroic models represent a particular

kind of myth in which technology, as manifest in the reconstructionist history of the Repack group, is said to represent the human ability to domesticate nature and transform it into objects of utility. In light of the work of Latour, I (re)evaluate phenomenological and subcultural claims regarding the relationship between riders and bikes, arguing that neither is sufficiently able to grasp the complex bonds that are formed between human and nonhuman entities. In contrast, it is concluded that the mountain bike is a collective and continual achievement performed within a wider assemblage comprising a series of heterogeneous actants, thus contributing to a growing body of work that focuses on the more-than-human aspects of leisure.

## Introduction

In the opening scene of the film Klunkerz (2006), Billy Savage announces that "The question of who actually invented the mountain bike is steeped in myth and legend, but certain facts are undeniable". This message is echoed in a number of popular literature sources and emanates widely in mountain bike folklore. These sources share a unanimous and unwavering faith in the origins of the mountain bike, whereby the antecedents of the sport are traced back to a group of cyclists known as the "Repack" group, who raced steel bikes down unpaved fire-roads on Mount Tamalpais, California in the late 1970s. The bikes used in these races were constructed from childrens Schwinn Excelsior frames that featured wide tyres, large handlebars, and a broad saddle, which were said to have been well suited for off-road racing (Rosen, 2002). To withstand the strain exerted on the bikes and to increase their chances of winning, riders began to add more sophisticated components including derailer gearing systems, front and rear drum brakes and motorcycle brake levers, and in the process are purported to have invented a new kind of all-terrain bicycle (ATB) that was uniquely suited to the rigours of off-road cycling (Ballantine, 2000). Subsequently, Gary Fisher, Joe Breeze, and Charlie Kelly brought the mountain bike to a mass market, and in doing so are purported to have spawned a new leisure culture that culminated in the emergence of professional competitions and its subsequent inclusion in the Modern Olympiad (Savre, Saint-Martin, & Terret, 2009).

This was undoubtedly a significant period in the evolution of mountain biking, involving a series of unprecedented cultural and technological leaps. Indeed, the culture today owes a great debt to the Repack group and other riding collectives such as the "Lark Spur Canyon Gang", "Cupertino Boys" and the "East Bay Bicycle Coalition". However, such readings of leisure are also deeply contentious, in that they represent a reconstructionist history which is premised on the naïve assumption that historians "can discover the past as it really was, or as it actually happened" (Booth, 2006, p. 20). This amounts to an act of intellectual provincialism that essentialises the practices of the societies that proceeded them "and prevents an exploration of the undoubtedly vibrant, complicated meaning of physical culture in those preceding contexts (Sansone, 1992, p. 9). In so doing, authors and filmmakers such as those listed above have a tendency to exaggerate both the uniqueness of a given event and the motivations and attitudes of the people involved, thus promulgating a heroic model of technological innovation (Pinch and Henry, 1999).

What emerges here is a very specific kind of myth, in which the complex, contradictory and multifarious aspects of the mountain bike are undermined in favour of a new set of associations that revolve around simplicity, intentionality, and linearity. Here, the original signifier of the mountain bike, represented here by the involute blend of matter, human activity, temporality, and socio-cultural landscape, and the original signified - namely, the impromptu activities of a group of countercultural "hippies", are transformed into a second-order semiological system (Barthes, 1973) which elevates the Repack Group to a cultural tour de force. Thus, the role of myth is to take a purely cultural and historical object such as a bike and transform it into the sign of universal value, that is, something that is entirely the achievement of a few (human) actors whose accomplishments come to represent "the miraculous embodiment of the human ability to transform nature into wholly domestic, wholly bourgeois objects of utility" (Barthes, 1973, p. 97). Such crude representations of mountain bike culture and its leading protagonists are then sustained through a process of creative destruction, in which the subtleties of history and historical practice are dismantled and reorganised in a manner befitting the market-orientated and commodity-driven nature of the 21st-century leisurescape (Rinehart, 2008).

In this chapter, I seek to highlight the shortcomings of this heroic model of innovation, whilst destabilising, and subsequently reassembling the involute mythologies of mountain biking in/as/with leisure. Through an analysis of popular literature, academic studies regarding the leisure-technology nexus and popular media documentaries, and drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, I will challenge the notion that this leisure form had a definitive beginning, whilst re-orienting the cultural history of mountain biking in such a way as to recognise its complicated and entangled origins. In doing so, the chapter highlights two attendant sub-narratives upon which this enduring mythology has been constructed. Firstly, and in line with a unique reading of subcultural theory, I contend that the tendency to locate the Repack group within the binary of agency-structure obfuscates mountain bikers' relationship with, and reliance upon the nonhuman. Concomitantly, I shall grapple with the phenomenological notion of intense embodiment as it applies to the exploits of the Repack group, via a critical engagement with the work of Garcia (2018). In doing so, the chapter supports the claim that mountain biking does not have a single, definitive origin (Partland and Gibson, 2003), whilst adding to the rich vein of research that seeks to reclaim and evoke the complex, global and pluri centered development of technology.


### The Mountain Bike as Socio-Technical Assemblage.


In contradistinction to the heroic model of innovation, this paper adopts an Actor-Network approach to the development of the mountain bike and its position within the sphere of leisure. Pioneered by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law, Actor-Network Theory (ANT) constitutes a unique way to approach agency and society as they converge within the (historical) development of technology. United in their opposition to technological and social determinism, proponents of ANT argue that sociological approaches to innovation must necessarily focus on the associations that are formed between natural, human and technological entities. Key to this is the recognition that agency should be attributed to both human and nonhuman actors - what Latour (2004b, p. 75) refers to as "actants", forming part of a dynamic and negotiated realm of social relations in which neither human or non-human are privileged. In this sense, social relations are always socio-technical and humans and non-humans should be treated equally in their ability to produce action and affect. By way of illustration, Latour describes a range of nonhuman entities, including guns (Latour, 1999), doors (Latour,1992) and speedbumps (Latour, 1996)

that interact with humans and perform a significant role in the performance of everyday relations. Similarly, and within the context of leisure, Johannesson (2005) is critical of those approaches that adopt an either/or approach to tourism as "destination" and "performance", and in their stead seeks to deal with the relational materiality of the social world that is manifest in the concept of *translation.* In drawing on the example of a photo, he illustrates how certain objects become the intermediary through which the multiple notions of place are materialised: it is a souvenir for the taker, an annoyance for local inhabitants, a form of self-promotion on social media and/or a marker of success which can be (re) purposed by the city for future promotion. Accordingly, it is argued that these features of ANT provide a possibility to overcome dualism and appreciate the significance of materialities in the study and practice of tourism.

In recognising the importance of non-human agency Latour forces a radical recasting of the notion of the subject, for if we recognise the agency of non-human we must also, by extension, accept that the principle of irreduction (Harman, 2009), that is, a relation between different entities that suggests that it is "always possible to explain anything in terms of anything else - as long as we do the work of showing how one can be transformed into the other, through a chain of equivalences" (ibid: 26). Against the sociology of the social, Latour posits that we should work against the tendency to see individuals as self-serving vessels of power, and instead position actors as that those who are "made to act by many others [including non-humans]…the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming towards it" (Latour, 2005a, p. 46). This strikes at the core argument of leisure theorists such as Rose and Wilson (2019), Aitchinson (2006) and Evers (2019), and is this aspect that has the most explanatory power in understanding the limits of the heroic model of innovation. Indeed, rather than being produced individually, agency for Latour is produced via a heterogeneous network, or (leisure) assemblage that is understood as a matter of intra-acting or enactment which cannot be reduced to either the individual or the collective, but rather as "complex networks of individual and collective agents (both human and non-human), which constitute waves of confrontational social engagement at many levels and encompass difference forms of performances and associations marked by their oppositional but proactive character" (Baron and Gomez, 2016, p. 15). Within an ANT framework of sociality, performativity is therefore key, as it is only through the practices, doings, and actions of leisure contexts, rather than the heroic actions of a few isolated individuals, that technology is brought into being.

In light of this position, Latour (1996) urges us to rethink other sociological dualisms including those that relate to size, proximity, distance, and power. If there are no essences, and agency is the consequence of intra-active performances between humans and non-humans, then the particularities of such dualisms can be disassembled by foregrounding a series of "irreducible, incommensurable, unconnected localities" (Latour, 1996, p.3). From this perspective, it makes little sense to think of the "invention" of the mountain bike as happening in one socio-temporal location as evidence suggests that the roots of mountain biking are multiple in origin. In the same vein, the difference in scale between small and large is flattened as we move toward a monist system of relations, in which it is no longer a question of whether a given invention is a representation of a thing such as a person, city or a society, but rather what moves and how this movement is recorded (Latour, 1996). This does not mean, as critics have often suggested (see Buchanan, 2015), that Latour is guilty of ignoring the way in which certain manifestations of power can be unequal and oppressive. Nor does it mean that the individual is made passive by the assemblage within which they find themselves. On the contrary, Latour suggests that actants, which may include humans such as Gary Fisher and Joe Breeze but also nonhumans such as the Schwinn Excelsior, are not stronger or weaker because of some inner, potential essence, but rather, that all actants are locked in a battle for strength, and each is defined by the (in)ability to form vibrant associations with other entities (Harman, 2009).

Scholars who align with ANT in the study of leisure practices such as music (Showen and Mantie, 2019), sport (Kerr, 2016), tourism (Johannesson, 2005) and the use of public parks (Rose and Wilson, 2019) therefore reject the notion that technology can be reduced to a tool, preferring to see such objects as assemblages of actants that come into being through their multiple and often overlapping associations. Additionally, innovations are not seen to be the privilege of a single source but are said to come into practice through a number of iterations involving a myriad of humans and non-humans (Latour, 1987). It is perhaps for this reason why Gary Fisher, one of the so-called founding members of the Repack Group, issued this statement of caution regarding his influence on the development and design of the mountain bike:

> I still speculate on whether a few of my friends and myself really did influence the world, or whether we were just the people who were standing there when the appropriate forces came together. All of us who participated in the seminal mountain bike period...wonder whether we did anything or whether it just happened to us (Fisher, cited in Rosen, 1993, p.493)

In his reference to "appropriate forces", Fisher renders an explanation for the technological development of the mountain bike that explicitly dislocates the agency of the individual. Furthermore, and in relation to Latour's notion of the actant, Fisher is willing to decentre human influence whilst shifting emphasis onto a complex, interwoven assemblage. In this way, the mountain bike is akin to Latour and Venn's (2002) illustration of a hammer, in that various heterogeneous actors, including history, minerals, factories, tools, retail outlets, and factory workers are "folded" (2002, p.24) together to form a "socio-technical" assemblage (Latour, 2010).

In what follows, I draw upon ANT to answer Sarah Whatmore's (2002, p. 1361) plea to push "hybridity back in time" to explore the historical roots and possible futures of our "more-than-human" world. Through careful (re) engagement with the (social) history of mountain biking, specifically the mythical legacy of the Repack Group, I hope to both demythologise the notion that the mountain bike had a singular, definitive origin whilst reassembling the social in such a way as to reveal the socio-technical origins of mountain biking as a leisure form. To achieve this, and in drawing on the conceptual framework outlined above, I begin by turning to the supposed subcultural affiliations of the Repack group, followed by a brief critique of the search for intensity that is purported to have driven the group's sense of community.

**The Mountain Bike as Dingpolitik.**

It is generally accepted that the Repack group developed a unique counter-cultural identity that was in keeping with the personal and political sensibilities of 1970s America. For instance, Mcullough (2013) contends that mountain biking was born out of a disenchantment with an emerging fitness culture which required increasing levels of discipline and bodily conformity in artificial environments. Members of the Repack group, McKewan (2019) elaborates, grew tired of being excluded from more formal cycling competitions because of their long hair and scruffy appearance, and thus "sought to establish an alternative pursuit where they would be welcomed regardless of how they looked" (ibid: 14). Within such texts, we find frequent reference to the notion of the "hippy" in describing these sub-cultural affiliations, so described because of their search for new sensations and an informal approach to sport which developed out of a shared disenchantment with the mainstream (Berto, 2015). This sub-cultural ethos is evidenced most clearly in Savage's (2006) feature film Klunkerz in which members of the

Repack Group are noted for their propensity for pot-smoking, dressing provocatively, and dangerous, fast paced riding styles.

However, the agentic capacity of its protagonists and their potential for challenging mainstream sporting formations remains deeply contested within cultural studies and the sociology of leisure. Commentators such as Beal (1995) maintain that leisure-cultures are the manifestation of resistance by subordinated groups, and that cleavages in hegemonic power can be opened up through those practices, such as snowboarding and skateboarding which resist dominant ideologies and create transformatory morals and ideals. By contrast, post-subcultural theorists such as Wheaton (2010) and Thorpe and Wheaton (2019) contest the collective nature of these transformations and the supposed coherence of subcultural affiliations, opting instead for the term lifestyle sport, which they see as representing the fluid, individualised and highly performative nature of postmodern identities. Similarly, Kiewa (2002) adopts the notion of a neo-tribe to describe contemporary post-war leisure formations such as climbing, since this term is said to encompass the fleeting, fragile and hedonistic bonds to which subcultural members are supposed to adhere.

What emerges throughout these studies, according to Hodkinson (2016, p. 631-32) is a conception of subculture that is all too frequently polarised:

> The inference that the concept is so inflexible that is always must infer culture as determined by structure and cannot accommodate even the smallest measure of individual diversity leaves us with a charictature that few of its adherents would recognise…[yet]…to repeatedly assert the importance of individual difference, agency and fluidity…may only get us so far.

Hodkinson's critique of the dualistic tendencies of subcultural and post-subcultural theory offers a valuable insight into the limits of this dyadic notion of agency and structure. It also highlights the importance of praxis in the performance and emergence of subcultural identities. As an alternative however, his suggestion of reconciling the subjective with the structural and the everyday to the spectacular offers limited utility in explaining the mountain bike assemblage, in that, by adding further layers of human meaning and interpretation we end up reifying the role of human agency in the development and maintenance of such identities, while further burying the influence of non-human entities such as mountain bikes, marijuana and beer. Indeed, to ignore the role played by nonhumans here would be to ignore the manifold ways in which technologies such as surfboards, mountain bikes, and parachutes, as well as more subtle environments and materials such as water, rock and air, play a constituent role in the enactment (and disruption) of subcultural identities (Evers, 2019). To develop an effective analysis of subcultural identity within mountain biking, one must, therefore attend to this principle of symmetry (Latour and Woolgar, 1986), whilst understanding the way in which human and non-human are mobilised in the act of subversion.

When seen in this light, the mountain bike can be positioned as a collective and continual achievement performed within a wider assemblage comprising a series of heterogeneous, sociomaterial actants, as opposed to a discrete and stable unit of technology. In addition, any attempt to impose a universal explanation on such technology, such as that represented in the myth of the Repack group, is seen as an act of power that should be questioned and subsequently unraveled (Muller, 2015). As such, ANT allows us to account for both the instability of power attributed by Gramscian renderings of subcultural participation as well as the material qualities of contemporary consumer culture identified in post-subcultural accounts. Furthermore, it instigates a move away from crude notions of collective identity and rational choice. Indeed, for proponents of ANT it is precisely within the fragile and uncertain

alliance between a series actants involved in this socio-technical assemblage that political change can be enacted, something that Latour (2005b) refers to elsewhere as *Dingpolitik*. Here, Latour argues that more emphasis should be placed on the alliances formed between things, non-humans, and attachments since it is via this focus that we can decentre politics from the Anthropos and acknowledge the generative potential of matter. Accordingly, entities such as the mountain bike are more than just a resource or a self-contained entity, but take an active role in the shaping of a given social and political order.

When applied to the activities of the Repack group it is not difficult to locate the Schwinn bicycle as a considerable example of such Dingpolik. For instance, Mcullough (2013) observes how the counter-cultural sentiments of the group were reinforced through the onomatopoeic name of the original klunker, whose heavy frames and rattling components serving as both a visual and auditory reminder of the mountain bikers' marginal position within the mainstream. Furthermore, Partland and Gibson (2003) have shown that the mechanical failures associated with the new off-road bicycle played a significant role in defining the creation of a new brand of "anti-bike" (2003, p. 15) which was widely revered by the riders. Throughout the film *Klunkerz* numerous members of the Repack group vouch for the pleasure associated with repacking their failed braking system with oil at the end of each ride, and frequent mention is made of the sense of authenticity derived from this as it contrasted with that of the conventional bicycle (Berto, 2015). As such, the practice of mountain biking, as evidenced in the assemblages of humans and nonhumans outlined above, is akin to what Chandler (2018, p. 17) describes as the process of "hacking"; which necessitates that riders develop an intimately entangled relationship with their bikes, and that disturbances (between rider, bike, and landscape) are seen "as opportunities for experimentation rather than merely as problems in need of solutions" (ibid:19).

Like Latour, it is my contention that this emergent Dingpolitik holds genuine political promise in a post-political age. Under our current late-capitalist condition it is has been said that all acts of dissent are incorporated (or rather, "pre"corporated) by capitalism and fed back to consumers through a relentless supply of commodities. By converting authentic practices and rituals into aesthetic objects, writes Fisher (2009, p. 4) "the beliefs of previous cultures are objectively ironised, transformed into artifacts …and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics". In the context of extreme leisure, these sentiments are echoed by Wheaton and Thorpe (2019) who remain dubious of the alignment of such leisure formations within mainstream sports organisations and commercial agendas. However, by returning to the missing masses and developing a more sophisticated onto-politics of leisure it may be possible to de-mythologise commodity fetishism, distance ourselves from the present centered-ness of neo-liberal, capitalist culture and rekindle an intimacy with nonhumans in such as way as to realise the proximity of capitalism in our everyday lives. Furthermore, by foregrounding and further unravelling the mountain biking actor-network as materialised in the actions of the Repack group, we can potentially unsurp the unsatisfactory distinction between resistance and incorporation as it applies to the consumption of objects, showing that as "things and technologies complicate, partake in and reshape the process of governing, they foreground the political, opening up new controversies and new grounds for contestation" (Muller, 2015, p. 31).

## Intense Embodiment, or the "Life Intense"?

Another prominent feature of historical accounts of the Repack group is the supposed "intensity" of their embodied experience (Anne-Collinson and Owton, 2015). This was also manifest in the film *Klunkerz*, where numerous members of the Repack group express the perilous and risky nature of the races:

> We were adventurers. We did a lot of crazy stuff. We were all kind of adrenaline junkies. That was the one bond we had. We loved getting off doing crazy stuff. And riding our bikes down Mount Tam was a total rush. (Tom Slivka)

> At the start line I was so terrified, I could barely turn the pedals I was so scared. I was like this great big bowl of Jell-O, you know. It was, it was hairball… I mean, it was, like, a two-mile drop, vertical drop straight down, laden with cavernous holes, and huge rocks, and hairball turns, and all these places that you could just, you could drop into them and never be seen again. You know, it was scary [laughing] (Wende Cragg)

Adopting a sociological phenomenological perspective towards embodied leisure experience, Collinson and Owton (2014) use the term intense embodiment to refer to such periods of heightened corporeal awareness. These instances, as we may glean from the statements above, are said to come the foreground of perception when humans engage in euphoric experiences that enliven the senses and allow individuals to feel deeply connected with their bodies, resulting in a sense of mastery and elevated intentionality. Yet, in order for participants to engage with this intensity, they must first master the body techniques and physical expectations of particular socio-cultural setting, which may dictate specific types of haptic, kinaesthetic, proprioceptive and vestibular regulation. For example, in moving through "outdoor" environments such as heathland and mountains, individuals must first understand how to enjoy the smell of flowers and the wetness of rain, one must be comfortable with heights and a sense of isolation and must learn not to litter because it compromises the natural aesthetic of the countryside. Thus, through this lens, the senses are seen not as merely passive receptors but as "part of the phenomenological intertwining of mind-body-world" (Owton and Allen-Collinson, 2014:8) that condition all forms of physical culture.

In the extreme leisure literature, this notion has been widely adopted in analysing what has been variously described as "flow", "stoke" or "buzz". Dant and Wheaton (2007, p. 12) suggest that "the feelings of flow and the buzz of excitement in these leisure forms can be appreciated both internally (i.e. the rush of going fast), and externally, within a social context in which such experiences are shared" (i.e. the bonds developed through the shared sense of fear). Similarly, and in line with the phenomenological works listed above, Le Breton (2000) contends that participation in extreme leisure is characterised by an escape back into the body, by engaging with danger and deliberately exposing oneself to certain types of risk. Specifically, Brymer (2013) posits that the benefits of risk-taking is that it elevates individuals above and beyond the social, allowing people to accept "the reality of the abyss (nothingness), the acceptance of the presence of anxiety and of being open to confront one"s own death" (2013, p.867). Such sentiments are echoed in Atkinson's (2011) study of fell runners, in which scrambling up steep, boggy hillsides on dangerous terrain is said to induce a sense of vertigo, uncertainty, and personal disruption that "remind the participants of the pleasures of moving freely and wildly, like children sunk in the joy of play" (ibid:110), whilst at the same time counteracting the modern, institutionalised and formal expectations of contemporary sport.

However, the problem with phenomenology as it applies specifically to mountain biking is that it is exclusively dedicated to focussing on only those aspects of human experience that take place within the correlation between thought and being (Sparrow, 2014). That is, there is too much emphasis on

individual potentiality and agency, at the expense of a more detailed analysis of the reality of *things*. This leaves little scope for analysis of nonhuman entities since correlationism suggests that things cannot be realised unless they are first brought into being through human intentionality (Morton, 2017). Furthermore, Sparrow (2014, p.vii) laments that "despite phenomenology"s thick carnal descriptions…it cannot even match Heidegger's insights into a deeper withdrawal of real entities from consciousness - much less tell us anything about the interaction of nonhuman objects". From the excerpts outlined above, and others contained within the annals of mountain bike history, this seems an important oversight, especially when one considers the manifold ways in which mountain bikes, as nonhuman actants, are incorporated into human identity and seen as an extension of the self (Dodson, 1996).

As an alternative approach, Garcia (2018) reasons that the problem with modern aesthetics is that it is reduced to the "here and now" of human perception. This extreme presence is what Garcia refers to as *intensity*, and is characterised by a number of important aspects: (1) it is immediate and not successive, (2) it cannot be quantified numerically, (3) it cannot be compared to anything else, (4) it is continuous and non-discrete, (5) it is what emanates from intimate, interior experience and (5) it is a stronghold against extension, space, rationalism, and universality. Garcia suggests that the same search for intensity that has dogged philosophical thinking has also been extended to everyday relations, to the extent that it has now become a moral and ethical imperative. Morally, intensity has been elevated to a set of values to which we are all keen to aspire, that of the intense person, who craves the "fast life, the disorderly disturbance of all sensations, the desire to feel the intensities of whatever might happen coursing through you" (2018, p.76), and ethically the most important question, regardless of the actions or motivations of the individual is whether they "have lived life to the fullest" (ibid:11). Consumer capitalism caters widely for this modern obsession for the intense. Chocolate manufacturers promise the most intense tasting products, perfumes are advertised for the intensity of their aroma, and media outlets advertise extreme sports that promise a stream of intense and dangerous action (Rinehart, 2008). Intensity therefore becomes the "standard by which we measure the value of both our intimate life and the moment in which we live" (ibid: 13).

Of particular interest here, is Garcia's suggestion that objects such as bikes, mountains, and rocks can have an intensity of their own. For example, in a manner similar to Latour, Garcia attributes agency to electricity as the driving force of modernity, and thus a key factor in the modern obsession with intensity. Garcia gives the example of the guitar, which in becoming electrified moved from the natural world into the technical world, and as it did so moved the discipline of music into a whole new era in which the technical objects of music were connected to the nerves and electricity of our bodies. The mountain bike emerged out of a similar process of cyborgification, in which the intersections between the rider's bodies, the Swinn Excelsiors and the mountain trail produced new hybrid technologies that were "at once technocultural, material, natural, disciplinary, resistant, and discrete yet constantly changing (Rossiter, 2007, p. 303). Buenstorf (2003), for instance argues that the enormous mechanical stress on the bikes during races and the various types of brakes available turned out to overheat to different extents during the long, rocky downhill stretches which meant that a close relationship between rider and bike were essential if they were going to win the race. This process was intensified by the strict race regulations which prohibited riders from receiving any external help, therefore increasing the need for a reliable frame and components, as well as a the kind of rider who could better understand how to be "affected" (Latour, 2004a, p. 210) by the peculiarities of their bicycle.

Therefore, in contrast to those theories of leisure that see risk and attendant feelings of "flow" as a sociological and/or psychological endeavour (see Chamarro et al, 2019; Robinson, 2013), evidence from the Repack group suggests that risk should instead be considered as a specific heterogeneous

assemblage that does not emanate from a single (human) source, but rather from the fragile and uncertain connections between a range of different hybrids (Nieisser, 2014). As I established earlier, leisure assemblages comprise an irreducible set of relations and all actants within these assemblages (including rocks, wheels, humans, mud, etc.) are locked into a continuous battle for strength. Since these relations are necessarily indeterminate, there is a contingency within them which means that there is always the risk that alliances can change and the assemblage can be reconfigured. Thus the risk of mountain biking is not the exclusive property of subjective perception or (un)intentionality (i.e. the fear that made riders feel like a "great big bowl of Jell-O", getting a "total rush"), but rather, in the changing configuration of the actor-network. The mountain bike is an object that "unsettles" (Silva, 2014, p. 203) in so far as they routinely exceed human intentions, destabilising and decentering the knowledge, perspectives, and emotions of those who encounter it. Such disturbances can be disconcerting, but as the riders from the Repack group have shown they can also be positively connoted in that they lead to moments of creative innovation or a new direction for those who engage with them (Nieisser, 2014).

## Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have argued that heroic models of innovation, represented here by the myth of the Repack group, do not reflect the complex, entangled and hybrid history of mountain biking. By drawing on actor-network theory, specifically the work of Bruno Latour, I have shifted emphasis beyond the narrowly anthropocentric focus of existing accounts and refocussed attention on the material, emergent and socio-technical qualities of leisure. In doing so, I have shown how the history of mountain biking is one that comprises a social-technical assemblage in which neither human or nonhuman is privileged, and how the monist and heterogeneous nature of this assemblage allows for a radical recasting of orthodox sociological/historical notions such as agency, space, resistance, embodiment, and risk. In section one, I introduced the story of the Repack group and positioned this as a specific kind of myth that attempts to isolate the uniqueness of given events and recreate the past "as it really was". In section two I critiqued such models of history by way of actor-network theory, locating the use-value of this theory at the juncture of sociology, technology and leisure studies. Key to this section was the recognition that individuals cannot be isolated from the various assemblages within which they are part, and that technological innovations and there impact on history should never be seen as the heroic achievements of a few unique human actors. In the final two sections, I applied these theoretical tools in analysing the legacy of the Repack group. Drawing on a combination of film, popular literature, and academic publications, I suggested that the group's subcultural orientation and the intense forms of embodiment that were said to have followed this curtail the influence of nonhumans such as bike components, rocks, clothes, and marijuana whilst further entrenching the myth of human intentionality.

The importance of this paper is therefore twofold. Theoretically, the work presented here adds to a growing body of literature that seeks to question, deconstruct, and reassemble dominant historical tropes within leisure studies as to bring them to bear on the present. This is a crucial exercise, as historical myths can often act as invented traditions that reinforce a series of ideological assertions regarding the ascendancy of Western modernization, as well as attendant notions of racial, gendered and national superiority (Clevenger, 2019). In this respect, a central tenet of ANT and a key contribution which is manifest in my focus on heterogeneous networks is that studies of technology do not just neutrally describe the makeup of history and the technologies that such histories comprise, but that they actively

transform these histories in the process of (re)writing them. Secondly, by engaging with the mountain bike assemblage as evidenced in the story of the Repack group we can begin to envision and therefore constitute a range of alternative leisure forms . This comes at a crucial juncture in the development of the extreme leisure landscape, as due to their increasing incorporation and co-option into the mainstream it is becoming ever more difficult to see how such activities are going to maintain their informal and anti-corporate ethos (Thorpe and Wheaton, 2019). In this chapter, and in line with Barthes (1973) I have destabilised the appearance of a natural, inevitable (human) order (i.e. anthropocentrism, capitalism, isolated acts of human heroism) to reveal a series of fragile and contingent connections between humans, mountain bikes and history, and have restored some of the synergistic intensity between humans and nonhumans that the process of commodification frequently eliminates. In doing so, my hope is that this chapter may provide a springboard for further discussions regarding more-than-human analyses in leisure and their potential for addressing these various dilemmas in a more nuanced and less anthropocentric way.

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