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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

**A LIFE OF ITS OWN:
THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE TOUR DE FRANCE**

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the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

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Catherine Palmer

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with representations of French cycling life. Based on a fieldwork period from July 1993 to August 1994, it focuses on the characteristics and personalities of those cyclists living and riding in the *département* of Isère. To examine the ways in which these cyclists variously construct and conceptualize the social and cultural dimensions of their daily lives, I draw on the field of interpretive anthropology as pioneered by Clifford Geertz.

The annual return of the Tour de France proves to be fundamentally shaping of cycling lives. For those riding in Isère, cycling represents an acutely reflexive enterprise, with personal experiences being both measured and validated in terms of the Tour de France. The Tour presents a dramatization, or an exemplification, of social action which is appropriated by cyclists to contextualize their local conditions.

The relationship between local cyclists and the national event however, runs deeper than this. In thinking and talking about the Tour de France, Isérois cyclists *fetishize* the Tour; they imbue it with a power, a dominance and a life of its own. In bringing the race to life, it is France itself that is fetishized; injected with new life, vitality and national autonomy.

My thesis is concerned to identify and elaborate the ways in which the experiences of Isérois cyclists are influenced and changed by the Tour de France. It asks two questions: what narrative and performative themes are articulated by Isérois cyclists, and how do these dimensions of cultural life come to fetishize, not only the Tour de France, but also, the country in which they live and ride?

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NOTE ON CITATION AND PRESENTATION OF ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL

When re-creating an image of cultural life for a larger public, invariably there are problems concerning the confidentiality of sources. My treatment of the Isérois cycle domain reflects this. Most cyclists were happy for me to acknowledge their involvement and inclusion in my thesis, however others were less so. While I have duly named my sources where appropriate, out of respect for my more reticent informants, I have deliberately left their names blank, rather than create a pseudonym for them. I refer to these informants as Isérois cyclists, local riders, cycling enthusiasts and aficionados in order to preserve their anonymity. I also adopt these terms when referring to a group of cyclists. Unless appropriately acknowledged and cited in the text, all quoted exchanges are personal communication.

The names of all towns, prominent leaders and bureaucratic organizations are real names, so I have left them in their original French. On the whole, conversations and dialogue have been translated to make the text easier to read, although in places the lexicon of French cycling evokes a quality that is difficult to convey in English, so I have left these terms as they are.



CHAPTER ONE
FIRST GEAR; METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS AND
THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Why bear the unbearable? Why stay indentured to a
featherweight frame with cobweb wheels? Why?
To sweep through the Arc de Triomphe on the last day.
To be able to say you've finished the Tour de France
Gilbert Duclos-Lassalle (1989: 137).

Introduction

Characterized as 'the greatest race ever', as an epic battle of herculean athleticism, and as the finest test of a cyclist's mettle, the Tour de France captivates an entire nation. Each July, France lives and breathes cycling. People follow the progress of the race through the three television channels dedicated to its coverage, through the national daily sports newspaper, *L'Equipe*, through news and radio broadcasts and importantly, through local gossip. A huge vocabulary of anecdote, idiom and popular sentiment surrounds the Tour. The saying, "you can raise the price of bread, you can put more taxes on, you can do almost anything you want in July, because they [the people] only care about who's wearing yellow," captures the all-consuming quality of the Tour de France. As a "paradigmatic human event" (Geertz 1973: 405), the Tour de France can be seen as a cultural phenomenon that reveals and reproduces a multiplicity of meanings, both for those watching and those participating in this epic event. The Tour de France represents the enactment of discrete narrative themes that have the capacity to engage a variety of people in a variety of ways.

Staged annually in July, the Tour circumnavigates France, passing through five hundred towns and covering approximately four thousand kilometres in three weeks. Negotiating an ever changing, ever challenging route, the Tour de France is a three week drama where even the *lanterne rouge* or last rider has his *élan* tested to the limit.¹ The Tour symbolizes a gluttonous feast of sporting combat that both demands and demonstrates complete cycling competence. With its death-defying sprints at more than seventy kilometres

¹It should be noted that the Tour de France is an exclusively male event, hence my deliberate use of gender specific language when discussing the race.

an hour, with its solitary suffering as the riders endure the individual time trial, and with its back breaking climbs through the Pyrénées and the Alps, the Tour tests every facet of cycling. For the estimated three million people who follow the Tour each day, the race provides a three week splurge of athletic bravado, triumph, joy, suffering and despair. For twenty three days in July, its fans tune in to, read about and stand by the baking hot roadways of France to follow the triumphs and tragedies of *les hommes du juillet*.

The Tour de France exists as a collective experience that evokes and justifies grandiloquence; it is a distinctly French focus of shared consuming passion. As one informant remarked, "who doesn't know the Tour de France? What Frenchman hasn't stood by the road to wait for the race? It is every boy's dream to ride the Tour." The Tour de France is a profoundly significant sporting moment that inspires unswerving devotion from its followers. The same informant continues, claiming that, "in truth, there are two sorts of French people. Those who confess to liking the Tour de France and those who like it without confessing to it."

Le Tour de France; historical perspective and brief ethnology²

First staged in 1903, the emergence of the Tour as a cultural force finds its roots in a precise historical moment. At the turn of the century, France offered a political, economic and social climate which provided fertile soil for sowing the seeds of the Tour de France. With the onset of industrialization, people migrated from rural to urban centres of cultural and commercial life, a move that brought about many social dislocations. Most notably, French pride in the ideas of intellectual, financial and spiritual progress was challenged. Despite, or because of, France's movement from an agricultural stronghold to an industrial force, the belief in the need to protect *la France profonde*- the real France of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*- pervaded the country. It was from within this protectionist climate that the Tour de France emerged. It captured the essence of freedom and fraternity that the instability of the newly urbanized France had begun to erode.

According to archival sources, the Dreyfus Affair was the catalyst for the inception of the Tour. Pierre Giffard, the editor of *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Vélo*, was one of only a few journalists to support Emile Zola and to defend Dreyfus publicly against charges of treason. Giffard's impassioned articles, particularly in *Le Vélo*, angered the Count de Dion, the leading financial

²All quotations found in this historical section are taken from unpublished archival material from the offices of *L'Equipe* newspapers.

supporter of the paper. Withdrawing his backing from *Le Vélo*, the Count, with Adolphe Clément (a major manufacturer of bicycles), established a rival cycling newspaper in October 1900. This paper was *L'Auto*, and its first editor was Henri Desgrange, a former bike racer who had set the first unpaced hour record in 1893, and was now acting as the publicity agent for Clément Cycles.

While support for Dreyfus and a perceived threat to the national ideals of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* foreshadowed the Tour, a more pressing concern was the financial imperative of boosting the circulation of the newly established newspaper. Searching for a gimmick to promote *L'Auto*, Desgrange and the chief cycling correspondent, Géo Lefèvre, hit upon the idea of using a bike race as a money spinner for the paper. The race was announced in a florid editorial claiming:

with the same broad and powerful swing of the hand which Zola gave to his labourer in *The Earth*, *L'Auto*, a newspaper of ideas and action, is going to fling across France those reckless and uncouth sowers of energy who are the great professional riders of the road. From Paris to the blue waves of the Mediterranean, from Marseille to Bordeaux, passing along roseate and dreamy roads, sleeping under the sun, across the calm of the fields of the Vendée, following the Loire, which flows on still and silent, our men are going to race madly, unflaggingly.

'Le Tour de France', the greatest cycling test in the world- a month long race. Paris-Lyon. Marseille-Toulouse. Bordeaux-Nantes. Nantes-Ville d'Avray. 20,000 francs in prizes. Leaving 1 June. Arriving in Paris 5 July at the Parc des Princes (press kit: La Société du Tour de France, 1993).

Notwithstanding widespread publicity in *L'Auto*, and the enticement of an unexpectedly large prize purse, the Tour de France had a difficult birth. According to the staff historian at *L'Equipe* (the contemporary namesake of *L'Auto*), even Desgrange himself contemplated cancelling the event when, in May of 1903, only twelve riders had signed on. "Without fifty riders there would be no Tour de France," Desgrange warned in his editorials. Recognizing that a major obstacle to the success of the race was the fact that few riders could afford to be away from home for thirty five days, Desgrange reduced the duration of the Tour to twenty three days- the length which remains to this day.

The inaugural Tour de France proved itself to be an overwhelming success. Seventy eight riders started (sixty finished) and the circulation of *L'Auto* rose from 80,000 to 300,000 copies. Enthusiasm for the Tour grew quickly. By 1904, eighty eight *engagés* had signed on for the second edition which was held

over the same course as the previous year for an increased prize purse of 21,000 francs. The second Tour was a disaster, the anecdotal remains of which continue to colour popular treatments of the race. As common opinion has it, treachery and sabotage were rampant, with crowds of hooligans blocking the road at night, beating up some riders and allowing their favourites through.³ Nails were strewn on the road, puncturing the tyres of the riders and even those of Desgrange's car as he attempted to return control to the race. Shots were fired at some of the riders to force them to quit and several disguised themselves as waiters to escape. Of potentially greater damage to the '*humaine, sportive, égalitaire*' image that the Tour was intended to encapsulate, cheating was widespread, with charges heard that some riders had gained an advantage through travelling by car at night over the difficult stretches of the road. Given these circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that Desgrange was resolute in his declaration that the race of 1904 meant the end of the Tour de France. "[It] is finished," he wrote in *L'Auto*, "and the second *édition*, I'm afraid, has been killed by success, by the blind passions it has unleashed, by the injuries and filthy suspicions caused by the ignorant and the wicked."

Persuaded by Lefèvre to let the race continue, Desgrange instituted several changes that have helped shape the race in its contemporary form. In 1905, the number of stages was increased to eleven to eliminate the risky night stages, and the length of the stages themselves was shortened. The route was enlarged to include excursions into Brittany, Normandy and Alsace, and the overall length of the course grew to 2975 kilometres. With the expansion of the race to include more of France on its itinerary, many towns complained that the route would miss them. Desgrange noted in his pre-race editorial for 1911 that "Perpignan, in a tearful letter, insists that it isn't far from the projected route. Albi, Cahors and Auch, with a touching unanimity, protested that they had not been included."

Desgrange had obviously found the right formula for the Tour de France; a race now nearly twice the length of the next longest, the Paris-Brest-Paris, and one far richer in prizes and prestige than any other. As Lefèvre identified in relation to the first Tour de France, "the triumph of the winner will be that he did not win simply Paris to Lyon or Marseille to Toulouse or Bordeaux to Nantes, but the race of the Tour de France." Such hyperbole proved prophetic: in 1919, eleven riders signed on for the race. By 1986, there were

³In these formative years, the Tour was raced like a RAAM or 'Race across America' style race, with racing being a continuous affair- whoever gets there first wins- rather than being circumscribed by the limits of daily stages.

more than two hundred participants.

The Tour de France has evolved from these comparatively humble origins into a sporting spectacle on a scale with few rivals. Almost nothing stops the Tour, except of course, the two world wars which led to its cancellation between 1915-1918 and 1940-1946. A veritable national monument, the place of the Tour in France is unnervingly secure. It is now a euphoric expression of collective identity that has an unmistakable impact upon the cultural and commercial interests of France. It is, as Debord notes, "a spectacular time" (1983: paragraph 147). Comparable in scale to the Olympic Games or to soccer's World Cup, the complexity and magnitude of the event guarantee the Tour de France a certain stature as the archetypal postmodern sporting moment.⁴ Like the Olympic Games and the World Cup, the Tour employs various trappings to make it culturally satisfying.⁵ For these grand-scale sporting extravaganzas, it is the combined efficacy of costumes, crowds, heroes and the media that give them their potency.

While the Olympic Games and the World Cup are staged only every four years, with a different country playing host for each new contest, the Tour de France returns annually and it stays (essentially) within the territorial boundaries of France. The logistics and scale of it all are truly breathtaking: the race is inherently spectacular and visually staggering. It has its own particular scale, style and self-assurance. Here and gone in thirty seconds, the Tour de France is the only sporting event in the world that can be glimpsed from one's own door step. Since other 'mega-events' (Little 1995) like a Super Bowl showdown or a Wimbledon tennis final take place behind the high walls of a grandstand or stadium- the odd roar of the crowd occasionally escaping- it is possible to remain quite oblivious to their existence. But the Tour de France is impossible to ignore. Its scale and style mean that its impact and effects are undeniable and inescapable. Indeed, the enormity of the Tour confirms the dependency of a spectacle on a certain size or grandeur; they are "public displays, appealing or intending to appeal, to the eye, by their mass, proportion, colour or other dramatic quality" (MacAloon 1984: 247). As MacAloon argues, "spectacles give primacy to visual, sensory and symbolic codes; they are things to be seen, and seen in person, to be believed" (1984:

⁴By using the term 'postmodern', I am referring to its ephemeral, sensual and consumer driven qualities; to its demonstration of the maxim that 'culture is no longer built to last' (Baudrillard 1990). In chapter six, I explore some of the ways in which consumers of the Tour salvage or prolong their experiences of it.

⁵Gaboriau (1987) argues that, like the Paris-Dakar, the Tour de France is an '*épopée moderne*' in that both are stage races which mobilize a vast cavalcade of resources and personnel.

247).⁶

Its size and grandeur notwithstanding, the Tour de France remains a race of unparalleled sporting purity. While offering a total of 11 million francs or A\$3.3 million dollars in prize money,⁷ the potential financial rewards of winning the Tour de France are a secondary motivation for riding the race. It exists as the cyclist's Everest, Wimbledon or four minute mile, and to conquer cycling's toughest challenge guarantees enduring public veneration. Despite its stature as a *gigantisme*, the scale of organization in the Tour de France never dwarfs the action of the race. It has never lost the essence of courage, endurance, pride and determination, of unsurpassed sporting authenticity, first displayed in 1903. The Tour de France remains a quintessential sporting moment as even more sponsors slap their names upon it. And with good reason, for it commands, after the Olympic Games and the World Cup, the highest viewing figures of any sporting event.

I timed my fieldwork to coincide with the staging of two Tours de France. The first, I spent as a guest of SBS Australia, travelling virtually the entire race with the television crew. The second, I spent immersed in French appreciations of the event; reading about it in the newspaper, watching it on television and talking about it in bars, cafés, post offices and laundromats. When the Tour passed through the *département* of Isère, where I had been residing for the past year, I waited roadside with local cycling enthusiasts—now my friends and informants—for the race to pass. One week of this second Tour I also spent with the Festina professional cycling team.

As well as being impressed by the physical abilities of the riders involved, what struck me in both years was the sheer extravagance and enormity of it all. The Tour de France is unashamedly commercial and necessarily so. Its overall budget is estimated at 150 million francs (about A\$40 million), with overheads including an approximate A\$16 million in organization costs, A\$10 million in fixed fees such as team hotels and police protection along the route, as well as the salaries of the employees of Le Société du Tour de France.

⁶Alomes (1985), Browne (1980), Chaney (1993) and Handleman (1990) have made contributions to the literature detailing the rise of popular ceremonies in contemporary culture. While the authors do not deal with sporting spectacles *per se*, they provide useful points of comparison to the collective and ceremonial nature of the Tour de France.

⁷Of this, the overall winner receives a purse of A\$500,000. Compare this with the A\$480,000 that Andre Agassi received for winning the Australian Open tennis tournament in January 1995. As of 1995, there will be a 10% increase in prize money with the winner of the Tour de France taking 2.2 million francs or A\$542,750.

Reportedly bringing in 100 million francs (A\$25 million), not a *centime* of profit comes from admission fees to this "*fête populaire*" (Couede 1983). Rather, the most significant financial offerings are made by such corporate giants as Coca-Cola, Fiat and the French banking empire Crédit Lyonnais. All have three year contracts with the Tour, reportedly costing between twelve and eighteen million francs (A\$3-4.5 million) apiece. The sale of television rights and contributions from those towns hosting a stage start or finish help make up the total Tour budget (*L'Equipe* magazine #596, 1993: 102).⁸ Smaller fees are paid by secondary sponsors and by the twenty two or so advertisers that make up the publicity caravan.⁹

The Tour de France is indeed a showcase of corporate interests. Its arrivals and departures are timed by Festina. Its results are computed by IBM and Hewlett-Packard. Supermarché Champion rewards the best climber, and Aspro vans trail the field, ready to ferry the injured to hospital. Even Poulain Chocolat offers prizes (his weight in chocolate) to the rider with the biggest nose. The entire history of the Tour de France is bound up with commerce and, in popular perceptions, this long standing association justifies the extravagance and excesses of the event. The Tour itself is a product so competition for sponsor association is fierce, as the principal sponsors bid for logo placements at key high profile locations in the start and finish area. The Coca-Cola kite, a billowing, red and white balloon suspended above the road, indicates to the riders that one kilometre remains in a day's stage; blue and white Fiat logos adorn the marking signs that tick off the remaining metres in the finishing straight, while the PMU 'Hot Spots' (intermediate sprints) are manufactured highlights that draw attention to their sponsor. The three jerseys competed for by the riders similarly telegraph the names of corporate backers.¹⁰ The red and white polka dot jersey of the King of the Mountains (or

⁸This divides up as 65% publicity sponsorship, 25% television rights and 15% from host towns.

⁹Sub-sponsors contribute 15 million francs, technical sponsors, 2 million francs, and the publicity caravan adds in 45,000 francs.

¹⁰*Le maillot jaune* has been part of Tour iconography since 1919, when Eugène Christophe wore it on the departure from Grenoble. The green jersey has been around since 1953, and the polka dot jersey since 1933. From the total 11,597,450 francs prize money on offer, 4,870,000 francs is allocated by Crédit Lyonnais to be shared by each of the daily wearers of *le maillot jaune*, with 2,000,000 francs going to the final winner. The PMU puts up 500,000 francs for *le maillot vert*, with 150,000 francs for the final winner of this jersey. Similarly, Supermarché Champion finds a total of 563,000 francs for *le maillot blanc à pois rouge*, with 150,000 francs being awarded to the final winner. Coca-Cola finds a total of 3,420,450 francs for the daily stage winners, with 50,000 being handed out each day and 998,000 francs for the overall best team in the teams classification. 200,000 francs is awarded for a stage win by the team in the teams' time trial.

'best climber') in the Tour is sponsored by Supermarché Champion, and the green (or 'points') jersey of the most consistent finisher is sponsored by the PMU (the French betting agency). Even cycling's most revered prize, *le maillot jaune*- the yellow jersey of the overall winner- is named, not after some huge heroic effort, but after the colour of the newspaper which first sponsored the race.

Financial involvement touches every aspect of the Tour de France, so much so that cynics label it the '*Tour de Franc*' or the '*Tour de l'Argent*.' Both expressions acknowledge the vast sums of money that are needed to power this mobile kingdom which includes more than four thousand subjects. The 198 riders who start each year are far outnumbered by the 1800 reporters and photographers, 264 team officials, mechanics and masseurs, 745 chauffeurs and technical assistants, 20 judges, 263 race officials and 1300 sponsor pitchmen. The Tour has its own bank (the only branch allowed to open on Bastille Day), its own hospital, weather station, hairdresser, local produce stalls and bakery, all of which travel as the Tour Village. In this portable sovereignty, commercialization is constantly on the move, for the Tour de France is a nomadic spectacle of commodified athletic performance.

The concern of my thesis is to address and articulate the processes by which the Tour de France is sustained as a cultural performance of gargantuan proportions. Using ethnographic material based on fourteen months of fieldwork undertaken in the *département* of Isère, I argue that not only is the Tour de France maintained as a national event of consuming passion, but it is, in fact, a *fetishized* display of shared obsession. Taken for granted and unchallenged in French culture; treated as a subject rather than an object, the Tour achieves its status as a great French monument. Once fetishized or brought to life, the Tour de France has an unmistakable power to transform France; to inform and influence both perceptions and processes of cultural production. By bringing the bike race to life, it is *France* that is fetishized; annually injected with new life, vitality and national autonomy.

Fetishism; points of clarification

The notion of 'fetishism' creates much conceptual confusion with different theorists applying the concept to a range of conflicting cultural contexts. As Ellen writes, "fetishism has, over the years, emerged as a confusing hydra. In order to tame the beast it is necessary to lop of its many heads and begin to reconstitute its conceptuality" (1988: 220). To clarify exactly how I propose to

apply the idea of fetishism throughout my thesis, a brief consideration of the term and its implications for an ethnography of the impact of the Tour upon a French cycling community is a necessary point of departure.

Much anthropological attention has been paid to the animation of objects, with a myriad of goods and artifacts being endowed with seemingly inexplicable powers or properties. "Such animated and classified objects and the relations between them and their significant human others can be regarded as taking innumerable forms" (Parkin 1991: 90), including the Nuaulu sacred shields of Indonesia (Ellen 1990), totemism (Boon 1982: 90) and the more generic interests of rosary beads, lucky charms and worry dolls, through to the continued preoccupation with the cultural and symbolic aspects of consumption pursued by Baudrillard (1968, 1975), Appadurai (1986a), Douglas and Isherwood (1978) and Friedman (1974, 1988).

Regardless of how the object is conceived in either pre-capitalist or contemporary consumer cultures, there are still certain underlying features of categorization that enable its representation as an object of fetish. These are: animation and anthropomorphism, concretization and an ambiguous relation of control between person and object. As Ellen identifies, "all lie on a processual continuum that begins with the identification of categories and relationships of phenomena and proceeds- via reification and iconification- towards their personification" (1988: 213).

The idea of attributing another value to an article or an object is by no means new. The original formulation comes from Aristotle who argues that,

every article or property has a double use; both uses, they are not similar uses, for one is the proper use of the article in question, the other is not. For example, a shoe may be used either to put on your foot or to offer in exchange (in Taussig 1980: 25).

This recontextualization of goods or objects remains the tenet upon which contemporary applications of fetishism rest. While attributing a different value to an object does not, in itself, necessarily constitute fetishism, it does however, presuppose it. As Taussig writes "some objects can, in different worlds, have very different values...Although they may be the same articles, socially and conceptually they are very different" (1980: 25). Thus, a bicycle is, for most, not much more than a means of transportation, but for an avid cyclist, the bike takes on a life of its own. In the world of a cycle racer, the bicycle can be seen as being representative of cycling itself, for it is in embodying the bicycle that the cyclist creates his or her involvement in the sport.

This bringing to life or endowing of objects with animate qualities takes the form of the process known as 'commodity fetishism,' and it finds its roots in the writings of Karl Marx. As Marx intends it, commodity fetishism occurs when capital and workers' products are spoken of in terms that are more commonly used for people or animate beings. The notion of the 'fetishism of commodities' as a specific instance of a more general fetishism of property was not fully developed until *Das Kapital* in which Marx defined it as "where a definite relation between persons assumes the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx 1970 [1867]: 72). In formulating his notion of commodity fetishism, Marx draws an analogy with religious discourse. The world of fetishized commodities, Marx argues, is like the

mist enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relations both with one another and the human race...This I call fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities (1970 [1867]: 72).

While applications of commodity fetishism in critical theory, anthropological or otherwise, have, by now, a fairly extended genealogy¹¹, arguably the most successful use of the concept is found in Michael Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980). Taussig looks at two South American cultures invaded by capitalism and examines the locally articulated relationship between the devil and capitalist development. According to Taussig, the image of the devil amongst workers on Colombian sugar plantations and in Bolivian tin mines effects particular cultural consequences. For Taussig, "the devil symbolizes important features of political and economic history" (1980: 3). The pacts established with the devil by rural Latin American peasants serve, in effect, to control the forces of capitalism that ultimately control their lives. The low wages earned by the workers in the mines and on the plantations prevent them from engaging in capitalist exchanges of buying and selling. Thus, they fail to understand how people in the capitalist economic system can be seduced by things and subjugated to the value of money or goods with scant regard for human welfare. The image of the devil, Taussig claims, mediates the conflict between pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of objectifying the human condition. In pre-capitalist worlds, it is the production of labour that mobilizes such fetishisms: in a capitalist context, it is the consumption of the goods and

¹¹See, for example, Ellen (1990), Godelier (1977), Herdt (1982), or Apler and Pielz (1993).

services produced under the conditions of labour.

Aspects of *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* have a particular relevance for discussing the effects of the fetishized Tour de France upon its followers. In the South American context, the extra earnings that the workers made from their pacts with the devil were spent on non-lasting consumer items, for it was believed that unless the material goods were quickly dissipated, then the life of the worker allegedly in league with the devil would be taken. As such, these goods provided an ephemeral satisfaction, ultimately turning against the workers themselves. In Taussig's formulation, the power of the goods was stronger than the beliefs of the people. This is my argument for the Tour de France. Once fetishized, endowed with almighty powers and properties, the Tour de France operates as an imperial force that is unstoppable. As it moves its way around France, the Tour claims, colonizes and progressively conquers all that lies in its wake. As a fetishized 'sports spectacular' (Cheska 1979), the powers of the Tour de France must necessarily be greater than those of the people who bestow dominating and autonomous properties upon it.

While I am concerned with fetish in the sense of objects or commodities, I am equally interested to examine the contexts or *processes* in and by which the object, in this case, the Tour de France, is animated and empowered with human representations and characteristics. Rather than privileging the Tour de France as a finished product available for consumption, I consider the processes by which this event is produced and then sustained as an all-consuming 'mega-event' to be of equal importance. While the unique properties of the Tour de France as a commodity to fetishize warrant considerable discussion and critique, this is not at the expense of those processes that sustain the Tour as an animated cultural phenomenon. The ways in which the Tour de France is endowed with human qualities capable of transforming life in France are of equal importance to my thesis.

My focus on both the production and consumption of commodities poses a contradiction for Taussig's distinction between the ways in which fetishization is manifested in pre and post-capitalist environments. While Taussig concentrates exclusively on pre-capitalist South America to argue that it is the production of labour and goods that enables the mobilization of particular forms of fetishism, the other side of this equation must mean that, in a capitalist environment, it is, unequivocally, the consumption of goods that empowers them with human like properties.

The Tour de France however, occurs in a profoundly capitalist, commercialized context, and endorsing the dichotomy implicit in Taussig's figuring would preclude a consideration of the processes by which the commodity in question is produced. As such, Taussig's distinction is not one I propose to sustain. Instead, I argue that both the production of the Tour and its inevitable consumption provide particular opportunities for fetishization and each will be duly considered. As Peace recognizes, the argument for commodity fetishism applies "as much to the production of popular culture as it ever applied to the production of durable commodities" (1996a: 17).

The methodological emphases of my fieldwork demand an examination of both process and product. The Tour de France as a fetishized sports spectacular lasts for only twenty three days; ostensibly it is available for consumption for just three weeks. However, I spent fourteen months in France; the eleven months of the year when the race was not on were distinguished by the manufacture and maintenance of a highly particular narrative discourse that ultimately kept the Tour alive. Fetishism is created and experienced at different levels and, of particular importance for my thesis, it is the year round consideration of aspects of the Tour that, most dramatically, brings the race, and France itself, to life for three weeks every July.

I emphasize that my use of the term fetishism is my anthropological construct; it is my critical analysis of actions and beliefs, of nuance and interaction. Certainly, those cyclists whose lives inform my thesis concede that particular patterns of their behaviour support the Tour as a cultural performance *par excellence*, however, they are, in no sense, conversant with the intricacies of Marxist applications of commodity fetishism. The terms 'fetishism' and 'fetishization' were to them (like they are to most) loaded with sexual innuendo. This, in no sense, dilutes the potency of fetishism as an analytical device. As Crapanzano recognizes with respect to Geertz's choice of title headings and sexual puns in his essay on the Balinese cockfight,

suggestive of a sex and violence whodunit, which the villagers could not possibly have understood, the titles do not characterize the ethos of a Balinese village, but like puns, they create a collusive relationship between the ethnographer and, in this case, his readers (1986: 69).

Fetishism becomes then, my device of anthropological collusion, appealing to academic rather than to local sensibilities in order to make sense of particular patterns of behaviour.

Further, while previous applications of the term 'fetish' have concentrated on manufactured goods and commodities, in the case of the Tour de France it is an *event* that is fetishized; it is a collection of interlinking bureaucratic organizations and personnel that is imbued with the power to transform and consume. While it is people who run the Tour, in popular constructions of the race, they are seen as faceless, even powerless or non-existent. It is the Tour as an 'event' that is infused with autonomous powers and properties. The race director, the on-course doctor, the media entourage and the boys and girls who sell cans of Coca-Cola and T-shirts, by themselves have no apparent power. Slotted into the spectacle as a whole however, their collective contributions act to mobilize the entirety of the Tour. Once fetishized, the enormity of the event transcends the individual and collective powers of the people. "This I take to be a particular illustration of commodity fetishism, whereby the products of the interactions between persons are no longer seen as such, but as things that stand over, control and in some vital sense, may even produce people" (Taussig 1980: 15). Thus, throughout my thesis, I use the term 'fetishize' to mean that a power, an autonomy and, above all, an ability to transform, are attributable to the ostensibly inanimate monolith that is the Tour de France.

As a fetishized force in motion, the Tour de France is a highly orchestrated, highly co-ordinated piece of cultural engineering that claims, conquers and progressively transforms every town it touches. Such statements of intentionality are deliberate, for the take over of France is executed with an impressive degree of efficiency by the core group of La Société du Tour de France. The Tour de France represents a consummate example of cultural editing, for its every aspect is dependent on the discretion and direction of this organization.¹² La Société sets in motion particular lines of fetishization, the imperatives and implications of which I examine in future chapters.

Consisting of forty seven permanent staff and more than two hundred part-time employees, La Société controls everything to do with the organization of the Tour from deciding the route to finding accommodation for the riders. It is, to borrow from Goffman (1968), representative of a 'total institution', controlling the social, cultural and commercial rhythm of the event. Based in

¹²In addition to controlling and executing the Tour de France, La Société also runs several lesser known races including the Paris-Roubaix, Paris-Tours, Liège-Bastogne-Liège, Grand Prix des Nations, Tour de l'Oise and Critérium International. Because most of these smaller races are run at a loss, the only way to pay for them is out of the revenue which comes from the stage towns and sponsors of the Tour de France. Such a stranglehold on French cycling invites the charge that La Société holds a monopoly on the sport.

Issy-les-Moulineaux, an outer suburb of Paris, La Société shares its building with the French national sports daily *L'Equipe*, and both are owned by the Amaury group of companies, as is the tabloid *Le Parisien*. Military metaphors are particularly apt when describing the unshakable power possessed by La Société du Tour de France. Identifiable on-course by their distinctive camouflage green jackets and grey pants, La Société mobilizes a massive flotilla of troops. There is a service corps which maintains the vehicles of the teams and officials, a medical corps which tends to the sick and the wounded, a signal corps which puts the various units in touch with one another and a disciplinary corps which fines any combatants who are late on parade or incorrect in their dress. The whole enterprise is co-ordinated by the Directeur Général du Tour de France, Jean-Marie Leblanc, who follows the course shouting orders through the open roof of his car, directing operations like a tank commander. There is even a *Médaille de la Reconnaissance* awarded to local dignitaries and others who render special services when the Tour passes through their town. On the road, the riders are foot soldiers deployed to wage a war of attrition; their daily departure is reminiscent of the troops going off to war, while the team cars, doctors and technical vehicles that follow provide their food, rations and medical support.

Despite his appearance in countless television and newspaper interviews, it is notable that few people- even die-hard Tour aficionados- recognize the role of Jean-Marie Leblanc in constructing and co-ordinating the Tour de France. While La Société possesses exceptional control over the administration and execution of the Tour, in popular perceptions, it is the event itself, a seemingly nameless, faceless entity, that is imbued with power, presence and dominance. The Tour acts autonomously. Stripped of human intervention- the labour and skills that, in actuality, mobilize the race- the Tour enacts the logic of commodity fetishism. The event thus has the power to transform and consume.

Parallels with Taussig's formulation of 'state fetishism' are not misplaced when considering the fetishization of the Tour de France. In both instances, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. As Taussig writes,

it is to the peculiar sacred and erotic attraction, even thralldom, combined with disgust which the State holds for its subjects that I wish to draw attention in drawing of State fetishism. By State fetishism I mean a certain aura of might as figured by the Leviathan as an impressively organic unity, something much greater than the sum of its parts (1993: 218).

The parallel I wish to draw is that in both the fetishization of the State and

the fetishization of the Tour de France, it is a collection of organizations and individuals that are imbued with totalizing powers. By existing or operating as this empowered collectivity, the Tour de France, now the event and not the people, is capable of self-expansion and diffusion; of transforming the most minute or mundane aspects of everyday life in France. As a fetishized cultural performance, the Tour engages a variety of people in a variety of places across France. Multiple personnel in multiple sites are touched and transformed by the penetrative nature of the event. Ultimately it is the ability of the Tour de France to transcend, affect and effect micro sites of experience that concerns my thesis. It is the capacity of the Tour to link people and places, to transcend geographical, economic and importantly, personal boundaries that makes it such a profoundly unique event warranting detailed ethnographic scrutiny.

It is the intrusive nature of the Tour, its capacity to permeate a range of people across a range of sites, that is of particular importance to my thesis. It is the ability of the Tour to open up creative space through which a particular representation of cultural life can be examined that is critical to my application of the concept of fetishization. As Marcus and Fischer recognize, "exploring the cultural meaning(s) of commodity fetishism provides a textual means for bringing the larger order into the space of ethnography" (1986: 173). Thus, the Tour de France can serve as a prism through which a range of other processes can be viewed. By examining the particular strategies of fetishization peculiar to those cyclists riding the roads throughout Isère, the larger order of life in France can be revealed. The fetishization of the Tour de France effects extended social consequences and it is the aim of my thesis to examine their range and reach.

Given the size of the Tour, it inevitably mobilizes cultural and commercial resources on a scale that demands a total, albeit temporary, shut down of life while it marches imperiously across France. It is hardly the most anthropological of metaphors, but the Tour de France operates like a Pacman, munching its way through the five hundred odd towns in its path. Moving its way around France, the Tour systematically claims or conquers entire regions. With every journey through France, the strength and status of the Tour is galvanized. As a form of cartography, the mapping of France by the Tour is dependent on the movement through France by the Tour. Known colloquially as *La Grande Boucle* or 'The Big Lap', the circumnavigation of France by the Tour is both implicitly recognized and explicitly articulated in popular discourse. Critically for my thesis, in mapping France each year, the

Tour also creates a new social landscape of France; it defines her composition, ambience and aesthetic. The ever changing route of the Tour produces an ever changing cartography of the country. The race reorders, reframes and restructures her cultural territory. As I argue throughout my thesis, the Tour does not simply represent, but it actively constitutes, a map of France. Conceived anew each year, this mapping denotes not only a definition of, but, more importantly, an ownership of France by the Tour.

My thesis has two concerns: the first is to address what is so unique about the Tour de France that makes its fetishization possible. As I argue throughout my thesis, the necessarily fleeting progression of the Tour around France both demands and enables its fetishization. Because tangible reminders of the Tour dissolve with each passing, the experience has to survive in other ways. The enormity of the Tour is sustained by a range of processes which extend the experience of the race beyond its largely ephemeral boundaries. The Tour thus has a power in motion that colonizes and a power which lingers in memory. To amplify this argument ethnographically, I draw on the actions, events and interactions of and between those cyclists riding the roads throughout the *département* of Isère.

The second concern of my thesis is to address and articulate what is so unique about these strategies; to illustrate how and why they elevate the cycle domain to a distinctive ethnographic plane. While interest in the Tour de France waxes and wanes for non-cyclists, cyclists have developed ways of behaving that keep, like the beast in the cellar, the thing alive. To maintain and sustain the presence of the Tour as an animated, dynamic phenomenon, amateur, grass roots cyclists- as represented in this analysis by those whom I studied in Isère- continually draw upon a range of narrative themes that engage elements of both cycling generally and the Tour de France specifically. Cyclists have avidly acquired the hype of the Tour and they perpetuate it through their own articulations of and attitudes towards the race. My thesis is thus concerned to identify, itemize and elaborate the discrete narrative and performative elements by which the Tour de France is fetishized.

The ethnographer as cyclist and the cyclist as ethnographer

The complexity of the Tour de France poses considerable interpretive challenge, for unravelling the range and reach of its impact is beyond the scope of any single ethnographer. The race offers a wide range of possibilities by which people can experience, if not, fetishize, it, but for my part, it proved

more rewarding to involve myself with the particularities or peculiarities of one easily distinguishable cycling community. Throughout my fieldwork, I was concerned to examine the ways in which the members of this group appropriated the Tour de France into their everyday experiences. Thus, for reasons I will outline shortly, the daily exchanges between those cyclists riding the roads throughout the *département* of Isère became the axle around which my fieldwork revolved.

In narrowing the focus of my field to Isérois cyclists, I do not intend to underestimate the *sui generis*, indeed, omnipotent, qualities and capacities of the Tour de France. The Tour mesmerizes France and finally, it would not have mattered where I was in the country, its impact would have been similarly consuming. In fact, at one point in my field accounts, I noted to myself, "I could be anywhere in France and the Tour would be just as enormous." When the Tour is in motion, there is a certain typicality to its effect upon individual towns. The nation of France is transfixed by the imperialism of the race.

If the impact of the Tour de France upon each town is so similarly consuming, then my reasons for choosing Isère as an area of anthropological inquiry warrant explanation. Several considerations influenced my decision to base myself in the region: during the time I spent following the Tour in progress, I immediately saw the Alps that dominate the topography of Isère as being pivotal to my discussion of cycling in France. As well as being impressed by the sheer physical presence of the mountains, I was awe struck by the atmosphere of the race once it reached the Alps. During the mountain stages of the Tour in 1993, I witnessed first hand the route lined with tents, caravans and camper vans, the road dotted with people setting out their picnic baskets, playing *pétanque* and scrawling and painting messages to the riders on the road. I also saw literally hundreds of aspiring cyclists riding the route themselves. Seeing and experiencing the passion and enthusiasm of the spectators in the mountains, feeling the undeniable sense of anticipation that pervaded as we waited for the race to pass, confirmed the central place which the mountains would need to occupy in any anthropological study of cycling in France. Thus, the mountains and mountain roads of Isère became the field sites that focused my ethnographic inquiry.



Map 1: General map of France, shaded area highlighting the location of field site(s).

Isère is saturated with cycling activity. A long time fixture on the Tour calendar, Isère has featured on the Tour route since 1905, when the third

stage (from Besançon) finished at Grenoble and the fourth (a 342 kilometre journey to Toulon) set off the following day. Isère's mountainous setting guarantees that the region is regularly included on a range of race itineraries. The professional calendar in both 1993 and 1994 saw the Paris-Nice, Tour Cycliste Féminin, the Classique des Alpes, the Critérium du Dauphiné-Libéré and the Giro d'Italia, not to mention the Tour de France, pass through the region. At the amateur level, twice weekly race meets and innumerable informal outings confirm Isère's status as a cycling mecca. It is the long standing association with the Tour and the intensity of cycling action that make Isère a particularly fruitful region of ethnographic inquiry.

My reasons for focusing on the experiences of the cyclists were influenced by my own understandings of the nature of cycling itself. Having raced competitively for more than seven years, I was aware that cycling is hugely vicarious, with most people who watch bike races also likely to participate in the sport themselves. This being the case, it seemed potentially most rewarding to involve myself with other riders on the assumption that, as fellow cyclists, they would have, at some stage in their cycling careers, seen at least one Tour de France.

By way of immediate qualification, my admission to a personal involvement in bike racing suggests problems for the reflexive effect of anthropological endeavours. It has for some time been commonplace in our discipline that we look to the Other to explain ourselves, that we generate critical questions and perspectives from one culture and use these perspectives to probe the complexities of our own world. "In using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways, anthropology disrupts common sense and makes us re-examine our taken for granted assumptions" (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 116). By concentrating our gaze on the actions and events of others, the anthropological quest can provide a self-conscious criticism of the quality of life and thought in modern, urban, industrialized settings. Reflexivity dissolves the opacity of the Other and illuminates the particularities and peculiarities of our own world.

The reflexive premise of our discipline means that anthropologists have always had a vested interest in the portrayal of other cultures as alien and exotic. Distance, it seems, lent enchantment and enhancement to the anthropological vision. The further afield the anthropologist travels, the greater the validity and authenticity of the ethnographic quest is deemed to be. "The experiences of those lesser known others- the herders, the gatherers,

the hunters, the hand tool horticulturalists- unsullied by the corruption of modernity, became a model for moral transformation and self discovery" (Blanchard 1992: 258).

Our predilection for the exotic however, can blur the reflexive endeavour. In attempting to see the Other as radically different in order to adequately distance ourselves from them, anthropologists run the risk of unwittingly exoticizing what is domestic. As Keesing warns:

we are compelled, not only to choose the most exotic possible cultural data as our texts, but to give them the most exotic possible readings. In doing so, we distort, mistranslate and misrepresent those cultures...Our professional role as dealers in exotica may impel us to seek deep and cosmologically salient meanings where native actors may find shallow, conventional and pragmatic ones; to discover non-existent philosophies (1989: 459-460).

Such concerns, while they suggest caution for undertaking fieldwork in traditional contexts, fail to recognize the disciplinary challenges of doing anthropology amidst the growing complexities of Western cultural systems. The postmodern turn in anthropology however, has brought to attention, indeed, brought into question, the methodological and theoretical imperatives of our discipline.

Without doubt, the issues posed by postmodernism have created much epistemological and ethnographic confusion. As Marcus identifies, "the body of ideas that authoritatively unifies a field is in disarray" (1986: 166). The postmodern turn, and its associations with the self-scrutiny of literary criticism, have shifted the moorings of anthropology. Far from using the term pejoratively as Pool (1991: 309) suggests is commonplace, I see the current postmodern climate as an exciting time for anthropology. It has opened up a range of new interpretive possibilities as targets of ethnographic inquiry. 'Postmodern' anthropology now offers a myriad of people in a myriad of new cultural contexts as subjects of critical scrutiny. Of particular concern for my thesis, one of these previously ignored domains is that of sport, which offers an unimagined cultural richness overlooked by the limits of traditional anthropology.¹³ As Hadden (et al) identify,

the study of sport, especially qualitative study, has much more to offer than the metaphoric. The study of sport offers a *strategic arena* for any number of social science concerns because it offers the dramatic and explicit display of such conditions, causes and consequences which impact upon more mundane social life (1989: 11, italics)

¹³Sport has, for a long time, hovered on the margins of legitimate anthropological inquiry. Sport is, as Banks describes, an "academic step child" (1983: 90), the designation undermining the veracity of inquiries into the subject.

in original).¹⁴

However, in giving us new people in new places to write about, anthropology also gives us new things to think about. The reflexive effect of anthropology is increasingly open to scrutiny. When the field of inquiry was 'exotic' from the outset; when anthropology was solely the preserve of ethnographers studying distant people, living lives fundamentally different from anything a Western anthropologist may have ever experienced, everything was unusual from the outset. The very fabric of the world under scrutiny was already unfamiliar and surprising and thus open to critique by comparison. The boundaries of anthropology however, are now blurred. Anthropology no longer has clear guidelines and this unavoidably complicates both the notion and the method of cultural representation. Whereas social anthropology traditionally examined the fabric and structure of 'exotic' societies, with globalizing forces of world systems, financial restraints within the discipline and personal predilections of fieldworkers (Jackson 1987), the 'exotic' is now not so far from home, and this raises several questions for the self-conscious critique of one's own society.

Indeed, the nature of my own project poses questions for the reflexive effect of anthropology. The ability of a bike riding anthropologist to adequately reflect on bike riding worlds surely invites criticism. How can I look to the Other to explain myself if the object of my inquiry is one with which I am already intimately familiar; if the self and the Other are seemingly one and the same? After years of racing in an unproblematic fashion, how can I bring out the distinctiveness of the cycling community I was involved with in France? "Auto-anthropology", that is, "anthropology carried out in the social contexts which produced it" (Strathern 1987: 19), attracts disciplinary criticism for the perceived inability on the part of the anthropologist to self-consciously reflect upon his or her predominant cultural world. It is argued that, when the field of inquiry is one with which the ethnographer is familiar, it becomes increasingly difficult to first achieve distance from the subject under scrutiny, and then to reflect upon his or her own world.

However, the largely unrecognised complexities of Western culture mean that auto-anthropology is inherently problematic. As Strathern continues, it is "clear that simply being a 'member' of the overarching culture or society does not mean that the anthropologist will adopt appropriate local cultural

¹⁴I examine some of the literature in the anthropology of sport when discussing an interpretive approach to cycling culture, pages 33-36.

genres. On the contrary, he or she may well produce something quite unrecognizable" (1987: 18). Simply because we are reflecting upon ourselves is not in any sense to make an assumption of homogeneity. The belief that "the Other cannot be mundane and humdrum, for he or she would then be too much like us- too comparable" (Chick and Donlon 1992: 238), devalues the range of fine-grained cultural differences that co-exist within complex cultural settings such as France. It is absurd to assume that conflicts, contradictions and cultural differences disappear when we reflect upon ourselves. Where do they go? Such a position attributes a spectre-like quality to culture, that it can dissolve into the amorphous mass of the anthropologist's own particular milieu. These hierarchies of anthropological worth are dangerous, for as Hannerz asserts, "the intellectual resource of otherness is lost when it turns into a more exclusive concern with the *most other*" (1986: 363, italics in original).¹⁵

Assumptions of familiarity, the belief that we all know a bit about cycling because we can all ride or know someone who can ride a bike, cloud the anthropological vision. Because we can all do it, it is perhaps difficult to understand what the fuss of an event like the Tour de France is all about. However, I would argue that people do not, in fact, know nearly as much as they think they do about cycling. In Australia, the most popular way to ride a bicycle is probably glued to the floor of a health club, watching nothing more scenic than the wavering needle of the speedometer. For most, cycling is either stationary indoor exercise, transport, or the remnants of a misspent youth. As one enthusiast notes in a letter to a leading cycling publication:

in our culture, bikes have been equated with kids. They were something to be ridden until driving age and then discarded. Those in their post teens who took them up again or who never really left them were begging to be branded as a juvenile or as some kind of nut (*Velo News*, May 14, 1989: 137).

But in France, cycling is a way of life; it is so much more than simply a means of transport. It is to be a member of a distinctively bounded, complexly connected, mobile social world. For the non-cyclist, it is difficult to grasp that cycling has its own particular pleasures, and ultimately identifying and addressing these hidden qualities is what my thesis is about. The Tour de France is not simply about cycling, and the transcending of commonsensical understandings is inextricable from my anthropological task. To bring out the integrity of the cycling community I was involved with, it was necessary to go beyond the taken for granted, superficial and largely utilitarian assumptions of what bike riding is. To capture the distinctiveness of my ethnographic

¹⁵Appadurai picks up on this theme, writing that "although anthropologists traffic in otherness...some others are more other than others" (1986b: 357).

project I had to live my life as an anthropologist, immersed in the world under study. As Geertz recognizes, "understanding what's out there can only happen if you're out there too" (1973: 15).

Setting up and settling in; establishing ethnographic authority

Disciplinary self-scrutiny has meant that anthropologists must now confront and explicitly address issues of cultural representation. The political and epistemological assumptions contained within both fieldwork and the process of 'writing up' can no longer be ignored (Wellman 1994). The question now on every fieldworker's lips is how do we legitimate our presence- our inextricable mediatory role- in the Other's lives? Due respect must be paid to recognizing and reproducing the voices from the field, for as Strathern acknowledges, "without knowing how they 'own' their words, we cannot know what we have done in appropriating them" (1987: 19).

Following Clifford's (1983) intervention, the question of 'ethnographic authority'- the self-situating of the ethnographer in relation to his or her field membership- has earned a position of methodological pre-eminence.¹⁶ As Rabinow notes, "conventions of how anthropologists convey their material and establish their authority has become a thriving cottage industry in certain quarters of anthropology in recent years" (1985: 1). No longer a marginal dimension, "writing has emerged as central to what anthropologists do both in the field and thereafter" (Clifford 1986: 2). In any fieldwork endeavour, ethnographic authority must be established. It can no longer be assumed, for authority is the manner by which a convincing or authentic field account is constructed. Ethnographic description must both recognize the role that informants play and acknowledge the position that they must then occupy in the final textual account of their lives.

Establishing ethnographic authority however, can employ a variety of techniques; there is not one right way to do it. Crapanzano (1986) points out that ethnographic authority is often constituted through a claim that the anthropologist was invisible, thus ensuring that what 'really' happens is not disturbed or altered by the ethnographer's presence. Disciplinary self-regulation however, means that such approaches are no longer appropriate.

¹⁶As Marcus and Cushman suggest,

authority is the combined structure of a covering legitimation and the styles of evidence derived from it for the page by page descriptions and claims of the text. This structure, integral to the text, should constantly reinforce unselfconsciously the reader's confidence in the author's knowledge as sufficient credibility for what the text states (1982: 38).

The anthropologist must be visible in his or her account of the field. His or her activities need to be made explicit, research protocols stated and, increasingly, subjected to disciplinary scrutiny. Given this climate, my ethnographic authority will be established by acknowledging my visibility and self-interest in the field and, by describing how I managed both to achieve my ends; this being the textual reproduction of the social world of Isérois cyclists, particularly the strategies by which they fetishize the Tour de France.

By its very nature, any ethnographic enterprise is an exploitative one, requiring the anthropologist to intrude, uninvited, into the lives of others, hoping to be accepted, despite intentions to report to all and sundry what he or she has seen and heard. Those cyclists with whom I was most immediately involved did not have a say over how or why I entered their world- I just turned up one day unannounced. Eventually, I came to be seen as one of them by virtue of my familiarity with and enthusiasm for their world. It was this relationship that both eased my entry into the field and then sustained my presence as credible. My ethnographic authority is thus necessarily located in my continued associations with a cycling community, and my method for establishing authority is to detail the processes of constructing that relationship. What follows is the means by which I positioned myself in relation to my field sites and subjects.

While I lived in the town of Grenoble, my field sites comprised the locales of cycling activity that surround the town. The roads that cyclists occupied, the cafés that we stopped at for a post-ride coffee, and other identifiable cycling haunts such as bike shops and cycle club rooms defined and directed my ethnographic gaze. Acknowledging the diversity of my field sites is important, for as Geertz recognizes, "the locus of study is not the object of study" (1973: 22). Thus, it was not so much the goings on in Grenoble that I was interested in, as the social world experienced by those riders using this part of France for training and competition. Similarly, it was not so much the membership of a specific bicycle club that interested me, as the somewhat more mercurial *néo-tribe* (Maffesoli 1988) of cyclists riding the roads throughout Isère.

Even within the collectivity of bike riders in Isère there is still considerable diversity. There is a sliding scale of ability and enthusiasm along which cyclists can be, and are, ranked. Ranging from those who *faire du vélo* (those who ride, but do not consider themselves to be cyclists), through to those

who ride *pour le plaisir et la santé* (for health and fitness), those who are *les cyclistes licenciés* (licensed riders) and those who are triathletes, overwhelmingly, my thesis is concerned with the place of *les cyclistes licenciés* within the regional cycling network. The distinction is made clearest by one local rider, Fabrice, who recognizes that “in cycling, you have people who just ride and then you have people who have really been bitten by the bug.” I am concerned with those who have been ‘bitten by the bug,’ and when I write of ‘Isèrois cyclist’ or ‘local rider,’ I am referring to those cycling aficionados who consistently demonstrate their commitment to and engagement in the culture of cycling.

Even when concentrating on cycling life in Isère, I was also, unavoidably, involved in the daily, non-cycling, machinations of life in a foreign town and world. However, soaking up the atmosphere of Grenoble and the ambience of an alpine region was heavily influenced by my cycling friends. It was through cyclists that I was introduced to these more peripheral aspects of my fieldwork. Those cyclists with whom I was most immediately involved became my cultural navigators, leading me to and through a range of distinctively French places and practices. In many ways, cycling lives became a prism through which I could view a range of broader processes and practices. Ultimately, I learnt about France by having my cycling friends teach me about the Tour de France and its effect on the more mundane aspects of their daily lives. Cycling thus provided a window to meaning, value, nuance and idiosyncrasy; to the richness of French culture.

My own demonstrated commitment to the sport of cycling proved invaluable to accessing information. It allowed me to discern and dissect beliefs, symbols and values intrinsic to the ways in which cyclists interacted. My prior knowledge of the area gave me certain advantages which made my entry into (and continued presence) in the field much easier than, I suspect, would have been the case had I been a non-cycling ethnographer. Before I left Australia, I had been racing under a professional licence which, because of the organizational particularities of Australian cycling, is a fairly meaningless category of racing to Australian cyclists. In France however, the distinction between amateur and professional is far more marked, with those cyclists who own a professional licence being held in high esteem.¹⁷ For those cyclists with whom I was dealing, my possession of a professional licence confirmed

¹⁷It should be noted that the cyclists with whom I was most immediately involved were amateur riders. I follow Stewart’s (1985) distinction between the two domains, in that this designation refers simply to remuneration. As the following chapters demonstrate, it does not reflect commitment or enthusiasm.

my cycling credentials. It was like paper gold, seen as a mark of my cycling prowess that gave me a certain, continued credibility in the field.

While my proven engagement in cycling was an invaluable stepping stone to social acceptance, what maintained my existence was the willingness with which local cyclists talked. Stilted small talk was avoided as we all shared common links, ties and interests. An on-road conversation of several hours would frequently start with the utterance, "*c'est un bon vélo.*" The very nature of cycling lends itself to communication. The anecdotes and narratives that define the informal order of Isérois cycling form a public discourse that is concerted and unambiguously articulated on a daily basis. I could set out each morning and meet remarkably enthusiastic cyclists who would happily talk at great length about their sport. Some became my regular informants, others I encountered less frequently. Nonetheless, all contributed to my understanding of the nature of cycling in Isère.

The centrality of communication to cycling was made evident very early on in my fieldwork. I had arranged to meet a group of riders in L'Étape café, a regular cycling haunt in the town of Vizille, fifteen or so kilometres from Grenoble. *En route*, I overtook another rider and I made the mistake of not even acknowledging him. Within five hundred metres he had caught up and was riding next to me. At this point, I greeted him with the standard *Bonjour*, to which he responded, "I'm sorry. I thought that you were deaf because you did not talk to me." Only a medical condition, it seems, is good reason for a cyclist in Isère not to engage in conversation. In the streets of Grenoble however, such a chase on foot would have been considered an invasion or an assault on personal space. On the bike, it represented a *de rigueur* introduction; a prelude to social intimacy.

The ease with which cyclists identify both themselves and with other cyclists proved invaluable for accessing information. While my accent identified me as being an outsider once conversations were underway, my looking the part, my possession of the requisite *bon vélo* and *jambes jolies*, identified me as being one of them and importantly, they served as my passport to entering the particularities of the local cycling world. Within weeks I was no longer a stranger and by the time I left, I was a friend. Questioning and inquisitive probing along the lines of "Don't you get bored?"..."How's the study going?"...or, "What have you found out?" were replaced by "Ah, Skippy, where/how have you been?" as my time in the field wore on.

Such a painless entry to the field contrasts heavily with existing accounts of fieldwork initiation. For me, there was no baptism by fire, there was no walking on coals or any other similarly feared method of initiation that existing ethnographies suggested entry to the field might be. Clifford Geertz's well known account of participating in a police raided cockfight testifies to the informant hostility I was expecting upon reaching the field. While Geertz's involvement in the raid opened doors to Balinese culture and custom, it was nonetheless preceded by a period in which he and his wife were assiduously ignored. As Geertz admits, he and his wife were "non persons, spectres, invisible men" (1973: 412) prior to the raid. Fortunately, I did not have to break the law to enter my field. Those cyclists whom I, as an anthropologist, intended to study, were unexpectedly co-operative and enthusiastic from the outset.

Nor did I have any sense of being tried or tested. For me, accessing information was largely dependent on my physical fitness and my bike handling skills. Certainly, I had to ride very hard, often for up to twelve hours a day, and many times I went home completely spent, unable to even write my name, let alone cogent field notes. There were days when I went home and lay for hours on my bed in my sweat soaked cycling clothes, too exhausted to move. However, in no sense was this hard work an initiation to the field, it was simply the nature of my fieldwork. Living in the Alps meant that hard, high rides and roads were unavoidable. This was where the local riders rode and if I was to access cyclists I had to keep up. It was not a matter of riders deliberately setting a super fast pace to 'burn me off' and watch me squirm, Isèrois cyclists are majestically fit and these Alpine roads were the ones that they habitually rode. My ease of access to the field contrasts with reports such as Kirsten Hastrup's (1987). Describing her participation in Icelandic farming life, Hastrup suggests enormous problems for crossing the boundary into the field. Noting the genderized division of labour, Hastrup feared that wholehearted participation in farming life would be denied unless she, in some way, proved herself. "Having demonstrated my physical fitness in rounding up some stray lambs...I was allowed to join one of the lesser expeditions" (Hastrup 1987: 96). By contrast, my own pre-conceptions as to how macho and unwelcoming French cycling worlds would be were, in no way, borne out in practice.

The raw physicality of the cycling task opened doors. A shared awareness of the difficulties in climbing to summits so high that the air thins and you cannot breathe, and of the dangers of descending at nearly eighty kilometres

per hour, unable to slow down for fear of burning your rims and blowing a tyre, unites local riders in a veritable circle of suffering. Agony is understood because, at some stage, everyone experiences it. One day, we climbed Col de la Bonette, the highest road in France, and, after nearly three hours of thinking that my lungs were going to burst out of my chest, we reached the summit where I promptly threw up. Predictably, I was mortified, thinking, "they're never going to ride with me again." Yet, the reactions of my fellow riders were quite the opposite. On our return to Grenoble, several commiserated with me for having suffered so badly, then confessed to their own similar embarrassments: vomiting, missing a turn and crashing into the back of the French national champion, and severe, mid-ride, diarrhoea brought about by drinking too much Isostar (a brand of sports drink). As Geertz notes, "the sincerity crux awaits all who pass this way" (1988: 99), or as Roth concurs, "the author, having exposed himself, is now certified to expose others" (1989: 557).

Multiple sites, multiple personnel

The nomadic nature of cycling necessarily brings with it several methodological considerations, the most obvious being the practicalities of following transient, ever moving subjects. My own and others' incessant movement between multiple sites of experience presented a range of unexpected problems. The basic act of note taking became inconceivably difficult on the move. How do you write anything when your hands are occupied with steering? At first, I would simply stop periodically on the side of the road to record events as they transpired. However, I sensed such methods would ultimately jeopardise my future access to information. For a cyclist, there are few things more infuriating than having to continually carry a passenger, so I cycled on, carrying out conversations and vainly holding information in my head until someone else demanded a rest and I could jot it down. While I never tried to pass as anything other than an anthropologist, it was almost impossible to carry a notebook and pencil to record my observations. To help jog my memory, I developed a reminder system made up of differently coloured and numbered pieces of masking tape placed along my handle bars which I could translate into comprehensive field notes once I returned home.

More importantly, the refusal of cyclists to stay put poses a challenge to disciplinary conventions regarding the nature of both fieldwork itself and the final production of an ethnographic text. Although ethnographies have typically dealt with a delimited field site and set of subjects, "people have

undoubtedly always been more mobile and identities less fixed than the static and typologizing approaches of classical anthropology would suggest" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 9). Indeed, the movement of cyclists throughout Isère presents enormous obstacles to conceptualizing and then creating a single site account of cycling life. To capture the distinctiveness of my project, it was not enough to simply construct a text around a single locale, for the very nature of cycling rendered such treatments of the field inadequate or inaccurate. To accommodate field sites and personnel that spill out of containable boundaries, it was necessary to come up with a productive ethnographic strategy that adequately dealt with multiple and mobile sites and personnel.

The postmodern turn, with its call to reformulate the anthropological vision, has enabled a certain degree of experimentation in representing and re-creating experiences from the field. In recognizing the new epistemological challenges of anthropology, one must also concede a change in ethnographic practice that can accommodate multiple sites and multiple personnel. As Marcus and Fischer note,

the realization of multi-locale ethnographic texts may entail a novel kind of fieldwork. Rather than being situated in one, or perhaps two, communities for the entire period of research, the fieldworker must be mobile, covering a network of sites that encompass a *process* which is, in fact, the object of study (1986: 94, italics mine). For me, this process is the fetishization of the Tour de France. Within the network of ethnographic sites that comprises their social territory, Isérois cyclists engage in practices by which they maintain and sustain the Tour as a cultural performance capable of transforming the immediacies of their lives.

While the movement of cyclists between multiple registers of interpretation may suggest a randomness to my fieldwork, my project was, in fact, remarkably manageable. It was not a case of my aimlessly roaming the streets of Isère hoping to stumble upon cyclists, but a far more contained undertaking by virtue of two factors. First, my fieldwork was determined by the physical limitations of how far I- and those cyclists I was dealing with- could ride in any given day. Although cyclists are constantly on the move between sites, locations, towns, even *départements*, they return to their respective bases (most often Grenoble and environs) each night. It was the relationship between local, regional and national places or activities that brought into being and progressively elaborated an unfolding narrative order that gave meaning to cycling lives. What defined the culture of cycling were the endless processes of negotiation and networking between cyclists as they moved between these multiple sites of experience.

Second, although the multiple membership of the cycling community may have been diverse, it was far from ephemeral. Enduring social relations developed across a range of ethnographic sites, and what gave structure, order and definition to the possibly seamless domain of my ethnographic inquiry was the persistent ability of the Tour de France to connect people and places. While my ethnography is necessarily multi-locale in nature, the shared appreciation of the Tour between or amongst people and places enables me to examine its impact across a range of ethnographic sites. As Marcus recognizes,

any cultural identity or activity is constructed by multiple agents in varying contexts, or places...ethnography must be strategically conceived to represent this sort of multiplicity, and to specify both intended and unintended consequences in the network of complex connections within a system of places (1989: 25).

Thus, while my field sites and the cyclists I encountered there may have been disparate, what united these bike riders, both demonstrably and symbolically, was their shared connection with the Tour de France. What gave holism and focus to my ethnography was the power or purpose of the Tour de France to connect times and spaces, people and places.

Given the climate of disciplinary self-questioning, it is perhaps surprising that there have been few attempts to reformulate the object of anthropology in such a way as to take into account multiple sites and personnel in field situations such as mine. George Marcus, James Clifford, Arjun Appadurai and Ulf Hannerz are the most persistent crusaders for the redefinition of the anthropological project as one increasingly sensitive to the growing complexities of 'macro' social systems. To account for the illusive dimension of contemporary cultural process, while remaining sensitive to the particularities of local customs, Marcus calls for a reconceptualization of the discipline as concerned with "the ethnography of complex connections" (1989: 24). How can an ethnography, Marcus asks, "define its object of study in ways that permit detailed local, contextual analyses, and simultaneously the portrayal of global implicating forces? Accepted textual strategies for defining cultural domains are no longer adequate to the challenge" (in Clifford 1986: 22). As Hannerz concurs, "a considerable part of the unfinished business of anthropology involves developing a coherent theoretical stance towards complex cultures" (1986: 362).

Marcus and Fischer advocate the formulation of an ethnography of multiple discursive sites, and it is this emphasis that I embrace throughout my thesis.

As Marcus and Fischer recognize, the ideal multi-locale ethnographic account is one that treats as its subjects, not a

concentrated group of people in a circumscribed site or circumstance, but the overarching system itself; the political and economic processes, spanning different locales, or even different continents. A multi-locale ethnography must take account of a system or a major social drama encompassed by them (1986: 91).

For me, the Tour de France represents the social drama, and my anthropological task is to demonstrate the ways in which particular forms of local cycling life both affect and are affected by the 'macro' system that encompasses or encourages social practice. The activities of cyclists scattered throughout Isère effect extended social consequences, for they are complexly connected by the annually returning Tour de France.

Such experimentation with multiple discursive sites is reminiscent of existing models of regional analysis (Smith 1976, Fardon 1990). Certainly, both regional analyses and multi-locale ethnographies reflect a greater ambition for cultural representation that stems from a dissatisfaction with the ways in which ethnographies have narrowly bounded their subjects in the past. However, the appeal of multi-locale ethnography is that it embodies a comparative dimension. While regional analysis involves both a geographic-economic mapping of what happens where, "and also the relative power linked articulation and conflicts over ideologies, world views, moral codes and the locally bounded conditions of knowledge and competence" (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 94), multi-locale ethnography, by linking seemingly disparate groups through continuous time, generates a critique across different spatial perspectives. By concentrating on a particular event or phenomenon, it is possible to gauge multiple responses in multiple settings in ways that a regional analysis, in its strictest sense, cannot practically cope with. As Marcus recognizes, "focus on an event, such as a scandal or a stock market crisis, creates the opportunity for a narrative framework which emphasizes the simultaneity of action in multiple locales" (1989: 25-6). By refiguring both fieldwork and its discursive representation in such a way as to include multiple sites and multiple personnel, it is possible to demonstrate how actions and events in connected cultures have applications for and direct effects upon each other; it is possible to represent the diversity and complexity of local situations.

It should be noted however, that this multiplicity of locales and personalities is not, in itself, peculiar to cycling. As Appadurai recognizes, "there are some brute facts about the world of the twentieth century that any ethnography of

it must confront. Central among these facts is the changing social, territorial and cultural reproduction of group identity" (1991: 198). Much of popular culture involves the connection of multiple sites and personnel. Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 7) point to migrant workers, nomads, members of transnational businesses, immigrants, refugees, exiles and expatriates as examples of those who are constantly crossing borders and moving between sites of experience. As Bauman recognizes, "we live today in a nomadic world, in the *universe of migration*- of commodities and increasingly, of people" (1992: 693, italics in original). The processes and practices of a contemporary consumer culture are ones in which we are all unavoidably implicated.

Hannerz particularly, captures the complex and cosmopolitan dimensions of contemporary cultural process. Describing this world of movement and mixture as a 'global ecumene' (1989), Hannerz directly confronts the global flow of images, objects and peoples. For Hannerz,

there is now a world culture...marked by an organization of diversity rather than by a replication of uniformity...This world has become one network of social relationships, and between its different regions there is a flow of meanings as well as of people and goods (1990: 237).

The tentacles of late capitalism touch a myriad of people in discrete, seemingly unconnected, places. The technological explosion of the Internet, for example, testifies to the complex connections of postmodern times. Through a veritable arsenal of technology, media, advertising, gossip and a range of other ways of communicating across varying degrees of distance, we all share in the experiences of consumer culture. Cycling worlds, as a part and product of this culture, are a very real demonstration of its inherent complex connections at work.

An interpretive approach to cycling culture

Both the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted by my thesis borrow from the field of interpretive anthropology. For the remainder of my thesis, I work within an explicitly interpretive framework in order to explain, comment on and critique the flow of meanings within which cyclists circulate. Here, I follow Rabinow's interpretive rationale that "both anthropologist and native are seen as engaged in interpreting the meaning of everyday life" (1986: 257). In the more ethnographic chapters of my thesis, I am interested in exploring how representation is defined and problematized from within the interpretive community of Isèreois cyclists. In other words, I

am interested in examining how these cyclists interpret the meanings of their everyday life; what it is to be a cyclist living and riding in Isère in the mid 1990s.

Given the substantial body of literature concerning the anthropology of sport, an interpretive framework may seem an odd point of entry to discussing the sport of bike racing. However, it is precisely my dissatisfaction with the anthropology of sport that prompts me to look elsewhere in order to locate my ethnography of Isèrois cycling life.

While critical writings on the significance of sport in contemporary society are indeed plentiful, they are nonetheless premised on some fairly narrow assumptions about what sport is and how it is played or practised. The unquestioned and unproblematized reproduction of these assumptions in anthropological literature presents enormous problems for trying to understand the nature of cycling. It simply does not fit the model of sport as it is typically understood or presented. From its conception through to its enactment, competitive cycling presents a paradox, a contradiction and an anomaly for current writings on the form and function of sport. By revealing the limitations of these frameworks, a more appropriate theory of practice can be applied to my ethnography of Isèrois cycling life.

The field of sport received considerable academic attention in the 1970s and 1980s. Birrell (1981), Blanchard and Cheska (1985), Bourdieu (1975, 1988), Calhoun (1987), Chu (1982), Defrance (1987), Donnelly (1984), Dunning (1971, 1983), Gruneau (1980, 1983), Loakley (1983), Mergen, (1986) and Theberge (1984), to name several, have contributed to the genesis of sport as a sociological and/or anthropological problem. While I do not intend to provide an exhaustive or annotated bibliography of this literature, I do propose to highlight some of the problems that emerge when applying it to my ethnographic area.

Even a preliminary survey of this literature reveals that within this broad area of inquiry there remains little definitional agreement. What are taken by analysts to be straightforward categories are, in fact, immensely problematic ones when applied to the demonstration of individual activities. As Duncan writes, "the body of sports literature [has become] a salad of theories, some of them conflicting, some of them downright contradictory" (1988: 29). Indeed, the anthropology of sport can be distinguished by its lack of conceptual clarity. Analysts launch in and talk about the many manifestations of 'sport' without

first clarifying exactly what this phenomenon might be. Blanchard and Cheska, for example, define the anthropology of sport as being simply the "anthropological analysis of sports behaviour" (1985: xi), to which one immediately responds, 'what is sports behaviour?' What is distinctive about this type of behaviour that separates it from leisure practices, play, pastimes, a game or some sort of recreational diversion?¹⁸ What is this distinctive way of behaving that Blanchard and Cheska can render anthropologically critical? This is never made clear. Rather, there seems to be a universal ambiguity surrounding definitions of sport. As Blanchard and Cheska concede, "sport has no definite meaning or referent. Many discrete types of activities are labelled sport" (1985: 32). A convenient ambiguity indeed! As Hargreaves notes, "we can't treat sport as a refined homology" (1982: 7), and to perpetuate the ambivalence and uncertainty that surrounds definitions of sport is to reproduce an unsatisfactory theoretical framework within which to position an analysis of competitive cycling in Isère. It is only at a veneer level that cycling conforms to customary expectations of sport, and to offer a definitional framework which lacks a consideration of its specific social and structural properties is to provide a tenuous analytical framework within which to examine its unique qualities.

While a lack of theoretical rigour transcends most critical considerations of sport in contemporary society, to avoid conceptual confusion, I follow Henrick's model which defines sport as a "*competitive physical activity in which the outcome is determined primarily by physical skills*" (1988: 4, italics mine). Further, I contend that these competitive enactments of physical prowess are distinctive by a task orientation or a 'work ethic' possessed by the adherents of such activities. As I elaborate throughout my thesis, cycling in Isère is officiously organized with practitioners rarely riding aimlessly or for the fun of it. Cycling is approached with a faithful devotion and seriousness that seems, at once, to contradict existing expectations of sport as being fun and relaxing.

Perhaps it is the overriding focus on sporting events that limits a consideration of the fine-grained cultural nuances through which interpretive communities can constitute their sporting presence. Analyses focus on issues such as violence at a bullfight (Arratia 1988), fan behaviour at a cricket match (Harris 1988) or hooliganism at a soccer game (Walvin 1986). By presenting events at the level of spectator consumption alone, such

¹⁸Harris and Park (1983) are the notable exception here. In their collection of essays, these authors take care to define and distinguish play, games and sport across a wide range of cultural contexts.

studies overlook the highly interpretive and culturally redolent work that members of sporting communities do on a daily basis in order to constitute their membership within such communities. My focus however, is on the means by which participation within a cycling social order is expressed and embellished. Commitment to cycling life is intense and engaging, to the point that to focus simply on this world for the three weeks of the Tour de France would be to misrepresent the total and transcending nature of belonging to a cycling community. The intense quality of the daily interactions and exchanges between Isérois cyclists means that customary considerations of the event, rather than the processes that bring the event about, no longer apply to an ethnography of cycling life.¹⁹

To return to an earlier theme, assumptions of familiarity figure heavily when discussing the domain of sport, and some of these need to be dispensed with, for they could prejudice perceptions as to what a thesis detailing the cultural imaginings of a cycling community should include. Issues of masculinity and drug taking, for example, consistently appear in popular understandings of cycling, neither of which I address in my thesis. Contrary to my experiences of cycling in Australia, and my expectations of what I would encounter upon reaching the field, neither concern emerged as significantly shaping of Isérois cycling life. As my fieldwork revealed, drug taking is largely a predicament of the culture of *professional* cycling. At the amateur level of Isérois cycling, drug taking is not an articulated concern. Thus, it remains outside the bounds of my ethnographic inquiry. Similarly, while it is tempting to see sport as a vehicle for the elaboration of particular representations of largely unsavoury masculine values, as Dunning (1986), Hargreaves (1986a), Messner (1987), Sabo and Runfola (1988) and Theberge (1981, 1985) have all done, the performances of Isérois cyclists give the lie to the assumption that all sports are sites of unequivocal male domination. For cyclists, the socially acquired virtues of perseverance and determination, rather than gender, warrant and confer membership. While using the egalitarianism of local cycling to critique the totalizing and frequently unproblematized nature of theorizing sport is an interesting exercise in itself, it is beyond the bounds of my project here. The important analytical point to emerge from these popular assumptions is that it is only at a superficial level

¹⁹Most analysts of sports culture have not been sports people themselves which limits a detailed discussion of the sport from the participant's perspective. Albert, (1984, 1990, 1991), Aycock (1988, 1992), Hilliard (1989) and Granskog (1992) are all 'active' anthropologists working in the areas of cycle racing, chess and triathlon. All are competitive in their field areas and readily declare their self-involvement and self-interest in each of their ethnographies.

that cycling in Isère conforms to these familiar assumptions of sport. To be a cyclist is to be a member of a distinctively bounded, complexly connected, mobile social world that simply does not fit the model of sport as it is typically understood in either popular opinion or when presented by social scientists.

Having suggested that an interpretive approach to cycling culture is a more satisfactory framework for my ethnographic purposes, it is necessary now to outline its epistemological base, for it is within such a framework that I will operate for the remainder of my thesis.

The work of Clifford Geertz is a necessary starting point when promoting an interpretive model, for his theoretical and methodological persuasions have unquestionably shaped, if not defined, the nature of the interpretive quest. As Blanchard notes,

to date, no Geertzian school of thought has emerged in anthropology, but his treatment of culture as text, his "personally wrought" (Marcus and Cushman 1982: 38) style of ethnographic reporting and his compelling writing style have played major roles in shaping the anthropology of the last twenty years (1992: 260).

Roseberry, an otherwise strident critic, is compelled to concede that "few anthropologists have enjoyed wider influence in the social sciences than Clifford Geertz" (1982: 1016). This being the case, a consideration of Geertz's contributions to interpretive anthropology is a necessary point of departure to a discussion of its implications for framing an analysis of Isèrois cycling life.²⁰

Geertz's best known treatise, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), serves as a progressive programme for revising both anthropology itself and the ethnographic approach. All the essays assembled therein are concerned with "pushing forward a particular view of what culture is, what role it plays in social life, and how it ought properly be studied" (Geertz 1973: vii). In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz begins with addressing theoretical concerns and he concludes with a consideration of methodological issues. Choosing examples from religion, ideology and art to formulate an anthropology increasingly sensitive to meaning (Sangren 1988: 60), the sources Geertz draws on are as invigorating as the questions he poses. The preliminary essay, 'Thick description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture,' offers a

²⁰I am wholly concerned with Geertz's interpretive phase of anthropology. His earlier works such as *Peddlers and Princes: Social Development and Economic Changes in Two Indonesian Towns* (1963) or *The Social History of an Indonesian Town* (1965) are not of interest to my thesis.

theoretical approach to framing ethnographic experience, while in 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', Geertz concludes his methodological rationale for interpretive anthropology, for seeing things from 'the native's point of view'. Both the notion of 'thick description' and 'the native's point of view' have particular relevance for unpicking the complexities of cycling life in Isère and, as such, warrant some discussion.

Geertz's well known pronouncement on accessing and unravelling layers of meaning seems an appropriate point of entry for approaching the complexities of both the Tour de France and cycling life in Isère.²¹ The concept of 'thick description', of peeling back what are ostensibly commonsensical understandings of a particular event to reveal far greater cultural ramifications, can certainly be applied to an examination of the Tour de France. The Tour is an intricate tapestry of actions and events or, as Geertz more eloquently expresses it, a multiplicity of "complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another" (1973: 10). Archaeological metaphors are not misplaced when discussing the notion of 'thick description.' As Geertz intends it, 'thick description' conceptualizes culture as a "piled up structure of influence and implication through which an ethnographer is continually trying to pick his way" (1973: 7). Accordingly, ethnographic accounts or descriptions must be of the whole, considering all its levels and intertwinings of meaning.

I have not just borrowed a theoretical model from Geertz but also a methodological one. To see things from the participant's perspective or 'the native's point of view' (Geertz 1974), is fundamental to Geertz's (and my) interpretive endeavour. For Geertz, interpretation should not be grounded in the ethnographer's culture, but in the participant's culture as understood by the ethnographer:

the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong. There are enormous difficulties in such an enterprise, methodological pitfalls...and some moral perplexities as well (Geertz 1973: 453).

The 'native's point of view' captures the essentially chameleon like qualities

²¹It should be noted that Darnton (1984) has similarly applied a Geertzian framework to his historical treatment of French cultural practices in *The Great Cat Massacre and other episodes in French Cultural History*. An advocate of a Geertzian style of interpretive strategy, Darnton maintains that "history in the ethnographic grain begins with the premise that individual expressions take place within a general idiom" (1984: 3-5). That it strikes a chord with other social scientists testifies to the durability of a Geertzian perspective as an analytical framework within which to locate a discussion of contemporary cultural phenomena.

of ethnographers, for we constantly shed our skins as we move between different cultural worlds. To see things from the 'native's point of view' is not to empathize with local subjects, but to reshape our own perspectives so that the Other becomes intelligible on its own terms.

Certainly, there is always the risk of unwittingly conflating pre-existing experiences with the new ones of the field when the area of inquiry is one with which the ethnographer has some degree of familiarity. However, the implication here of the inert interpreter, weighed down with unshakable cultural baggage, proves itself to be mythical. The 'native's point of view' involves dialogue, communication and an exchange of ideas which empathy, with its suggestions of an intuitive understanding, necessarily precludes. Empathy implies bringing cultural baggage, of never really unpacking, settling in and setting up; it is a closed conception, an interpretive cul-de-sac. As an anthropologist, to appreciate local sensibilities and sensitivities, it is necessary to really settle in; to get as comfortable as one possibly can with his or her adopted (or appropriated) way of life. Suspending or reshaping judgment, seeing things from the 'native's point of view', opens a window to unimagined and often unexpected richness and rewards. As this translates for my own fieldwork, to appreciate the subtleties of Isèrois cycling worlds, it was necessary to live my life, as much as possible, as an Isèrois cyclist; to go where they went, to ride where they rode, and to all the time, engage in the immediacies of their (and subsequently my) social world. Demonstrating to the locals that I was virtually one of them by wholeheartedly participating in cycling life was a key point of entry to accessing wider reaching processes and practices at work in France.

The raid on Geertz

While Geertz's theoretical and methodological persuasions have a particular relevance for my material, it must be noted that he has a great many detractors. Critiquing Geertz, it seems, has become a disciplinary sport, with both his methodological procedures and theoretical pronouncements attracting criticism. As Shankman notes,

Geertz has proposed that social scientists study meaning rather than behaviour, seek understanding rather than causal laws, and reject mechanistic explanations of the natural science variety in favour of interpretive explanations. He has invited his colleagues to take seriously the possibilities of analogy and metaphor, to consider human activities as text and symbolic action as drama. In other words, he has asked social scientists to rework, if not, abandon, their traditional assumptions about the

nature of their intellectual enterprise (1984: 261).

Given such a challenge, is it any wonder that Geertz has so successfully managed to raise anthropological ire?

Interpretive anthropology (and its parent framework hermeneutics) has long borne the scrutiny of the discipline for its perceived lack of methodological rigour. Austin (1979), Crapanzano (1986), Fischer (1977), Keesing (1987), Kemper (1979), Shankman (1984), Scholte (1987, 1988), Shore (1988) and Webster (1982), to name several, bludgeon the interpretive quest for its believed lack of a discursive or paradigmatic bedrock. Crapanzano, for example, asserts that Geertz hides his theoretical inadequacies behind an unconvincing appeal to meaning. "Despite his phenomenological-hermeneutic pretensions, Geertz offers no specifiable evidence for his attributions of intention, his assertions of subjectivity, his declarations of experience" (1986: 74). Despite, or because of, these criticisms, Geertz himself admits the illusive quality of interpretive anthropology. In a much touted statement, he acknowledges the irresolute nature of the interpretive quest: "I have never gotten anywhere near the bottom of anything I have written about. Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And worse than that, the more deeply it goes, the less complete it gets" (Geertz 1973: 29). Here, Geertz concedes both his own limitations and the shortcomings of the interpretive framework within which he operates. More importantly, here Geertz preempts his detractors, for his concession both predates all major criticism regarding the nature of the interpretive quest and recognizes the partiality of any interpretive effort.

While interpretive anthropology lacks closure, it need not be as slippery as even Geertz himself implies. Despite disciplinary scepticism, where the postmodern debate has impacted upon anthropology is that it has, in fact, provided ethnographers with new methodological tools with which to refine their interpretive tasks. While it is claimed that interpretive anthropology can only ever be richly descriptive, and that pleas to 'the native's point of view' are all that we have to substantiate our claims of cultural authenticity (Marcus and Fischer 1986), the much pondered issues of ethnographic authority, reflexivity and the self-conscious situating of the self in the text, have provided new guidelines on how to undertake interpretive anthropology, on how to do ethnography. The application of certain of the key concerns of postmodernism to my material indicates that methodological rigour can be adhered to when working within an interpretive framework.

Criticisms of Geertz are persistent. All however, are essentially concerned with his notion and application of culture as 'text,' which Geertz defines as "imaginative works built out of social materials" (1973: 449). In these texts, social life is 'written' by the culture concerned. The informant acts as a translator of these texts and what is left unsaid, that is the cultural contexts in which they occur, is then augmented by the anthropologist (Marcus and Cushman 1982: 43-44). Describing, with varying degrees of thickness- to borrow from Geertz- the parts of the 'unsaid' is thus taken to contribute to the meaning of the text (Chock and Wyman 1986: 11). As Geertz maintains with reference to his treatment of the cockfight:

to treat the cockfight as a text is to bring out a feature of it (in my opinion the central feature of it) that treating it as a rite or a pastime, the two most obvious alternatives, would tend to obscure; its use of emotion for cognitive ends. What the cockfight says it says in a vocabulary of sentiment- the thrill of risk, the despair of loss, the pleasure of triumph. Yet, what it says is not merely that risk is exciting, loss depressing or triumph gratifying, banal tautologies of affect, but that it is of these emotions, thus exemplified, that society is built and individuals are put together. Attending cockfights and participating in them is, for the Balinese, a kind of sentimental education (1973: 449).

Taking culture as text, "symbolic anthropology seeks to read [it] deeply: to find...the 'reverberations' of a culture in ritual, in metaphor, in the meanings of everyday life" (Keesing 1987: 161). This is my argument for the Tour de France. Treated as text, the Tour can reveal a cultural richness elsewhere unimagined.

Yet such treatments of culture as text attract wide ranging criticism, which Geertz himself pre-empts: "The text analogy now taken up by social scientists is, in some ways, the broadest of all recent refigurations of social theory, the most venturesome and the least well developed" (1983: 30). Shore itemizes a range of concerns regarding the formulation of culture as text: treating culture as text implies "cultural determinism and cultural relativism, it offers too monolithic an understanding of cultural systems and it is socially and politically naive" (1988: 161). It is on this last point that Roseberry (1982) takes particular issue with Geertz, arguing that a cultural event, when conceived of as text, cannot consider the productive forces that work to shape it, for 'text' implies a finished piece of work, like a novel to be read.

While I do not propose to defend Geertz's analysis of the cockfight in these terms, I can validate the anthropological merit of treating the Tour de France as a text that is sensitive to the productive forces that construct and shape it. While Geertz is silent on the ways in which cultural meanings sustain power

and privilege in the Balinese condition, my reading of the Tour de France identifies precisely the ways in which this occurs in the French situation. Treated as text, my analysis of the Tour must necessarily recognize process, for what are fetishism, history, saga and mythology if they are not explicitly articulated productive forces that are constantly being considered by cyclists on a daily basis? Cycling worlds hinge on a turn-over, in which ever evolving narrative themes are reproduced, while new or additional ones are introduced. The Tour de France is sustained by a web of local, regional and national narratives that are historically cumulative and reflective of broader patterns and processes at work in French society.

The works of Lavenda (1980, 1984a, 1984b) and Ricoeur (1981) are particularly useful for buoying the notion and application of text to the Tour de France. As Lavenda claims, there is a duality to all texts. They are double texts by virtue of both inscription and performance.

On the one hand they are planned events and are scheduled, and all of this, a plan for social action, is written down. It becomes a text which is designed to be performed, and it is a text with distinct authors. It is not the gods or 'custom' dictating the actors, it is a group of people with very distinct ideas about that which they wish to accomplish (1984a: 49).

The text of the Tour de France is indeed carefully authored, performed and orchestrated. It is a consummate example of cultural editing and coordination. How the Tour happens is dependent on a very specific group of people- La Société du Tour de France- and the performance of the riders is ultimately subject to the whims and dictates of these authors.

Perhaps the writing of such an influential piece has been to Geertz's detriment, for criticisms of Geertz's anthropology, such as those put forward by Friedman (1987, 1991), seem only to focus on the cockfight. As Geertz himself admits, "I expect to be remembered, if at all, as the man who wrote 'that piece on cocks'" (Slowikowski 1992: 226). Despite Friedman's criticisms to the contrary, Geertz's anthropology is progressive and evolving; it is accommodating of both current and changing issues within the discipline. Indeed, it is from Geertz's formulation of culture as text that the pressing issue of "how interpretations are constructed by the anthropologist who works in turn from the interpretations of his informants" (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 26) emerges.

Geertz's writing reveals more than a passing interest in the politics of anthropologizing. His best known study, *The Interpretation of Cultures*

(1973), explicitly recognizes the necessarily engineered, inscribed nature of ethnography, it being "fiction (not falsehood), something that is made, something fashioned" (Geertz 1973: 15). Yet it is in his later, often ignored, theoretical pronouncements that Geertz most succinctly acknowledges the inherently collaborative nature of ethnographic endeavours. *Local Knowledge* (1983), a collection of essays, is concerned with systematizing an anthropology of knowledge; how do scientists, social and natural alike, gather and produce knowledge of their subjects or objects under study? Implicit in this quest, Geertz argues, is a comprehension of the research milieu in which the scientist operates. In reproducing experiences from the field, questions of authorship and authority are inextricable from the exegesis of symbols and meanings in which Geertz engages. As Biersack maintains, "*Works and Lives* (Geertz 1988) is a key text in the burgeoning literature on the aesthetics and politics of anthropologizing" (1990: 77). There, Geertz contends that ethnography, and by association anthropology, must be constructed on two fundamental precepts; "how is the author made manifest in the text and just what is it that an author authors" (1988: 8)? For Geertz however, pondering the polemics of anthropology, simply

concentrating our gaze on the ways in which knowledge claims are advanced, undermines our capacity to take any of these claims seriously. Explaining how the thing is done is to suggest, like the lady sawn in half, it isn't done at all (1988: 2).

This is not to trivialize the postmodern influence: in 'Being There' Geertz is critical of ethnographies that have "explicit representations of authorial presence relegated, like other embarrassments, to prefaces, notes or appendices" (1988: 16).

When discussing the politics of anthropologizing, there are a number of similarities between *Works and Lives* (Geertz 1988) and *The Predicament of Culture* (Clifford 1988), the work that has, through chance or design, become the seminal work concerning authorship and styles of ethnographic presentation. Whereas both were published in the same year, the latter has been embraced as an anthropology of anthropology, while the former is seen as *débranché*. Kapferer however, recognizes the contributions that Geertz has made to debates concerning representation, noting that,

[Geertz] has always been the anthropologist most explicitly concerned with authorship and modes of writing and ethnographic presentation. His many monographs can be seen as experiments in styles of ethnographic argument. It is Geertz who has often registered sharp disagreement with ruling analytical orthodoxies in anthropology (1989: 78).

To privilege Clifford's collection of essays on the predicament of commenting

on culture is to freeze Geertz's brand of interpretive anthropology in time; to deny the contributions that it can continue to make to the politics of anthropologizing.

While it is argued that an interpretive anthropology fully accountable to its historical and political-economy implications remains to be written (Marcus and Fischer 1986, Sangren 1988: 405), the Tour de France as a fetishized cultural performance is steeped in political and economic implications, and any ethnography of it must address these issues. The very notion of an event that has the power to impact upon processes and perceptions of cultural production seems to anticipate Marcus and Fisher in their suggestion that "the time now seems right for a thorough integration of an ethnographic practice that remains markedly interpretive and interested in problems of meaning with the political-economic and historical implications of any of its projects of research" (1986: 85). My ethnography of Isèrois cycling life addresses their question of local level populations maintaining and manufacturing their own cultural distinctiveness in the face of such homogenizing processes as globalization and mass consumerism. While I applaud the spirit in which Marcus and Fischer write, I am less enthusiastic of their use of headings to mark developments and disjunctures in anthropology. In separating 'The Revision of Interpretive Anthropology' from 'The Spirit and Scope of Experimental Writing' (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 33, 40), the implication here is that it is not possible to experiment with ploys of ethnographic representation when working within an interpretive framework. My ethnography of cycling life in Isère however, while being explicitly interpretive, simultaneously draws on new tactics of multi-locale ethnographic practice and description.

The claim that interpretive anthropology finds meaning everywhere, yet does not itemize a clear theory of practice for dealing with this multiplicity of meanings, is an equivocally valid criticism. As Shankman argues, "the inability of interpretive theory to offer criteria for evaluating different interpretations or different paradigms poses a formidable barrier to claims of a theoretical superiority" (1984: 89). Certainly, reconciling the abundance of interpretive possibilities from the field with a logically developed theoretical account for this diversity poses considerable anthropological challenge. However, implicit in the application of 'thick description' are several constraints that help to order the potentially seamless nature of interpretive endeavours.

'Thick description' embodies a comparative dimension that recognizes the need to discern, order and privilege particular presentations of meaning from the field. As Biersack notes, "thick description consists in its ability to distinguish a meaningless reflex, a twitch or a blink, from a consciously employed communicative device, the wink" (1990: 74). From within the flow of meanings that circulate in any culture, certain salient ones must always rise to the surface, and the ability of 'thick description' to discern makes it a particularly potent analytical tool. Thus, those perceptions that shape the world of Isérois cyclists circulate within a wider discourse on, not only the Tour de France, but on France itself, and my analytical task becomes how to determine what they mean. While I am not, and will never be French, nor can I hope to get inside French heads, I am trained, as an anthropologist, to recognize meaning and value, nuances and idiosyncrasy, as significantly shaping of social life. Interpretive anthropology reveals intersections in social space and ultimately, my thesis is concerned to examine the gaps in everyday life through which cyclists escape. By employing the tactic of 'thick description', I can sift through a range of other possibilities by which Isérois cyclists make sense of their world, and then identify the importance of the Tour de France in sustaining cultural meaning for them.

To further contain the dimensions of a field inquiry, there is a need to identify its key players. As Keesing recognizes, "cultures are webs of mystification as well as signification. We need to ask who *creates* and who *defines* cultural meanings and to what ends" (1987: 161-162, italics in original). In the case of the Tour de France, to avoid pulling thick description out of thin air, there is a need to recognize the role that La Société du Tour de France plays in controlling, selecting and framing the package of the Tour from which Isérois cyclists can constitute their collective cultural presence. More than anything else, it is the crucial role of La Société in editing the text of the Tour that both shapes the nature of my field, and demonstrates the analytical veracity of the interpretive quest.

While critics such as Shankman imply that interpretive anthropologists view culture as an ever spouting fountain of significance, people can only make meaning from what is provided: ultimately La Société du Tour de France mobilizes particular lines of fetishization, it sets in motion particular narratives, and it is to these that Isérois cyclists respond. In every sense, La Société runs the show. The race, the route and the riders are all decided by La Société, and this must unavoidably limit the ways in which the Tour is experienced by those standing roadside, watching from their lounge rooms,

or talking about it in bars and cafés. In promoting particular presentations of the race, the route and the riders, La Société functions as a cultural broker, mediating the textual potential of the Tour. Le Société operates as a cultural intermediary *par excellence*. As Bourdieu (1986) notes, postmodern society has produced a class without precedent, that of cultural brokers or intermediaries who produce the symbolic images and capital consumed by the rest of us. Television and radio producers, journalists, public relations officers, advertising agents, publishers and academics, these brokers have become, for Bourdieu, an imperative class in contemporary culture. They are a new class for new times, presenting, packaging and promoting new information, knowledge and cultural products on a daily basis. These intermediaries offer us a position of the world which is mediated by their selection of cultural choices. For Isérois cyclists, indeed, all of France, their reception of the Tour depends largely on the signals that are transmitted by La Société du Tour de France.

Nonetheless, reconciling the imperialism of La Société with the multiplicity of my field is an important task. While the text of the Tour is a particular construct, how it is 'authored' is unavoidably multi-locale and polyvocal in nature. Multiple voices of multiple cyclists talk over one another and it is important to recognize the range of interpretive possibilities that this polyvocality presents. My experimentation with multiple discursive sites acknowledges that individual expressions can only take place within a general idiom, in this case, one authored by a very specific group of people, and such analytical self-regulation makes it a potent framework within which to ground the perceived ambiguities of interpretive anthropology.

In the current climate of disciplinary self-scrutiny, the claim that Geertz silences all local voices to produce his reading of the text is an equivocally valid criticism. Certainly, the Balinese do not speak in his work. We hear only one voice- Geertz's- and therefore only one truth. If the cockfight is indeed a "story the Balinese tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1973: 421), then a few Balinese voices would not go astray. As Crapanzano notes,

there is in fact in 'Deep Play', no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed understanding of the constructed native's constructed point of view. Geertz offers no specifiable evidence for his attributions of intention, his assertions of subjectivity, his declarations of experience (1986: 74).²²

Admittedly, such criticisms are valid, however only so with the benefit of

²²Clifford (1986: 133-134) has been a particularly strident critic of Geertz in this respect.

hindsight and an ever evolving, indeed restless, discipline, that only now is beginning to recognize the mediatory role that the ethnographer plays in producing an account which lets the local, authentic voices be heard. As Slowikowski writes, "gaining access- being there- has been further refined. We now acknowledge that the author creates or writes culture; the very ethnography intervenes in the representation and explanation of culture" (1992: 230). To remove Geertz's description out of its historical context, to fastforward it almost forty years, and to continue to critique it must necessarily distort. And finally, what ethnography can stand the test of time, what ethnography can continue to accurately reflect the life of a culture across decades or generations? Geertz (1995) himself acknowledges the difficulties in doing precisely this. As a description of Balinese life in 1958, I would argue that the notes on the cockfight stand as a seminal account of a precise historical moment.

Contents and chapters

Working within an interpretive framework depends on the premise that sports, rather than being means and ends in themselves, can and do reveal intersections in social space. To see sport as culture is, as Robbins notes, "to establish what its practice signifies to its adherents, to establish the ways in which the sport is invested with these meanings and how they may change over time" (1987: 587). Cycling in Isère is suggestive of a range of symbolic possibilities that lie beyond the bounds assumed by popular conceptions of sport. As Hargreaves writes, "sport is part of a common tradition of collective experience, that of shared, easily understood meanings and values, internalized by way of unique ritual and dramatic qualities and powerful symbolic characteristics" (1982: 16). As I demonstrate throughout my thesis, it is the repetition of certain, cycling specific, behaviours that surface in ways that sustain the Tour de France as a cultural performance *par excellence*.

I adopt a particular strategy of textual representation to elaborate the processes by which the interpretive community of Isérois cyclists construct their social world. In the following chapters, I am concerned to detail the processes and practices by which cyclists carve out their cultural integrity on a daily basis. Before I address the maintenance of social distinctiveness, it is necessary to provide some sense of the geography and culture of Isère, for it is out of these conditions that cyclists emerge. Thus, the following chapter provides an unfolding cartography of Isère, one that maps the social and territorial landscapes of the region. It is against this backdrop that the particularities of

the Isérois cycling community can then be positioned. From detailing a knowledge of location, my thesis moves towards detailing a range of local knowledges that articulate Isérois considerations of their social world. Chapter three examines the interdependence of the bike and the body as a key text in the fetishization of the Tour de France. To develop this argument, I draw on particular instances of equipment and scientific fetishism. From examining the co-existence of the bike and the body, chapter four elaborates a specific mythology of the Tour de France and the men who ride it, one that emphasizes a highly particular saga of suffering. This mythologizing process gives the Tour de France a larger than life quality; a key dimension in its fetishization. The mythology that surrounds the Tour de France extends to a fetishization of the mountains, in which certain *cols* and *côtes* are held to be sacred places, and gifted climbers become the embodiment of archetypal cycling excellence. Chapter five details the ways in which local riders mythologize the mountains that they encounter on a daily basis.

Chapter six shifts from local to national. It is the concern of this chapter to elaborate the cultural consequences that are effected by the Tour as it moves across the country. It is my argument that the extreme commercialization of the event continually presents images of 'Frenchness' through which consumers constitute an enduring cultural identity. The Tour de France provides a key site, albeit one of many, at and towards which new trajectories for nation building can be articulated and directed. Chapter seven moves from looking at the Tour as a force in France to looking at the Tour de France as an international sporting event. It offers some concluding reflections on the construction of the Tour de France as a distinctly French event in the face of its global media coverage and the international commercial interests that it attracts.

CHAPTER TWO MAPPING ISERE

"The geographical territory that cultures and societies
are believed to map onto do not have to be nations"
(Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 7).

Introduction

The impact of the Tour de France upon the cultural face of France is enormous and inescapable as everything gears up for the show of shows. To trace the transformation of rural and urban landscapes as the Tour progresses across France, it is necessary to first provide some sense of the geography and cultural ambience of a region prior to its colonization by the Tour. It is the aim of this chapter to detail the social and territorial landscapes of Isère, for they become almost unrecognizable when the Tour moves across the *département*. By examining the cultural and geographical features of Isère, it is then possible, in future chapters, to survey and scrutinize the cultural consequences of the Tour as it impacts upon the region.

This chapter does not intend to elaborate any of the mentalities out of which Isérois cyclists constitute their sporting presence. Instead it traces the territorial landscape against or through which a distinctive cosmology of cycle racing is produced. Far from being inalienable and pre-given, the landscape of Isère is socially constructed; the product of sustained agency and intervention by bike racers. By repeatedly negotiating particular mountains, roads, *cols* and summits; by regularly riding in the sun, the wind, the hail and the heat, cyclists appropriate their surrounding environment in ways that are crucial to the maintenance of their social relations. As Wolch recognizes, "it is impossible to understand human society without accounting for its geographical underpinnings" (1989: 4), and the familiarity of Isérois cyclists with the roads that they regularly ride accounts, in some profound ways, for the particularities of their cultural domain. The cycling world is a tactile and sensual one, and it is through the relationship that adherents have with their riding environment that this is best expressed. The concern of this chapter is to paint a territorial backdrop; to introduce the

landscape that plays a key role in the constitution of cycling social practice.

Certainly, landscape exists independently of cyclists, however, their constant reworking of it as cycling terrain enacts a key strategy of fetishization. While fetishization takes many forms, it is the perception shared by cyclists that landscape has the power to inform and transform social relations which provides a particularly compelling point of entry to some of its implications. In mapping Isère, cyclists fetishize Isère; they give land a power beyond its ostensible purposes of agriculture or transport. While I do not illustrate any of the ways in which the territory of Isère is fetishized- chapter five provides a detailed analysis of the reterritorialization of Isère as sacred space- this chapter maps the terrain through which these processes of fetishization can be enacted.

In addition to mapping the geographical landscape of Isère, this chapter also provides a cultural backdrop against which to consider the characteristics and personalities of the local cycling community. Here, I embrace the spirit, although not necessarily the content, of *Cartographies* (Diprose and Ferrel 1991), in which various forms of social experience are mapped to produce a cultural cartography of postmodern living. The cartography of Isère that is regularly and repeatedly drawn by cyclists is not the only map of the region, indeed, the social world of cyclists is frequently at odds with a range of assumptions, popular and anthropological alike, concerning the nature of French culture. This problematic terrain needs to be charted, and I address a range of counter cartographies that are drawn in opposition to cycling ones. Given the central concerns of this thesis however, the cartography that provides a point of centrality for cycling lives is emphasized in this chapter.

Introducing field sites by an appeal to geography is standard anthropological practice. Many an account of social life includes a "classic 'ethnographic map' that purports to display the spatial distribution of peoples, tribes and cultures" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 7), and many an ethnography begins with an evocation of the ambience of the anthropologist's milieu. Zonabend immediately positions her field site, describing Minot as "a village typical of that region [northern Burgundy] of open fields, with the houses grouped in the centre of its territory...hemmed in on the horizon by strips of the huge communal forest" (1984: iii). Likewise, Rapp provides a compelling introduction to her account of returning to Montagnac, the site of her fieldwork, in Haute-Provence:

the voyage back to Haute-Provence was harder than I had remembered. To begin

with, there were the roads. One cannot yet pierce the Durance Valley by the autoroute: the high valleys of the upland French Mediterranean remain relatively inaccessible. Although the Durance River was canalized in the 1960s and as floods pacified, the path into the backlands still winds along its torturous banks. Short distances required long stretches of time and memory to return (1986: 35).

Such appeals to geography are not confined to French situations. Herzfeld (1985) begins his analysis of the poetics of Cretan manhood by locating his subjects within the geographical context of a hostile and windswept island village. As anthropologists have long realized, the implications of ecological description for cultural life are important and, as such, it is necessary to examine the involvement of territory in the production of the cultural landscape of Isère.

An extended description of the geography of Isère is an important preface to my project, for cycling lives are played out in terms of a profound attachment to the territory which defines their region. Knowledge of local geography represents a key means of social organization by which one's experience with and commitment to the culture of cycling is measured. Just as Cohen points to "the context of rather mundane circumstances; how to evaluate your neighbour's work in making a wheel barrow; where, and in which tidal conditions, to fish for a particular species; when to cut hay; how to tell a yarn" (1982: 6), as illustrations of the ways in which specific communities articulate belonging, knowing where to ride represents a key dynamic in Isérois cycling practice. Familiarity with the territory of Isère exists as a form of local knowledge (Geertz 1983) upon which belonging both rests and depends.

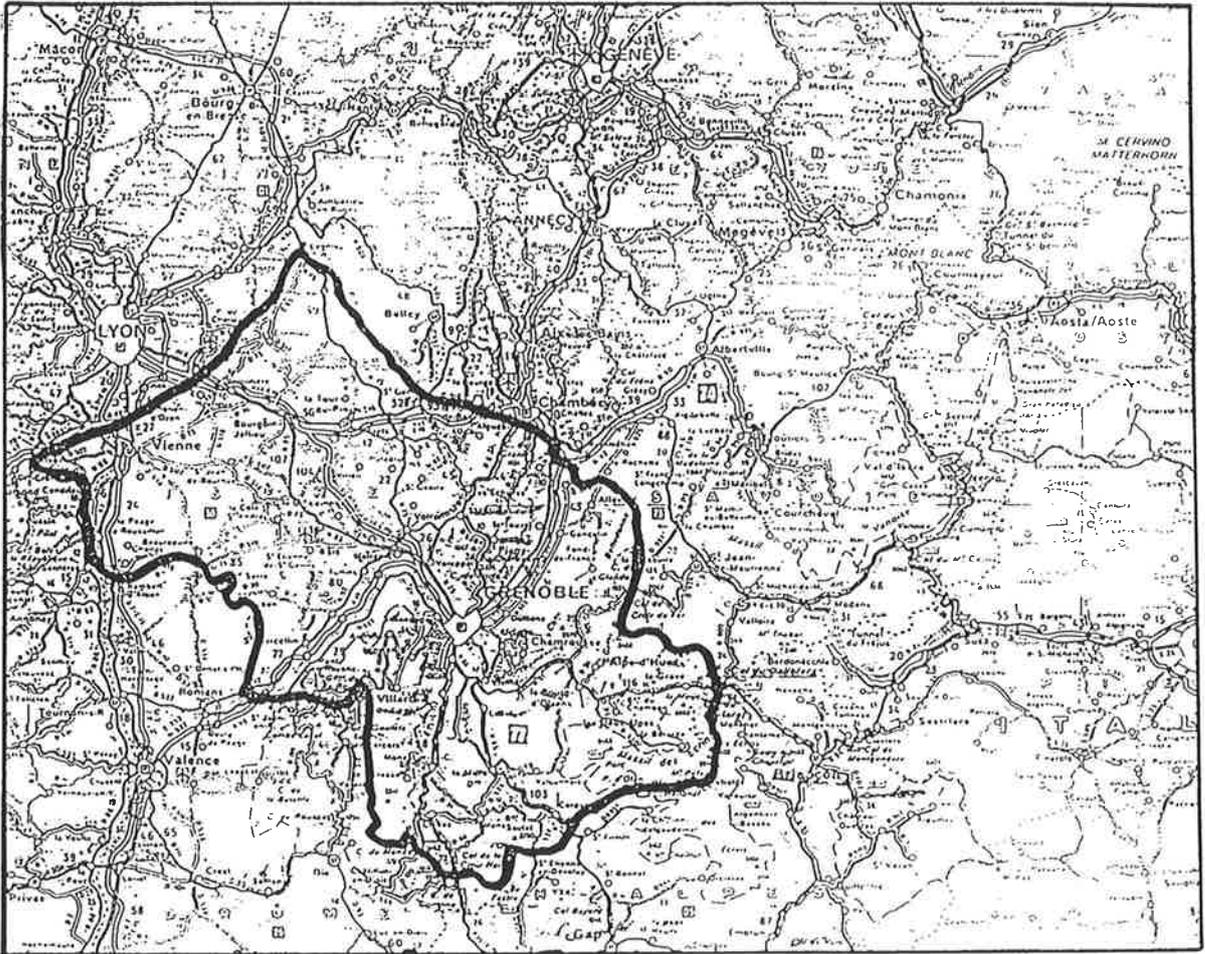
Isère: geography and ambience of the region

Taking its name from the River Isère¹ the *département* of Isère is located within the administrative region of Rhône-Alpes, and it is surrounded by the *départements* of Savoie, Ain, Rhône, Ardeche, Drôme and Hautes-Alpes. Extending from Rive de Gier in the west (c. 50 kilometres south-west of Lyon), to the Col de la Croix-Haute in the south, through to the Col du Lautaret in the east and Vertrieu in the north, the *département* of Isère covers 7431 square kilometres, 3500 of which are mountainous. The most defining feature of Isère is the Alps.² Towering granite and crystalline rocks

¹The River Isère starts high on the Franco-Italian border and threads towards the River Rhône via Grenoble where it is joined by the rivers Drac and Romanche.

²The mountains of Isère are part of the wider chain of the French Alps. The Alps extend from Genève on the Franco-Swiss border in the north and dominate the *départements* of Haute-Savoie, Savoie, Hautes-Alpes and Isère.

(still subject to change from frost shattering and wind erosion), fertile valleys and an expansive, untamed wilderness, give the region an atmosphere all of its own. The mountains serve as looming cultural beacons to which the Isérois constantly refer to ground their understandings, articulations and appreciations of living in the area. In popular discourse, the role of the mountains proves inextricable in shaping a collective Isérois identity.³



Map 2: Departmental boundaries of Isère.

The borders of Isère are ringed by a natural mountain frontier. Her southernmost border is marked by the Col de Menée and the Col de la Croix-Haute. To the north, the Col du Lautaret, Col de la Croix de Fer and Col du Glandon serve as imposing landmarks that separate Isère from elsewhere in France. Historically important, these *cols* or passes mark transport routes

³I examine the centrality of the mountains as a focus of social identity in chapter five. All I am doing in this section is acknowledging their undeniable physical presence in the geographical landscape of Isère.

that, for centuries, have linked towns, villages, *départements* and even countries. Col du Galibier, for example, marks the former frontier between what was Savoie⁴ and France, while Col du Lautaret sits on the road from Milan to Vienne- an important trade route between France and Italy prior to the building of the Tunnel de Fréjus. Known as 'collis de altaureto', the Col du Lautaret takes its name from the small temple (*altaretum*) that the Romans built to placate the deity of the mountains. While I address the mythology of the mountains as an important narrative feature in the fetishization of the Tour de France in chapter five, it is important to realize here that, symbolically, such shrines speak a thousand words, shrouding the mountains in an aura of sacredness that only their users- hikers, skiers, but particularly cyclists- can truly appreciate.

The outstanding feature of any mountain habitat including Isère is its altitude, which determines a number of climatic factors. Affected by both Atlantic and continental influences, temperatures in Isère tend to be higher than average in summer and, perhaps predictably, winter temperatures are lower than elsewhere in France. In summer, the temperature hovers around 30 degrees Celsius, although temperatures as high as 36 degrees are not uncommon. From November through to February, the temperature sits between plus and minus 6 degrees, the sky hangs so low it feels as though it is possible to reach up and touch it, and a biting wind whistles through the valleys. There is a local expression, "*neuf mois d'hiver, trois mois d'enfer*" - nine months of winter, three months of hell- referring to the unrelenting cold that cripples the uppermost reaches of Isère. Atop the Col du Lautaret, a cairn commemorates the fact that Scott (of Antarctic fame) stayed there in 1908 to experience cold conditions before his fateful voyage of 1912. Reference to temperature is important, for the very nature of cycling in Isère is seasonally dependent, with snow, sleet and rain limiting access to much of the mountain territory that comprises the cycle domain. The Col du Galibier, for example, is closed by snow from mid-November to mid-May, while any mountain taller than 2,000 metres is snow bound until early June.

The beauty of the Alps belies extraordinarily difficult living conditions. Viazzo refers to an unnamed historical source to capture the extremities of life in the Italian Alps: "mountains are regions of much labour and little leisure, of poverty today and anxiety for the morrow, of toil cramped hands and toil dulled brains" (1989: 2). While grossly caricaturing *montagnards*, Viazzo nonetheless recognizes the difficulties and contingencies of living in

⁴Savoie only became a part of France when she was relinquished by Italy in 1860.

the Alps. Long unproductive winters, short growing seasons and a high population density mean that *montagnards* must supplement their income with other sources. While agriculture remains the stronghold, producing mainly cash crops including lavender, apples, peaches and grain, the burgeoning tourist industry, coupled with seasonal migration to coastal cities such as Marseille or Toulon, contribute to the regional income as Isèrois residents adapt to the economic niches that are left open. Tourism and seasonal unemployment notwithstanding, much of Isèrois life reflects a traditional attachment to the land. Farmers still use *alpagnes*- high pastures- to graze their herds in summer, hence their reluctance to allow the development of unregulated ski fields, while many maintain long distance, reciprocal, links with pastures on the warmer plains of the Vaucluse and the Vars for winter grazing. In every conceivable way, the local ecology of Isère both facilitates and constrains the practices of daily life. As well as practicalities such as farming, pleasures such as cycling are determined by the seasons. The range and reach of the local cycling network are seriously limited by the seasonality of the sport. On-road ties are severed with the first fall of snow, only to be re-established with the spring thaw the following year.

The irreducibility of ecological givens in shaping social life is appropriated in particular ways to articulate popular consciousness. Most notably, the local tourist industry feeds on images of alpine serenity; on the "aesthetic of the infinite" (Nicholson 1959). Publicity brochures, road signs and billboards advertising the resort of Villard-de-Lans proclaim it '*tout vert ou toute blanche*'- all green or all white, depending on the season. Serre Chevalier is *le Toit du Monde*- the roof of the world-, while Alpe d'Huez is *l'Isle du Soleil*- the island of sun- in an otherwise bleak alpine winter. There is also extensive summer tourism, with tourist pamphleteering paying special attention to the sporting potential of the region. "Tennis, skiing, horse riding, mountain biking, archery, hang gliding, climbing...even if you are in top form, you'll never be able to try all that is possible during the summer at Alpe d'Huez" (*Respirez, c'est l'Oisans!* tourist brochure). Indeed, the Alps are a veritable playground for the sporting enthusiast. Swimming, sailing and windsurfing are possible in the region's many lakes, caves, crags and sheer cliff faces provide launching points for those interested in abseiling or *spéléologie*, while the mountain slopes attract hikers and mountain bikers of all abilities.

The snow fields of Isère make the region equally attractive to tourists in winter. Magnificent, but hardly unspoilt, Isère's privileged mountain setting was not lost on the International Olympic Committee who chose Grenoble as

the site of the Winter Games in 1968 and Albertville, in the neighbouring *département* of Savoie, in 1992. There are nearly forty ski resorts scattered throughout Isère: more than 4,000 kilometres of snow have been groomed for use. There is an annual rhythm to the use of the local landscape. The mountains of Isère are appropriated differently with the changing of the seasons. In winter, the mountain slopes become the domain of skiers, with many cyclists resorting to *ski de fond* or cross-country skiing to maintain their fitness. Few skiers turn to cycling in summer. The mountain roads become, instead, the preserve of cyclists who now occupy an entirely different social and territorial space to that of their winter counterparts.

While capitalizing on the region's natural bounty, extensive tourism has had detrimental consequences for local economy and populations. As Rosenberg (et al) identify, "snow and sunshine are discovered as commodities by a consumption directed society" (1973: 34). While many *communes* in Isère have, over the years, bought and groomed land to use as ski fields, opened ski boutiques and established resort style chalets in the hope that they would boost local economy, increasingly, these acquisitions have generated local tensions. Benefits such as improved public transport are seasonally dependent, there is a limit to how many ski boutiques a town can support, and many young people see no future for themselves in their villages as clerks, chambermaids or as ski-lift operators. The majority of the more prestigious jobs- interpreters and receptionists- are taken by Parisians completing a *stage*- a training programme- with one of the *écoles du tourisme* that are scattered throughout the region. Although the social, cultural, political and economic consequences of tourism in Isère deserve extended ethnographic scrutiny, I can only signal this malaise, for it lies outside the main interests of my thesis. The point I wish to make is that while the transitory visits of the highly modernized and technologically sophisticated cyclists to the mountains lead them to valorize Isère's natural beauty, such romantic treatments of the environment must be positioned alongside those who depend on the region for economic prosperity and survival.⁵

⁵Villepontoux's (1981) ethnography of Maurienne, a region with a population of about 47,000 on the border of Isère and Hautes-Alpes, contrasts with the widespread feeling (see Blaxter 1971, Huston, J 1971 and Huston, S 1971 and Reiter 1972) that tourism is destroying the social fabric of alpine villages. Villepontoux (1981: 143) notes that tourism in Valloire, the largest city in the region, is largely 'State-run', with vacation homes for employees of Renault and the Department of Domestic Affairs. Whereas elsewhere in the Alps, tourism is characteristically fickle, as various ski resorts come in and out of fashion, tourism in Valloire remains constant.

Grenoble

When discussing the territorial reaches of my field sites, a description of Grenoble is an important consideration. While it was not so much the developments in the town, as the activities of Isérois cyclists along the region's many roads that commanded my ethnographic attention, a brief discussion of Grenoble is necessary, for cyclists are frequently involved in the daily non-cycling routines of life in the town. Although I privilege cycling specialists in my thesis, to ignore the non-cycling world would produce a lopsided account of life in Isère. While, in many ways, the cycling world is far removed from the non-cycling domain and, while a number of my informants did not actually live in Grenoble proper, they did work in Grenoble, shop in Grenoble and drink and dance in the town's many cafés and nightclubs. Cyclists and non-cyclists alike are constantly brought into co-existence and, this being the case, some of the cultural characteristics of Grenoble that facilitate this interaction need addressing.

Grenoble is the *ville préfectorale* of Isère, and has served as the capital of the region since the fourteenth century when Louis XI designated the town the permanent parliamentary seat. The city's prosperity was originally founded on glove making (France's first trade union was established in 1803 by Grenoblois glove makers), but in the nineteenth century, its economy diversified to include mining, cement, paper mills and metallurgy. At the converging point of the Drac and Isère rivers, Grenoble also has, like elsewhere in Isère, a sizable hydroelectric industry. The discovery of *houille blanche*, or 'white coal' as it is known, has led to a growth of heavy industry around Grenoble, with most towns along the rivers being dependent on the industry for their survival.

The population of Grenoble proper is estimated at 155,000, but the surrounding suburbs increase this figure to nearly 405,000. A diverse population mix from immigrant workers to wealthy industrialists inhabits Grenoble, and it is possible to match social status to where one lives. The inner city apartments of Grenoble are occupied by the wealthy, with addresses such as Rue Clot-Bey, Avenue Alsace Lorraine and Place Grenette being highly sought after. The right bank of the River Isère, known as the Quartier St. Laurent, was colonized by Italian immigrants in the nineteenth century and now, the Italian population who still occupy the Quartier, takes an active interest in encouraging ethnic life in Grenoble. The soccer grand final

between Milan AC and Barcelona in the 1994 European Cup testified to this, with spirited crowds filling the Spanish bars and Italian pizzerias along the Quai St. Laurent. The low-cost housing estates on the outskirts of Grenoble, most notably Grand Place and Villeneuve, are filled by the 'wretched of the earth' (Fanon 1967). While down at heel and of ill repute now, the Villeneuve housing project started out as an idealistic attempt by the former mayor Hubert Dubedout to provide an integrated living space for a complete mix of social class.⁶ Chiefly ghettos for North African immigrants, both Grand Place and Villeneuve support an entire discourse steeped in overt and irretrievable racism. Frequent warnings are issued against *les Arabs* and blood curdling stories of murders and muggings at Villeneuve are recounted, and particular bars such as the river-side Bukana or the downtown Le Crocodile are to be avoided at all costs. While identifying and redressing the racism inherent to Grenoble is beyond my project, racial stereotyping remains an important consideration when mapping a particular Grenoblois identity. In Grenoblois conceptualizations, "the Orient is at bottom, something either to be feared...or to be controlled" (Said 1978: 301).

An energetic crusade against immigration is to be anticipated: the proximity of Grenoble to the Italian and Swiss borders, and the ease of overland access from ports such as Marseille or Toulon, make Grenoble a particularly attractive destination for illegal immigrants.⁷ To counter this migration, random police squad visits to homes or restaurants owned by those of North African origin, *rafles*- round ups- and stringent identification checks, often based purely on skin colour, are everyday occurrences in Grenoble. On numerous cycling trips, we would see the little blue police cars waiting in the exits from the *autoroutes* to apprehend suspicious looking drivers. A lay-by just outside the *commune* of Séchillienne on the N85 back into Grenoble from Italy was a frequent identification check point, particularly in summer when the warm temperatures would send immigrants scurrying about the

⁶Hubert Dubedout was a scientist at Grenoble's Centre Nucléaire de la Recherche in the 1960s. Exasperated that the water supply to his apartment kept failing, Dubedout led a campaign to force the then mayor to do something. He established a non-party political group whose only brief was to improve local services and local planning. He contested the local elections of 1965, winning handsomely. Dubedout was to be mayor for nearly twenty years.

⁷Grenoble's location means that smuggling is both feasible and tempting. As popular opinion has it, Grenoble is the centre of operations for the French Mafia. The region has a history of smuggling, with the Musée Dauphinois featuring a display of body hugging flasks used for smuggling contraband liquor.

countryside in search of seasonal work.⁸

As Rogers has noted, France possesses a "very entrenched and unusually elaborated ideological and institutional apparatus aimed explicitly at consolidating, preserving and asserting a nationally uniform cultural identity" (1991: 204). Such perceptions resonate with popular sentiment in Grenoble. As one of my friends explained, "in France, you are supposed to integrate minorities and they are supposed to become French as soon as possible." In his study of immigrant life in Lyon, Grillo (1980a, 1985) describes the experiences of middle class French (teachers, social workers and politicians) at 'helping' *les immigrés* to become *évolué* or evolved and civilized; French. Such hopes for cultural uniformity are expressed most clearly by Charles Pasqua, the Ministeur de l'Interieur and defender of White France, who claimed in an interview on national television, "we are arresting clandestine immigrants. We are sending them back where they came from. Once we have filled boats, planes and trains, the world will understand." The point to be drawn out of this ideology of racism is that Grenoble is a socially diverse locale in which the expression of cultural distinctiveness is systematically denied. The apprehension felt towards *les immigrés* is widespread in Grenoble. It is an attitude that transcends the boundaries of cycling and non-cycling cultures alike.

As well as being cosmopolitan and multi-cultural, the ambience of Grenoble is that of unashamed modernity. From the sleek TGVs in the train station to the futuristic, transparent bubbles of the *téléphérique* which ferries visitors to the Fort de la Bastille, and the city's silent, pollution free, trams, the cultural and economic interests of Grenoble emphasize progress. The post-war reconstruction of France transformed her into a leading 'post-industrial society' (Touraine 1974), and Grenoble reaped the benefits of this industrial prosperity. Numerous textile and chemical factories have been established in the area. Neighbouring towns provide bases for the factories of Rhône-Poulenc, Hewlett-Packard and the ski manufacturer Rossignol.

Grenoble's post-war boom and reconstruction as a modern and vibrant city escalated with the 1968 Winter Olympics. Much of Grenoble was rebuilt for the Olympic Games. The train and bus stations were refurbished, the post

⁸ Illegal immigrants from former Yugoslavia are an increasing presence in the streets of Grenoble. Destitute, these beggars employ vulpine tactics to survive. One young mother made headlines in *Le Dauphiné-Libéré* for removing the foot of her infant daughter with a machete, improving the 'beggarability' of the disfigured child. Highly organized gangs of beggars also operate in Grenoble, targeting the tourist destinations.

office and the Maison du Tourisme were relocated in the town centre, and many of the inner and outer ring roads were built to cope with the increased traffic generated by the Olympics. Nowadays the Olympic Village at neighbouring Echirolles has been transformed into a low cost housing estate similar to Grand Place and Villeneuve.

As Augé has argued, "every settlement in France aspires to be the centre of a significant space and of at least one specific activity" (1995: 67). Thus, while Lyon claims itself as the 'capital of gastronomy', while Limoges is the self styled 'lace capital of France', while Grasse is the 'perfume capital' and while Jancé boasts that it is the 'birth place of free range chicken', Grenoble claims to be the capital of scientific research. The science oriented University of Grenoble, the Centre d'Etudes Nucléaire de Grenoble (C.E.N.G.) and the Atomic Energy Commission or 'Syncotron' on the banks of the River Drac have created a veritable 'silicon valley' in Grenoble, with many Grenoblois employed in scientific research. At the forefront of information technology, libraries are equipped with computer assisted consoles, CD Roms and translation packages, while the nation-wide electronic telephone book, Minitel, can be found everywhere in Grenoble. The library and the post office both have terminals available for public use, just some of the 6.6 million functioning Minitels in France. Billed as the world's largest data base, France Telecom offers Minitel to 4.4 billion subscribers. It is possible to order couscous, reserve plane and train tickets, book a seat in the theatre, look up long lost relatives, obtain medical services, play chess, pick ski slopes and consult the *messageries roses*, a network that links lonely hearts. Importantly, cycling fans can also follow the results of the major races in France, and solicit riding companions for long distance trips.

But while Grenoble prides itself on its modernity and progress, particularly in the fields of medical and nuclear research, historical ties are flaunted alongside the expressed need for integration into a European economic space. Statues commemorating historical figures and battles are prominent around Grenoble. A statue in Rue Phillis de la Charce recognizes its namesake- a regional heroine who, in 1692, helped to save the Dauphiné region during one of the many attacks by the Savoyards-, while a series of statues- *Les Diables Bleus*- in Parc Paul Mistral commemorate the role of the *déportés* in the Massif du Vercors.⁹ A historical dimension is imparted in Grenoble's street names. While serving as spatial landmarks rather than as points of articulated historical reference, some of Grenoble's streets and squares are

⁹The Blue Devils is the nickname for the Resistance fighters of the Massif du Vercors.

named de Gaulle, Voltaire, Lafayette, Rousseau, and most cross-town routes pass through the Place de la Bastille. Increasingly, street names are being replaced by more recent figures in local history. Albert Michallon who secured the Olympic Games for Grenoble has a square named after him in the satellite city of Echirolles, while the popular name for the Place de la Bastille is Place Dubedout, after the visionary former mayor.

Many Grenoblois engage in physical activities, including *le foot* in the town's many parks and *boules* (a variation of *pétanque*) wherever there is a patch of dirt. *Tiercé*, a type of betting in which punters forecast the first three horses in a special Sunday race, causes people to mill around the distinctive green PMU offices in droves to see if their bets pay off. The spectacular Parc Paul Mistral that rings the town centre was built for the Olympics and it holds the Palais des Sports. With a 12,000 spectator capacity, this indoor stadium is used for rock concerts, exhibitions and the Six Jours des Grenoble, a six day indoor cycling extravaganza. Outside, there is an ice rink, a mini golf course and an open air speed skating arena that are popular on the weekend.

The spatial layout of Grenoble mirrors what Augé recognizes as a commonality to the 'geometric' nature of urban space in France:

- there is not a town in France that does not aspire to be the centre of a region of variable size or has not managed over the years and centuries to build itself a monumental centre (what we call the 'town centre') to symbolize and materialize this aspiration (1995: 65).

Grenoble certainly has a distinctive town centre which co-ordinates and focuses the administrative, festive and trading activities of the city. Marked by a series of *voies piétonnes*, Grenoble's town centre is an active place, with a concentration of cafés, hotels, bars and businesses. As with other large cities, Grenoble's town centre has a seedy side. Le Crocodile Bar is a popular site for drug dealing, while prostitution is rife, with many operating out of campervans parked under the railway bridge. My first impressions of the town were of not feeling particularly safe, perhaps inevitably, given the brawls outside the railway station, the gun running and the drug smuggling. Like other town centres, that of Grenoble contains various monuments that symbolize religious and civil authority; that mark its regional dominance. On entering Grenoble, street signs point to *la mairie* and *l'église*; Place Grenette, the main pedestrian thoroughfare of Grenoble, is dominated by an imposing Gothic church, while Place Verdun houses the *Préfecture* and *Hôtel du Police*; the administrative centres of the region. National identity cards, travel visas, residence permits, driver's licenses and the like are all processed

by these bastions of bureaucracy with an unparalleled degree of despotic obstinance.

Addressing the role of bureaucracy is unavoidable when sketching a cultural cartography of life in France. Public life is arranged according to a series of large-scale routine operations in which a bureaucratic system of organization protects the individual from human interference. Most notably, both the postal and rail systems are computerized, to the degree that face to face exchanges are rarely necessary. The popular saying, "*l'état c'est l'homme derrière un guichet*" reflects this central feature of the modern French state. As Crozier notes in his analysis of bureaucracy as a cultural phenomenon, "unnecessary complications, constraining standardization, the stifling of individual personality" (1968: 1), are old but enduring French cultural traits. Indeed, the intervention of the State in ordinary lives is inescapable. As Berris identifies,

the dominant model for French identity, the central element that defines a member of French society, is his or her relationship to the State. The relationship provides the basic symbolic framework for defining what is, and what is not, French. The territory governed by the State is defined as one culturally uniform space in which the citizens act to produce the general interest, not as representative of subculture, but as members of French culture. The legitimacy of the State rests on its ability to represent this putatively homogeneous cultural community (1993: 109).

The State serves as the guardian of culture, operating in a variety of ways to mask, incorporate or limit assertions of difference within French society. The education system is both developed and centralized, with the Ministry of National Education determining the content and the method of teaching in primary and secondary schools throughout the country.¹⁰ Demonstrations of cultural or ethnic integrity are concertedly discouraged. School-age Muslim girls are forbidden to wear their head scarves to State-run schools, and during my fieldwork, a conflict emerged when the State requested that the religious preference of their parents be stamped on their *cartes d'identités*. Some form of identification must be carried by all at all times. For cyclists, this represents a logistical challenge, as identity cards become tattered when sweat soaks into their jersey pockets. Nonetheless, to possess a *carte d'identité* or a *carte de séjour* is to acknowledge the omnipresence of the State. As Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) recognize, the standardization of administration, in particular, state education, transforms people into citizens; it turns 'peasants into Frenchmen' (Weber 1977).

¹⁰Bourdieu (1964, 1970, 1986) has been a tireless critic of the cultural hierarchies which are efficiently communicated and reproduced within educational institutions.

The omnipotence of the State is well recognized by residents of Grenoble. Believing themselves to be at the mercy of its awesome power, they feel the need to scream and shout to communicate with the lowliest of officials. As one friend told me, "moaning means you exist. To prove that we are not simply cogs in a machine we raise our voices." Indeed, people are peculiarly antagonistic, as the following incident illustrates. Buying a *baguette* one day, myself and another woman indicated, unbeknown to each other, that we both wanted the last one. It was evident that one of us would have to concede, which I did obligingly. However, the woman was not expecting cooperation and she turned on me, loudly explaining that she needed the bread, that she had asked first and how dare I steal her *baguette*. It took three attempts on my part to explain that she was welcome to the bread, after all, finding a *baguette* in France is relatively easy. More saliently, I realized that by not sparring with the woman I had failed to make a fundamentally French move. As Crozier notes, "Frenchmen dislike disorder...they cannot move in ambiguous, potentially disruptive situations" (1968: 226). Crozier's insight strikes a chord with my own. What struck me was the immediacy with which the woman turned on me. It was expected that I would challenge her for what was at stake. The friend whom I was with remarked as we left the store, "why didn't you fight more?" To fight for your rights, however insignificant they may appear to an outsider, is a distinctly French response to a distinctly French system of entrenched bureaucratic control.

The supreme power of the State when in Grenoble clashes with the tranquillity of the town's alpine setting. Despite the 'high tech' feel of much of Grenoble, its atmosphere is, overwhelmingly, that of an alpine community. People refer to themselves as "*les gens de là haut*"- the people from up there- when comparing themselves to the rest of France, and residents of Grenoble embrace the pleasures and practicalities of life in alpine France. At an altitude of only 214 metres, Grenoble lies in the Grésuvidian Valley and is ringed entirely by mountains. In a curious paradox, despite the modernity, plurality and technological sophistication of Grenoble, the town, is in many ways, little more than an over-sized holiday resort. Most alpine traffic is routed through Grenoble, so in summer, the streets are full of backpackers *en route* to trailblaze the surrounding mountains, while in winter, car loads of skiers make their way out of town. In both seasons, the train and bus stations overflow with hikers waiting to be ferried to the higher mountains for extended trips. Both Club Alpin Français and the Maison du Randonnée co-ordinate trips throughout Isère, a popular holiday destination

for hikers and skiers of all nationalities, particularly school children from urban centres in France and Spain.

The omnipresence of the mountains articulates with popular sentiment. Every resident is familiar with the phrase coined by the writer Stendhal to characterize Grenoble: "at the end of every street there is a mountain." To help me find my bearings in the early days of fieldwork people instructed me to use the mountains as navigational devices. Whether on foot in the streets of Grenoble or riding home after a day in the field, the ruins of the Fort de la Bastille perched atop the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse served as a beacon that guided me home. By standing atop the Fort de la Bastille it is possible to get a good sense of Grenoble's bustling yet isolated nature. The Massif de la Grande Chartreuse looms behind the fort, and on the horizon rears the Chaîne de Belledonne. On a clear day it is possible to see Mont Blanc, looming yet distant in the *département* of Savoie. And directly below the fort, the urbanity of Grenoble sprawls out. From this vantage point, it is possible to map the development of the town. The colour of the roofs, the shape and size of the buildings and the lay out of the streets and roads below provide clues to the development of the city.

Grenoble possesses certain climatic features consistent with mountain habitats. Built in a valley ringed entirely by mountains, the cold air from the upper reaches presses upon the warm air in the *cluses* and creates "*un goût sucré*" - a sweetness in the air - that is characteristically Grenoblois. Worse, this air pressure leads to enormously high levels of pollution. Grenoble, is, as its residents informed me, the seventh most polluted city in France, with such sprawling cities as Paris, Lyon and Marseille occupying the front places in this rating. Diesel cars, air conditioners, heaters and the chimney flues of the various hydroelectric factories in the region, spew dense smog into the atmosphere, and the town's buildings have been stained a dirty grey colour. The topography of the region increases the problem. The height of the Alps means that the polluted air cannot escape over the mountains. A fierce wind is needed to blow the pollution out of the valleys. Even the howling Tramontane wind that arrives at the end of spring and lasts throughout summer cannot shake the haze which hangs over Grenoble.¹¹ The extent of the pollution is made most apparent when riding. Because the only way out of Grenoble is up, cyclists must necessarily rise above the pollution. The

¹¹The Tramontane blows through the Grésuvidian Valley, whistling around roof tops and shaking the windows of people's houses. In summer, warm and humid days are common in Grenoble, but by four-o'clock in the afternoon, the Tramontane has arrived, bringing with it thunder, lightning and heavy bursts of rain.

surrounding mountains offer a number of vantage points whereby cyclists can climb above Grenoble and look down on the haze that envelopes it.

Charting the territory of urban Grenoble is a necessary route to my field, for it is out of this background that cyclists emerge. The cycling world is just one dimension of a more general life in Grenoble, and it is this cultural landscape that both cyclists and non-cyclists alike are constantly negotiating. Most non-cyclists in Grenoble however, were busy people, leading busy lives, with little or no interest in me. Life in Grenoble was terribly private- *chacun chez soi*. Exchanges with my neighbours, for example, were frequently confined to a simple *Bonjour* or a *Bonsoir* on the staircase in my apartment building. My access to information that could detail the dimensions of cultural life in Grenoble was thus reduced to a limited range of times and places, for people had to go to work, go to school or to university or they had families to care for. Grillo observed and experienced similar obstacles when engaging with his informants in Lyon: "it is in Lyon extremely difficult to establish a relationship and maintain it on an informal basis. There is a positive hostility towards the casual call at home, amongst both French and immigrants" (1985: 16). To accommodate this, Grillo advocates that "traditional anthropological methods require a certain openness or public accessibility on the part of the society under observation" (1985: 16), so it became necessary to structure my fieldwork in order to take advantage of the periods of openness and public accessibility that interspersed the guarded nature of much of Grenoblois life. The moment I climbed on my bike and expressed a real enthusiasm for this particular public experience, people made time for me and questioned me in return for my own endless probing. Cycling became a conduit to cultural riches that were largely inaccessible in the more private domains of Grenoblois life. Thus my description of urban life becomes a means of contextualizing the activities of cyclists rather than providing a major focus of my thesis. This is not to suggest that the events of Grenoble are insignificant, it is simply to recognize that it is out of this backdrop that cyclists construct their enduring cultural presence. The detail that I have paid to mapping Grenoble is a necessary preface to the complexity of cycling life as enacted along the roads that surround the town.

Cycling cartographies: Massif du Vercors, Massif de la Grande Chartreuse, Massif de l'Oisans

Although I lived in Grenoble, only a handful of other cyclists also lived in the town. The majority of my cycling informants lived in neighbouring and

surrounding *communes* such as La Tronche or St. Martin le Vinoux, while some inhabited the far reaches of the *département* in towns like Clelles or La Grave. In terms of my ethnographic project, this paucity of cyclists actually living in the same town as me does not dilute any of my cultural claims about cycling life in Isère. As Geertz recognizes, "anthropologists don't study villages (tribes, towns, neighbourhoods...) they study *in* villages (tribes, towns neighbourhoods...)" (1973: 22, italics in original), and ultimately, Grenoble served as a pivot, rather than a point of focus, around which cultural life revolved. If anything, the scattering of cyclists throughout Isère positions them as particularly useful instructors in local knowledge. In moving between the various sites and locations within the *département*, cyclists come to appreciate a range of fine-grained cultural differences that spring out of a more general Isérois ontology. In comprehensively covering the region, cyclists become composite Isérois, experiencing on a daily basis, the diversity and local sensitivities of the region.

In no sense does the movement of cyclists between multiple sites of experience effect the cultural displacement and uprootedness that anthropologists such as Malkki (1992), Hannerz (1987) or Torgovnick (1990) suggest characterizes the mobility of contemporary life. While the "cultural displacement of people, things and products" (Malkki 1992: 25) affirms Said's characterization of a "generalized condition of homelessness" (1978: 18), for the subjects of these inquiries- refugees and other exiled peoples- the transgression of and movement across borders is not a voluntary choice. Cyclists however, choose to uproot and move. For them, there is no political or social imperative to do so. Bauman's characterization of "postmodern nomads" (1992: 693) seems particularly apt when discussing the mobility of cyclists, for they enter into a distinctively bounded, complexly connected, mobile social world that is constantly moving between multiple registers of interpretation.

In mapping the geographical dimensions of Isère, the mountain roads that carve through the *département* deserve extended consideration. The network of roads that links the various towns and villages within Isère (and Isère itself with other *départements*) presents a cyclist with a range of territorial possibilities through and by which he or she can experience the cultural and geographical features of the region. This is not to suggest that an awareness of the mountains is peculiar to cyclists. Their presence is both commanding and irreducible; inseparable from living in Isère. The sheer frequency with which cyclists negotiate the mountains however, frames their involvement in very

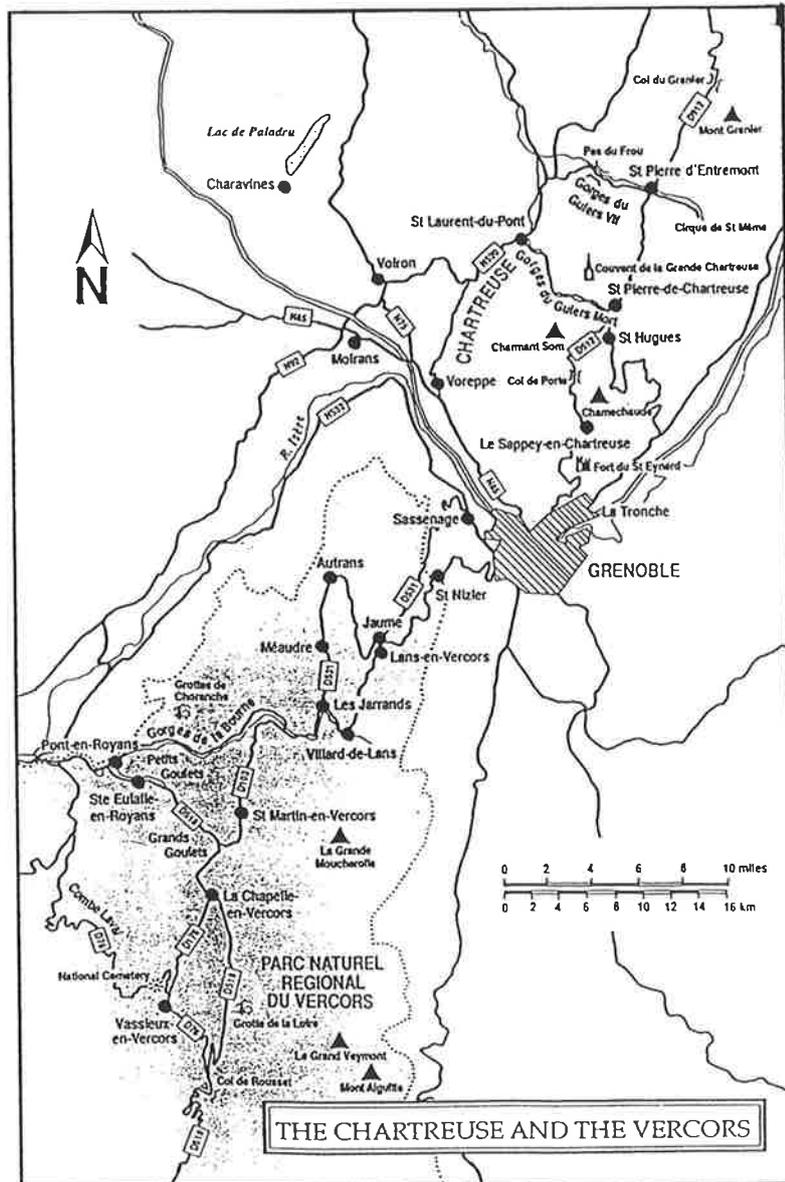
particular cultural terms. By regularly climbing the cols, by repeatedly negotiating the terrain of Isère, cyclists come to appreciate her geography in ways that only travel by bicycle allows. "It is by riding a bicycle that you learn the contours of a country best, since you have to sweat up the hills and coast down them. Thus you remember them as they actually are, while in a motor car only a high hill can impress you" (Ernest Hemingway, in *Velo News*, April 24, 1995: 44).

When mapping Isère in cycling terms, the town of Grenoble is positioned as the hub from which a range of major and minor roads branch out towards three mountain ranges: the Massif du Vercors, the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse and the Massif de l'Oisans. The roads that dissect each of these *massifs* represent set pieces or specific routes that are regularly ridden by Isérois cyclists. The Massif du Vercors, the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse and the Massif de l'Oisans provided, for me, strategic ethnographic sites with their own particular ambience. The ease of movement by cyclists between these very different points of reference proved to be profoundly shaping of, not just the nature of my project, but also the nature of the cycling world I was examining. There are, within the Massif de l'Oisans, the Massif du Vercors and the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse, varying degrees of thickness- to borrow from Geertz- and my anthropological task is to unravel the history, culture and geography of this rich and dense region. By riding through and between these *massifs*, by tracing and retracing certain cycling set pieces, local riders provide themselves with an unfolding cartographic order out of which to constitute the significance of their social world.

The cultural and geographical features of each riding route present it with its own particular character. To the south of Grenoble, the picture perfect landscape of the Massif du Vercors (refer map 3) conceals gruelling riding conditions.¹² Undoubtedly serene and tranquil, riding through the Massif du Vercors is nonetheless a harrowing experience. Undulating and unstable road surfaces, weakened by snow fall, and unpredictable wild animals wandering onto the road from the surrounding Parc Régional du Vercors, inject an element of danger into an otherwise peaceful wilderness. In the

¹²While outside the immediate bounds of my ethnographic inquiry, the presence of the Resistance in the Massif du Vercors is an influential factor in shaping local constructions of Isère. At Vassieux-en-Vercors the fighters of the Vercors division suffered a bloody defeat at the hands of the SS in July 1944. The Germans encircled and attacked the soldiers with vastly superior forces and parachuted an SS division onto Vassieux. The French appealed in vain for Allied support and despite their attempts to disperse into the thickly wooded forests that characterize the Massif du Vercors, seven hundred soldiers and civilians were killed and several villages were razed. A shrine now sits in the *Grotte de la Luire* as a reminder of these atrocities.

Gorges de la Bourne, the main link between the southernmost points of the Vercors and the more accessible top plateau or *lans*, the road cuts under massive limestone formations so sheer that, in places, they shut out the sky above.



Map 3: Regions of cycling activity; Massif de la Grande Chartreuse and Massif du Vercors.

In the Massif du Vercors, there are two set pieces that local cyclists regularly ride.¹³ The first runs from Fontaine, a satellite city of Grenoble, to Villard-de-Lans, a medium altitude ski resort. The climb is known colloquially amongst

¹³All names of cycling set pieces are local designations.

cyclists as 'Engins,' as it takes its name from the café that provides welcome relief after climbing out of the claustrophobic Gorges d'Engins. 33.5 kilometres in length, this cycling set piece has featured on the itinerary of the Tour de France in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1989 and 1993. In 1990, it was the route used in the decisive individual time trial won by the Dutchman Eric Breukink. Numerous remnants mark the passage of the Tour through the Massif du Vercors. Worn paintwork along the cliff faces and on the road itself serve as written tributes to the riders in the Tour, and faded stickers and posters still adorn the walls of cafés and bars in Engins and Lans-en-Vercors, reminding patrons of the presence of the Tour de France through the *massif*.¹⁴ At Villard-de-Lans it is still possible to purchase the bottles of commemorative port that marked the passage of the Tour through the region.

The second set piece through the Massif du Vercors begins in Seyssins, a heavily industrialized suburb on the outskirts of Grenoble. Climbing sharply to the town of St. Nizier du Moucherotte before descending once more to Seyssins, 'Le Mouche' is named after Le Moucherotte, a tooth-like rock formation that juts out from the distinctive white faced cliffs of the Massif du Vercors. 'Le Mouche' is both a regularly ridden informal training ride and also the route of an organized bike race. Held on the last Sunday of September, 'Le Grimpeur de St. Nizier' is one of the great cycle races in the Massif du Vercors. Thirty kilometres in length and at a grade of 12 per cent, Le Grimpeur de St. Nizier requires massive local knowledge regarding the contours of the road, not to mention great strength and fitness to ensure that a rider does not run out of energy or worse, overshoot a corner on the frightening descent and plummet to the valley floor below.

The second region of cycling exploration is centred in the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse which lies to the north of Grenoble (refer map 3). The Massif de la Grande Chartreuse is known locally as "*le printemps éternel*" - the eternal springtime- in contrast with the endless winter of the higher *massifs*, for its tallest peak is the Col de Porte at only 1326 metres. Despite the fact that there are roads into the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse from every direction, it remains cut off from the surrounding valleys in such a way that there is a very real sense of isolation.¹⁵ Although it does not cover a huge geographical

¹⁴The importance of this sort of road writing in identifying and recording the saga of the Tour de France will be elaborated in chapter five.

¹⁵Despite its seclusion, heavy industry still influences the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse. The perfect combination of limestone and clay has led to the emergence of a number of cement factories in the *massif*, but difficulties in negotiating the steep, narrow roads have restricted production to a few key areas on the edge of the *massif*.

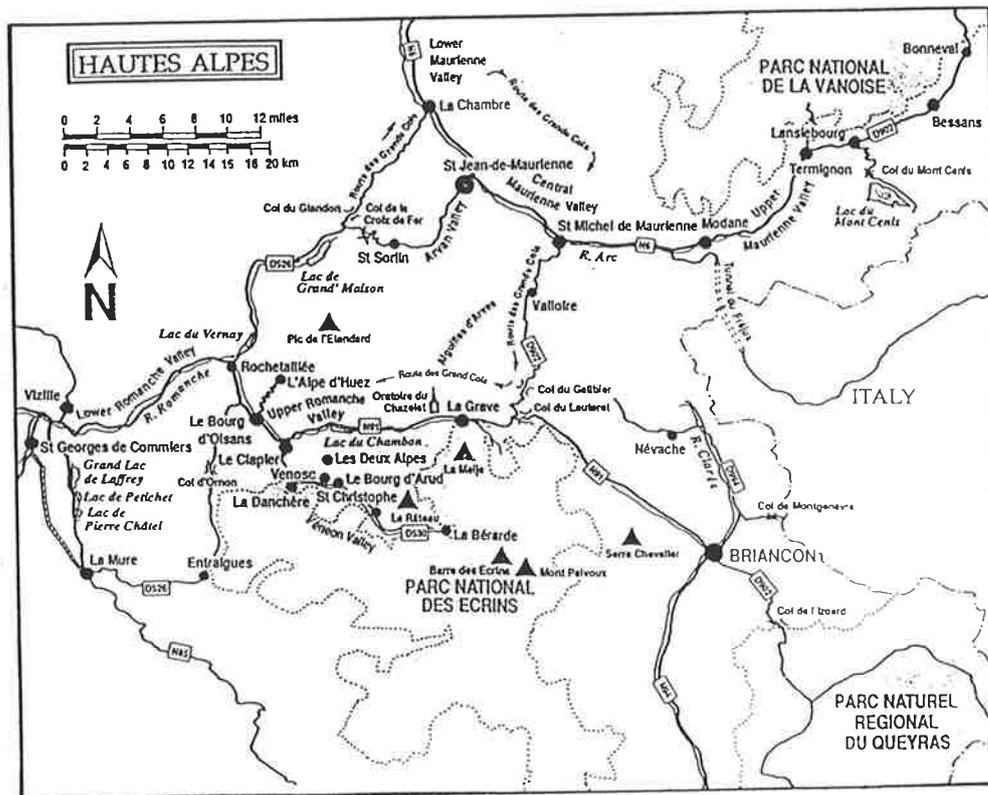
area- it is only 40 kilometres long and 16 kilometres wide- the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse nonetheless feels like an oasis of solitude. Huge limestone cliffs prove impenetrable and, despite a network of internal roads linking the towns throughout the *massif*, only two roads manage to penetrate its length. It is the isolated nature of the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse that attracts a range of visitors, be they hikers, cyclists or motorists.

With road gradients in excess of 12 per cent, the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse conceals some formidable cycling challenges. On the professional calendar in 1994, both the Classique des Alpes and the Critérium du Dauphiné-Libéré included stages through the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse, and each year, numerous amateur challenges are raced through the *massif*. The most popular cycling loop undertaken in the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse is known as the 'Col de Porte' after the highest point that the ride travels over, and this cycling loop includes the road from St. Laurent du Pont to St. Pierre de Chartreuse. Considered by locals to be a national monument, this road carves through the Gorges du Guiers Mort, passing by a monument to 130 young people, locals and tourists alike, who were immolated when the nightclub in which they were dancing burnt to the ground.

To the east of Grenoble, the mountains peak in the vertiginous Hautes-Alpes which extend to the Italian border (refer map 4). The Hautes-Alpes can be divided into three regions of cycling exploration- the Chaîne de Belledonne, the Massif des Ecrins and the Massif de l'Oisans. It was in this last *massif* that I did most of my cycling and, as such, its historical, cultural and geographical features need briefly addressing here.

While the extensive network of roads throughout the Massif de l'Oisans enables cyclists to cover the region, three loops are completed more often than others, and their attraction can be attributed to specific historical junctures which I address in the following pages. In the lower Romanche Valley, two circuits capture cycling imagination. The first, 'La Boucle de Vizille', is a low altitude, fifty or so kilometre loop, that threads out of Grenoble through the towns of La Tronche, Meylan, Domène and Gières until the town of Vizille, before returning to Grenoble along the Romanche Valley via the industrialized towns of Basse-en-Jarrie, Claix and Echirolles. The importance of hydroelectric power to the region is made apparent when returning to Grenoble through these industrialized towns. For the return leg,

the Vizille Loop follows the River Romanche which flows flush against the road's edge. A milky grey colour, the river powers the numerous paper mills and cement factories that line its banks. In places it is possible to see run-off pipes draining into the fresh water of the River Romanche. Smoke billows from the huge chimney flues and an acrid smell hangs in the air. For local cyclists, such conditions, as unpleasant as they are, are accepted as evidence of the juncture between industry and the natural beauty of the region.



Map 4: Regions of cycling activity; Hautes-Alpes.

While most tourists visit the town of Vizille for the Château de Vizille, cyclists visiting Vizille choose to occupy an entirely different social space, one that constructs the township in very different cultural terms indeed. Diagonally facing the château at Vizille is L'Etape brasserie, a regular cycling haunt managed by Thierry Claveyrolat, a recently retired professional and a former wearer of the coveted King of the Mountains jersey. Importantly, 'Titi', as he is known, lives in the neighbouring *commune* of Nôtre Dame-de-Méssages, and his long-standing associations with the region, coupled with his proven cycling competence, elevate him to a position of regional pre-eminence in the collective cycling consciousness. His nickname, 'l'Aigle de Vizille' - The Eagle of Vizille - captures these qualities of soaring above

mere cycling mortals.

If not returning to Grenoble via Claix and Echirolles, there are two principal cycling routes remaining in the lower Romanche Valley. One is to head south and follow the Route Napoléon. This road traces, in reverse direction, the route that Napoléon took from Elba in 1815 on his way to rally troops for the final countdown leading to his eventual defeat at Waterloo. A monument overlooking the Lac de Laffrey marks this event. Climbing sharply from Vizille, the Route Napoléon cuts through the Massif de l'Oisans along a series of clear, blue lakes- Lac de Laffrey, Lac de Pêtichet and Lac de Pierre-Châtel- which serve as popular camping grounds and weekend retreats for aquatic enthusiasts from Grenoble primarily.

As was the case with the Vizille Loop, it is an entirely different motivation that lures cyclists to the Route Napoléon. Climbing steeply and immediately from the outskirts of Vizille, the Route Napoléon ascends for five kilometres, at a gear breaking grade of 13 per cent, before peaking at the Col de Laffrey. So steep is the grade that, when descending, the gravitational pull forces cyclists over the front of their handle bars. Road signs warn trucks to use low gears, and gravel run-off pits provide last ditch opportunities for a truck to stop should its brakes fail. Yet it is precisely the steepness of the climb that proves enticing for cyclists. In summer, it is not uncommon to see the road lined with cars, bonnets ajar, their engines having overheated from the arduous climb. Meanwhile, a steady procession of cyclists snake past *en route* to the water well, a popular meeting spot on the outskirts of the township of Laffrey.

Still in the lower Romanche Valley, the 'Circuit de Chamrousse' remains another favourite cycling excursion. The area around Chamrousse has become Grenoble's local ski resort, and it is claimed that downhill skiing was first introduced to France there in 1881 by Henri Duhamel. In any case, the road leading out of Grenoble towards the Circuit de Chamrousse bears his name. Following the line of the River Sonnant as it flows from St. Martin d'Uriage, the Circuit de Chamrousse begins easily- it remains a favourite ride early in the season when lingering cold and snow make high altitude climbs unappealing. In the thermal springs town of Uriage-les-Bains however, the road climbs upwards for sixteen kilometres through the Fôret de St. Martin before peaking at the Croix de Chamrousse. From the summit, the circuit weaves down through a series of hair pins, passing over the Col Luitel (a feature of the Tour Cycliste Féminin in 1994), before descending precariously

to the floor of the Romanche Valley.

It is in the upper Romanche Valley however, that the most famous of the cycling set pieces in the Massif de l'Oisans, indeed, in Isère, France or even Europe, is located: the climb to Alpe d'Huez. Situated sixty kilometres from Grenoble in the heart of the Massif de l'Oisans, Alpe d'Huez remains a mecca for cyclists lured by the mystique of the mountain. In fact, in the initial stages of fieldwork, some of the first questions I was asked were whether I had climbed Alpe d'Huez and whether there was a similar mountain in Australia. While I address the construction of Alpe d'Huez as a regional cycling shrine in chapter five, it is important to recognize here that the climb, like all cycling set pieces within Isère, can only be completed in spring and summer time. The severity of an alpine winter means that Alpe d'Huez, as a site of cycling activity, is inaccessible from late October until well into the new year. Indeed, Alpe d'Huez defines itself as a purpose built ski resort that is annually reappropriated by cyclists to present a new set of meanings. With the spring thaw, the snow melts to reveal a new significance for a new set of users.

In the Romanche Valley below Alpe d'Huez, the road divides at Rochetaillée with one road heading towards the upper Romanche Valley, while the other winds towards the upper and lower reaches of the Maurienne Valley. Meaning 'wicked river', the name Maurienne is taken from two *patois* or local words 'mau' and 'riau.' There is only one cycling loop in the Maurienne Valley, however it is a central one. Known as 'Le Route des Grands Cols', this cycling set piece is also a popular tourist drive from Grenoble, affording stunning views of the surrounding mountains, many of which peak higher than 3,000 metres. Le Route des Grands Cols includes the Col du Lautaret, Col du Galibier, Col de la Croix de Fer and the Col du Glandon- the five principal climbs that the Tour de France conquers when it reaches the Alps. 150 kilometres in length, this circuit follows the south-western borders of Isère and travels over some of the highest roads in Europe.

While I have spent considerable time tracing out the geographical, historical and cultural dimensions of these three key *massifs*, it must be noted that these cycling loops are not ridden to the exclusion of others, they are simply the most popular excursions in the region. The training routes of Isérois cyclists are reminiscent of gypsy travelling patterns as described by Okely: "the gypsies do not travel about aimlessly...neither do their movements follow fixed and invariable routes" (1983: 125). For both cyclists and gypsies alike,

travel involves a tension between following time honoured or historically significant routes and discovering the richness of their landscapes. The extensive network of roads throughout Isère means that cyclists can comprehensively cover the area. In many ways, cyclists served as territorial informants or tour guides of sorts, leading me to historically, culturally and geographically important landmarks, that only years of living and riding in the area could reveal as significantly shaping of social life. What appeared to be mere history was actually a specific cultural perception of the region. Each *massif* embodied a different narrative space that affected how cyclists talked about their identity and their sense of belonging to an Isérois *mentalité*. In tracing the region, cyclists map out particular patterns of meaning that order and define their cultural world. For Isérois cyclists, geographical landscapes continually impact upon cultural ones.

The movements of cyclists between locations presents an unfolding cartographic order through which they can constitute their sporting presence. In moving between sites, cyclists come to embody territory; they take on the social and symbolic properties of the area in which they are riding. The culture of Isérois cycling is constituted out of a complex and complicated relationship between territory and social space. Without the Massif du Vercors, without the Massif de l'Oisans and without the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse the world of the Isérois cyclist would occupy an entirely different social and narrative space. Such a powerful sense of territorial attachment resonates with the work by Hage (1993) on the production and reproduction of nationalist sentiment in which he identifies that, "to be a nation is to 'possess' a territory without which there is no national existence" (1993: 76). As this translates for Isérois cyclists, without a shared affinity with the landscape, discretely experienced and maintained by their daily coverage or possession of the region, there would be no cycling existence. In many ways, cyclists can claim exclusive territorial rights to Isère, for the very nature of cycling is proprietorial. Familiarity with the roads of Isère is a mechanism by which membership within the local cycling order is conferred. In moving between different *massifs* or regions, cyclists come to occupy Isère.

While I have spent considerable time designing and mapping a cycling cartography of Isère, it is important to recognize that the region is also drawn from a range of overlapping and interwoven maps that are not produced or appropriated by cyclists in their daily rides through the *département*. As Duncan recognizes, "local accounts of the importance of a given landscape, when situated within and structured by a general cultural discursive field,

can at times, differ sharply or entirely within or between groups" (1990: 15). Whereas cyclists make meaning in terms of the territory they repeatedly trace, non-cycling Isérois construct their social ideology in other ways which need to be addressed. While I privilege the on-road actions of cyclists throughout my thesis, there are particular off-road activities characteristic to Isère that must be considered. The social distinctiveness of the core circle of cyclists is made most apparent in opposition to those of non-cyclists, for while they are a part of the daily machinations of life in Isère, cyclists remain, in some very profound ways, apart from them. Particular narratives found both in the media and, importantly, in popular discourse, provide an intertextual account of Isère which requires elaboration here.

Parochial identities

While I lived in Grenoble and rode in Isère, I went to other races scattered throughout France and elsewhere in Europe. Each time I returned to Isère, the cultural and geographical distinctiveness of the region was reinforced.¹⁶ Even spending a weekend in a different *département* was enough time to notice differences and to realize the unique properties of fieldwork in Isère. While regional identity can be created from a myriad of influences, several factors work to constitute a distinctive identity for Isère. From the repertoire of available features, I have privileged those that most clearly demonstrate the highly parochial nature of Isérois social identity, for it is this aspect of local life that manifests itself most strikingly with the arrival of the Tour de France. As I examine in chapter six, the Tour de France provides a range of sites at which a sense of regional belonging can be experienced and expressed.

There is a profound feeling of unity amongst the Isérois, whether one lives in the Massif du Vercors, the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse, the Hautes-Alpes, the towns of Grenoble, Voiron, St. Jean-de-Maurienne or La Mure or, indeed, whether one cycles or not. Weekly strike action in the streets of Grenoble, for example, appeals to a common sentiment. *Manifestations* rally unionists, teachers, chefs, the physically disabled, the homeless, the unemployed and students, amongst others, into common action which reflects and supports local interests. As Touraine (1990) has noted, the idea of revolution has long been at the heart of French identity, for it acts as a riposte to the feeling of powerlessness produced by the bureaucratic monolith of the

¹⁶In April 1994, I travelled to the north of France for 'L'Enfer du Nord'- the Hell of the North- as the Paris-Roubaix is known, and to Belgium and Holland for the Liège-Bastogne-Liège and the Amstel Gold Race. In May, I travelled to Spain for one week of the Vuelta d'España and, in June, I crossed the border at Sestrière for one stage of the Giro d'Italia.

modern French state. The frequency with which *manifestations* occur in Grenoble testifies to the peculiarly antagonistic trait of the French, certainly the Grenoblois, to fight for what is at stake. Strike action and demonstrations

through the streets of Grenoble provide sites at which cyclists and non-cyclists alike can march together in common support of local interests.

Regional attachment is demonstrated through a range of other means. At an obvious level, car license-plates indicate the driver's allegiance to a *département*. Every car registered in a *département* must carry the departmental code as the last two digits on the plate, and the plates must be changed when the owner moves to another *département*. Thus, every car with a number plate ending in 38 advertises that the driver, regardless of whether he or she is travelling through Provence, Alsace or Burgundy, is Isérois.

The parochialism of the media ensures a monopoly on local interest in a region. While the electronic media emphasizes local news, events and personalities, the parameters of the print media are especially narrow in their treatment of important events, national and international alike. Although there are several nationally distributed papers such as *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro*, these were rarely read by locals in Isère. The public library in Grenoble held copies of both national and local papers and, while there was invariably a queue of people clamouring for the local paper, *Le Dauphiné-Libéré*, the national dailies remained untouched in their display racks. Interestingly, the only national paper that was widely read was the sports daily *L'Equipe*. For most, *Le Dauphiné-Libéré* provided their news and information. Focusing on events that transpired within the administrative region of Rhône-Alpes, *Le Dauphiné-Libéré* rarely covered events outside of these *départements*. Such parochialism constantly asserts, reinforces and supports local values by virtue of sheer volume of information. The events of every *commune* within the region, regardless of how seemingly slight or insignificant, received attention in the pages of *Le Dauphiné-Libéré*, with often the most exciting news being that a cow had been lost on the slopes of Vaujany or that Villard-de-Lans was holding a *fête municipale* on Sunday.

At the outset, I felt very isolated: as Herzfeld notes, "every ethnographer is in some sense marginal to the society being studied" (1983: 15). However I soon conceded that being saturated by media images and presentations of the region would prove invaluable for accessing and appreciating local

sensibilities. Embedded within media products are a range of narratives that elaborate the character of the region. Indeed, the media are key means by which Isérois tell stories about themselves. Nonetheless, I was desperate for news from home, or from anywhere other than Isère. Adding to my sense of isolation were the geographical features of the region. The Massif de la Grande Chartreuse and the Massif du Vercors separate Isère from the rest of France in the west and, to the east, the high alps divide Isère from the rest of Europe. While trains and planes link Isère with other countries, being physically surrounded by mountains creates a feeling of profound insularity, and many times I felt stranded, aware that there was an entire world unfolding just beyond the mountains, which the limits of the media and the mountains themselves prevented me from experiencing. Again, natural features help define cultural ones. The parochial social ideology of Isère is largely defined by circumstances of physical isolation.

The regional pride and insular parochialism that unambiguously defines Isère are reflected in the contents and interests of local museums and galleries. Many house works peculiar to the region: the Musée de la Résistance in Grenoble is dedicated to the French Resistance who were particularly active in the Massif du Vercors. The Musée Dauphinois is devoted to the history, folklore, arts and crafts of the historic province of Dauphiné. This museum also houses an alpine library, and has become a regional centre of information for researchers into the history of the Alps, with its collection of rare manuscripts, documents and books. The Musée d'Histoire Naturelle houses a collection of fossils, rocks, animals and birds of prey unique to alpine habitats. The cultural artifacts of Isère confirm the region's insular and isolated nature, supporting and promoting local values at the expense of national ones. The local tourist industry particularly, perpetuates the notion of the region's 'splendid isolation.' Brochures advertise Isère as an 'alpine oasis' or 'the ideal place to get away from it all' and, "after museum corridors and exhausting urban centres, the majestic Alps and the glassy rivers that carve their valleys here turn city smog into a distant memory" (*Respirez, c'est l'Oisans!* tourist brochure).

People show their allegiance to a *département* in a variety of other informal ways. Throughout France, the dialectical use of language serves as a powerful identity marker, with vocal inflections, grammatical constructions and choice

and use of words being characteristic of particular regions.¹⁷ While the guttural rolling of the 'r' sound is associated with the south of France and Parisians are notorious for their slang and the speed of their delivery, Isère similarly possesses its own *patois*. Most common in the upper reaches of the *département*, through the Maurienne Valley especially, *patois* bares little resemblance to *la langue d'oeil* that I am fluent in. I frequently had no idea what people were talking about when they slipped into *patois*. For example, the *patois* phrase, "*si je jacte l'argoumanche de ragan, t'entraves que pouie*" translates as "you don't understand me when I speak the argot of the region"- an entirely different formulation from the "*quand je parle l'argot de la région, tu ne me comprends rien,*" of *la langue d'oeil*. While Isérois cyclists used either *la langue d'oeil* or, as commonly, English in daily conversation with me, it was the *patois* of the region that was frequently singled out to illustrate their cultural distinctiveness. Its use was not employed to exclude me from ongoing conversations. Rather, it was identified, along with the mountains, as being a key feature in marking cultural integrity.

While there is a certain pride to the regional use of language, it is important to note that the protectionist zeal typically associated with the French language is imposed by the State. At the local level, people are happy, indeed eager, to speak English and most are impressively fluent, for a huge population cross the Channel to improve their language skills. At the level of the State however, it is perceived that the introduction and domination of English language in cultural products will dilute the essence of France. To combat this, L'Assemblée Nationale has instituted a series of protectionist policies to preserve *la France profonde*. As Van Elteren notes, "France has the most articulate state policy on the question of cultural defence in Europe" (1996: 1).¹⁸ As of 1995, French radio stations have had to devote at least 40% of air time to French language songs, and the Minister for Culture has passed through the Senate a language protection law that imposes fines and even jail terms for advertisers using foreign (read English) terms when a French one is available.

¹⁷Attachment to a region can also be indicated by the use of the word '*pays*'. While '*pays*' is the generic term for the whole country, local people frequently refer to their immediate vicinity as *mon pays*, and to someone who comes from another *département*, as being from another *pays*.

¹⁸An ongoing debate during my fieldwork raged over the signing of the GATT Accord. It was believed that the freeing up of trade and tariff arrangements would see a saturation of American cultural products in markets where the French had traditionally flourished. The film industry was one such forum and, at the initiative of French intellectuals, more than 4,000 European artists, producers and other cultural intermediaries published- in six European newspapers- a petition for 'cultural works' to be excluded from the GATT Accord.

McDonald maintains that

there is nothing in the British context to match the linguistic sensitivity of France. The French language and French national self-definition are deeply implicated the one in the other, and linguistic self-consciousness and political centralism have been closely linked features of the French nation (1989: 5).

But in the course of everyday life in France, the English language is enthusiastically appropriated into popular discourse. Amongst young people who see his policies as extremist, the Minister for Culture, Jacques Toubon, is cynically referred to as "Jacques All Good." While anthropologists of France have tended to cling to caricatures of linguistic zealotry, the ease with which my informants moved between *le bon usage* (the 'high French' preferred by Monsieur Toubon) and *le français relâché* (the street slang detested by Monsieur Toubon) suggests caution for relying too heavily on existing anthropological accounts of life in France to support my ethnographic material. Adolescent Isérois particularly, participate in the sort of linguistic global ecumene (Hannerz 1989) that characterizes so much of postmodern living. Through their sustained encounters with the products and commodities of popular culture, they come to embrace 'Americanisms' such as 'cool', 'OK' or 'totally'; a popular expression is "*merci un max*," replacing the more traditional "*merci beaucoup*." Acknowledging the tension between 'theorizing about France' and 'living in France' proves itself to be a key part of my project. In many ways, the anthropological literature concerning social practice in France did not prepare me for the paradoxes, the contradictions and surprises of life in this far-eastern corner of France.

The Isérois are literally playful with their own language; they are enthusiasts of word games such as Scrabble, and many are devotees of cross-word puzzles. Several of my informants attempted to teach me "*le parler branché*". *Branché* means literally 'plugged in' (a reference to electrical appliances), but in this context, it means 'switched on' or trendy. Ball describes *le français branché* as an "amalgam of suburban slang, terminology from the drug, pop-music and fashion scenes, elements of sociological and psychoanalytical jargon, together with bits and pieces of media and publicity français" (1990: 22). The current *le français branché* is a practice known as *l'envers*. Taking its lexical roots from *à l'envers*- 'back to front'-, *l'envers* is a form of 'Pig Latin,' in which words are both reversed and shortened and the order of the syllables in a word is swapped. Thus, *l'envers* becomes *vers-l'ens*, *vélo* becomes *lévo*, *café* becomes *féca*, *bizarre* becomes *zarbi*, *monnaie* becomes *némo*, and so forth. The point to be drawn out of these linguistic concerns is

that anthropologists of France have tended to focus on exceedingly small, isolated units of analysis, with little consideration for the global influences that shape cultural products. In assuming that linguistic rigour is imposed by the State, anthropologists understate the agency and creativity of those who consume cultural products on a daily basis.¹⁹

Cultural cartographies

The identification with certain foods and beverages distinctive to the area offers another mechanism by which Isèrois identity is asserted. Food and drink offer powerful metaphors for characterizing the people of a region. They provide a further cartographic form in which the distinctiveness of place is mapped in terms of foods, beverages and surrounding rituals. Kava drinking, for example, is particular to Micronesian cultures, pasta is associated with Italy, while the phrase, "as American as apple pie" captures the importance of sweetstuffs when characterizing Americans. In conversations where I acknowledged that I was Australian, people would invariably respond, "Australia? Isn't that where everyone drinks too much?"

For France, of course, it is the image of gourmet excellence that supplies most of its culinary metaphors. As Goody writes, "one would not expect food to be excluded, in concrete as well as symbolic form, from an analysis of French culture" (1993: 13). In popular constructions of France, there seems to be an unseen line that, once crossed, effects alchemic changes capable of transforming ingredients into *good* food simply because they are French. The expressions *haute cuisine* and *nouvelle cuisine* capture the expectations of culinary excellence, indeed, they have become French monopolies. Before I entered the field, I made a pact with myself that I would not eat fast food, wanting, instead, to savour the authentic French experience. However, I soon realized that the authentic French experience was actually one of *le self-service* and *le fast food*. The Golden Arches of McDonalds are more ubiquitous than Michelin five star restaurants, and people are more inclined to stop for a *cheeseburger royale* on their way home from work than to cook *cuisine bourgeoise*. The foods that are routinely eaten are as ordinary as anything I may have eaten in Australia: I was invited to share a *repas français* at a friend's house one evening. With great ceremony, we sat down to enjoy a barbecue, complete with burnt sausages and tomato sauce- a meal that I had

¹⁹While there is considerable literature concerned with the distribution of languages within class hierarchies, with Grillo (1989) and Bourdieu (1986) being the most notable, my emphasis is on the inescapable influences of global culture in shaping what is said.

always regarded as quintessentially Australian.

While meals at 'McDo' are a routine part of Isérois cuisine, they are rarely subject to affectionate detail. There are however, a number of foods and drinks that are universally valorized amongst Isérois residents, and these take on an almost iconic status. The regional cuisine of Isère includes *cobaye* or guinea pig, particularly in the more rural reaches of the *département*. Savoyards and Isérois also net superb trout and fresh water lobster from the icy mountain streams that flow through the Alps, and they cure excellent hams and salamis. *Fondue Savoyard* (a blend of three alpine cheeses, white wine and kirsch), is frequently eaten on special occasions, while pizza and *raclette* are popular for more casual gatherings. Here, a large, Swiss style cheese is halved and the edges are suspended over a flame. As the cheese becomes runny it is scraped off and served with boiled potatoes, pickled onions and gherkins. *Gratin Dauphinois* (potatoes baked with garlic, cream and cheese) and *Crêpes de la Chartreuse* are also regional specialties. Just as each *massif* in Isère possesses its own geographical features, each region has developed its own particular style of cheese. Tomme, Beaufort, Reblechon, the blue veined Sassenage and the creamy St. Marcellin, made with half goat's milk, are all distinctive to Isère and Savoie. Regional desserts are especially mouthwatering. A popular ritual on Sunday is to buy a bunch of flowers from the local market and, on the way home, to stop at the *patisserie* for a pastry or a chocolate, some of which include *Roseaux d'Annecy* (liqueur filled chocolate), *St. Genieux* (briôche topped with pink praline), and the sponge like *Gâteau du Savoie* and *Gâteau du Roi*. This last treat is a special cake filled with plastic trinkets of a king that celebrates the coming of the New Year. As popular opinion has it, whoever finds a trinket in their cake is soon to be married.

While German and Danish brand beers such as Paulinger or Tuborg are popular amongst cyclists in Isère, there are also several other drinks distinctive to the region. *Picon bière* and *demi-pêche* are both beers that have had grenadine and peach flavouring added to them respectively, and they are favoured beverages in summer time. Isère also has a popular tradition of brewing every conceivable type of alcoholic drink from every kind of available fruit, berry or plant, with *Liqueur de la Chartreuse* being perhaps the most well known. Believed to be an elixir of long life, the *Liqueur de la Chartreuse* was first made by the Monastère de la Grande Chartreuse in 1605, and only three monks know the secret recipe of the 130 ingredients in the *Liqueur de la Chartreuse*. Rumoured to cure everything from constipation to

cancer, *Chartreuse Vert* or *Chartreuse Jaune* can be consumed in a variety of ways including an addition to coffee or hot chocolate, as an ice cream flavour or, most commonly, as a *crêpe* topping. At 55% alcohol, *Liqueur de la Chartreuse* is a popular pre and post-ride drink, with cyclists often downing it neat or *sec* to offset the chill of autumn. Numerous other *eaux de vie* are also distilled from fruits and flowers. *Gentiane* is a sweet smelling mountain flower that yields a wickedly bitter, almost hallucinogenic brew, while raspberries and walnuts are other common ingredients in these characteristically potent beverages. A tidy tourist industry has sprung out of this popular distillation process, with supermarkets, tourist offices, *tabacs*, *caves du vin* and cafés all selling the various brews.

But it is wine that is perhaps best associated with France. It is, as Barthes notes, a “totem drink” (1973: 65). Surprisingly, this alpine region yields a good vintage. The Combe de Savoie to the south-east of Chambéry is covered with vineyards and it grows mainly Mondeuse and Gamay grapes which produce good reds and whites. Apremont, Marignan and Chignin are perhaps the best known whites from the Combe de Savoie, while Montmélian and St. Jean de la Porte *vignobles* produce particularly good reds. Although it is not a regional wine, much festivity accompanies the arrival of the Beaujolais Nouveaux in the last weeks of October. In Grenoble, informal street parties erupt, with people clamouring to try the latest vintage. Most *caves du vin* offer free tastings- an entire bottle is frequently offered by the proprietor- and Place Grenette is lined with stalls at which people mill about, sampling the wines that provide much needed warmth against the autumn chill.

Counter cartographies

While this general cartography is one that Isérois cyclists negotiate to varying degrees, on a daily basis, there are still a number of issues to address and misconceptions to clarify. In positing a particular reading of Isère, I am in no way suggesting that this is the only reading of France: indeed, there are countless other alternative and overlapping cartographies through which people can map their social identity. I am, however, proposing that an image of France filtered through the prism of cycling lives poses a contradiction to existing understandings and expectations, both anthropological and otherwise, of France.

‘Frenchness’ exists *sans doute*, however, it is not as an entirety that unequivocally spans locales. Conflicting interpretive stances taken at the

local level are often more constructive of belonging than the gloss of an abstracted national identity. As Cohen notes,

national myths...are like empty receptacles which are filled with local and particular experience. A man's awareness of himself as a Scotsman may have little to do with the Jacobite Wars, or with Burns, or with the poor state of the housing stock in Glasgow. It has to do with his particular experience as a farmer in Aberdeenshire, or as a member of a particular village or of a particular group of kin within his village. *Local experience mediates national identity* (1982: 11, italics in original).

For Isèrois cyclists, being 'French' has little to do with universally acknowledged icons. It is more about their experiences as members of a discrete, mobile community which pivots around and appropriates certain stock images of France in order to articulate their own cultural integrity. France is culturally heterogeneous to an extent rarely appreciated, and the pathways between local idiosyncrasies and national interests represent terrain that needs to be negotiated. As Cohen notes "to perceive only the familiarity of form and not the difference it conceals is to perceive only the surface and not the substance" (1982: 9).

While it is important to situate a specific ethnographic study within a larger national context, the danger here is that the criteria of typicality for the national situation can be far removed from the reality of local experience. Popular perceptions of France, for example, represent another cartography of the country that stands in strict opposition to the daily lives of cyclists in Isère. This counter cartography positions France as a sophisticated and seductive nation. The sentiments of a middle-class English academic are particularly telling: as McDonald writes when introducing her fieldwork in Brittany, "as we all know, France is both civilized and exotic, and, above all, jolly sophisticated" (1987: 124). This 'high' cartography of France transcends the arts, literature and music as well as cuisine, while Cartier, Chanel, Baccarat, Hermès and Christian Dior exist as ebullient icons of a hedonistic France of unlimited wealth and pleasure. In keeping with the cartographic theme of this chapter, such romantic perceptions of France present an interpretive cul-de-sac to conceptualizing and contextualizing the cultural distinctiveness of Isèrois cycling worlds.

The assumption that all that glitters must be French poses a range of anthropological challenges, not the least of which is convincing a readership that not *all* of France is *très chic*. Challenging this overly simplified or romanticized portrayal of France is critical, for it provides an unsteady surface upon which to rest a description of cycling life. A fundamental obstacle to

redressing the inaccuracy of these portrayals of France is that past icons still linger in contemporary imaginings of France. Indeed, the nation has a rich, almost mythical, tradition of artists, musicians and literary figures that contributes to the image of France as a focus of intellectual and artistic pursuits. As Berris notes, "cultural production, in the artistic sense, has long played an important role in the formation of ideas about the French nation. To belong to the French nation is, as Sartre (1954) has remarked, to grasp a sense of high cultural production" (1993: 110).

Certainly, I was attracted to the country by the myth of 'high' France. The thought of a year of fine food and wine, smoky bars where Edith Piaf sings, Sartre and de Beauvoir engage in existential debates and the smell of Gauloise hangs in the air was enticing. In many ways, I shared the common perception of France as a playground for the rich, the artistic and the intellectual. Images of the sun drenched Côte d'Azur circled in my head, fuelled by my memories of literature such as *Tender is the Night*, *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Bonjour Tristesse*. I entered the field fully expecting France to meet the stereotype of a giant Cannes film festival.

The reality of everyday life in Isère however, is very different from the France of travel brochures. *Livres pôches*, soap operas and detective films, amongst other products of mass culture, are voraciously consumed at the coal face of French culture. Indeed, the 'intellectual traditions' of France (Chartier 1982) are being replaced by a cynicism of the intellectual climate on which so much of France's past is constituted. Contemporary cultural players such as the internationally known rap artist MC Solaar and the group Raggasonic take their inspiration from poets like Arthur Rimbaud to comment on the state of post-industrial France. Even when reappropriating the icons and images of a halcyon France, there is little sense of a 'high' France reflecting the interests and desires of the everyday France which I, as an anthropologist, intended to probe. Engaging in the routines of everyday life in Grenoble and Isère more generally soon gave the lie to assumptions of a 'high France.'

Amongst the interpretive community of Isérois cyclists, there was no glamour, there was no chic. The France I experienced alongside bike riders was cancerous with beggars, unemployment and chronic homelessness; not quite the France of Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1986). In a country that once celebrated *le bon vivant*, one in four now pops Valium. High unemployment (14%) looks permanent, an immigrant underclass threatens

to explode and the government lavishes a fortune on industrial losers.²⁰ There is, in Isère, what Duhamel (1993) characterizes as an air of *la mélancholie française*. I am not suggesting that wealth and excess do not exist in France- it is, after all, a complex Western society that wholeheartedly embraces consumerism- I am simply arguing that those cyclists with whom I was most consistently involved were *les peuples ordinaire* caught up in the frustrations and complications of everyday life. The world of the sophisticated and the chic happened far beyond the world of Isérois cyclists, and the issues that concerned them were not existential debates but mundane concerns of financial stability or their employment prospects. People struggled to pay their rent or to make their car repayments, and far from swanning about in expensive *haute couture*, the leisure oriented cyclists were more comfortable in jeans and T-shirts.

When debunking popular yet misleading stereotypes, that of France as an archetypically macho and patriarchal environment is a necessary consideration, for it did not see fruition in the world of Isérois cycling. While I met many a 'Latin Lover' when dealing with non-cycling males, my experiences with cycling males were totally at odds with the stereotype. The cycle world is one of egalitarianism, in which the contributions of both sexes to training networks, racing alliances and other elements of the local cycling order are equally valued. I am not suggesting that cyclists do not have sexual relations with one another, rather that, when they do, they maintain relationships of equality that are surprising given the French situation in which they occur. While the popular assumption is of French men as being sexual opportunists, forever on the prowl, cycling males were trustworthy, considerate and accepting of their female cycling colleagues to a degree that I did not anticipate. While my thesis is not about the chauvinism of French men, it is nonetheless important to note that, in many ways, the subjects that my thesis covers produce a reading of France that is at odds with many assumptions, popular, anthropological or both, and these need to be recognized.

Charting an anthropology of France

More limiting to an ethnography of cycling in Isère is the paucity of

²⁰The free spending of the then Prime Minister Edouard Balladur to buy his way out of political trouble is satirized in newspapers. One cartoonist in *Le Canard Enchaîné* shows Balladur at his desk, writing cheques for embattled farmers, industrialists and *fonctionnaires*. An aide announces that a mail courier has arrived. Without looking up, Balladur replies, "give him 300 million francs."

anthropological interest in life in this far-eastern corner of France. Anthropology in France has tended to involve fieldwork undertaken in small-scale, relatively bounded units such as tribes or villages. To illustrate this "village fetish" (McDonald 1993: 5), Delamont (1995: 213) lists a range of ethnographic sites in France, citing the number of people living in each. Overwhelmingly, this directory of research locations includes villages, bourgs and hamlets, with populations running from 190 [Melize in Hautes-Alpes] to Auguste in the Pyrénées, a village with 320 permanent inhabitants. In leaning towards the village as an isolated entity, certain areas of investigation are privileged at the expense of others.

It is perhaps not surprising that the anthropology of rural France is particularly detailed, reflecting this pre-occupation with the small-scale and the bounded. To list some of the areas of ethnographic interest: McDonald (1987) has worked in Brittany, Rogers (1991) in Aveyron, Urla (1988) has examined language revival and ethnic protest in the Basque region, Favret-Saada (1980[1977]) is concerned with witchcraft in the (fictional) Bocage, Abélès (1991) has worked in Yonne, a *département* in Burgundy, and Segalen (1991) has worked in the Bigouden region in far-west France. While I do not intend this overview of literature to be exhaustive, nor do I wish to take to task any particular anthropologist, I do wish to question the value of a heuristic category of an anthropology of France,²¹ for it remains, in many ways an inappropriate template upon which to rest an ethnography of cycling life in Isère. Certainly, some cyclists live in villages, but they frequently spill out of them. It is when outside of a spatial demarcation of a village or a town, it is when they take to the roads of Isère, that cyclists constitute their cultural presence. The mobility and multiplicity of the local cycling community thus render typical anthropological approaches inappropriate.

More limiting however, is the emphasis that such analyses place upon particular subjects of ethnographic scrutiny. As Zonabend notes, "ethnographies of European societies are caught between grand impersonal surveys of 'folk culture' and ethnographies of communities intimate enough to seem acceptably exotic in their own right" (1985: 34). Zonabend's own work in Minot, northern Burgundy, can best be described as a structural analysis of the rhythms of peasant life, reflecting the disciplinary emphasis on particular kinds of social organization. As Appadurai recognizes,

the ethos of anthropology has been driven by the appeal of the small, the simple,

²¹I follow Llobera's (1986) line of questioning with regard to the continuing applicability of an anthropology of Europe.

the elementary, the face to face...Certain forms of sociality (such as kinship), certain forms of exchange (such as gift), certain forms of politics (such as the segmentary State) have been privileged objects of anthropological attention and have constituted the prestige zones of anthropological theory (1986b: 357).

To cite the title of an apposite paper, for the anthropology of France, "small is beautiful" (Hannerz 1986: 367). The diffuse nature of cycle racing, as cyclists move between multiple sites of experience, means that the interpretive imperative behind many traditional anthropological investigations no longer holds. Existing emphases on peasant communities, with relatively simple structures of social organization, are no longer applicable for the Isèrois cycling world. With its space-age technology, intricate structures of social organization and pronounced degree of consumer sophistication, the primitive nomadicism of cycle racing is subject to increasingly complex influences.

Although expansive and encompassing a range of ethnographic sites, the predominant focus on rural French life produces a curiously romantic portrait of France. In anthropological literature, rural France is often seen as being quintessential France. Most notably, Hélias's (1975) account of peasant life in *pays bigouden* in the first half of this century reflects this ethnographic preoccupation in reporting cultural life in terms of a traditional attachment to the countryside. In ethnographies and monographs such as those by Badone (1990), McDonald (1987) and Rogers (1991), the countryside experiences a striking emergence as a national cultural totem. Seen as the heartland of revolution, with angry farmers and rioting fishermen fearful of change and powerfully xenophobic, the anthropology of rural France is accordingly romantic. As McDonald purports when introducing her fieldwork in Brittany,

the air of archaic resistance to change that all such images have given to Brittany has helped make the region all the more attractive to certain brands of modern social science, anthropology included. Added to this, Brittany is still a rural area, with a sizable, active peasantry (1987: 126).

I am not denying the anthropological merit of these sorts of inquiries, nor am I underestimating the complexities of the research undertaken or the questions posed. I am simply indicating that such a focus has several methodological and theoretical limitations. As my thesis makes explicit, not all of France conforms to this model. 'Rural' France "represents no more than one particular variant among many others and cannot legitimately be taken as France writ small" (Rogers 1991: 193). To anticipate that my ethnography of cycling life in alpine France will replicate this 'village fetish' is to underestimate the complexity and diversity of life amongst

contemporary cyclists.

Concentrating anthropological description on small-scale village life is, to borrow from Llobera (1986), a straightjacket of sorts. In many ways, the *raison d'être* of the postmodern project is wholly appropriate. As people move out of villages; as people become more mobile than 'village anthropology' can account for, there is a need to come up with a way of doing fieldwork in France that can accommodate these shifting, mobile alliances, while simultaneously recording the distinctiveness of the field site under study. The postmodern turn, with its call to reformulate the anthropological vision so as to question the continued applicability of long-standing paradigms, begins to address the increasing complexities of life in France.

The anthropology of urban France is less comprehensive and less problematic than its rural counterpart, for it is beginning to acknowledge the complexities of its field sites. Grillo (1980b) is especially critical of anthropology's assumption that small communities can be spoken of as existing outside of and untouched by the forces of state and nation. As Grillo writes, "anthropological research...in Europe has often turned its back on precisely those issues on which a European anthropology might be constituted" (1980b: 4). For Grillo, the effects and interactions of state bureaucracy with the local community are rarely discussed (1980b: 21), and this represents a significant disciplinary oversight. Increasingly though, the collapse of trade borders and expanding economic and political interests are becoming subjects of anthropological inquiries into urban France. Abélès (1988) looks at the political rituals surrounding the election campaigns of President Mitterrand, while Zonabend (1993) looks at the language and practice of a nuclear waste processing plant in la Hague, western Normandy. Issues of immigration and ethnic independence attract much ethnographic attention. Berris (1993) offers a compelling account of Antillian immigrants in Paris, Dahlberg (1991) and Eade (1991) examine the ethnic mix of the pilgrim destination of Lourdes, Grillo (1980a, 1980b, 1985) examines the social lives of North African immigrants in Lyon, and Boisvert (1987) addresses the assimilation of Portuguese immigrant guest workers in Poitiers, Western France.

While the aforementioned studies are of the 'small site, big issue' variety, examining the impact of social change upon a particular ethnographic locale, Rabinow offers an account of a "constellation of thought, action and passion" (1989: 13) that is peculiarly French. For Rabinow, this is the belief that

individuals- regardless of *habitus* or pre-destination- are fated to struggle. Certainly, my own dealings with obstructionist bureaucracy support Rabinow's assertion that the French situation is one of pathos. Characterizing his book as "an ethnography of French pragmatic philosophical anthropology" (1989: 16), Rabinow draws on an eclectic mix of philosophical, historical and ethnographic sources to thematically trace the modernization of France. Rather than look to a precise ethnographic site, Rabinow moves between institutions in order to locate his claims for the French *mentalité*.

Mountain communities, by and large, remain outside the sphere of anthropological interest. To quote one of my informants, "there have not been many anthropologists in the Alps." While there have been various scholarly investigations into the effects of tourism upon alpine ecology, (Burns 1963, Rosenberg (et al), 1973, Reiter (1972), Villepontoux (1981), Hutson (1971) or *Le Journal de la Géographie Alpine* produced by The University of Grenoble), alpine habitats have escaped sustained anthropological attention, with the ethnographies by Viazzo (1989), Cole and Wolf (1974) and Ott (1981) being the most notable *oeuvres* in this field. The works by Viazzo and Cole and Wolf arise from fieldwork undertaken in Tyrol in the southern Italian Alps, and are concerned to detail changing folkloric perceptions within these traditionally peasant communities. Ott's (1981) work in Sainte-Engrâce, a Basque mountain community, reflects the anthropological bias of concentrating on the small-scale and the manageable.

If not detailing the impact of tourism upon alpine life, ethnographies focussing on life in the French Alps are concerned to examine the activities and mentalities particular to *les guides des hautes montagnes*.²² Françoise Loux (1990) is based in the Chamonix Valley of Haute-Savoie and her work focuses on the 'ethic of solidarity' that exists amongst these men and women. Majastre and Decamp (1988) and Bozonnet (1992) have both undertaken similar fieldwork in the valleys and mountains that surround Briançon in Hautes-Alpes. Each work offers a number of interesting parallels between cyclists and alpine guides regarding notions of community, commitment, myth making and a respect for the natural environment, and I draw on these throughout my thesis.

The mountain habitats of Isère however, elude ethnographic scrutiny. Grillo's (1985) study of immigrants in Lyon provides a useful overview of the administrative region of Rhône-Alpes, however, his ethnographic

²²The exception here is Rosenberg's (1988) detailed ethnography of changing patterns of life across three centuries in alpine France.

description of immigrant life in Lyon does not sit comfortably with the attitudes and articulations of cyclists in Isère. An absence of a local scholarly tradition that accurately reflects life in the French Alps is enormously frustrating. Isère is a region of many paradoxes that, in every way, appear to contradict both popular and anthropological perceptions of life in France. It is the inconsistency between the stereotype and the reality of the practices of everyday life, combined with a dearth of anthropological interest in the region, that makes Isère such a rewarding area of ethnographic inquiry.

Coda

This chapter has set out to provide a map of Isère within which to locate the cycling community. By considering the counter and cultural cartographies of non-cyclists, the cycling cartography- the map of meaning as to what cycling in Isère is all about- becomes maximally visible. As Gupta and Ferguson note, implicit in mapping of cultures onto places is to account for cultural difference within a locality...The idea of 'subcultures' attempts to preserve the idea of distinct cultures while acknowledging the relation of different cultures to a dominant culture within the same geographical and territorial space (1992: 76).

Cyclists and non-cyclists alike co-exist within the same space, but cyclists have reterritorialized it in highly specific cultural terms indeed. The particularities of the cycling world can only be considered against such a mapping of the region, for the nomadic nature of their sport engages multiple cyclists across multiple sites of experience.

CHAPTER THREE BIKES AND BODIES

*"Cycling is a marriage between the human body,
which is somewhat adaptable, and the bicycle,
which is somewhat adjustable."*

Bruno Roussel

Introduction

While the culture of cycling is constituted out of a number of factors, bikes and bodies occupy positions of symbolic pre-eminence. It is through recognizing the centrality of technology and physiology to the cycle domain that local riders elaborate various forms of fetishism which mark their world as a distinct one. Of particular concern for this chapter, the embodiment of technological dependence represents a key site at which the logic of commodity fetishism can be enacted, as equipment fetishism and scientific fetishism are married to a physical aesthetic which privileges a bodily style particular to cycling. To illustrate the importance of bikes and bodies in the construction of cycling identities, I emphasize the roles that the specialized cycling press play in elaborating these fetishisms. My use of cycling magazines to amplify certain narrative themes points to the fact that the media is ubiquitous, framing the local cycling world in some very profound ways. The key values of the sport are articulated by and through the media. Particular messages and motifs that resonate strongly amongst cyclists are seized upon and embellished by cycling magazines, thus reinforcing their salience for local cyclists.

In this chapter, I examine the roles that training and discipline play in producing the cultural aesthetic of cycling. The cycling world is a peculiarly narcissistic one, and this is repeatedly demonstrated in the daily exchanges between Isérois cyclists. The importance of training and discipline is that they facilitate this exhibition in ways that are distinctive to cycling. Before developing this argument ethnographically, there are two preliminary points to be made. First, the focus placed by cyclists on physical conditioning, and the extended social consequences that this effects, ensures that their commitment

to the sport is intense and engaging. The all-consuming nature of training, and the attention that is paid to maintaining optimal physical condition, give the cycle world an obsessive quality, akin more to a secular cult than to a sporting community as customarily imagined. Second, between professional cyclists and amateur aficionados, there exists a curiously vicarious relationship which frames their sport in specific cultural terms. This is a theme to which I will return, for the proximity of the professionals when in the amateur cycling milieu sets the sport apart from all others. The accessibility of the central players in cycling provides an important means of transmitting its values to amateur adherents.

Suffice it to say here, the professionals oversee every aspect of cycling life. The body of professional cyclists represents an authoritative and hegemonic form of reference upon which amateurs continually draw to make meaningful their experiences of riding a bicycle. The professionals are, in Gramsci's (1971) terms, the organizing agents of hegemony. Just as the American basketball player Michael Jordan occupies a position of "herculean cultural heroism" (Dyson 1994: 64), professional cyclists set and regulate the standards of their sport. They operate as public pedagogues, as figures of estimable moral authority. The shifting tensions internal to the cycling world are regulated by the omnipresence of the professionals; they determine the success of training routines, the longevity of dietary regimes, and the popularity of technical apparatus. Every aspect of professional cycling is appropriated by amateurs and applied to their daily cycling routines. From wearing their jerseys to riding their bicycles, cycling is simulacrum *par excellence*.¹ As Williams writes, "the subcultural standards of cycling are set by professional riders. What the professionals ride and wear, what they eat, how they train, are pounced upon in the hope that it will make a difference in their next race" (1989: 318).

While the professionals are a recurring presence in the amateur cycling scene, in this chapter I emphasize but one dimension of their role, namely their influence in embodying and embellishing a particular physical and cultural aesthetic. It is the bodies of the professionals that are held up as a physical yardstick to which amateur cyclists aspire. The hours of endless training, spent building and sculpting muscle, produce a particular body type

¹Perhaps the most extreme example of such imitation is the Tour de France role playing game that some Isérois riders possessed. Played on a giant plastic map of France, players are appointed a rider and they followed their fortunes around the board: Crash out, lose a turn. Win a sprint, move forward two places. Test positive to drugs, game over, and so forth.

that confers one's commitment to the sport.

The embodiment of technological dependence

The body has long received considerable anthropological attention. As Featherstone notes, in pre-modern societies the body represented an "important surface upon which the markers of social status, family position, tribal affiliation, age, gender and religious condition could easily and publicly be displayed" (1991: 6). In postmodern societies, the body continues to function as a prime site for ordering and classifying social action. As Jones writes, "the body can be regarded as the primary unit of social interaction as it, at once, acts in society and is acted upon by ideological discourse" (1993: 78).

In postmodern times, the analytical focus must accommodate new political, social and epistemological agendas for considering the body. Frank (1990) provides a particularly detailed overview of some of the emerging trends in anthropological and sociological literature. Examining the primary influences of feminism and Foucault, he outlines the impact that these schools of thought have had for the corpus of theoretical work devoted to the significance of the body in contemporary society. As Frank identifies, much attention, anthropological or otherwise, has been paid to examining the role that the body plays in producing disciplinary compliance.² Drawing on Foucault's (1979) characterization of docile, disciplined bodies, Featherstone notes that "diet, ascetism and regimes are obvious forms of control exercised over bodies with the aim of establishing a discipline" (1991: 159), while Turner writes that, in both academia and in popular culture, the body is implicated in a complex matrix of "'reproduction' [of populations in time], of 'regulation' [of bodies in space], of 'restraint' [of the 'interior' body through disciplines], and of 'representation' [of the exterior body in social space]" (1984: 2). Notions of reproduction are targeted by feminist scholars such as Theberge (1984) or Moore (1994) as being supportive of the politics of patriarchy: to quote Scarry, "whatever is done to our body is political" (1985: 243). Extending Foucault's (1979) seminal work, the notion of the regulation of the body invokes his characterization of the panopticon, while the idea of restraint conjures up his characterization of the disciplined body. The idea of representation strikes a chord with a number of contemporary scholars including Turner (1984, 1987) and Featherstone (1982, 1991) who are concerned with how subjects display and adorn their bodies. As both authors

²Jones, (1993), Fiske (1993) and Gerber (1972) amongst others, have examined the role of the body in the production of discipline.

make clear, notions of representation resonate with those of commodification and the cultural aesthetics of postmodern times.

What is missing from these positions however, is a recognition of the role that equipment, technology or machinery plays in reproducing, regulating, restraining and representing the body. In thinking and talking about their bodies in particular ways, cyclists do some culturally constitutive work on the equipment that is their means to a competitive end. Amongst Isérois cyclists, there is an organic unity between the rider and his or her machine, which shapes how they conceptualize their bodies. How the body is thought and talked about by local riders is always done in terms of how they think and talk about technology; it is always mediated by the presence of cycling apparatus. While critics such as Foucault (1979), Cockburn (1984, 1985) or Csordas (1994) emphasize one at the expense of the other, the integration of bike and body is both recognized and articulated by cyclists.

The nature of cycling clearly demands a close association between rider and machine. Cycling is a sport in which success is dependent on physical conditioning, tactical acumen and bike handling skills, all of which require a cyclist to spend many hours each week riding his or her bicycle. The Isérois cycle world is dominated by racing hardware. It is an environment driven by the need to acquire and use the best available technology. The literature of the racing scene is well represented with references to equipment. The newspaper *L'Equipe*, the specialized cycling press and instruction manuals in how or what to use, and how to fix it, contribute to this storehouse of knowledge. Amongst Isérois cyclists, there is a common reference world of technology. The language of local cycling is peppered with trade names and a highly technical vocabulary. Riders talk of Campagnolo, Suntour, Shimano or Mavic, the widths of handle bars, the lengths of head stems and a range of spoking configurations for their wheels. Cyclists read about and debate the merits of frame geometry, frame material, gear ratios and component groups, the intricacies of aerodynamics and the relative worth of carbon fibre and titanium frames. In local cycling circles, discussions of equipment are endless and limitless. While it could be argued that a fascination with technology is common to all sports that are dependent on equipment (skiing, motorcycle racing and Formula One racing) in cycling, such a singular focus on bicycles and associated hardware produces and reproduces a highly regulated social space in which commitment to being a cyclist is measured. The validation of cycling competency is always, and necessarily, done on the bike. Without the bike, one's physical abilities cannot be gauged or recorded. The bike, and

associated equipment, thus become necessary means of establishing control over the sport. Equipment is used, managed and fetishized to regulate the social order of Isérois cycling, a way of life that is then publicly embodied in the particular aesthetic of their sport.

Their language particularly confirms the unity between cyclist and technology. Local riders talk of a smooth style, of "looking good on the bike," of "looking at home on the bike," while Bruno, a top regional triathlete, claims that "it is important to feel part of your machine." Properly positioned, there is a synergy between the body and the bike, so local riders endlessly scrutinize the association between the two. Cyclists spend many hours adjusting the height or the fore and aft position of their saddles, moving cleats and aligning head stems, in order to attain the rock solid position in which only their legs move. It is said of someone who has found this position that they "*chatouiller les pédales*"- tickle the pedals- or that they "*avoir la soquette légère*"- have light socks. It is said of someone lacking in style and fluidity that they "*rouler comme une clé à molette*"- a reference to the jagged motion of a band saw or cutting wheel in action-, or that they "*pédaler carré*"; they ride 'square' rather than smoothly. Each expression acknowledges the light and fluid pedalling action that can only be produced from correct positioning on the bike. Every effort is made to achieve peak aesthetic balance between bike and body for, as Bruno continues, "the perfect position is the difference that makes a champion."

The specialized cycling press play a paramount role in articulating the association between bike and body. Even a preliminary survey of magazines reveals that a new Klein bicycle is described as producing a "completely neutral handling and steering, it felt so natural that it seemed to disappear underneath the rider"; that a model of Vitus bicycle "offers a synthesis of frame performance characteristic to enhance your style of riding" (*Cyclisme International*, September 1993: 53); and that the copy of an advertisement promoting a Sachs brand of *dérailleur* reads: "mind, body, machine- interdependent elements. Success depends on each functioning at peak performance- there's no room for compromise" (*Cycle Sport*, June 1993: 3). An accolade given by technical writers when speaking of a newly tested bicycle is that "one forgets it is there when one is riding it" (*Le Cycle*, May 1994: 57).

Although reading cycling magazines can provide some awareness of the interdependent relationship between rider and machine, it is only from

within cycling networks that the expressed significance of technology to the aesthetic of cycling becomes apparent. While considerable detail is available for identifying the unity between bike and body, it is in the area of training that this relationship is made most apparent. It is through dedicated daily training that one takes on a distinctive body type that marks his or her commitment to cycling. Thus, I privilege the discipline of training above other concerns of cycling. This is not to deny that issues of diet, sleep or sex are important for framing the cultural aesthetic of cycling. Indeed, there is an enormous range of opinions about effective methods of weight reduction, amongst other things, that testify to the role that these factors play in producing a body type characteristic of the competitive cyclist.

The importance of these contributing elements however, is best revealed in the on-road exchanges between training partners, for they provide the opportunity for a range of conversations concerning diet and physiology to develop. Thus, it is necessary to spend time discussing the formation of cycling coalitions, for these training networks are the bedrock of the cycling world. As Falk (1994) notes, in order to understand how the body-image functions in social space, one needs to examine the body when engaged in processes of interaction at the level of everyday reciprocities and exchanges. Cycling training networks provide an important site at which to witness the function of the body within a specific social space, for they depend upon a cyclist's involvement in a developed social relationship.

Training networks

Bike racing is an extremely difficult and demanding activity that requires dedicated training to remain competitive. Just to keep up with the *peloton* (or 'pack') in a race of one hundred kilometres requires daily training.³ As a result of his or her dedication, a competitive cyclist has very little time during a normal day, after going to work or studying, nor the energy, to devote to non-cycling activities, and this represents a serious commitment to the sport. As Georges notes, "*faire du vélo, c'est facile. C'est continuer qui est difficile!*" Isérois cyclists place a huge investment in training. Social engagements are constantly cancelled, and non-cycling boyfriends and girlfriends are frequently stood up because the cyclist is too tired to interact. After eight hours of

³The *peloton* automatically forms at the beginning of any massed start race. The *peloton* functions both as a support system with riders sharing food, water and words of encouragement in difficult stages and, more importantly, as a communications network as information regarding race developments and road hazards is circulated amongst the riders.

training or racing, cyclists often have difficulties even walking. The time and energy invested in bike racing demands a privileging of the cycling life over all other aspects of a cyclist's life. Such dedication articulates with Isérois cycling sentiment: featured on the T-shirt of one local rider was the claim, "my wife said she was going to leave me if I go racing one more time. I'm going to miss her."

Cycling is a purpose driven pursuit that, while rarely 'fun,' is intensely satisfying. Despite the amateur status of training networks, riders rarely fool around. They approach their sport with unswerving seriousness. Vincent, a category one racer with Club 2S,⁴ on the brink of securing a contract with Aubervilliers '93, claims, "if I hadn't become a bike racer, I would have joined the circus. No, I'm just kidding. I kid about a lot of things, but when it comes to cycling, I'm serious."⁵ Competitive cycling is a goal driven, physical undertaking in which the performance of certain skills or manoeuvres works towards achieving a specific goal, be it winning a sprint or claiming a personal best time in a *contre-la-montre*. The language that surrounds cycling draws on the imagery of an industrial economy. Riders speak of a "*un bon rythme auquel du travail*" - a good work rate-, "*commander le train*" - driving the train home-, and "*travailler comme des pistons*" - working like pistons. While cyclists approach their task with the dedication expected of those in the work force, the critical difference is that their labour is unwaged.

In drawing on the language of an industrial economy, cyclists realize a symbolic reversal of the domains of work and leisure. A work ethic is transferred to the leisure sphere and work, in the conventional sense, is relegated to a second order issue, with cyclists privileging the time spent racing and training over all other dimensions of their lives. As Patrice remarks, "I spend more time with my bike than with my family. My bicycle is my first wife." While such an all-consuming focus on sport may seem excessive to a non-cyclist, it is important to recognize that, only superficially,

⁴Club 2S- Club Seyssins-Sassenage- is the *première* cycle club in the Dauphiné-Savoie region. It has a membership base of nearly two hundred riders of all abilities, although most tend to be amongst the upper *échelons*.

⁵Clubs like the Paris based Aubervilliers '93 or Corbeil-Créteil-Essones serve, in effect, as schools for professionals. To ride for these clubs, aspiring amateurs must either send a *curriculum vitae* detailing their successes at the local and regional level, or they can hope to be spotted at regional and national championships by the team coaches and managers. If they are selected, then the riders are contracted to the club and are fed and clothed in the hope that they will make it in the big league of professional cycling. If an amateur here has a chance of professionalism, he then secures a sponsor and applies for a professional licence. The sponsor must guarantee the rider the base salary of the country in which the rider is registered.

does cycling resemble a sport as it is typically understood. To return to a critique of the anthropology of sport, it is the conceptual blurring between sport and play that problematizes critical writings on the domain of sport. Whereas "play is childlike, without any ulterior motive, [played] for the sheer fun of it and for no other reason" (Duncan 1988: 34), sports are highly structured events; their enactments are always governed by rules and normative guidelines. Whereas play is spontaneous and creative, sport is calculated and controlled. As Edwards points out,

sport always involves physical exertion, has a formal structure and organization and demands an adherence to tradition, has a seriousness of purpose, requires meticulous preparation and in all sports, rules and positions are explicitly defined (1973: 61).

Indeed, commitment to cycling is intense and engaging. It is total and transcending. To be a cyclist in Isère demands complete commitment: to quote Gilles, a category two racer with Le Vélo Club de St. Martin le Vinoux, "you are either in or you are not." As Cohen notes, "to remain in a community is itself an expression of commitment, and commitment is sustained by a continuous elaboration of the culture" (1982: 6). Whereas adherents of other sports such as rugby union or lacrosse allocate one or two nights a week for training- their sessions devoted to refining tactical moves and honing physical skills that will be put into practice during the big game at the weekend- cyclists in Isère train daily and race twice weekly. This saturation of cycling means that it is difficult to package the activity of training as separate from racing. The two spheres blur, with non-racing periods seen as a time to recover rather than to prepare for the next race. While I have separated the idea of training out as a discrete analytical category, no such designation is made in reality. Bike racing is so totally engaging that the cycling life cannot be separated from other aspects of a cyclist's life. The refinement of skills, the learning of tactics and the conditioning of the body for optimal performance are constant, to the degree that the term 'training' is rarely used. Cyclists talk instead of "*pédaler à fond*", or "*aller à fond de ballon*"- going 'full tilt'- a designation that reflects the intensity of the activity. In emphasizing the work ethic of cycling, and its all-consuming nature, the customary divisions reserved for other sports rarely apply.

In season, the average competitive cyclist would train six days a week, spending a minimum of two hours in the saddle each session. The training programme religiously followed by Olivier provides tangible evidence of the enormous commitment that cycle racing demands:

On Monday, I go on an easy [50 kilometre] 'recovery' ride. Tuesdays, I work on my climbing. On Wednesday, I will do a long [between 100 and 150 kilometres] road ride to build endurance. Thursdays, the same thing, but a little shorter- about 70 kilometres. Fridays, I have off, and Saturday and Sunday I race.

A huge amount of time, energy and social capital is invested in training alliances, for they represent a gauge along which degrees of commitment, engagement and competence can be measured. While Olivier's training programme reflects his individual needs, there is a certain commonality to such routines. All over Isère cyclists are following similar programmes. Training schedules often overlap, so riders invariably will train together; an individual training programme is thus given a public airing.

While some cyclists prefer to train alone, most seek to train with others. The overall cycling network in Isère is dense and expansive, reaching every corner of the *département*, however the size and composition of on-road training groups are significantly smaller. On training rides, partial networks break off into smaller groups of between three and six riders, usually with at least two or three men, although this is not always the case. A range of coalitions, alliances and clusters emerge as cyclists move between multiple sites of experience and various registers of interpretation. Such networks serve as communication channels; as outlets or opportunities for exchanging information, knowledge and expertise. There is an intensely collaborative dimension to local appreciations of cycling, as riders relay in conversation the difficulties of particular climbs, the achievements and accomplishments of training partners, and they engage in the practice of *commérages*- harmless gossip involving one's club mates and training partners.

Rumours of possible club defections circulate amongst training networks, while sexual peccadilloes are a recurring point of conversation. Given that men and women train together for nine months of the year, it is inevitable that romantic liaisons form between cycling partners. Despite the frequency of their occurrence, the formation of a romantic couple represents major news, as the following snatch of dialogue between Dominique and Alain demonstrates:

Dominique: "Christophe and Catherine got together at Le Couloir Café last night. Isabelle and I saw them holding hands, and when we suggested going to Le Saxo, Catherine said she was tired and wanted to go home. But Christophe left with her!"

Alain: "Eh alors? Let's hope they don't get married like Laurent and Natalie- then we'll be the only *célibataires*."

When either member of the new couple presents him or herself to the rest of the training coalition, they are subject to a barrage of good humoured banter. When Christophe joined Dominique, Alain and myself the afternoon following his evening with Catherine, he was greeted with "Le Saxo eh Christophe? More like Le Sexo!" Dominique's comment was followed by a feigned concern for Christophe that his strength had not been sapped by his late night.

The diffuse nature of Isérois cycling is such that far reaching networks develop between cyclists. Local riders necessarily have contacts that extend beyond their club mates; they constantly enter into a range of informal networks that operate independently from the rigid structures of club racing.⁶ Without these overlapping or additional friendships, club cycling would remain remarkably insular. What gives a unity to the order of cycling is the constant mixing of a wide range of people who possess varying degrees of competence, experience and social background. These complexly connected competitive networks serve to link the local into the national. The nature of competition is such that local riders make contact with the greater whole as they compete with cyclists from other regions, *départements*, and even countries. The competitive hierarchy is organized so that the local, the regional and the national repeatedly collide.

The multiplicity of membership means that it is difficult to single out one particular type of person who rides. My core group of riding companions included Dominique who was a postman, Fabrice who was a civil servant and Pascal who was an engineer at the C.E.N.G. Thierry and Valérie were both teachers, Christophe was a sculptor, Natalie was a graphic designer, Frédéric was an alpine guide and Jérôme was a waiter. Accountants, chefs, bank staff, ski instructors, hotel workers, farmers and bakers all cycle, their presence contributing and comprising various cycling networks. The

⁶Racing categories are decided by L'Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)- the international ruling body for professional and amateur cycling- and such categories are standardized throughout Europe. For women, the categories of *minime*, *cadette*, *junior féminin* and *senior féminin* apply. For male cyclists, the categories of *minim*, *cadet*, *junior*, *senior 1* through *5* and *vétéran 1* through *5* are the competitive divisions which riders must adhere to. There is some overlap; for example, the holder of a category 3 license may compete against a category 4 or a category 2 rider, but overwhelmingly, cyclists compete solely within their designated category. Men and women can ride together. Holders of a *senior féminin* license are allowed to race against 3rd or 4th category senior men. Although imposed by the UCI, the categories of racing are enforced by national bodies. In France, this is Le Fédération Française de Cyclisme (FFC). In addition to restricting the range of competitors, the FFC also imposes limits upon the lengths of the race for the various categories, the days of the week on which racing can occur and the gear ratios that bikes can be equipped with.

members of this diverse community are nonetheless bound together by cycling talk. It is their shared participation in banter and gossip such as that concerning new romantic liaisons that unites them as a collectivity. As Duck notes,

friends as well as cultures develop their own sets of shared concerns, common interests and collective problems, as well as shared meanings, common responses to life and communal emotionality. Friends are often appreciated exactly because they share these private understandings, private jokes or private language (1983: 17).

The connected transitoriness of cycling network resonates with the work by Boissevain on social networks. As Boissevain notes,

each person can thus be viewed as a star from which lines radiate to points, some of which are connected to others. These form his primary network zone. But these persons are also in contact with others whom our central person does not know, but with whom he could come in contact via members of his first order zone. These are the often important friends of friends (1974: 24).

The emphasis that Boissevain places upon strategy, calculation and self-interest in the formation of social networks is inversely mirrored in cycling situations. While there are elements of mutual self-interest in establishing a training network- it can help reduce the costs of accommodation and petrol at out of town races- cycling clusters, by and large, form out of collective interest, as riders of the same abilities or with similar amounts of leisure time join together as a training network. It is group rather than individual good that motivates the formation of a cycling cluster.

Boissevain's notion of extended networking between friends of friends is particularly applicable to the cycle world, for it is constituted out of interweaving alliances and coalitions. Cyclists in Isère constantly overlap one another. Their networks become, in a sense, genealogical charts of a family, united, not through blood, but through bicycles. Several months into my field period, I met a cyclist *en route* to meet Thierry and Lydie, two of my regular training partners. On-road pleasantries revealed that this man had raced as a category one racer with Dominique who was one of my first points of contact upon entering the field. He now owned the tourist train in the grounds of the Château de Vizille, and he knew Isabelle Mouthon- the women's triathlon champion of France- and Thierry Claveyrolat- the former professional rider-, both of whom lived close to Vizille. Once I explained myself and my interest, this man offered to introduce me to Isabelle and Thierry who, in turn, introduced me to Jean-Claude Colotti, his former team mate on the GAN squad. There is a spiralling dimension to the building of

cycling associations. From my primary network zone, I met an innumerable number of friends of friends, all of whom helped in building up a composite picture of cycling in Isère. My gradual inclusion into local activities culminated in my complete acceptance as I made my own friends of friends.

In addition to territorial proximity and similar training schedules, the formation of a cycling alliance is also determined by a rider's degree of experience. There is inevitably some overlap, as weaker riders struggle to keep pace with faster athletes or, conversely, as better riders slow to offer tips and suggestions to new members. As well as providing emotional support and camaraderie, training networks serve as a vehicle for learning new skills from more experienced riders. Cycling coalitions serve as communication channels through which the subcultural style of the sport can be transmitted. The neophyte who turns up with loose shorts, black socks and his or her saddle cocked at a crazy angle is quickly taken under the wing of a more experienced rider.

The practicalities of cycling are such that group discussion is not feasible, so cycling conversations are usually one on one, with the conversing cyclists modulating their efforts in tune with each other. Riders drop back or speed up according to the conditions of the ride and the abilities of their riding partner(s). When the road begins to climb, conversations cease entirely. Because it is not possible to talk in a group, extended discussions of the ride are usually left until the group stops for a post-ride coffee. On the road, the conversation is strictly cycling oriented. Conversationally, the unity between the bike and the body is constantly asserted. Questions of gearing, whether someone's pedal action is symmetrical, the physical attributes needed to be a cyclist, the definition in a rider's legs, and the relative strengths of the group as cyclists, are all topics of conversation within these relatively dense clusters. Aspects of personal lives are rarely discussed, save a preliminary introductory session, after which these formalities are quickly dispensed with. Once a regular training network is established, this information is stored away. I discovered that a riding companion had been married for fifteen years just two weeks before I left the field, despite having ridden with him on many occasions. Such matters are simply not discussed.⁷ The discipline of cycling demands a focusing of conversations on technology and physiology.

⁷In-group romances are discussed precisely because they have the potential to affect the training coalition as a whole.



The proximity of the professionals

The transmission of the key values of cycling through riding networks is facilitated by the particular relationship that amateurs have with professionals: there is a marked degree of proximity of the style setters to the style followers. Whereas in sports such as tennis or basketball the gap between professional and amateur is unbridgeable, in competitive cycling, amateur bike racers can, and frequently do, approximate the behaviours of the professionals by virtue of their physical proximity. While it is unlikely that an aspiring tennis player will ever play a set with Pete Sampras or Monica Seles, and while it is unlikely that an aspiring basketballer will ever go 'one on one' with Michael Jordan or Magic Johnston, in cycling, the professional and amateur milieux continually intersect. Along the roads of Isère, amateur and professional environments repeatedly overlap.

No less than ten licensed professionals live in Isère and many more come to the region to hone their climbing skills. The number of professionals riding the roads throughout Isère means that it is not uncommon for an amateur to meet one or more of them on a training ride. The regularity with which these encounters occur is well documented by local riders. Eric recalls meeting Chris Boardman and Greg LeMond, then visiting Isère to train with Thierry Claveyrolat and Jean-Claude Colotti. Natalie counts riding alongside Jeannie Longo, perhaps the most decorated female cyclist of all time, as one of her greatest cycling moments and, for Didier, climbing Alpe d'Huez in the company of Eric Caritoux was the highlight of his amateur career. The sheer inescapability of the professionals when in the amateur milieu is articulated by cyclists who routinely appropriate the subcultural style of the greats. As Adam, an American rider contracted to the Paris based Aubervilliers '93 club, confessed when I encountered him climbing the Col de Porte in the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse:

even though I'm riding a cool Klein carbon-fibre with STI gearing and a titanium seat post, in my mind, I'm on a Celeste Bianchi with Campy Record components, a spare sew up slung over my shoulder and a little cotton cap on my head. I feel like Coppi in the '50s.

The accessibility of professional cyclists when riding in the amateur milieu means that the masters are on hand to offer advice. When I was riding alongside Thierry Claveyrolat one morning *en route* to Alpe d'Huez, he dropped behind to observe my pedalling action. Returning to my side, Claveyrolat then advised me to adjust the cleat on my right shoe so as to

improve the symmetry of my pedal stroke.

Such encounters represent a major topic of conversation ever after. The day the Tour de France was to finish at Alpe d'Huez in 1994, Dominique met up with Gilles Delion- a former rider with the Chazal team- on the outskirts of Rochetaillée, and he climbed two thirds of Alpe d'Huez with this former professional. Delion invited Dominique to watch the race with him and, as both men stood by the road, they were greeted by Delion's former colleagues when they rode past with the race. To spend the afternoon in the company of a rider of the stature of Gilles Delion- talking tactics, seeking advice on diet and training- was a significant moment for Dominique. Later that afternoon, he met a group of cyclists at L'Etape. His eyes were shining and he could not stop talking about his afternoon. Encounters such as this are life changing. For the remaining month that I spent in the field, every training ride I undertook with Dominique was peppered with references to his ride with Delion. Even now, in letters and postcards, Dominique continues to make mention of this memorable afternoon.

The proximity of professional and amateur cyclists is increased by the anonymity and universality of the cycling uniform. While I address the form and function of the cycling uniform shortly, it is important to note here that the uniform of the cyclist continually blurs the boundary between professional and amateur. When not wearing club colours, amateur cyclists wear jerseys that are direct copies of those worn by trade teams. At first glance, there is nothing to distinguish an amateur from a professional. Frequently, riders will be side by side before they realize that their new cycling companion is Claveyrolat, Bincoletto, Biondi or any of the other professionals living and riding in Isère. Having been joined by Colotti one training ride, Patrice remarked, "you're in good company here...you never know who you will see." Indeed, there is an uncertainty to the local cycling world. A rider flashes past wearing a GAN jersey: was that Claveyrolat or Colotti? A rider in the team colours of Chazal is bent over changing a puncture: was that Delion? Was that Kirsipus? Or was that simply an unknown amateur wearing the same jersey? There is a constant tension in the Isérois cycling world that the accessibility of the professionals increases. This uncertainty however, is, in fact, remarkably stabilizing. It is a key element in maintaining the distinctiveness of the cycle domain. If the gap between professional and amateur cycling became unbridgeable, then cycling in Isère would look very different.

Equipment fetishism

A major stepping stone to acceptance within a training network is the acquisition and use of cycling hardware. Equipment serves an important gate-keeping function that regulates access to and inclusion within local cycling circles. Knowledge regarding appropriate equipment use grants a rider with the recognition of competence. While a demonstrated familiarity with the technology of the sport warrants membership within a training network, this knowledge can only be applied in particular, on-road, situations. An inner-city bar, when surrounded by non-cycling friends, would be a wholly inappropriate context in which to discuss the relative merits of carbon-fibre and titanium frames. Such actions reflect Douglas and Isherwood's (1978) argument that goods and commodities are used to draw the lines of social relationships. The ability to use and consume commodities in appropriate circumstances involves a mastery of the good or commodity in question. An awareness of the appropriate context in which to disseminate one's cycling expertise is required, for it grants a rider with particular conversational rights to stop and chat with others. It enables a cyclist to participate in the opening gambit of "*c'est un bon vélo*", for the bike is always the first point of focus in encounters with fellow cyclists.

Cycling networks are regulated by equipment use. The application and display of technology is critical to establishing the 'street cred' of a rider. There is a continual spiral of credibility that is subject to the group legitimation of training and racing coalitions. The knowledge and application of technology to particular cycling situations operate as a form of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986). The accumulation of knowledge regarding technology is used as a resource in cycling social life.⁸ The function of cultural capital is perhaps most apparent to those hovering on the fringes of the sport, as the following snatch of dialogue illustrates. In describing his first race to me, Pierre remembered that a great deal of conversation had dealt with race conditions, the direction of the wind, the position of the hills and the turns in the course. As Pierre recalls, the rider standing next to him in the start area bemoaned that he would regret not changing the 'alpine' free wheel on his bike to a standard

⁸Cockburn (1984, 1985) and Cockburn & Fürst-Dillic (1994) write of the genderized nature of technology in workplaces and homes. In each analysis, the authors assume that men are technologically more confident and competent than women. Such an emphasis however does not apply to the Isérois cycling world. The practical demands of the sport ensure a certain egalitarianism to equipment use. Technological competence transcends gender boundaries with one's expertise and experience as a cyclist being valued over and above one's gender.

racing free wheel, saying "in this wind, I won't have the gears low enough to get up some of those climbs." At this point Pierre realized that he did not even know what gears he had on his bike, let alone whether they would be suitable for racing in these conditions. It was at this point that Pierre realized he had a lot to learn, that he had a lot of cultural capital to accumulate, if he was going to take the sport seriously.

While one cannot overstate the centrality of equipment to cycle racing, it is important to note that its presence also serves to maintain a safe environment. A dizzying glance over the Col du Galibier, which towers more than 2,000 metres and has no guard rail, will confirm the need to create and maintain a situation in which rider safety is paramount. Long periods of training, particularly solitary sessions, foster a special unity between rider and machine. Given that a rider could spend up to eight hours alone, a heavy reliance on equipment is needed so that the rider can, in effect, fend for him or herself. Michèle, for example, when completing lengthy solitary rides, carries two spare tubes, two *bidons*, a puncture repair kit, a change of T-shirt, a spare jersey, a rain jacket, biscuits, a pump, a map of the region and provisions for an emergency telephone call. The manufacturers of cycling hardware recognize the need to ensure rider safety. In cycling magazines, Cinelli handlebars are promoted as:

even under extreme conditions, when cornering or travelling downhill at high speed, a light pressure on the handlebars is enough to maintain perfect control over your bike, even when braking. CINELLI BARS. ERGONOMIC, PRECISE, SAFE (*Le Cycle*, April 1994: 23).

As Albert recognizes, "the role of equipment is to structure the day to day activity of the sport and to create an atmosphere of community which enables the race to go on as an accountably safe environment" (1991: 332).

A rider's bike handling abilities testify to the utilitarian role of equipment. A necessary and highly valued technical skill, bike handling represents the capacity of cyclists to control their bikes as they control their bodies. In training and race situations, bike handling is constantly tested, for it functions to keep the sport safe. In *critérium* racing- an extremely popular form of night time competition- riders must repeatedly negotiate numerous sharp turns on a street circuit, a manoeuvre which requires considerable technical competency. Riders must move quickly off from the start and jostle with others, as everybody attempts to position themselves near the front of the pack, so as to avoid the inevitable crashes. Equally, skilled riders rarely apply their brakes when cornering, for it causes them to lose their position in the

peloton. Both manoeuvres are masterful demonstrations of bike handling skills which reveal the special unity between rider and machine.

The presence of a poor bike handler or a bad rider within a race situation is a cause for concern. A rider who brakes abruptly, who misjudges his or her line in a corner or who fails to warn back riders of imminent road hazards is singled out as a dangerous presence in a cycling bunch. Warnings such as "watch out for number 7"... "He's right behind you"...or, "let her through" circulate amongst a racing group in which a dangerous rider exists. And, despite the individuated circumstances of bike racing, there is much body contact as riders push away or flick the backside of others riding inappropriately close. Dangerous riders are pushed aside by the rest of the racing group because their presence puts in jeopardy any possibility of competition. In other words, there is an aesthetic to the performance of the pack which is especially savoured amongst cyclists, for their safety depends upon it.

The presence of equipment however, serves far more than simply the utilitarian function of keeping cycling safe. There is an evolved level of quality to equipment; a hierarchy of purchase that warrants membership within the local culture of cycling. Unquestionably, cycling's dependence on equipment makes it an expensive sport. The purchasing of a bicycle and associated accoutrements represents a large initial financial outlay. Investment in a racing bicycle can run well over 5,000 francs (A\$1,200). To be taken seriously, a cyclist must ride a bike that can be lifted with one finger. To use the parlance of the sport, "you can't ride a bike with *chauffage central*."⁹ In addition, there is a myriad of expenses once the racing season is underway. The costs of a racing license,¹⁰ tools, racing fees, travel costs, equipment failure

⁹This term is applied to low priced bikes with poorly designed frames in which the tubing that holds them together is heavy and unattractive, resembling those of an apartment building's central heating.

¹⁰Depending on the type of license one wishes to race under, a rider can pay anything from 135 francs (A\$35) to 500 francs (A\$125). A license "*cadre technique*" is the cheapest, whereas those cyclists wishing to compete in senior 1 or veteran 1 are required to pay 500 francs for a license "*categorie*". All licenses are issued by the regional branch of the Fédération Française de Cyclisme (FFC) which is administered from Grenoble. Co-ordinating all aspects of competitive cycling in the region of Dauphiné-Savoie, the region encompasses the departments of Isère, Savoie, Hautes-Alpes and Haute-Savoie. The *comité* issues racing licenses for road and track racing, mountain biking and cyclocross events, they act as marshals and officials for both the professional races when they pass through the region and for a range of other forms of local racing such as *cyclosporives*, *critériums* and stage races that regularly occur on the roads of Isère. Racing neophytes are also required to submit a detailed medical certificate to the Fédération Française de Cyclisme before they are issued with their racing license.

and wear and tear on jerseys, gloves and shoes, all contribute to a heavy financial burden.

As well as a high priced bicycle, the uniform of the cyclist is perhaps the most obvious marker of their engagement in the sport. Cleated shoes, lycra shorts with chamois inserts in the seat, and cycling jerseys, not to mention aerodynamic helmets and padded gloves, all comprise essential cycling regalia. Indeed, the uniform of the bike rider is misplaced in situations other than cycling ones. As Greenway notes, albeit in terms of a different sporting context, "the singular dress of the athlete, the baseball player for example, makes him look absurd on the way to the game, but on the field, the odd looking stirrups become functional" (1985: 58). Likewise, the cyclist, in full regalia, appears ridiculous off the bike. On the bike however, the uniform serves both practical and expressive functions.

There is a utilitarianism to the cycling uniform. Considerations such as comfort or the weather demand a certain style of dress: the chamois inserts in the seat of one's shorts help guard against saddle sores, while jerseys are used to store tools and food, crucial considerations when training for hours at a time. Considerable attention is paid to maximizing the life of cycling equipment. Riders routinely wash their kit after each ride and they care for their inserts with special moisturizers and softening lotions. Riders talk of lucky socks and favourite shorts, invariably those that are the most comfortable, and with which they scored their most impressive victory. It is the shoes of a cyclist however, that are the most personalized of all equipment. The importance of the humble shoe to a cyclist was made apparent when one local rider, Pascal, had his car stolen. Sharing his woes with his cycling companions, he remarked, "they can have my car; it's just a piece of junk. But my cycling shoes were in the boot. Now what am I going to do?" Pascal's concern for his lost shoes is revealing. Much care goes into selecting and fitting cycling shoes, for they require precise anatomical adjustments. With their short heels, cleats and stiff carbon soles, cycling shoes are impossible to walk in, but on the bike, they represent a necessary interface between rider and machine. While such attention may seem excessive, given the intensity of training and racing, rider comfort is paramount, demanding an almost obsessive concern with one's uniform. For the committed cyclist, wearing the uniform has a far greater importance than simply the desire to keep warm or dry or to stay comfortable: looking the part denotes membership and inclusion into the local cycling world. Just as the "uniform

helps the soldier to find courage, the minister piety and the professor wisdom" (Berger 1963: 93), the uniform of the cyclist helps him or her to find strength, assuring competency and commitment to the specific task of bicycle racing.

While the dress of the bike rider signals his or her cycling allegiance to outsiders- it is what non-cyclists notice when they see a brightly coloured rider whizz past- the aspect of cycling that is valued most from within the cycling world itself is equipment. The acquisition, care and use of cycling hardware carry little weight in terms of conferring status outside of the Isèrois cycling world, for using technology to confirm commitment to the culture of cycling is internal to the culture itself. The possession and demonstrated mastery of state of the art cycling exotica provide a system of referencing and communication common to Isèrois cyclists. This dependence on equipment translates into an obsession with racing hardware, a practice that I term 'equipment fetishism'. Here, "life, autonomy, power, even dominance are attributed to otherwise inanimate objects" (Taussig 1980: 31), these being the confluence of hardware that dominates the local cycling scene. Just as in the parent practice of commodity fetishism, where "commodities become free to take on a wide range of cultural associations and illusions" (Featherstone 1991: 14), cyclists associate their status within the informal hierarchy of local competition with the inanimate objects they acquire and use.

Anthropological literature on 'fetishism' has tended to focus on the breakdown of social relationships that fetishizing an object is perceived to bring about. Taussig (1980: 32), for example, argues that social relationships are dismembered, dissolving into relationships between mere things, and Pfaffenberger (1988) sees fetishism as disguising the fundamentally social behaviours in which people engage when they create or use a technology. I argue however, that in the case of Isèrois cyclists, their practice of equipment fetishism, in fact, brings into being a set of social relations that are absolutely and unavoidably contingent on the fetishization of cycling hardware.

Indeed, equipment fetishism transcends Isèrois cycling life, with the minutiae of everything from heart rate monitors to the optimal material for the sole of a shoe being considered. Close attention is paid to detail, as the following snatch of dialogue illustrates. Two local riders were looking through a copy of *Le Cycle*. They came to the 'new products' section, where a new model of bottle cage was advertised. "I have to have that!" Gilles exclaimed. "But you

already have two," Natalie replied. "No, you have them. I *need* this one," Gilles continued. "It's .7 of a gram lighter." To the non-cyclist, such exchanges must seem inexplicably childish. To insiders however, this obsessive attention to detail is an important ingredient in maintaining the informal social order of cycling. The shared possession and appreciation of state of the art racing paraphernalia signals their commitment to and identification with the culture of the sport.

But equipment fetishism is more than a pedantic obsession with racing hardware. In focusing attention on technology, the equipment is brought to life. It is animated and empowered with human qualities and characteristics. Reference to the importance of the bike itself best illustrates the process of equipment fetishism. As Albert writes, "it goes without saying that the bicycle serves as a means to a competitive goal but, as importantly, it takes on a life of its own in the world of the bicycle racer" (1984: 319). For local cyclists, the bike serves as an orientating feature of conversation, an object of endless investment and an instrumental sign of competence. In the world of the bicycle racer, the bike serves considerably more than its practical function of transportation.

One particular incident from the field defines this fetishistic obsession with bikes. Having finished a training ride, a group of us were sitting in a café, drinking coffee and preparing for our return to Grenoble. One of the cyclists I was with noticed someone suspiciously examining our bikes which were parked outside the café. "I think he's going to steal our bikes" warned Eric. "Shit! Mine's got Campy on it," was the worried reply from another rider. Several points of clarification are needed to highlight the significance of this exchange. First, 'Campy' is the abbreviation for Campagnolo, the Rolls Royce of bike parts. In opposition to its mass produced Japanese counterpart Shimano, Campagnolo is locally revered, with bike dealers posting stickers that proclaim "Campagnolo spoken here." Second, the thought that flashed through *my* head when it seemed that *my* bike was about to be stolen was, 'how am I going to get home?' I was still seeing my bike as a means of transport. But for my riding partners, their concern was with their equipment. Their relationships with their bikes transcended its ostensible purpose of locomotion.

In local conceptualizations, the bike is seen as organic, capable of change through adjustment and modification. Riders devote hours of labour to tuning and caring for their bicycles. Maintenance is a veritable labour of love.

Lambswool mitts are worn to polish the paintwork or chrome, while an early season routine is to spend Saturday night at a fellow rider's house, tuning and cleaning bicycles in preparation for the regular Sunday ride. Claudine, the wife of Patrice, informed me conspiratorially that "leading up to a big race, I've seen him get out of bed several times to go down to the garage to tinker with something on his bike." The obsession that Isèrois cyclists have with their bikes parallels the care and grooming that Balinese men devote to their cocks. The same degree of fanaticism and fetishism pertains to both performances: the comment "I am cock crazy. We are all cock crazy" (Geertz 1973: 419) could easily be expressed as "I am bike crazy. We are all bike crazy."

The media are largely responsible for reinforcing this equipment fetishism. In part, this can be attributed to the fact that the professional cyclists have united with entrepreneurs and manufacturers to disseminate the dominant ideology of the sport. As Williams recognizes, professional cyclists "function as industrial technicians at the service of hegemonic persuasion; they practice the ideology and legitimate its content as the 'right' thing to do." (1989: 319). The dominant value system of professional cycling provides the moral frame of reference for the cultural aesthetic of amateur cycling. The constant aspiration to ride like Merckx or to dress like Indurain directs cycling action towards a certain kind of homogeneity in which the standards of the sport are codified.

Magazines such as *Le Miroir du Cyclisme*, *Le Cycle* or *Cyclisme International* provide information regarding new training strategies and new nutrition programmes and they evaluate the latest cycling technology. Each edition of *Cyclisme International* features a guide to "what the pros are using, where you can buy it and how much of a hole it will leave in your pocket." Here a scientific fetishism is enacted in which the professionals are personalized so as to encourage customers to wear or ride their products. Frames ridden by Stefano Colagé and Massimo Ghirotto, Cinelli handlebars- "introduced to the racing world by Claudio Chiappucci at Milan-San-Remo"- and sunglasses worn by Miguel Indurain, are all promoted as necessary acquisitions for competitive success (*Cyclisme International*, October 1994: 72). Aimed at cycling aficionados, magazines both encode and disseminate the key values of their sport. The cycling press boosts the already privileged knowledge and expertise of the aficionado. Profiles of those riders who are doing well, and collector cards which commemorate particular achievements, highlight the performances of the professionals on an enduring basis. The cycling press thus becomes an important text in the construction and maintenance of a

cycling social order, for its daily machinations are determined by the organizing agents of professional cycling.

A key site for the transmission of cycling knowledge is the bike shop. Providing far more than simply a point of purchase, they serve, in effect, as brokerage houses for the cultural styles of competitive cycling. It is only at a specialized cycle shop that one can purchase "*les articles pointu*"- items of clothing or equipment that are difficult to find in general sporting outlets like Go Sport- for they are deemed by local cyclists to be "*sophistiqué*," "*de luxe*" or "*rare*." In and around Grenoble, shops such as Cycles Routens, Cycles Pinsarello and Fiordialsi Cycles help to co-ordinate cycling activity in the region. Pasted on the walls are calendars, publicity brochures for local and international races, 'for sale...' advertisements and offers and requests for touring partners. Acting as intermediaries between Le Fédération Française de Cyclisme and riders looking to join a club, the owners of bicycle stores often serve as patrons to individual clubs, sponsoring them and offering a discount to their members. Invariably, the sponsored club is the same as that which the owner rode for in his youth. Trophies in Pinsarello Cycles, for example, recognize Roger Pinsarello as 'the most improved cyclist' of 1972 amongst Le Vélo Club de St. Martin le Vinoux, the club he now sponsors, while Henri Liberia Cycles is decorated with publicity stills and old group photographs of Le Club Cycliste d'Eybens-Gières, of which he was a member and who he now sponsors. The location of these cycle shops means that the shoppers who visit usually come by bicycle. Cycle Routens, for example, is situated on a back road at the beginning of the Vizille Loop. Directly above the store, an overpass carries, at great speed, cars travelling along the *autoroute* between Lyon and Italy. The back road location of Cycles Routens means that the cars whizzing along the *autoroute* miss the store entirely. It remains the preserve of the cycling aficionado who knows it is there.

Inside, bicycle stores are a treasure trove of cycling lore. The type of bike, the style of jersey, the brand of shoe and other such racing paraphernalia are all recommended by the owner. What is ostensibly a mundane trade outlet conceals a constellation of elite expertise. Yellowing newspaper clippings and trophies, dusted faithfully, testify to the cycling heritage of the store's owner, denoting, in effect, his right to disseminate information. While the aesthetic of local cycling could be determined by simply browsing through a store, far more revealing are the snippets of information volunteered by the owners of the cycle shops. François Fiordialsi, who owns Fiordialsi Cycles, served as a guardian of cycling knowledge. The reputation, credibility and competencies

of the various clubs and local riders could all be ascertained from a visit to Fiordialsi Cycles. What were highly subjective accounts of cycling were taken seriously, for Monsieur Fiordialsi occupied a position of respect amongst local riders. Having been in business for nearly forty years, his longevity in the trade accorded him a certain credibility amongst Isèrois cyclists.

Negotiating the cycle store depends upon and responds to a wealth of insider knowledge. With frames suspended from the ceiling, a myriad of components and clothing laid out before the customer- the prices often unmarked-, the cycle store is a bewildering Aladdin's Cave. There is little to assist the non-cyclist in differentiating a 1,000 franc bicycle from a 10,000 franc one. Yet for the cycling aficionado, the cycle store represents an important site of social finessing. It is a place at which one can demonstrate his or her knowledge regarding technical apparatus. For cyclists, there is a strict performance code to live up to, and it is through the conversations undertaken between owner and customer that this code is articulated. Indeed, the bike shop is often a place where all one does is talk: "Is this the new line?"..."How does the STI go in the hills?"..."Is this compatible with 105?"..."Can I match Record with ZAP?" By talking, one's technical expertise is given voice. Far from being simply a point of purchase, the cycle shop enforces the standards of the sport that are set by the professionals. Equipment is frequently sold because of its associations with trade teams or riders. ITM handlebars are promoted as 'the handlebars most used by professionals', a very old RMO jersey is advertised as 'on special...as worn by Claveyrolat', while particular brands of tyres and wheels are accorded the same mystical powers that propelled Indurain and Rominger to competitive success; a supreme case of equipment fetishism.

When fetishizing equipment, the bike is frequently personified. An advertisement for Cinelli handlebars informs readers that "the grip has taken on the shape of a hand" (*Le Cycle*, April 1994: 23), personification *par excellence*. The animate qualities of the bike are made apparent by Jérôme who notes that "the bike is the only vehicle whose engine can think, change its mind, show courage and feel pain." Isèrois cyclists admire animate attributes in their bike, with speed, elegance and balance being the qualities sought after. Treated as human, the bike becomes a celebrity. Indeed, it is known colloquially as "*la petite reine*." When large races such as the Tour de France pass through Isère, the bikes are frequently as much the stars as the riders. At the end of a day's stage, the riders are quickly whisked away to their hotels to shower or to take a massage, however crowds linger to watch the

mechanics clean the bicycles and load them onto the team cars. Given that each team of nine riders will have a regular and a spare bike for the road stages, a special light-weight bike for the mountain stages, a 'funny' bike¹¹ for the team and individual time trials and numerous spare wheels, there is much to focus on. Paint jobs are admired, tyre pressure is felt and fingers are run over the handlebars. The bike is as much the star as the rider who sits upon it.

Although Isèrois cyclists routinely engage in processes of equipment fetishism, the importance of these processes, like much of cycling life, is made most visible with the arrival of the Tour de France. The annual return of the Tour legitimates the local order of cycling. The technological extravagance, and extremes of attention that are paid by team mechanics to cleaning and tuning equipment, confirm the centrality of such practices to the local cycle domain. Everything that Isèrois cyclists understand about the nature of cycling is realized with the arrival of the Tour de France. What are common properties throughout the racing season are exemplified by the arrival of the Tour.

While the bikes of the professionals, like the riders themselves, are held in high regard, it is a cyclist's association with his or her own bicycle that forges a special relationship between rider and machine. For those involved, the bicycle can be seen as representative of the cyclist him or her self. In many ways, the bike becomes an extension of the self; a key means of creating and maintaining individuality in a world of unquestionably high conformity, and it is this variation of equipment fetishism that I turn to now.

The cycle domain is certainly one of uniformity, in that riders adopt the same dress, follow the same training program, ride the same roads and use the same language to signal their common appreciation of and involvement in their chosen sport. However, there is also an air of anonymity. Under their helmet and with their sunglasses on everyone looks the same. A rider could be a plumber or a company director and his or her training partners may never know. This anonymity accounts for the egalitarianism of cycling. As Isabelle notes, "that's the great thing about cycling, everyone feels equal." Given the likeness of their uniforms, cyclists necessarily look elsewhere to assert their individuality. The bicycle becomes a key text through which one articulates his or her personality. While some cyclists may purchase the same model of bicycle, the mixing of different frames, wheels and other

¹¹A 'funny' bike is a custom built bicycle in which the top tube slopes towards the front fork, improving the aerodynamics of the rider's position in the saddle.

componentry, combined with the individuality in paint jobs, and the application of personalized decals or stickers, make for a distinctiveness to one's bicycle. Despite the availability of factory produced frames, it is rare to find two bikes the same amongst Isérois cyclists. In addition to conferring status and membership within the local cycling community, bicycles assert the individuality of the owner.

This being the case, the issue of one's next bicycle purchase becomes an important topic of discussion, for what one rides says something about who one is. Bikes create an identifiable individual; in cycling circles, a rider is frequently identified by the bike that he or she rides, as the following exchange between Christophe and Natalie demonstrates:

Christophe: "Do you know Jean-Claude?"

Natalie: "No I don't think so."

Christophe: "He rides the De Rosa."

Natalie: "Oh yeah, I know who you mean."

The bicycle marks out identity, both in the everyday sense of recognition, and in the deeper sense of who one is. Certain brands of bicycle are associated with certain types of personality, and a rider is seen to take on the qualities associated with the bicycle. De Rosa and Colnago cycles, for example, are seen to be *marques* of great class, the brands Look and Time are associated with technological innovation, while Gitane bicycles signify tradition. The equipment loyalties of a cyclist reflect his or her personality. Franck, who rides a De Rosa, is locally revered as a cyclist possessing extreme *élan*, while Jean-Marie, who rides a Gitane, is seen as being a stickler for the traditions of cycling. Indeed, he still wears woollen jerseys, while his training partners have progressed to the space-age fabrics of lycra, Cool Max and Du Pont. The notion of integrating with the body for long periods of solitary training further enhances the idea that the bike is tailored to suit the personality of a cyclist, and conversely, that the personality is tailored to suit the bicycle.

When discussing the identity conferring properties of a bicycle, the idea of craftsmanship is important, for custom made or hand built cycles help to create individuality amongst cyclists. The personal attention that is paid to design detail identifies the personality, not only of the frame builder, but also of the cyclist who rides his handiwork. Master craftsmen are artisans in Bourdieu's (1986) terms; a unique class of cultural producers whose skills are highly valued and sought after. The scarcity of frames produced at their factories contributes to the popularity of a hand built cycle, for mass produced

frames belie the mythology of the master craftsman. As a result, the marking of a bicycle by a frame builder is requested at considerable expense, with handle bars, head stems, seat posts and chain wheels being the most common points for engraving the name of an artisan. Nonetheless, it is the rider, not the craftsman, whose identity becomes associated with the bike. Mass produced frames are shunned by local cyclists: in the quest to escape the conformity of their sport, they look to the rare breeds of bicycle produced by master craftsmen such as Ernesto Colnago or Jean Routens to assert their personality. This idea of the individual in the cycling society is picked up the frame builder Jean Routens, who remarks that "in ten and a half years of [frame] building, I have never built two identical frames, because I have never met two identical people." While considerably more expensive, and a rider may have to wait more than a year to receive his custom built steed, it is the twin notions of individuality and rarity invoked by hand built frames which set the owner apart from his co-riders.

The aesthetic of cycling

Having addressed the importance of bicycles to cycling, it is now necessary to consider the centrality of the body. The hours spent endlessly turning pedals produce a body type that is distinctive to the competitive cyclist. The physical appearance of a cyclist is a hugely crafted, constantly sculpted one which embodies one's commitment to the sport.

While there is some difference between the body type of a sprinter and a climber, overwhelmingly, competitive cyclists are whippet thin, with big strong hearts, lean powerful frames and, of course, finely muscled legs.¹² Isèrois cycling aficionados are majestically fit, with unusually drawn faces, their lantern jaws accentuated by the tan marks left on their cheek bones by their ever present sunglasses. An important element when considering the aesthetic of cycling is the maintenance of a precariously low body weight. While the average trained cyclist has between twelve per cent and twenty per cent body fat, Leontien Van Moorsel, perhaps the best woman racing during my fieldwork, has only six per cent body fat, while Allan Peiper, a former Australian professional, began the Tour de France in 1992 with only five percent body fat. By the time he finished racing three weeks later, he had lost so much more weight that he could see the veins in his stomach.

¹²The universality of the cycling body type is at odds with Bourdieu's (1986: 207) assertion that bodily properties are reflective of social standing. While the particular body type of a cyclist is indicative of his 'class' as a cyclist, 'class' is seen in terms of a stylistic or aesthetic sense, rather than an economic one.

This awareness of the need to stay light and lean is articulated by local cyclists. One enthusiast recognizes that "it's a skinny man's sport," an observation that was confirmed when I returned from the field. After fourteen months of riding and racing in Isère, my family and friends commented on how gaunt I looked. While the emaciated appearance of cycle racers is of concern to non-cyclists, to race well, cyclists must be exceptionally thin and this is recognized by local riders. For Isérois cyclists, the need to maintain a low body weight is a shared experience that is profoundly influential in socializing cycling neophytes into the culture of their sport.

The act of climbing particularly, demands that a rider stays as light and lean as possible, so the upper *échelons* of the Isérois cycling community share an almost anorexic fear of gaining weight. Despite the huge intakes of food that are needed to race for up to eight hours a day, the rigours of the sport are such that a rider will still lose weight.¹³ Nonetheless, cyclists express acute concern at gaining weight and thus slowing up. For the serious cyclist, all five food groups must be represented at every meal and the number of calories or grams or fat in each serve are noted with discernment. Cyclists do not talk of eating, they talk of feeding. For competitive cyclists, food is not a pleasure, it is simply fuel for the machine that is their body. Before a race or a ride, food is obsessively discussed and debated- this power bar, that power cake, this power drink-, while dangerously high levels of 'Slim Fast' and the like are consumed to purge the cyclist of any excess weight. In a sport where much of a participant's ability or credibility is determined before he or she even pedals a stroke, meeting the physical requirements frequently demands extremes of action for those who are not innately suited to cycling.¹⁴

The featherweight appearance of cyclists is acknowledged by local riders. As Patrice comments, "the day will come when I will put rocks in my pockets because I am too light to stay on the road." While maintaining a low body

¹³A cyclist may consume between four and six thousand calories over eight hours of racing. Fastidious about food, cyclists often forego the pleasures of taste for athletic correctness. A cyclist's diet is built around storing carbohydrates for use during competition and training. Fruits and vegetables are the prime sources of vitamins, minerals and fibres. Pasta, rice and lean meat supply the carbohydrates and the proteins which are necessary for building muscle.

¹⁴There is a certain eccentricity to the diet of cyclists. According to local commentary, one rider, Jean-Guy, who rode in the 1940s and is now deceased, was known for training for ten hours at a time while drinking no water and eating nothing but salted fish in the belief that this dehydration diet would prepare him best for the hot summer races. By conventional wisdom, such dietary practices are deemed downright dangerous. But the singular focus on improving and conditioning the body against the rigours of cycle racing endures throughout the decades.

weight is important to the aesthetic of competitive cycling, weight loss can have perilous physical side effects. Cyclists become tired and irritable, and they lose the enthusiasm that attracted them to the sport in the first place. More seriously, female cyclists suffer amenorrhoea (cessation of menstrual periods) when their body weight falls below a certain, critical level. One rider had her first period in five years after she quit training at the end of the 1993 season. When cyclists of both sexes 'hang up their wheels' over winter- or more permanently- they have a tendency to gain weight. It is part of the body's survival mechanism to want to regain the healthy covering of body fat that the demands of continual cycling strips off.

While the gaunt appearance of a cyclist embodies his or her degree of commitment, it is his or her legs that are focused upon most: it is legs that best transmit the aesthetic of the sport. Whereas pianists care for their fingers and baseball pitchers nurture their arms, cyclists publicly worship their legs. Shaved and sculpted, the legs of a bike rider are cycling hallmarks in their own right. Certainly, the rest of the body is important in cycling, however it is the legs that are itemized and isolated from the rest of the physiological package by cyclists in ways that are peculiar to their culture. A rider's legs carry him or her over mountains when the mind and the heart have long since abandoned the cause. A cyclist's legs, made solid by miles of riding and racing, supply tangible evidence of his or her cycling progress and prowess.

The yearning by cyclists for an enviable set of legs is seized upon by the specialist press in their treatment of the sport's culture. Cycling magazines feature articles entitled 'Cycling's best legs- you can grow some too' or 'Awesome legs- ever wondered what weight training might do for you?' One edition of *Cyclisme International* featured a pictorial spread. On one side of the page, a photograph of a pair of skinny, white, hairy legs was accompanied by a caption which read: "the petty pedestrian." On the other side of the page, there was a series of photographs highlighting a range of cycling legs. The accompanying text read: "powerful pistons! Sharp legs! Gigantic legs! Legs as hard as steel! For the perfect cyclist, the legs are a superior connecting rod" (June 1994: 8-9). A range of expressions circulate amongst local cyclists which denote the spectrum of cycling legs. *Les rouleurs* (all rounders) have "*jambes comme des lapins*"- legs like rabbits-, *les sprinteurs* (sprinters) have "*briseurs des chaînes*"- chain breakers-, and *les grimpeurs* (climbers) have "*cannes de serin*"- canary legs. Each expression reflects the difference in musculature between certain types of cyclists: the legs of an all rounder are sinuous, those

of a sprinter are bulky, while the skinny legs of a climber belie his or her immense physical strength.

The shaving of the legs is a key means of initiation into the world of the competitive cycle racer; it marks the transition from casual to committed cyclist. While some cyclists shave habitually, others only shave the day of a race. As Eric confesses, "it probably doesn't do anything, but it makes me *feel* faster." A veritable *rite de passage*, shaving offers no physical or aerodynamic advantage, other than facilitating the healing of cuts and scrapes and making a post-ride massage easier to administer. But shaving serves an important social function. It represents the most obvious step towards acknowledging the aesthetic of cycling. While the financial outlay involved in buying a bicycle and associated *accoutrements* is the first major step towards becoming a bike rider, shaving the legs clearly indicates commitment to a culture of cycling and its accompanying rituals, rules and regard for tradition.

Noticeably increasing muscle definition, the shaving of the legs by a cyclist functions as a key index of commitment and competence. A set of well muscled and 'polished' legs- "*les jambes raffinées*", to use the local expression- signals to other riders that the owner is not only committed to the training and discipline that their sport demands, but is willing to flaunt it. Legs represent a critical measure of ability. The greater the muscle definition, the better the cyclist is believed to be. One particularly well endowed cyclist bemoans, "when I go to races, everybody thinks I'm better than I am." Ability and longevity in the sport are written, literally, on the body. When I asked one rider how long another had been riding for, he replied, "thirty years, you can tell by his legs." A set of shaved legs telegraphs to one's cycling companions that the owner has crossed the line from being an occasional bike rider to being a lean, mean cycling machine. Put simply, legs measure ability.

As the *peloton* assembles at the beginning of a race, much scrutinizing and comparison of cycling legs takes place. There is constant monitoring and evaluation, as fellow cyclists gauge their competition by the musculature of their opponents' legs. Having developed an enviable set of legs, local cyclists are eager to show off their prized acquisitions. If, on a training ride, should a group pass a particularly impressive rider going the other way, the riding group will turn their heads in unison to admire the passing rider's attributes. The endless practices of surveying and scrutinizing that characterize the local cycle domain guarantee that cyclists are always on the look out, in a sense, for an enviable pair of legs to savour and scrutinize.

On the road, ubiquitous light coloured ankle socks comprise standard cycling uniform, for their cut most dramatically highlights the musculature in a rider's legs. Off the bike, cyclists rarely wear long pants, preferring instead to pose and parade their marks of cycling. In winter however, legs cease to carry status: cyclists dissolve back into the anonymity of the non-cycling world. Forced to wear long pants and long sleeves, there is little to distinguish the cyclist from the non-cyclist any more. Their tans fade, they gain weight, and their talk now concerns the long period of enforced hibernation. In the words of Franco, "*putain la neige!*"

While the long hours spent turning pedals sculpt a cyclist's legs into objects of envy and admiration, there are a range of other identifying features that similarly define a cyclist. The razor sharp marks etched onto a cyclist's arms and legs by the sun serve as explicit proof of engagement in the sport. The outline of a jersey and riding shorts, along with the distinctive glove marks left on the hands of a rider- a brown imprint the size of a ten cent piece- testify to a rider's commitment. Again, the centrality of equipment to encoding the aesthetic of cycling cannot be overstated. To develop their particular tan line, riders must spend a sustained period of time pedalling under the hot sun. Far from being purely aesthetic, the scarring and sculpting of cycling serve important functions of social finessing. The greater the definition in a cyclist's legs or the deeper the tan line, the greater his or her ability as a cyclist is believed to be.

Cyclists are marked men and women and this is endlessly paraded. Scars, scrapes and broken bones are marks that provide confirmation of a bike rider's commitment to the sport. This codifying of engagement however, can only be done through training. The sheer amount of time that a rider spends in the saddle guarantees that he or she will inevitably crash and, when this happens, cuts and bruises will be sustained. Although fatalities are few, crashes are everyday occurrences in cycling: riders are thus resigned to their inevitability. As Anne reflects, "like a horse rider who has been thrown from his horse, the trick is to get going right away, not to brood about it." Cyclists talk of injuries in the matter of fact way that footballers refer to knocks and groin strains. Riders battle on with luridly exposed bruises, abrasions, hidden abscesses and saddle sores so severe that many resort to carving a niche in their saddle to relieve the pressure.

Marking the body in particular ways is an important means of legitimating

entry into the social order of competitive cycling. Isérois cyclists are thus remarkably extroverted when it comes to demonstrating their cycling heritage. Riders love showing their scabs and scars and they relate, in intricate detail, the drama of the crash that caused the scar. Cycling injuries represent a key form of social differentiation in that scars and scabs show the lineage of a cyclist. I have chipped teeth, scars on my knees and elbows, and one shoulder sits half an inch higher than the other, the cumulative result of three broken collar bones; testimony to my cycling heritage. Other riders have grotesque scars that run from their hair line to their lip, missing fingers and disfiguring limbs, the results of injuries sustained during competition. As Laurent remembers, "since I've been cycling, I have had concussion, crushed vertebrae, head injuries, a broken collar bone, broken ribs and a broken leg." Such injuries are "*insignes de l'honneur*"- badges of honour- that are worn with pride, for the greater the injuries, the greater the cyclist is believed to be. There is an informal hierarchy along which Isérois cyclists rank their scars and scrapes. As one local rider distinguishes, "you only count the crashes where you lose skin. If you don't have any scars, you haven't crashed." What is left unsaid is that if you haven't crashed, you haven't cycled properly, for to achieve competitive success, one must ride in situations of danger and adversity which increase the likelihood of crashing.

While cycling involves constant injury, the breaking of a collar bone is a 'classic' *rite de passage*. Unlike other rites or forms of ritual, the breaking of a collar bone is not something that can be planned. It is not something that is anticipated. It is not something that can be prepared for. Invariably, it is a modest incident that sees a rider break his or her collar bone. A rider suffers a tyre blow out or hits a pebble on the road and he or she falls forward. The natural defence mechanism is to instinctively throw one's arms in front to protect the head and body. The resulting force snaps a collar bone and confirms the rider's standing as a cyclist. At local races and informal club meets around Grenoble, the cyclist standing roadside, his or her arm in a sling or strapped against his or her chest, is greeted with sympathy and concern: "how long are you out for?"..."Will you be back for La Marmotte?" Far from being a mere observer, the sidelined rider remains a central fixture in cycling circles. At post-ride social functions the injured rider is included in conversations. He or she is asked for opinions regarding the race: "How did I look?..." "Did you think I went out too hard?" While physical consequences are part and parcel of most competitive sports, as athletes constantly abuse and injure their bodies through over training, attempting high risk skills and endangering their lives by drug misuse and diet manipulation, for cyclists,

the scars that frequent injury brings become particularly powerful indices of their commitment to and engagement in their sport at a competitive level.

A culture of narcissism¹⁵

The cycle domain is unquestionably narcissistic, as cyclists savour both their own and the physiques of their training companions. In talking of narcissism however, I adopt a very particular definitional stance. Here, I follow Maffesoli argument that narcissism is

generally taken to be an error to the extent that it means a narrowing of and retreat into the individual's world. It may, on the contrary, be quite legitimate to envisage a *collective narcissism*, if one understands by this the fact of producing and living a specific mythology. Such collective narcissism, which certainly affects the individual, emphasizes the aesthetic, because what it involves is a particular style, a particular mode of life, of ideology, of dress, of sexual manners, in short, everything pertaining to the order of collective passion (1991: 16, italics in original).

For local cyclists, their entire world is ordered by a collective narcissism in which they routinely gaze upon and devour the cultural aesthetic as embodied in the physiques of their co-riders.

Amongst cyclists, the gaze is ubiquitous: there is constant checking out and being checked out, as the gaze moves back and forth between cyclists. When meeting a new rider, a waiting game of sorts is played, in which a rider surveys his or her new companion. Initially the riders acknowledge each other with the standard *bonjour*, after which each subtly increases his or her speed to see if the other can match it. This gambit is known amongst cyclists as "*faire une partie de manivelles*,"¹⁶ during which time each regards the other's position on the bike, the bike itself, their shorts, their jerseys and, over and above all else, the musculature of their new associate's legs. If, after this gaze has been cast over them and each meets with the other's approval, one will then turn and ask the other "*vous allez où?*" Thus, the gaze becomes a critical means of taking one's measure. Like any newcomer, on entering the field, I was subjected to surveillance and scrutiny. My riding companions examined my legs and my physique; they subjected me to their gaze, looking for imperfections or deviations from the expected aesthetic of cycling.

Such encounters are reminiscent of Goffman's description of 'unfocussed interaction,' in which "two strangers across the room from each other check

¹⁵I borrow the title from an apposite book by Christopher Lasch (1979).

¹⁶The closest English translation would be 'crank it up' which refers to the situation in which a rider meets another on the road and each tries to drop the other by increasing the pace.

up on each other's clothing, posture and general manner, while each modifies his own demeanour because he himself is under observation" (1961: 7). Cyclists seek confirmation of their own abilities in the performance of their new riding companion. As Featherstone notes, "a mirroring body constitutes its objectives in its own self-reflection" (1991: 61). The gaze then, becomes a cultural barometer by which ability can rapidly be gauged: the gaze shortcircuits the need to verbalize encounters. Evaluating the quality of the bike, the competence of the rider, the shape of his or her legs, all of this is predicated on a knowledge and awareness of what is needed to be a cyclist. The gaze speaks a thousand words. It presents a condensed version of a large discourse in which physiology and technology are equally valued. For local riders, the physicality of their sport becomes total and comprehensive as they seek to know every inch of their bodies and those of others.

I have privileged the gaze so as to draw attention to the rapidity with which insiders are separated from outsiders. But there is a wide range of other inclusionary and exclusionary practices which cyclists apply when determining the limits of knowledge and expertise. Most notably, the public evaluation by cyclists of their physical form frames images of the body in very different cultural terms to those articulated by non-cyclists. Whereas a non-cyclist may worry about his middle age spread or her sagging breasts, overwhelmingly, these expressions of concern for the condition of the body are done in the privacy of the owner's bathroom or bedroom. While Maffesoli maintains that "even in its most private aspects, the body is being constructed only in order to be seen" (1991: 19), the actual processes that shape the body into a state at which it can be seen are done in isolation, in privacy and sometimes even in stealth.

For cyclists however, there is a very public sociability to body maintenance. In gazing at other cycling bodies, the aesthetic of the sport is transmitted. In displaying cycling bodies, riders receive confirmation of their own image from their training companions. Riding partners are quick to acknowledge physical improvements: "You're looking really good. You can see the separate muscles in your calves." Or: "Are you losing weight? You look thinner?" Cyclists are equally self-reflexive and self-congratulatory about their own bodies. As Eric reflects, "I love it after a big ride and my legs bulge against my jeans." There is much visual pleasure in the cycling gaze. For cyclists, there is an endless reproduction of self-image or images of the self. As Featherstone notes, "bodies seek to mirror images that they have already internalized"

(1991: 68).

In displaying their own bodies, cyclists highlight the 'fetishizing character of narcissism' (Jacoby 1980), wherein the person projects self-images onto commodities and others as objects of mirroring the self. Indeed, the skin-tight lycra suits and smooth shaved legs accentuate the form and contours of the cycling body. Such open exhibitionism is important within Isèrois cycling circles. Informal competitions erupt to determine whose legs are the brownest, the most scarred and the most muscular. The numerous club social functions that fill the cycling season provide the location for many of these impromptu competitions. Male cyclists will, at the (frequently drunken) insistence of their club mates, eagerly strip to their underwear to display their prized possessions. After much wolf whistling and cat calling, the group that invariably gathers around these *poseurs* decides who has the best legs. For cyclists, the athletic becomes the aesthetic, and this formulation is enacted by local racers as they engage in processes of self-surveillance. Whether riding past their reflections in shop windows or spectating at the major professional races that pass through Isère, much attention is paid to scrutinizing the bodies that are on display. Cyclists become *flâneurs* supreme, 'browsing' through a range of exhibited bodies. The performance of cycling proffers a legitimate space in which a knowledgeable spectatorship can watch, dissect and devour fellow cycling physiques.

While the Tour de France must seem a distance indeed from Isère, its annual return makes the aesthetic of cycling highly visible. The Tour highlights an exceptional relationship between exceptional athletes and their exceptional machinery. It routinely presents the aesthetic of cycling for local aficionados to consume. As it moves around France, the Tour engages an ever changing audience who savour and scrutinize the bodies of the professionals. In gazing at these bodies, in admiring their position in the saddle, their physiques and the musculature in their legs, local cyclists have the narcissism of their world confirmed. Everything that Isèrois cyclists understand about the nature of their sport is realized with the arrival of the Tour de France. It is a cumulative symbolic drama that consolidates local assumptions about cycling.

Within Isèrois cycling circles, the social body of professionals is always seen in terms of their physical bodies. The capacities of the professionals are constantly monitored: who has got the lowest heart rate, the highest anabolic threshold or the greatest VO₂ capacity are subjects endlessly debated by cyclists. Such knowledge of the riders' vital statistics represents a proprietorial control over

the cycle domain. The professional riders are 'known' statistically by the age, height and weight of their bodies. The physiology of the professionals represents a gauge by which amateurs can measure their own abilities and limits. Fitness levels are always compared to those of the professionals: "My resting pulse is only ten beats more than Indurain's"..."My VO2 maximum is the same as Anquetil's"...or, "my body fat is only three per cent higher than Pensec's." While the attributes of the professionals are a physical yardstick to which amateurs aspire, the injuries sustained by Isèrois cyclists are equally compared to those experienced by the professionals. The misfortunes of the professionals become the referents for the battle scars of Isèrois riders. A serious case of 'road rash' was sustained in "exactly the same way as the TVM rider in 1982"; an inexplicable case of lethargy is attributed to being "the same thing that kept LeMond out this year", and there is a local rider with a bad back "just like Roche's." The marks of cycling particularly, carry great anecdotal weight. One account in particular circulates amongst Isèrois cyclists. Involving a Belgian rider named Leon Scieur, he was forced to complete a stage of the 1921 Tour carrying a spare wheel across his back. When Scieur finished victorious, he was left with the outline of the gear cluster permanently indented in his back. These marks became his battle scars and he would not hesitate to lift his shirt to exhibit, "this is where I won *le maillot jaune*."

While the Tour de France is certainly testament to the importance that physical conditioning and body maintenance play in continuing competitive success, for the average Isèrois cyclist, these physiological capabilities are tantalizingly out of reach. Despite every effort made to reach cycling excellence through diet, training and commitment, achieving the level of physical superiority possessed by the professionals is finally unattainable. There is a constant tension between training to reach cycling perfection and knowing you will never reach it. The processes of body maintenance are, in Foucault's terms, 'technologies of the self'; a set of systematic techniques which society makes available- or requires- for the self to discipline itself into a higher form of being.

L'auto-façonnage¹⁷

Amongst members of fully postmodern societies such as France, sensuality and self-worship are taken as self evident. The narcissism of cycling however, differs in one fundamental way to other notions of self-image: the processes of body maintenance that are routinely engaged in by cyclists are necessary for asserting the distinctiveness of their social order in contrast to those of others.

¹⁷Self-fashioning.

While consumer culture encourages the unashamed display of the body, achieving 'the look' is a hard slog that is frequently overlooked when considering the importance of the body to complex western societies. As Featherstone notes, "images of the body beautiful are openly sexual and associated with hedonism, leisure and display, they emphasize the importance of appearance and the look" (1982: 18). While consumer culture permits the open display of the body, it does not, as a rule, permit the public *maintenance* of the body. Whereas sapling-slender female bodies are revered in postmodern living, the processes of maintenance that go into achieving culturally perfect form- laxatives, amphetamines and purging- are met with distaste and displeasure. The body as product is separated from those practices of drug misuse and diet manipulation that sculpt the body into a desirable shape. We are uncomfortable with (some of) the means to the end.

Cyclists, by contrast, actively situate themselves firmly in the processes of maintenance. Achieving '*le look du cyclisme*' is done by obsessively tuning and conditioning the body. The processes that fuel the narcissism of the sport are consciously and conspicuously articulated as central to cycling lives. As soft muscle grows hard, and pale skin becomes bronzed from hours of pedalling under the hot sun, the cyclist takes on a body type that signals his or her commitment to cycle racing. The appearance of the cycling body confirms the extent of the owner's engagement in the sport. Indeed, for every neophyte who pursues the sport to its highest level, there are several who fail to make the grade. Both the entry into and the exit from the cycling culture are marked by the same phrase; "*rouler comme un avion*." Cyclists who rapidly take on the aesthetic of the sport, and those who fall short of the mark and never return to training and racing, are both said to 'go at great speed.' To endorse the physical appearance that denotes entry into the highly ordered social space of cycling is to provide confirmation of one's commitment to the sport's culture. Discipline and hedonism are completely compatible in cycling. Bike riders constantly concern themselves with 'the look' of cycling. It is, after all, how they measure and legitimate their commitment to the sport.

Calculating effort is a delicate calibration that demands a certain intuitive feel for the condition of the body. As Christophe, a former amateur champion of France, explains:

the good riders know their fuel reserves. It's like driving a car- some riders have bigger tanks, some read their gauges better, some drive better. Riding is all about trying to save as much energy as you can for the finish. As you know, races are won in

the last inch. Good riders like Frédéric or Patrice use every one else up and they come through at the finish to win. I always listen to my body. You have to. Except for when you're climbing, you are doing something that is aerobic for five and a half hours; you use oxygen as your main energy source. Then, with maybe one kilometre to go, you swap energy systems and you use glucose or glycogen. That last part is anaerobic and if you are tired from chasing all day or from going out alone, you won't make it.

To non-cyclists, *l'auto-façonnage*- the concern with monitoring one's physical condition- must seem pedantic. Because we can all cycle, it is perhaps difficult to understand what makes a person constantly mould or shape his or her body for optimal performance, and it is even more difficult to understand what makes someone so outstandingly good at it.

For insiders however, these considerations lie at the core of cycling identity. They represent the fine detail upon which commitment and belonging to the obsessive milieu of competitive cycling can be determined. To underestimate this attention to detail is to misread the nature of competitive cycling, for it is only from the 'native's point of view' that the importance of physiology to shaping and regulating the social order of cycling becomes apparent. The subjective interpretations that the participant's perspective allows positions the obsessive quality of cycling in very different cultural terms from other sports.

Indeed, methods of maintaining cycling bodies represent critical discursive elements in the construction of a distinctive social order. The processes of care and maintenance that go into cycling are focused on as in no other context. Cyclists routinely engage in processes of *l'auto-façonnage* that are peculiar to their sport. They constantly tinker with their bodies in ways that mirror how they tinker with their bikes.¹⁸ Like a bike, a body requires routine care and tuning to reach and then sustain optimal efficiency. The social acquisition of knowledge pertaining to physical performance leads Isérois cyclists to claim that they have an intuitive awareness of their physical condition. Lydie notes, "I go by what my body tells me to do. I know when I'm racing well because it feels good." This instinctive feel for the condition of their body comes from cyclists having to gauge energy levels and modulate individual effort to avoid running out of energy.

Christophe's earlier comments point to the fine line that exists between expending maximum energy and pushing too far. Although a committed

¹⁸Drug taking is perhaps the most infamous example of such processes of body tampering in professional cycling. Such concerns however are a product of external media hype that focuses solely on the professional cycling milieu. The infrequency with which it occurs at the amateur level- indeed, it is conspicuous by its absence- renders a discussion of drug taking beyond the bounds of my ethnographic inquiry.

cyclist may ride between two hundred and six hundred kilometres each week to acclimatize his or her body to the demands of cycling, the fragility of the human form is such that, despite the hours spent training, suffering is frequently unavoidable. The meticulous approaches of cyclists to training and feeding are designed to avoid the ominous arrival of "*la fringale*" or 'the bonk'.¹⁹ In cycling parlance, 'bonking' refers to a cyclist suffering massive glycogen depletion through over exertion. It is the cyclist's equivalent of 'hitting the wall' or, more simply, running out of petrol. Symptoms of 'the bonk' include headaches, dizziness, shaking, delirium, confusion and the inability to pedal another inch. The obsessive attention paid to training is intended to avoid such debilitating consequences of rigorous cycling. Talk of "*la fringale*" has much mileage in local cycling circles. When talking of "*l'homme au marteau*"- the man with the hammer- as 'bonking' is also known, riders speak of hallucinations, of 'white line fever', of "*balayer la route*"- weaving from side to side- and of being incapable of cycling. Pascal recalls stopping twenty times between Gières and Grenoble [a distance of about seven kilometres] "because I was so tired I could not see the road in front of me," while Dominique remembers the final climb to the Collet d'Allevard in the gruelling Challenge du Dauphiné-Libéré of 1994:

I was riding and crying and the guy in front of me was wobbling all over the road and fell off into the gutter. He was swerving like a drunken man, even as the doctor's car drew up alongside and ordered him to stop.

The true insider's view of cycling is to see it as a precarious balance between self-discipline and self-torture. As Lydie notes, "what is great about cycling is the respect it teaches me for my body. The body feeds the brain, that's why I love the sport."

Coda

Having consistently argued that the co-existence of bikes and bodies is the bedrock of the cycling world, it is perhaps paradoxical to finally propose that the mutuality of bodies and bikes is, in fact, quite a precarious balance. Certainly, riders place a huge investment in equipment, however one can only attribute success or failure within pre-existing boundaries, and finally, these boundaries are imposed by the limits of the body. Despite lengthy rhetoric to the contrary, equipment does not make a significant difference to competitive success. Attitude, motivation and mind set are more important to the performance of a cyclist. Physical conditioning and tactical acumen

¹⁹'Bonking' is also known as "*prendre un coup de buis*," "*prendre un coup de latte*," "*prendre un coup de barre*," and "*prendre un coupe de pompe*."

have more to do with competitive success than an expensive bicycle. Equipment merely confirms commitment; it provides the vehicle through which honoured human qualities such as tenacity and determination can be displayed.

While equipment is important conversationally, it still awaits the test of use. To own equipment for which one has no functional knowledge or appreciation is to violate the culture of cycling. For more experienced cyclists, talk of equipment has a symbolic importance, whereas for novices, they have a tendency to take its significance to heart. Within local cycling circles, two maxims circulate that underline the subtle privileging of the body over the bike: 'He may have it in the wallet, but he doesn't have it in the legs', and 'a good rider can win on any bike'. As local accounts testify to, many an incipient superstar has emerged from obscurity to claim his first victory on a bicycle with "*chauffage central*". It is the superiority of the rider's physical qualities and capacities that count over and above any expensive hardware he or she may command. Ultimately technology is the servant to humanity.

The privileging of the body over the bike suggests that processes of body maintenance serve other than simply aesthetic functions. Cycling is undeniably a demanding sport that effects profound physical and social consequences. Subjecting oneself to the rigours of cycling at the highest level generates a discourse of suffering which is both reflective and shaping of many of the sport's symbolic resources. The Isérois cycling world is sustained by opposing forces between, on the one hand, controlling suffering through controlling the body and, on the other, needing it to mark the exclusivity of their world. In competitive cycling, there is a constant tension between sublimity and suffering, as riders condition themselves against the prolonged rigours of their sport. Fully aware of this tension, Isérois cyclists share particular narratives that both recognize and respect the precarious balance between maintenance and masochism. Intensely satisfying, competitive cycling is rarely fun. The sustained immersion in a world of constant suffering produces a particular compulsion that manifests itself in a cyclist's ability to endure agony. The capacity to withstand phenomenal amounts of pain represents a key means of conferring status within the local cycling community. There is a sociality to suffering, and the following chapter is concerned to address the social dimensions of suffering which provide key narrative and performative resources for understanding the culture of cycling.

CHAPTER FOUR OF MYTHS AND MEN

“Qui n’a pas une fois désespéré de l’honneur, ne sera jamais un héros.”
Georges Bernanos

Introduction

While the previous chapter paid considerable attention to the role of training, to processes of body maintenance and to the centrality of technology as key means by which a particular aesthetic of cycling is embodied, it is important to recognize that such behaviours simultaneously emphasize the ability to suffer. Although cyclists routinely engage in processes of body maintenance to avoid reaching the often painful consequences of their sport, the fragility of the human form is such that suffering is unavoidable. Having examined the physicality of cycling, this chapter details the various ways in which suffering is thought and talked about. For Isérois cyclists, the ability to endure phenomenal amounts of pain is a critical means of marking commitment to the culture of their sport. Agony, hardship, suffering and adversity contribute to a bundle of narratives that are routinely articulated as participants negotiate the interpretive space between narcissism and masochism.

More importantly, the sociality of suffering systematizes a set of expressions by which the Tour de France is mythologized and fetishized. It is the aim of this chapter to detail the elements of this myth as they are elaborated by Isérois cyclists, for it is through their creation of a myth of the Tour de France that local riders legitimate its status as *“l’épreuve cyclisme la plus belle du monde.”* Such suggestions of social agency on the part of Isérois cyclists are deliberate: the Tour de France is the product of various forces and influences, from local narratives to global media coverage, and it is worked upon in a variety of ways to produce a variety of meanings for a variety of consumers. Here, I address the meanings that suffering can take, and the roles that these then play in granting a larger than life quality to the Tour de France. In mythologizing the Tour, Isérois cyclists accord it a range of extraordinary cultural privileges that, in turn, fashion their own myth of the Tour de

France.

In elaborating the myth of the Tour de France, I do not propose to adopt the method of systematically unpacking individual myths to reproduce certain key structures favoured by Lévi-Strauss: rather, following Fabre (1991), Giradet (1986) and Durand and Vierre (1987), I intend to highlight particular themes which recur in ways that imbue the Tour de France with its mythical qualities. Following this, I will indicate what these themes suggest about the interpretive community from which they emerge. Paradoxically, it is Lévi-Strauss's own characterization of 'irradiation' that has particular relevance when elaborating the themes that bring to life the Tour de France. As he writes,

the divergence of sequences and themes is a fundamental characteristic of a mythological thought which manifests itself as an irradiation...this multiplicity is an essential characteristic, since it is connected with the dual nature of mythological thought...the constant recurrence of the same themes (Lévi-Strauss 1969: 5-6).

While the myth of the Tour de France is inherently polysemic; the product of diverging sequences and themes, its defining feature is that its repeated engagement of the theme of suffering strikes a chord with a range of cyclists scattered throughout Isère.

Sites of communal recollection

Given the range of cyclists riding throughout Isère, opportunities must be made which enable them to make sense of their diverse cycling experiences, for they are frequently profound, warranting discussion and reflection. As Shokeid asks "how does a human being lend meaning to experiences that touch him or her very deeply, but yet are not encapsulated in an experientially standardized pattern" (1994: 234)? For Isérois cyclists, what lends meaning to their experiences of riding a bicycle is their shared appreciation of and involvement in the making of the myth of the Tour de France. Indeed, myth is the perfect vehicle for unifying and binding a complexly connected and ever moving social world, for irrespective of the cultural contexts in which they occur, myths are successful at binding communities that are not spatially specific.

As I noted in the previous chapter, cycling is a sport in which conversation is important. Cyclists talk at bike races, in bike shops, at club social functions, on training rides and when competing in local races, all of which provide the opportunity to share particular presentations of their sport. These situations

offer a range of contexts in which cyclists can verbalize an enormous repertoire of anecdote, idiom, saga and narrative concerning, not only the local milieu, but also the Tour de France. While the verbal transmission of cycling lore takes many forms and occurs in many encounters, it is when cyclists meet up in bars and cafés that the oral tradition of their sport becomes most striking. Bike shops, club rooms and training routes provide the context within which to talk about bikes and bodies, however, there is another side to cycling talk which requires an altogether different setting. Cyclists need sites at which to bring together the stream of sagas, reminiscences and recollections that characterize their sport. The bars and cafés at which they frequently conclude a ride provide important sites of mythic elaboration, for as Douglas notes, "public memory is the storage system for the social order" (1987: 70). It is the concern of this chapter to itemize and amplify those dimensions of the cycling narrative which unfold at these places of communal recollection.

The café generally is an important feature of French life, with Hemingway and Sartre, amongst others, becoming emblematic of a particular cultural tradition: as Haferkamp notes, "the café has long been seen as a centre of the development of knowledge" (1989: 43). Grenoble particularly and Isère more generally have more than their fair share of cafés and bars. In Grenoble, Place Grenette has cafés stretching along its middle and a variety of international fast food outlets ringing its periphery. In the more residential *banlieux* of Grenoble, an eclectic mix of bars and cafés can be found. L'Entrepôt, a cavernous place in the suburb of Fontaine, is a popular dance venue that features a variety of local bands covering Motown tracks in English, while The Taxi Bar, also in Fontaine, is a tiny, hole in the wall of a bar. Run by two Senegalese brothers, the bar features North African music and food. The house specialty is a lethal punch made from proof rum and lime and little else.

I was introduced to L'Entrepôt and The Taxi Bar by non-cycling friends, and both establishments served the usual functions of entertainment venues—music, alcohol and the chance to meet the opposite sex. Cafés frequented by cyclists however, take on qualitatively different functions. They provide points of contact for a disparate network of social actors. Various training coalitions can meet and overlap in the recognized cycling haunts that are dotted throughout Isère. The diversity and nomadicism of bike riding demand locations that give a point of commonality to the multiplicity of the cycle world. The café constitutes precisely such a site for elaborating the sagas

of cycling which universally bind their narrators across multiple sites of experience.

Grenoble's network of one-way streets means that some bars and cafés are easier to access than others, and these become the domains of cyclists. In Grenoble proper, the Palais de Justice, an open square ringed by cafés, and the Latin Quartier, a bar on Boulevard Jean Jaurés, are popular cycling haunts. At the Palais de Justice, cyclists often drink at La Table Ronde, reportedly the second oldest bar in France, or they would simply buy a beer or a fruit juice and then sit on the statue in the centre of the square. Out on the roads, the Bar aux Alpes at Bourg d'Oisans, L'Etape in Vizille and the Auberge du Soleil and Etoile de la Neige at Alpe d'Huez are those bars and cafés readily identifiable as cycling haunts. The walls of these establishments are lined with faded news clippings of local riders. Favourite cycling scenes are cut out from calendars, and autographed pictures hold pride of place above the bar. At L'Etape, the brasserie owned by the former professional, Thierry Claveyrolat, his old jerseys, a collection of trophies and the insignias from the head stems of some of his bikes, form an elaborate display of cycling memorabilia. In St. Martin d'Hères, the Bar au Coin doubles as the base for the Jean-Claude Colotti fan club, while in St. Martin le Vinoux, Le Petit Pin houses the fan club for its most famous resident, Jeannie Longo. Outside each café, collected newspaper clippings from *L'Equipe* celebrate the achievements of both riders and inside, numerous autographed photographs and publicity stills adorn their walls.

Within cycling circles, such places are universally important; they provide points of anchorage for a scattered social network. The bars, cafés and pizzerias that dot Isère provide settings for the production of a communal cycling memory in which historical rootedness becomes a culturally charged crystallisation for contemporary cycling life. Meeting up in cafés becomes a commemorative ritual that is routinely planned and enacted. As Connerton (1989) notes, the peculiar efficacy of commemorative rituals- such as meeting up in bars and cafés- derive, not from merely reminding participants of some events, but from re-presenting/re-enacting the events in ceremonially embodied form. Importantly for this chapter, it is at the bars and cafés frequented by bike riders that one's experiences of the pain and suffering of cycling can be shared and compared. To develop this argument ethnographically, I examine the importance of story, tale and narrative as key discursive ingredients in the elaboration of a specific saga of suffering which circulates amongst Isérois cyclists. As I demonstrate throughout this

chapter, suffering is systematically articulated in particular narratives which give meaning to cycling lives on a daily basis. As Connerton notes, "the narrative of one life is part of an interconnecting set of narratives; it is embedded in the story of those groups from which individuals derive their identity" (1989: 21). For the remainder of this chapter, I draw on these places of communal recollection in order to locate the specifics of the myth of the Tour de France. Cycling haunts represent important sites of mythic elaboration, and it is the aim of this chapter to identify the ways in which these tales are told.

In acknowledging the power of a myth focused on like the Tour de France to unite seemingly unconnected people and places, it is important to recognize that those who visit these cycling sites of mythic embellishment are overwhelmingly cyclists themselves.¹ This is not to deny the roles that the media or La Société du Tour de France play in the making of the Tour myth, nor is it to suggest that non-cyclists do not visit cafés or attend the Tour de France-, it is simply to acknowledge that the most consistent and colourful contributions come at the grass roots level of cycling. Cycling spectators are cycling practitioners, and this relationship presents a unique set of considerations for the packaging, presentation and perpetuation of the myth of the Tour de France.

Most notably, because aficionados are cyclists themselves, they are actively and conspicuously alert to the pain and suffering of their sport. They know what it feels like to ride in the rain, the wind and the heat. They know the sting that comes from trying to sleep on frayed nerve endings, having scraped the flesh from hips or buttocks, and they know what the rider carrying a bent wheel or clutching a shredded uniform is going through. The Tour de France gives aficionados vicarious reassurance of their own human potential. For these cycling *connoisseurs*, the Tour de France is simple to understand: it is remarkably and publicly painful. Spectators who cycle themselves can easily understand the difficulties of the Tour; the never ending climbs and the dangers of descending a mountain road at 100 kilometres an hour. They can identify the rider in yellow and they can identify *with* the rider who drops behind and abandons in tears.

¹According to statistical information released by the French Cycling Federation, there are 95151 licensed riders currently registered and competing in France (*Guide Fédéral, Fédération Française de Cyclisme* 1994: 36). I use these statistics with caution, for such data indicates nothing of the indeterminate number of cyclists who are not licensed, but nonetheless identify with the conditions and culture of competitive cycling.

The shared appreciation of the agony of cycling helps maintain the Tour myth in particular cultural terms. While the etymology of a myth implies a fiction or a falsehood, the saga of the Tour de France is painfully real. Certainly, the myth of the Tour is fashioned, as new sagas replace or complement old ones, however the constant theme is that of near inconceivable agony. The myth of the Tour de France engages one essential theme; that of suffering. The Tour is a three week drama in which "*les forçats de la route*" - the convicts of the road- endure a very public pain just to finish the race. An immutable legacy of suffering defines the Tour de France, and its heroic sagas are inextricably linked to the theme of obsessional endurance that is needed to complete the race.²

Critically, it is in terms of this theme of suffering that local cyclists frame their understandings and expectations, both of the Tour de France itself and, importantly, of their own performances as cyclists. The saga of suffering is a very particular construction for them. For Isérois aficionados, the agony of the Tour becomes the basis for a long and endlessly elaborated narrative of heroic achievement. What happens in the Tour, what feats are performed, what pain is endured, become the gauge by which amateur cycling experiences are both measured and validated. Isérois cyclists reenact certain battles from the Tour, they play out roles, they adopt the personae of particular riders and they retrace key routes and climbs, all of which give a continuity to their collective cycling identity. The local experience of cycling is that of enacting and elaborating mini sagas which are constantly validated against the major saga of the Tour de France. These mini sagas serve as the cultural bedrock of cycling life, for engaging in the suffering of their sport gives both an exclusivity and a point of centrality to cycling experiences in Isère.

Certainly, France at large recognizes the greatness and grandeur of the Tour de France. Alongside their cycling compatriots, non-cyclists engage in the rhetoric that it is, "the greatest race ever," that it is, unquestionably, a story of truly heroic valour.³ Expressions of reverence are equally powerful in written form: An article in *Le Dauphiné-Libéré*, for example, maintains that

²The expression "*les forçats de la route*" was first coined by the rider Henri Pélissier in an interview he gave with the newspaper *Le Petit Parisien* in 1924. The expression captured an image of indentured servility which has survived in memory.

³A number of publications including Augendre (1991), Lapeyrère (1992) and Laget (1990) capitalize on the greatness and grandeur of the Tour de France. Pierre Chany's (1985) seminal tome, *La Fabuleuse Histoire du Tour de France*, provides an appropriately hyperbolic discussion of the Tour that testifies to the grandiloquence that surrounds popular and press treatments of the race.

it is impossible to grasp the greatness and grandeur of the Tour de France in words alone. If riding your bicycle through the countryside on a fine summer's day were equivalent to a child's drawing of a wild flower, then the Tour de France is a Sistine Chapel fresco painted by Michelangelo (June 12, 1994: 14).

What separates the sentiments of cycling aficionados from those of France at large is that, for cyclists, such statements are systematically articulated to give meaning and value to their cycling lives on a daily basis. Whereas for non-cyclists, their understandings of the importance of the Tour exist as a consistent undercurrent which breaks its banks for three weeks every July, for cyclists, a shared and articulated appreciation of the saga of the Tour de France gives a point of centrality to their collective existence. The making of a distinctive cycling myth is means of marking out boundaries "consisting in narrative contracts and compilations of stories...drawn from earlier stories and fitted together in makeshift fashion (*bricolés*)" (de Certeau 1984: 122).

This is not to deny the power of the Tour for non-cyclists- indeed, conceptualizing the Tour de France as an exercise in heroism, valour, endurance and determination is to itemize the cultural attributes on which the French have long considered themselves to have a monopoly-, it is simply to recognize that cycling knowledge brings an entirely different dimension to the making of the myth. Just as many influences combine to manufacture the myth of the Tour de France, a variety of cultural emphases are produced from these saga-centred accounts. Politicians, intellectuals and the media alike incorporate some elements of the myth into the construction of a national identity, for example, and cyclists incorporate many more when fashioning their social world. In constituting their cultural presence, participation in sagas of suffering represents a marker of commitment that identifies the cycle world as an arch fraternity. The ability to endure pain becomes a key means of conferring status and belonging. To amplify this argument ethnographically, I draw on the narratives and sagas shared by cyclists when meeting in their chosen sites of communal recollection and mythic elaboration.

Sagas of suffering

Cyclists endure amazing amounts of pain. They fall off, they crash, they ride with serious illness or injury, often unchecked or untreated because of restrictions imposed on pain killing drugs, and the suffering of cycling must be totally alien to a non-cyclist. Philippe Bouvet, the chief cycling correspondent for *L'Equipe* writes, "I don't think any athlete deals with pain

as many times in competition as a cyclist" (*L'Equipe*, July 5th 1994: 6). Such sentiments are shared by the riders themselves: Stephen Hodge, an Australian cyclist with the Festina professional team, insists that "there are only maybe 1000 'pro' riders in the world. If there wasn't the pain and suffering involved, there would be millions." To an outsider, the pain of a nasty crash, the nagging ache of a chronic over use injury or the distress of a searing muscle tear is perhaps unrecognizable. Riders need infusions of blood or oxygen, and spend the night on an IV drip before racing more than two hundred kilometres the next day, all of which may seem beyond logic to an outsider. Philippe Bouvet continues: "cyclists endure a physical pain and spiritual suffering so great that they seem to have come from another life" (*L'Equipe*, July 5th 1994: 6). In privileging a discussion of cycling pain, I am not suggesting that other athletes do not endure it. Rather, I am recognizing that the pain felt by a footballer, for example, is a very different experience to that endured by a cyclist.

To insiders, the suffering of cycling represents a critical discursive element in the maintenance of their social order. At cycling's core lies pain. Competitive cycling involves an agony that consumes every fibre of one's being. One local cyclist remembers completing a particularly gruelling ride: "I thought, 'this is what it is like to die.' I lay on the ground for half an hour. I could have been lying in a pile of shit and I wouldn't have cared." Such agony is the essence of cycling. As Eric, a category two rider with Club Seyssins-Sassenage, identifies, "if you never confront pain, then you're missing the spirit of the sport. Without pain, there is no adversity. Without adversity, no challenge." Referred to as *le monstre* or *la bête*- the monster or the beast- the irreducibility of pain articulates with local sentiment. Didier evocatively describes pain as "a big, fat creature riding on your back. The faster you ride, the heavier he feels. The harder you climb, the deeper he digs his claws in." Ways of thinking and talking about cycling are frequently done in terms of suffering, and it is only the sustained immersion within a cycling community that makes this visible.

Indeed, it is by isolating the cultural marker of pain that the strengths of a Geertzian style of analysis are made apparent. It is only by actively participating in the painful practices of everyday life that the agony of cycling becomes comprehensible. As Marie-Claire recognizes,

sure you suffer, but it is something you really can't describe. You have to experience it to understand what it is. I can't tell someone who only watches on television what it is like exactly to race for six or seven hours in the mountains. It's a rare experience

that you can only find out for yourself.

For me to appreciate the 'native's point of view,' with its emphasis on the ability to suffer, meant experiencing pain on a level that, despite my years as a cyclist in Australia, I had never experienced.

Baudrillard's (1988: 20) musings on the New York marathon illustrate the dangers of misreading situations by viewing from afar.⁴ Describing the marathon as "demonstrative suicide," Baudrillard argues that it has become an "international symbol of fetishistic performance, of the mania for an empty victory, the joy engendered by a feat of no consequence" (1988: 21). For Baudrillard, "marathon runners seek only to prove that they exist" (1988: 21). However, it is not simply to prove that you exist, but to prove that you exist as a very particular type of person, which motivates adherents to pursue activities like marathon running. Assertions such as Baudrillard's fail to comprehend the sporting mentality. It is precisely the excessive quality of such situations that contributes to their distinctiveness. As Rojek recognizes, "dedicated leisure activity is quite rare, which is why the compulsive hills walker, the serious amateur musician, or even the serious reader of fiction, stand out so starkly. Most of us are content to flit from activity to activity...our engagement is partial and episodic (1992: 216).

But commitment to the culture of cycling is intense and engaging. As Jérôme identifies, "the true cyclist lives in a possessive grip of a passion which begins in his teens and continues to demand an inordinate amount of his deepest psychic energy throughout full time competition." Such dedication has monastic undercurrents, with the deeply committed believed to be a certain, special, type of person. In Isère, gifted climbers in particular are seen by their cycling peers as having a calling. While this is a theme I will elaborate shortly, it should be noted here that, in local cycling circles, one is born a climber, not just any one can climb mountains. Loux (1990) and Majastre and Decamp (1988: 13) share similar findings in their accounts of the social life of mountain guides in Haute-Savoie and Hautes-Alpes. As reported by these anthropologists, becoming a mountain guide is a vocation that one learns and refines through associations such as Club Alpin Français or Les Colonies des Vacances. As with competitive cycling, particularly climbing, to become a mountain guide, one must be predisposed towards an exemplary lifestyle.

Certainly, sports such as marathon running or triathlons are peculiarly compulsive, and cycle racing is no exception. The desire to overcome and to

⁴See also Faure's (1987) account of the 'marathon mentality.'

endure is central to being a bike rider. Jean-Claude, an 82 year old, told me a story of how, in his youth, he manned a feeding station at one of the 24 hour races that were briefly popular in Isère in the 1950s. At the end of the race, Jean-Claude found the cyclist who he had been feeding for the past day and night. "Put your bike on the top of my car and climb in for a lift" offered Jean-Claude. "Whatever for?," the cyclist replied. "I have my bike, I'll ride home." Such an all-consuming focus on cycling, like distance running, is dismissed by outsiders as fanaticism or madness, as demonstrative suicide. But to view the compulsion that drives competitive sport as irrational is to underestimate the interpretive potential of such actions. Compulsion, like suffering, is a key dimension in the sociality of sporting, particularly cycling, worlds. It is the shared appreciation of the difficulties and demands of competitive cycling that binds and ties its adherents together. It is difficult to evoke, even now, the degree to which a cyclist suffers. One has to feel it to comprehend it. Such insider appreciations of intense emotion strike a chord with Rosaldo's description of grief and rage amongst the Ilongot: "to [the Ilongot], grief, rage and head hunting go together in a self-evident manner. Either you understand it or you don't" (1989: 2). To dismiss the pain of cycling as sheer lunacy is to misread the emotive force that drives such actions.

The specialized cycling press recognize the centrality of pain and suffering to the inner world of cycling. One edition of *Cyclisme International* features an article entitled 'Ouch! How pain can help you train.' The opening paragraph continues:

every cyclist rides with an invisible training partner. You can't see him. You can't touch him. You can't hear him. You can feel him though. Oh, how you can feel him. You can taste him too. He tastes like blood and bile. He tastes like fear. On easy days, on days when you feel great, you barely notice him. But you never escape him. You never drop him. He's always there and he's out to get you. He wants to hurt you. He wants to hurt you bad. And sooner or later, on the hard days and the bad days- on the days when it really counts- he does (May, 1994: 32-3).

It is in opposition to the indolence of urban life that the distinctive, painful, qualities of cycling lives are best expressed. The apparent lunacy of competitive cycling is most visible when positioned against the rationality and patience of the competitor's support crew. Mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, children and grandparents turn out to support their cycling kin. By washing the clothing, and by marshalling and officiating at local races, these non-cyclists facilitate the narcissism of the cycle world. As critics such as Baudrillard (1975), Alt (1983) and Featherstone (1992) have argued, we

have come to worship comfort and luxury rather than effort and achievement. It is precisely the physically undemanding lives of many urban Isérois that prevent them from appreciating the agony of competitive cycling. The pain of cycling is always in contradiction to wider expectations or assumptions regarding the frivolity of sport. Bike racing thus provides a situation in which both outsider expectations of, and the informal structures produced by cyclists during competition, can be consistently observed.

Whereas the ordinary world is untouched by pain, the cycling life is one of constant struggle, of overcoming adversity, of accomplishing extraordinary, out of the ordinary, feats. As Featherstone identifies, "if everyday life is usually associated with the mundane, taken for granted, common sense routines which sustain and maintain the fabric of our daily lives, then the heroic life points to the opposite qualities" (1992: 160). This heroic life, I take to be the life of a cyclist. With its emphasis on the quest for virtue and valour, the cycling life stands in contrast with the everyday interests of work, property, taxes and shopping lists. Cycling worlds, while a part and a product of contemporary consumer culture, nonetheless remain apart from the mundanity and indolence of Isérois life.

Although many people ride bicycles for pleasure or transport in Isère, commitment to the culture of cycling involves subjecting oneself to the daily rigours of the sport. The first expression of this is to take to the roads. While this may seem an obvious statement, throughout Grenoble itself and Isère more generally, there is a network of *pistes cyclables* that are designed for recreational use. Many people use these bike paths for riding to work or to school and for leisurely dawdles at the weekend. While it is possible to cover huge distances- bike riders can follow the River Isère for ninety kilometres to Valence in one direction or ride along the Grésuvidian Valley to Chambéry in the other- these *pistes* are avoided by the serious cyclist. Roads, for the committed cyclist, climb into the mountains, the steepest providing unavoidably demanding and painful riding conditions. Familiarity with the agony that riding in the mountains extracts becomes a key index of engagement in the sport of cycling.

The language of local cycling emphasizes the ability to suffer. Riders talk of "*mettre le nez dans le cintre*"..."*rouleur le nez dans le guidon*" and "*rouleur sur la jante*", each expression evoking images of a cyclist being pushed to his or her limits. Such an ethic is transmitted within cycling ranks by more experienced riders, with the general wisdom being "when you finish

training, you should have just enough strength left to get off your bike." It is not surprising that tales of suffering circulate in the Isérois cycling narrative. The riders love telling their own gory stories, it is part of the attraction of the sport. Pierre remembers competing in a rain soaked Tour du Nord Alpes, a seven day amateur event held in the normally dry and sunny month of June. However, unseasonal rain befell the race and having his wet feet encased in leather shoes for seven days had major consequences for Pierre: "I lost six out of ten toenails. They fell out, one by one, on each stage."

The concept of "*fierté*" or 'pride' is central to maintaining a social order which is constituted out of pain. Wimps are not tolerated. A wimp, however, is not a weak or inexperienced cyclist, rather, a rider who does not try. The frailty of the human form is such that every rider has the odd bad day in the saddle, when they fail to find their form or rhythm, and such temporary failings are tolerated by the rest of the cycling coalition. If a rider simply gives up or fails to expend appropriate effort, then his or her performance is met with much derision and impatience by the rest of the cycling group. Riders instruct their reluctant training partner to "*dépêche-toi*"...to "*mettre tout à droite*"...or to "*mettre les grosse soucoupes*."⁵ Given the physical challenges that the demands of cycling impose, training partners have developed strong support systems and networks to guarantee the survival of the riding formation. If a member of a training group appears to be struggling, his or her cycling companions will rally behind, offering words of encouragement such as "*on y va*" or "*bon courage*" and, where possible, providing physical support, such as pushing a rider up a climb or carrying a *bidon* to decrease the weight.

But such examples of altruism are enacted only if the struggling rider displays the *fierté* expected of him or her. My own experience is the most effective way to illustrate the importance of this. Less than a month before the 1994 Tour reached Isère, a group of local riders spent two days tracing, in reverse direction, its fifteenth stage. The temperature was very high and, as we covered the 224 kilometres between Alpe d'Huez and Valréas in the neighbouring *département* of Drôme, I felt myself becoming weaker and weaker as I counted down the final kilometres into Valréas. Having injured my ankle in a crash several weeks before this ride, every turn of my pedals caused me to wince with agony. All I could think about were ways to escape.

⁵ "*Dépêche-toi*" means simply to hurry up. "*Mettre tout à droite*" means to adopt the large chain ring that riders use when expending maximum effort. "*Mettre les grosse soucoupes*" loosely translates as 'to go where the flying saucers are'. Its sense is that of reaching the highest level.

I grew obsessed with thinking about my home, with sleep, with comfort and with more sleep. I was sure I would collapse and die if I didn't stop pedalling. Later, I hobbled painfully into the dining room of the hotel we were staying at in Valréas and Jean-Paul, one of my riding companions, remarked "you look wasted, very dehydrated." I knew what he meant. Looking in the mirror in my room half an hour earlier I had seen a pair of sunken cheeks and glassy eyes. I had a throbbing ache in the back of my neck and my wrists and thighs burned with lactic acid. I had a raging thirst and a raw sunburn was etched sharply by the outlines of my cycling jersey. I had spent the best part of a day pedalling 200 kilometres across France and the experience had left its mark. For those cyclists with whom I was riding, it was precisely my perseverance, the fact that I made it to Valréas, that proved critical. People responded in different ways; some congratulated me on lasting the distance, some offered to wash my *bidons* for the return journey the next day, others simply bought me a beer as reward for my hard work. My private hell became a public example of the centrality of pride and perseverance to competitive cycling.

While the prolonged punishment of cycling demands a physical toughness, mental self-discipline and self-awareness are imperative to competitive success. Undeniably corporal, cycling is also intensely cerebral as cyclists attempt to 'out psyche' their opposition. There is a huge intellectual challenge to being a cyclist which is well recognized by local riders. While the desire to overcome and to endure makes one think of sports like marathons and triathlons, cyclists insist that theirs is a far more cerebral affair. Whereas cyclists think that triathletes just plod on until the bitter end, they maintain that the shifting dynamics of a cycle race demand a mental awareness that elevates their sport beyond a purely physiological domain. One is always thinking: should I douse my feet with water for a few moments of relief? No, I'd better drink it, just in case. Should I wear my cap to keep the sun off? Maybe, but it also holds in the heat. The constant consideration of the minutiae of cycling action is endemic to the sport. From the cyclist's point of view, their recognition of the interdependence of the cerebral and the visceral positions their sport very differently from other endurance events.

Conversations with oneself however, manifest themselves most strikingly when the abilities of a cyclist are put to the test; when thought becomes action. The centrality of tactic and strategy to competitive success highlights the intellectual challenge of cycling. Described as 'chess on wheels', road cycling has many more tactical possibilities than any board game. Visceral moments, bloody falls, equipment failures and climatic interventions mean

that kings can topple and pawns can suddenly assume the throne. A race can be determined in so many ways- one unfortunate mishap or a timely break away can change a race's complexion entirely- that the metaphor of chess only scratches the surface of the intricacies of road cycling. As Chris Boardman, a British rider with the French GAN team notes, "it's like being a cross between a decathlete, a race horse and a chess player." Tactical *nous* is a highly valued skill that requires considerable road sense. Race situations continually present conundrums which require riders to make rapid decisions under pressure. Cyclists must constantly ask themselves, 'when do I make my move? How good are the riders alongside me? And what is their agenda?'

As well as being able to read a race, a cyclist must be mentally resilient. Describing his first season as a category one rider, Thierry remembers that "the hardest thing for me was the mental as well as the physical. The first week was murder and I felt that I was just going to fall to pieces. I couldn't see how I was going to get through the next few weeks or the whole season." A particular mind set is required, which is recognized by local riders: they talk of 'death rides' such as Le Route des Grands Cols in the Hautes-Alpes.⁶ Traversing particularly dangerous terrain, a death ride is, in Celine's words, "a ride that if you think it will kill you it will. On the other hand, if you think you can endure it, anything is possible." An awareness of the difficulties of completing death rides is shared and frequently articulated by local riders. Stéphane remembers completing his first Route des Grands Cols: "it was hard. It was very, very hard. The first time I did it I thought I was going mad. I started to hallucinate and I couldn't stop crying. It was so cold, I thought it would never finish. It is something for the "*costauds*." While seeming to defy logic, on a death ride, going forward is actually psychologically easier, for going back brings no relief, only humiliation, and it is this particular mind set that separates a ride of great adventure from a ride of doom and despair. Jean, a highly accomplished local rider identifies, "you ride at your limit the whole time. You think you're never going to finish, then you make it to the top and you know you're going to be o.k." While a cyclist is most unlucky, of course, to die on his or her bike, the probability of suffering is very real, so riders surrender to the inevitable with the same enthusiasm that drew them to the sport in the first place.

⁶Two *cyclosporatives*- La Marmotte and Le Brevet de la Randonnée- trace Le Route des Grands Cols and award medallions (gold, silver and bronze) to successful competitors. Not surprisingly, both have remarkably high attrition rates. La Marmotte in 1994 had nearly two thousand competitors, while less than a quarter actually completed the race.

Tour tales

While sagas of suffering swirl and circulate in the daily lives of Isérois aficionados, they see their realization in the annual return of the Tour de France. The mini sagas that are experienced by local cyclists on a daily basis peak in the major saga of the Tour de France. For riders in Isère, the Tour becomes a cultural pivot. Cycling worlds hinge on the Tour de France and without it, the door to them would close. By virtue of their familiarity with the pain of cycling, those cyclists riding in Isère are privy to the making of a rich and ever evolving myth of misery. For active cyclists in Isère, a demonstrable awareness of the saga of the Tour de France is necessary cycling knowledge, as central to being a cyclist as the ability to ride a pace line.⁷

It is the performances of the professionals that are used to measure and validate, rationalize even, local agonies. Attending the Tour becomes the basis for the creation of a distinctive cycling narrative that both recognizes and reinforces meanings for its audience. Like the co-riders I was spectating with, I remember feeling sick to the pit of my stomach when I saw one of the riders in the Tour, Armand de las Cuevas, pass by our roadside vantage point. Climbing towards the summit finish at the ski resort of Alpe d'Huez, he made a frightening picture as he rolled towards the upper reaches. With his jersey zipped down, his face scarlet with effort, sweat and mucus running down his chin, he looked like a man prepared to die for victory. But he was not trying to win: finishing the stage was the motivation for such a public display of physical excess. Such exhibitions of agony inspire a realm of shared understandings relating to the difficulties of cycling. When de las Cuevas passed by, my companion Laurent glanced at me; his expression conveying, in a split second, what every cyclist knows about the sport: it is, at times,

⁷Riding a pace line is a precise technical manoeuvre in which a front rider leads into the wind while a group of following riders tuck in to the leading rider's slip stream in a practice known as drafting. Drafting represents the primary physical law that shapes cycling. Its advantage is that it enables a group of riders to travel at a substantially faster pace while expending considerably less effort. It is estimated that, in comparison to the leading rider, a drafting rider can save between 27% and 39% of the energy needed to propel his or her bicycle forward (Albert 1991: 345). Drafting employs the same principle as the recreational rider pedalling in the slip stream of a bus on the way to work. It is so much easier when someone else is making all the effort. In riding a pace line, cyclists pedal at high speed, often in excess of 40 or 50 kilometres an hour, and in frighteningly close proximity to others, and one's efforts are constantly modulated in tune with those around you. Drafting is standard racing strategy, with riders willingly taking a turn at the front of a pace line, often in spurts of about 200 metres before rotating out. Riders measure effort in different ways. Some count the number of pedal strokes taken, others count seconds, while some use a repetitive landmark such as a telegraph pole to gauge effort.

excruciatingly difficult. Seeing the prominent riders suffer is central to the ways in which Isèrois cyclists constitute their sporting presence. The self-reflexive nature of cycling means that there is a constant tension between the 'experience near' performance of local riders and the 'experience distant' performance of the professionals. For both riders in the Tour de France and the amateurs elsewhere in Isère, there is a fine line between striving and humility. In both local and national situations, the cyclist's efforts are against the elements and him or herself, and this serves as an important cultural marker that differentiates insiders from outsiders.

A critical distinction between amateur and professional suffering is that the professional frequently has little choice. Whereas amateurs can dismount if the terrain proves too tough, professionals are compelled to keep going. If a professional rider refuses to go on he will be unemployed, so he learns to suffer. An apposite comment from Stephen Hodge summarizes the prolonged physical punishment that the riders endure in the Tour de France: "First week you feel good. Second week you lose your strength. Third week, you're fucked." The raw physicality of the Tour de France is a theme seized upon and repeatedly elaborated by local riders. To satisfy those standing roadside, or following the race in other ways, the 'world's greatest bike race' must necessarily feature the world's greatest athletes, and must necessarily test their greatest physical resources: without this masochistic side, it simply would not be the Tour de France. To quote one cycling enthusiast, "the Tour wouldn't be the Tour if it didn't have an inhuman side; such excess is necessary for the Tour de France."

Although Foucault (1979) notes the disappearance of punishment as a form of public spectacle, claiming that this represents the decline of the body as a text upon which punishment can be inscribed, the public pain of the Tour de France provides a setting in which self-torture becomes a legitimate public spectacle. The Tour de France embodies and embellishes the concept of "*supplice*"; public torture, liturgical torment and ceremonial pain. Year after painful year, riders torture themselves: road rash, heat stroke, saddle sores, broken bones, cysts the size of golf balls, penile numbness and fatigue induced hallucinations become merely occupational hazards for those who sit on their bikes for eight hours a day. To quote Bruno Roussel, the Directeur Sportif of the Festina team, "the greatest race demands that a man travels to the depths of suffering. To understand the Tour is to have ridden it, fought it, been brought to tears by it." It is the tortuous tradition of the Tour that differentiates the race from other sporting contests. As Duclos-Lassalle

recognizes, "when the legs and the spirit start to wobble, the thought seeps through. Quit. Go home. But you don't. It's the Tour de France, so you learn to suffer. After all, this isn't soccer. You can't pass the bike off" (1989: 134).

To see the vacant eyes of the Tour riders, hidden in sunken cheek hollows, as they prepare to ride another day, reinforces the theme of perseverance that is so central to being a bike rider. What is a highly valued social skill at the local level is endorsed by the major saga of the Tour de France, as became clear in the days that I spent with the Festina squad in 1994. Having completed an extraordinarily hard stage through the Pyrénées to secure a stage win for Luc Leblanc (their *chef de file*), the team was *épuisé*. At the breakfast table two days later (there was a rest day between stages), the riders looked like they had spent a month adrift in a lifeboat. With sun burnt skin, crusty lips and glazed eyes, they were at the end of their physical and mental tether. "Pascal's gone," Stephen Hodge said, referring to Pascal Hervé, Festina's *néo-pro*.⁸ "Where to?" I asked in alarm. "No, I mean he's gone, knackered. You have to work up to something like the Tour and Pascal is definitely delicate at the moment." Nonetheless, at the finish line at Luz Ardiden that night, Pascal was still there, having survived more than 160 kilometres of racing. His arms and legs were scraped raw by gravel, he had a red haematoma the size of a golf ball on his thigh, and traces of dried vomit were splattered on his legs. While acts of perseverance are intrinsic to the cycle world, it is only when a prominent rider abandons that they make the news. It is only when a big name publicly suffers, such as Claudio Chiappucci vomiting from foot to summit of Luz Ardiden in 1994, or Tony Rominger abandoning two days later, that they present a photo opportunity. Such media coverage, while testifying to the suffering of cycling, simultaneously serves to universalize the specialized world of the cycling aficionado. What is customary knowledge for both club cyclists in Isère and those in the Tour de France is made widely and maximally available through the agency of the media. The presence of the media allows non-cyclists a privileged insight into the suffering of the sport, while highlighting also the extreme social distance between the two.

Saddle gods; the making of heroes

In elaborating the sagas of the Tour de France, the making of heroes is a key consideration. Since its inception, the race has served as a site for the demonstration of particular actions, feats and performances which bestow a

⁸A *néo-pro* is a rider in his first year as professional.

legendary status upon the rider(s) concerned. Their identification is indeed important to the making of the Tour myth: as Bouly (1990) and Quinquere (1988) note, without them, there would be no myth. While simply surviving the three weeks of the Tour guarantees enduring public veneration, there are certain personalities that have, over the history of the Tour, added to the majestic image of the race. These riders have become "*les géants de la route*", and they have done so in very particular ways.⁹ The concern of this section is to show how the professional cyclist is constructed as a heroic figure in contemporary times.

Within the ranks of *élite* cycling, three types of cyclist are presented as a heroic class apart: those who are revered for their longevity in the sport, those who are admired for their skills as climbers and, perhaps paradoxically, those who become heroes for the moments of weakness or frailty they exhibit. The various manifestations of the cycling hero signal that there is a complexity to his character that needs to be unravelled. Cycling heroes are made along different lines and for different reasons, and in this section, I propose to detail how cycling heroes are presented by aficionados as possessing attributes and qualities that set them apart from the rest of cycling's *élite*.

Before exploring the ways in which the cycling hero is socially constructed, a discussion of 'the hero' more generally is necessary, for the heroes of cycling occupy an entirely different cultural space to that of other contemporary champions. In everyday parlance, a hero is an individual, usually a man, who is noted and admired for his execution of an outstanding achievement. The bank clerk who rescues a small infant from a burning building, the non-swimmer who defies the odds to save a drowning woman, or the war veteran who crosses a mine field to reach his injured comrade, all are variously conceived of and constructed as heroes. As Featherstone notes, when we think of heroes, "we think of extraordinary deeds, virtuosity, courage, endurance and the capacity to attain distinction" (1992: 160). For Featherstone, a hero is someone who transcends the boundaries of the everyday; who performs feats beyond the realm of his daily experiences.

Whereas Featherstone posits a distinction between the heroic life and the everyday life, the everyday lives of cyclists are, in fact heroic lives, in that

⁹As Callet (1981) recognizes, to whip up publicity in the formative years of the Tour de France, Henri Desgrange published profiles of *les géants de la route*; 'the giants of the road'. The term has stuck, and is used to describe riders of exceptional capacity.

they display virtuosity, courage and bravery on a daily basis. While a cycling life is one of virtue and distinction, it becomes the ordinary life of a non-cyclist when the cycling season stops at the beginning of winter. With snow and ice blocking the access to many of the regular cycling sites, riders unavoidably descend into the commonality of the non-cycling life. For dedicated riders, the non-cycling world becomes an abnormal one, devoid of the daily demonstrations of heroic action that racing and training allows. Retirement particularly represents this slip back into the mundane realm of the non-cycling life. Allan Peiper- an Australian rider who retired at the end of 1992- reflects on his exit from the sport:

when you are a 'pro', people treat you differently because you are famous. You go everywhere, appear in magazines- you think your life is going to flow on like that when the cycling's over. It goes on for a while, then you turn back into a normal person and people treat you no differently from anybody else.

Separating the heroic life of the cyclist from the everyday life of the non-cyclist is important when discussing Isérois understandings of the cycling hero. Just as appreciating the suffering involved in the making of cycling sagas distinguishes the active cyclist from his or her non-cycling compatriots, the making of the cycling hero separates the cycling insider from a peripheral observer of cycling action. While "contemporary heroes engage the fantasy lives of modern audiences on a daily basis" (Harris 1985: 205), the varying degrees of knowledge between the cyclist and the non-cyclist mean that the cycling hero is located along a sliding scale of appreciation, with the aficionado possessing a greater understanding of the social and symbolic properties that constitute the cyclist in heroic terms. In attributing super human qualities to leading riders, the processes of deification are different from the making of other sporting heroes which non-cyclists may identify with. Properties such as stamina, strength, speed and endurance are universally exceptional qualities for any champion to possess, however, such attributes are manifested differently depending on the individual demands of each sport. The stamina required by a footballer, for example, is very different to that needed to ride a bicycle around France for twenty three days, and such properties are read very differently in the making of a cycling hero. Over and above all else, it is the *mentalité* of a cyclist that is emphasized in the making of a cycling hero, for at the core of this *mentalité* lies suffering. A privileged knowledge regarding the agony of cycling ensures that aficionados view their heroes in very different cultural terms to those of their non-cycling compatriots.

Certainly France at large certainly elevates the riders in the Tour de France to positions of 'national hero'. However, cycling knowledge allows aficionados an unprecedented access to and appreciation of these men; the riders become *cycling* heroes; the flagships of their sport. Such a recontextualization of heroism denotes an ownership of the heroes of the Tour de France by those who cycle at an amateur level. Cycling spectators are, in Amesley's terms, "proprietary audiences" (1989: 324).¹⁰ The claiming of the cycling hero as their own is dependent on massive insider knowledge on the part of aficionados. Cyclists content themselves with minute distinctions, and such attention to detail represents a uniquely postmodern form of immortality. Memorizing statistics- winning margins, the longest race route, the youngest winner of the Tour and the physiological particularities of each of the riders- brings an entirely different dimension to the making of Tour heroes. In constructing cycling heroes, aficionados become interpretive scavengers, they are constantly reclaiming the textual material of the Tour de France, "making it [their] own, appropriating or reappropriating it" (de Certeau 1984: 166).

The insider knowledge of the exploits of the leading riders represents an arch refinement which makes cycling a specialist community. In the 1993 Tour de France, Tony Rominger won two consecutive stages between Villard-de-Lans and Serre Chevalier, and Serre Chevalier and Isola 2000; an achievement that demanded incredible stamina and suffering. When buying *L'Equipe* the following morning, I remarked to the newsagent "how about Rominger yesterday?", to which he responded, "who is Rominger?" Equally, media commentators such as the television presenters Patrick Chêne and Gerard Holtz are ridiculed by cyclists for misrepresenting information; for attributing the wrong rider to the wrong team, or for confusing his nationality. This is not to deny the power of the media in manufacturing heroes, indeed, they contribute to the discourse in some very profound ways, it is simply to recognize that, for cyclists, a highly refined knowledge separates their understandings of the Tour and the men who ride it from other representations of the Tour in France. For the aficionado, Tour heroes are ingrained in cycling memory. I showed an Australian bicycle magazine to one of my regular cycling companions. Flipping through, he stopped at a letter to the editor in which an Australian reader had requested more information on Phil Anderson and Neil Stephens- two of Australia's most

¹⁰ 'Proprietary audiences' are those viewers [or in this case, cycling spectators] who appropriate the primary elements of a mass-mediated narrative and actively reinvent it. Such an audience acknowledges and responds to elements in a particular text, but develops its own interpretive relationship with it (Amesley 1989: 324).

recognized and decorated professional cyclists. In her letter to the editor, the Australian reader was complaining that she was new to cycling and did not have the background information on the sport's key players. My French friend handed me back the magazine declaring, "a French cyclist would never not know who Fignon or Pensec or Anquetil or Hinault was. Even if they had only been riding for one day they would still know."

The status of the cycling hero is confirmed by his confronting of exceptional problems. In the 1914 Tour de France, Eugène Christophe broke a fork at the summit of the Col du Tourmalet. At the time, all repairs had to be completed by the rider- he could not simply raise his hand and a team car would instantly sweep along side to replace his bike- so Christophe had to make his way on foot to the nearest blacksmith in the village of Sainte-Marie-de-Campan to fix the fork himself. After walking the seventeen kilometres, Christophe discovered that it would take more than forty eight hours for him to stoke the fire and forge a new front fork (the blacksmith could not render any assistance and there were Tour officials standing by to ensure that none was given). Shouldering his bike, Christophe ran the remaining fourteen kilometres to the finish line. In the words of Bruno who told me this story, "[Christophe] never won a Tour, but he has become a symbol of heroic effort."

The ability to confront and overcome circumstances of unexpected adversity is an enduring quality for a cycling hero, and those who repeatedly do so are presented as the archetype of cycling excellence; as "*les routiers hercule*." While winning one *édition* of the Tour de France guarantees public adulation, those riders who manage to claim multiple and/or successive victories are rocketed to positions of symbolic pre-eminence in the making of the cycling hero. For these riders, tenacity and determination, coupled with their remarkable physical abilities, become the 'heroic' qualities that separate them as an *élite* class apart from their colleagues.

While riders from Holland, Italy and Spain have claimed victory in the Tour, few have claimed multiple successes. The exploits of the Frenchman Jacques Anquetil in the 1960s provided the historical precedent for the production of this particular type of cycling hero. Claiming victories in the *éditions* of 1957, 1961, 1962, 1963 and 1964, Anquetil was truly a "*géant de la route*." Amongst Isérois cyclists, Anquetil is remembered for his dry manner: asked how he felt about winning a race by twelve seconds, Anquetil replied, "it was eleven more than necessary." While not exuberant in victory,

Anquetil nonetheless displayed the tenacity necessary to secure results. It was his battles with his long-time rival, Raymond Poulidor, that tapped into the essence of courage and determination that is imperative to being a cycling hero. It was on the climb to Le Puy-de-Dôme in 1957, when the two men rode, literally side by side, neither able to expend the energy required to shake the other off, that the legend was born. Bumping shoulders as they snaked up the climb, this *mano à mano* is entrenched in Tour history. As one local rider remembers, "we forget the details of each of Anquetil's victories in the Tour de France, and we forget the details of Poulidor's defeats, but their one battle on the climb to Le Puy-de-Dôme stays in all our memories." Whereas Anquetil went on to win five Tours de France, Poulidor remained runner up three times and achieved third place five times in his professional career. A popular expression is '*faire un Poulidor*' which has the same currency as the English expression 'the eternal bridesmaid'.

The achievement of winning five Tours of France is rivalled by only three other men. Fittingly, each exists as a heroic figure amongst Isérois cycling aficionados. The next rider to claim five *maillots jaunes* was the Belgian rider, Eddy Merckx, who claimed his victories between 1969 and 1972. Widely regarded as the "champion of the century", Merckx's accomplishments are unmatched in cycling history. In addition to winning the Tour de France, Merckx also claimed three victories in the Giro d'Italia and the World Championship, five victories in the Liège-Bastogne-Liège, three victories in the Paris-Roubaix, and he held the world hour record; *palmarès* that earned him the nickname 'The Cannibal', "because he would eat his opposition alive" as Marie-Claire claims. The metaphoric nature of his nickname testifies to Merckx's complete dominance of the *peloton*, and it is his name, above all others, that inflames the passions of the local riders. Christian remembers,

the first time I saw the Tour was in the summer of 1969. I was 11 years old. I remember camping at the foot of the Roquebrune on my first holiday in the Midi. I remember the cicadas, the afternoon wind, my Belgian neighbours in their caravans and the sound of their radio. My father was pretending he was the champion in yellow, the man who's name finished with a bizarre 'ckx'. The riders finally arrived and my mother cried: "it's Merckx! He's in front, in the middle of the road." He was radiant. He seemed to be floating twenty centimetres above the ground. Some days later, three men left for the moon, I took off to the planet Merckx.

Merely the name 'Merckx' evokes such passionate responses. Blessed with phenomenal stamina, powers of recovery and an exceptionally long femur which enabled him to turn massive crank arms, it was the supreme

athleticism of Eddy Merckx that confirmed his status as cycling's brightest star.

In contrast with the athleticism of Merckx, it was the dogged determination of the Frenchman, Bernard Hinault, that allowed him to assume the throne of Merckx. While no less a hero, it was a vicious tenacity that elevated Hinault to the rare position of cycling hero. Equalling the record of Merckx and Anquetil of claiming five victories in the Tour de France, the exploits of Hinault are perhaps freshest in local cycling memory. As Isérois cyclists remember, the 1980s were France's halcyon cycling days with two riders in particular, Laurent Fignon and Bernard Hinault, dominating the professional calendar. An opposition between the two riders was established by the media and then elaborated in popular discussions of the race. Fignon, the Parisian was presented as the educated and methodical 'Professeur du Peloton', while Hinault was characterized in terms of his rural Breton roots. It was on the Col de Laffrey in 1984 that this opposition best captured the popular imagination. While *le duel Fignon-Hinault* had been raging for two weeks prior to the ascent of the Col de Laffrey, it was on this climb that Hinault made several valiant efforts to steal time back from Fignon. Attacking uphill and into a headwind, every time Hinault broke away, Fignon and the rest of the *peloton* caught him, with the Colombian Luis Herrera eventually taking the stage at Alpe d'Huez, fifty kilometres deeper into the Massif de l'Oisans.¹¹

"*Obstiné comme un Breton*" is a common epithet used to characterize those with a hard or stubborn personality, and it is rarely used favourably. Hinault's ceaseless attacks on the Col de Laffrey confirmed his typically Breton tenacity. More tellingly, they gave birth to a new nickname '*le Blaireau*'- The Badger- because he resembled an animal on scent. As one local rider explains,

the badger is a strong animal, especially in relation to his small size, and it can make a lot of trouble if he is attacked. I think the nickname sort of reflected Hinault's character. He could take a lot of blows without saying anything, but the next day, he would attack and when he did, he could be very, very *méchant*.

While national pride is a key determinant in the construction of a cycling hero, the recognition and demonstration of the universally heroic qualities of the cyclist are valued over and above his nationality. For a rider to be a cycling hero, he must display a certain *élan*. The sport's current 'great' rider, the Spaniard Miguel Indurain, is criticized by Isérois cyclists for his

¹¹Laurent Fignon went on to claim *le maillot jaune* for this year.

passionless approach to racing. Despite winning five *consecutive* Tours- an accomplishment unmatched in cycling history- Indurain does not have the charisma of a Hinault or a Merckx. Nonetheless, he possesses awesome physical qualities, and these become important elements in the making of a cycling hero that is especially savoured. With a resting heart rate of 28 beats per minute (compared with 36-38 of most of his rivals) and a VO2 maximum of almost 100 litres (compared with 70-80), Indurain remains the most perfectly formed specimen of a champion cyclist. While his style is all grace and beauty, Indurain is dubbed 'Robocop' or 'The Extraterrestrial' for his predictable approach to winning the Tour de France. His taciturn nature generates widespread derision amongst Isèrois cyclists: "what does he do when he is not on his bike? He sleeps"... "What is he going to do with his prize money? Buy a new tractor"... "When he rides his bike, it's like he's helping his father on the farm." As Dominique recognizes, "people don't know Indurain because he has no personality. It is a pity because now there's no one. It [personality] gives racing its heart."¹² Simply winning the Tour is not enough to warrant the according of heroic status. The win must be done in culturally prescribed ways, which include the ability of the rider to present himself as a tenacious, determined and courageous character.

In the making of heroes, the allocation of nicknames is important, for they develop the character of an individual into a far more complex personality. As Peace notes, "descriptive flesh is hung onto a hitherto bare skeleton of elementary information" (1991: 103). The Tour de France has a long history of attributing familiar or colloquial appellations to its riders. The winner of the first Tour de France, Maurice Garin, was exactly the prominent and colourful rider that Henri Desgrange needed to build interest in the race. As local opinion has it, Garin was a native born Italian who had come to France as a boy and was traded by his father to a chimney sweep for a wheel of cheese. Dubbed 'The Little Chimney Sweep' by Desgrange, Garin secured his position as the first in a long line of *les géants de la route*. Two riders in the 1950s, the Swiss, Hugo Koblet, and the Dutchman, Charly Gaul, continued the tradition of building well-rounded Tour personalities through nicknaming. Known as 'Le Pédaleur de Chârmé', Koblet is remembered as much for his style on the bike as for his extraordinary good looks. As Fabienne recalls, "How would I describe Koblet? In one word, class. He was a *seigneur*." The cycling character of Charly Gaul is similarly developed by reference to his

¹²In his native Spain, Indurain is revered as a hero. Welcomed home by King Juan, treated to a motorcade reception through the streets of Madrid and given the keys to his home town of Navarre in northern Spain, Indurain occupies a position not endorsed by cyclists in France.

personality. Known as '*Le Rimbaud du Tour*,' Gaul was believed to be the sensitive member of a ruthlessly competitive peloton. Nicknames however, are not always reverential. The current Italian rider, Marco Pantani, is dubbed '*Elephantino*,' a reference to his oversized ears, while the Colombian rider, Nelson Rodriguez, is known as '*Petit Cacao*,' a reference to his short stature and dark skin colour. Nonetheless, nicknames are contingent on the rider possessing not only superior cycling skills, but also a magnetic personality, for it is only through nicknaming that audiences can claim familiarity with him. As Dominique notes with respect to Bernard Hinault, "whatever else you say about him, Hinault's a pretty impressive guy. He has this air of authority that gives him this quite intimidating charisma." Here, Dominique talks of Hinault in language that suggests he knows him. While nicknames imply familiarity, the extreme social distance between an aspiring amateur and a rider of the calibre of Hinault can never be bridged. As Vigarello notes, "the champion is human and inaccessible at one and the same time" (1989: 71).

Climbers as heroes

In identifying certain heroes from within the general category of cyclists, the climber occupies a position of social and symbolic pre-eminence. *Le grimpeur* is exalted above all other cyclists; he defines and dominates the sport. Because of what it says about honoured human behaviour; because of the ways in which *les grimpeurs* consistently demonstrate courage, determination, tenacity and perseverance, climbing is elevated to the top of the cycling hierarchy. When local cyclists talk of 'true cyclists', they are talking about climbers. As Fabrice remarks, "to be a champion cyclist, you must be able to defy the mountains." The language that local riders use to characterize climbers reflects the position that they hold at the pinnacle of cycling experiences. Particular nicknames such as 'The Eagle of Vizille' (for Thierry Claveyrolat), 'The Eagle of Toledo' (for Federico Bahamontès) or 'The Angel of the Mountains' (for Charly Gaul), and the awarding of the King of the Mountains jersey in most major races, construct the climber in alternately animalistic and reverential terms. In this respect, climbing can be seen as a form of 'social climbing' in which one can claim a certain status as a cyclist through demonstrating extraordinary physical capacities. As Featherstone recognizes, "the charismatic hero's power does not lie in a legitimated social role, but in his extraordinary qualities as a person; his 'gift of grace' and the capacity to constantly subject it to demonstration and test" (1992: 169).

Social climbing is most visibly demonstrated in the on-road movements of

cyclists, as they get caught by a following group on a climb, as riders drop off a training network and are gradually phased out, and as the gifted climbers consistently set the pace at the front of a racing group. The phasing out of a rider from a climbing cluster is known amongst cyclists as "*faire l'accordéon*", in which a rider is dropped by his or her group and manages to rejoin them, only to be dropped again. The hierarchy of cycling is formalized in local competition. Le Monte d'Avoriaz and Les Portes du Soleil are the biggest mass start races in the region, while the *cyclo sportive*, Le Brevet de la Randonnée, attracts more than two thousand entrants. Time trials such as Le Contre la Montre d'Autrans, which runs from Autrans to La Molière in the Massif du Vercors, lure huge numbers. This race lasts a full day, with competition open to riders of all categories. For newcomers, *le contre la montre* is a chance to prove themselves; for seasoned performers, it is a chance to stamp their mark. Climbing is thus a dramatization of status concerns in which the brave and the skilled occupy the top placings.

While cyclists will spend many days training to reach a certain weight or level of fitness in the belief that it will carry them to climbing greatness, the ability to climb is, in fact, largely the result of physical attributes. In Isérois cycling circles, the ability to climb is seen as a social skill that one acquires through perseverance, an equally valued embodiment of honoured human behaviour. When one newcomer asked a more experienced rider if there was any special preparation he could do to improve his climbing, he was told "climb up mountains." An awareness of the physiology needed to be a climber articulates with Isérois cycling sentiment. According to local commentary, *les grimpeurs* possess innate abilities or God given skills; one is born a climber, not just anyone can climb mountains. While other skills on the bike can be honed- explosive sprint power can be developed through weight training- climbing is seen as coming from within. Climbers are regarded as "*en avoir encore sous la pédale*"- having still more physical resources- than *les rouleurs* or *les sprinteurs*. Certainly, a non-climber can improve his style or her form through practice and perseverance, but without the innate ability it never looks fluid or easy.¹³ To be a natural climber is to demonstrate a rare skill that is revered by Isérois aficionados. By way of illustration, a group of club cyclists was completing the Vizille Loop when we overtook a boy, about fourteen years old, wearing baggy shorts and sandshoes, riding a bicycle with "*chauffage central*." At the beginning of the first slight

¹³In an odd paradox, the Colombian climbers in the professional *peloton* are revered as climbers, not because of their innate abilities, but because of the rarefied air in which they train. High altitude training is a popular, and legal, form of performance enhancement which increases the competitive success of an athlete.

climb, this obviously inexperienced cyclist overtook us, covering the climb with phenomenal acceleration. Flabbergasted, the established cyclists were unanimous in their verdict that "*Il ce faire naturellement!*"

The physical make up needed to be a *grimpeur* is a recurring point of conversation. A *grimpeur* is thin and wiry, often weighing less than 60 kilogrammes, with slow twitch muscles; the suppleness of which enables him to '*mouliner*'; spin the small gears needed to propel his bicycle over steep gradients. While much is made of the physique of a thoroughbred climber - "a big and heavy rider will never do well in the mountains" - there is a curious paradox to this formulation. By conventional wisdom, the sport's current great rider, Miguel Indurain, remains, in many ways, a contradiction to the conventions regarding the genetic predisposition of cyclists to climbing. Standing 6 foot 2 and weighing 176 pounds, Indurain is, theoretically, too tall and too heavy to reach cycling excellence. A particularly gifted climber, none of the laws of physics apply to Indurain. When asked to define the archetypal climber in an interview with *L'Equipe*, the professional rider, Charly Mottet, replied, "I used to think it was a small person. Now I know it is 6 foot 2, 176 pounds and called Miguel" (July 17th, 1993: 7).

While much cycling talk is concerned with the physical attributes of a cyclist, local riders have no particular way of dealing with such outstanding exceptions to the rule. In part, this can be attributed to the evolved manner of encouraging conformity which surrounds so much of cycling life. From the similarities of training programmes to the uniformity of paraphernalia which they wear and ride, cyclists operate in a milieu in which appropriate standards are clearly set and regulated. For cyclists, 'common sense' is a cultural system (Geertz 1975), which orders their world. Exceptional riders however, defy or transcend conventional wisdom regarding physiology to such a degree, that the conforming riders are at a loss to explain the brilliance of the unexpectedly gifted climber, for it diverges wildly with the common sense of cycling. The "standard operating procedure" (Hannerz 1992: 127) of cycling is so rarely deviated from that cyclists have no vocabulary to deal with exceptions to the rule. The common sense of cycling, as a system of ordering cultural life, is therefore rather "tolerant towards inconsistency" (Hannerz 1992: 129).

Lagore (1980) has noted that the image of the climber in the Tour de France is reverential, a sentiment shared by local riders: as Jérôme reflects, "every one likes a climber. They give a race its soul." The high passes of the Alps and the

Pyrénées engender tremendous excitement amongst race followers. It is when the gradient goes upwards that "*les chèvres*"- mountain goats- within the *peloton* emerge from obscurity to greater glory. As Patrice recognizes, "the mountains are where we make our heroes." Indeed, there is a kind of romance in the quest to become the greatest climber in a race. The language that surrounds local considerations of climbing and climbers reflects this. Fabrice and Isabelle are unanimous in their designation that "climbers like them cannot be human. Gaul, he was an angel."¹⁴ In popular literature, Charly Gaul, the Dutch rider who dominated the King of the Mountains competition in the Tour de France along with Federico Bahamontès between 1954 and 1964, is described as a "natural born climber with wings on his heels...on the first steep climb, he would prance away as though he had springs in his calves" (Olivier 1993: 40).

Of critical consideration when constructing the climber as a figure of reverence, is the feeling that he is one of a dying breed. As the media coverage of the Tour de France shows, the climber's trademark, "*l'échappée*"- the breakaway-, is becoming increasingly difficult for him to execute. As road conditions improve, and as the flat stages get faster, when the race reaches the mountains, it becomes much harder for *le grimpeur* to keep away from the rest of the *peloton*. Nonetheless, the lone *échappée* is still an inspiring figure, dangling off the front of the pack, alone with his suffering. The Italian climbers, Marco Pantani and Claudio Chiappucci occupy positions of 'cycling hero' because of their lengthy and solitary breakaways, while the Frenchmen Richard Virenque and Luc Leblanc are revered for their dogged determination in attempting *les échappées*. Even amongst Isérois cyclists, where most can hold their own in the Alps, the really special climbers, the ones who "dance on their pedals and make it look so effortless", as Lucienne describes them, are admired and respected. Frédéric, the winner of the last three *éditions* of 'Le Mouche', is described by his club mate Dominique as "a pure climber of the type who has disappeared. He is of the same breed as Bahamontès and Gaul."

The hobbled hero

Having addressed those cyclists who emerge from the rank and file for their cumulative achievements or for their skills as climbers, it is perhaps paradoxical to now turn to the third type of cycling hero- the cyclist who

¹⁴Isabelle is talking here of Charly Gaul and Lucien Van Impe, a Belgian rider who won the King of the Mountains jersey ten times in the Tour de France.

exhibits moments of weakness or fragility. The heroes of cycling have a unique quality in that they exalt failure and frailty. The tales of greatness that define the Tour de France are always countered by human fallibility. The sheer difficulties of the Tour, combined with the fragility of the human form, mean that *les géants de la route* are hobbled heroes; they too have clay feet. Indeed, cycling must be the only sport in which a man who repeatedly came second, Raymond Poulidor, is treated like royalty, for he is feted around the Tour course in his own private limousine.

Again, it is the shared appreciation on the part of aficionados of the suffering of their sport that manufactures cycling heroes in this distinctive way. Far from being vain heroes, aloof and removed from the fan base that constructs them, cycling heroes remain real men, because the *connoisseurs* of cycling action can identify with the brutal honesty of the sport. It is impossible to fake anything in cycling: if a rider is hurting, this is telegraphed to all who are watching. He cannot 'sub off', pass the ball to someone else or call for a time out, as is the case with sports such as lacrosse, soccer and basketball. In cycling, the riders must suffer, and suffer publicly. The open display of suffering constructs the hobbled hero in very particular ways, for it rehumanizes him. While a cycling hero is idolised and adored for the extraordinary feats he performs, the suffering that he simultaneously endures reveal his weaknesses; it makes him mortal. Such a tension between striving and humility defines the hobbled hero. Cycling heroes are made, not because they demonstrate any superhuman heroicism, but, on the contrary, because they make heroicism very human.

The death of the British rider, Tom Simpson, on the slopes of Mont Ventoux in the 1967 *édition* of the Tour carries much currency when recalling hobbled heroes. Wobbling up the vertiginous climb, Simpson fell twice, both times he remounted before his heart eventually stopped beating and he died on the side of the road. Traces of amphetamines were found in his body and more drugs were later found amongst his personal possessions. As Simpson lay on the side of the road, he uttered "put me back on my bike": last words that speak of classic stimulant abuse, for the drug removes any warning signs of encroaching exhaustion that the body may be trying to give to the mind. His affront to the purity of the sport notwithstanding, Simpson remains a cycling hero. There is a monument erected in his memory on the summit of the Mont- at the exact spot where he fell- and, every year, thousands of cyclists make pilgrimages to this mountain top shrine to pay their respects. When the Tour de France passed over the climb in 1994, the organizers flew

Simpson's widow across from England to lay a commemorative wreath. Even now, Isèrois riders recognize that, "to climb Mont Ventoux, it is absolutely necessary to take something to breathe." When faced with the physical might of Mont Ventoux, cyclists, no matter how gifted, are reduced to a state of weakness more appropriate to a non-cycling life.

While heroism implies the intangible, cycling heroes are readily accessible, and are approximated by the amateurs in their daily cycling lives. The ubiquity of professionals when riding in Isère, means that amateurs encounter their heroes on a daily basis. As Friedman notes, "fantasies take on a durable reality when they are successfully communicated" (1992: 196). It is possible to see Thierry Claveyrolat and Jean-Claude Colotti riding the Vizille Loop, when descending the Col de Laffrey, one can see the greatest female cyclist of all time, Jeannie Longo, training with her husband and coach Patrice, or perhaps, when stopping for a post-ride coffee or beer, Claveyrolat himself will pull your pint at the brasserie he owns in Vizille. The sheer inescapability of the professionals means that aspiring amateurs find these local legends straining to get out of the saddle at precisely the same point that they do or, they see the greats adopt the same gearing that they use. Witnessing the weaknesses of the professionals gives aficionados reassurance of their own potential. In crafting a myth of the Tour de France, cyclists rely on their own understandings, expectations and experiences to make the heroes that are so central to this myth. By actively engaging in the sport, aficionados appreciate the concentrated burst of sheer and unadulterated agony that the three weeks of the Tour de France contains. Along the roads of Isère, there is a spiralling competition between riders to be like Merckx or to climb like Gaul that is never quite resolved. Cycling heroes fade with the passing of each season only to be reestablished the next.

It is the close relationship between spectator and athlete that both enables and reveals the construction of the hobbled hero. While most sports clearly separate those participating from those watching by installing stadiums, bleachers and grandstands, in cycling there are no physical constraints demarcating the cyclist from the audience. In fact, as Maynard identifies, "cycling is handicapped as a spectator sport. It is difficult to view the entire event and there is no comfortable seating" (1984: 82). Contrary to other sporting events, stage races are held on open roads, and spectators frequently line the road lending support to the riders.

Far from admonishing the riders as 'wimps', aficionados provide moral and

physical support for their hobbled heroes. When the Tour de France reaches Isère, it is a common sight to see spectators throughout the mountain stages actively assisting the riders by pushing them up the difficult climbs. The procession of onlookers lining the roads operates as a chain gang of sorts, shuttling the riders up these climbs. While accepting a push incurs a time penalty (usually of 10-30 seconds) if witnessed by the race *commissaire*, frequently the riders are powerless to fend off the enthusiasm of the spectators. And finally, the riders are usually so exhausted that they are willing to risk a few seconds in the overall classification for the sake of finishing the stage. Spectators also line the road armed with newspaper for the riders to stuff up their jerseys as insulation against the almost hypothermic winds faced during descents.

The human frailty of the professionals does not, then, detract from their achievements. The triumphs and tragedies of the American rider (now retired) Greg LeMond construct him as the ultimate hobbled hero. The first American to win the Tour de France, LeMond was set to win three consecutive *éditions* when circumstances intervened to alter the path of Tour history. He was shot by his brother-in-law in a hunting accident, nearly ending his life. Despite a body full of lead pellets, LeMond overcame the odds to win a third Tour de France. His comeback elevated him to the status of *un type sacré*. According to Isabelle, "LeMond really is a hero, partly because of his accident- it's very romantic. A hero is someone who has known adversity and pain." Cycling heroes are unique heroes by virtue of their flaws and failings. As Barthes recognizes,

I believe that the Tour is the best example we have ever encountered of a total, hence an ambiguous, myth...the epic expresses that fragile moment of history, in which man, however clumsy and deceived, nonetheless contemplates through his impure fables a perfect balance between himself, the community and the universe (1957[1987]: 156-157).

While each cycling hero is made for different reasons, they are kept in the public gaze through common processes of canonization. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the cycle domain is overseen by the body of professionals, and the heroes of the Tour de France remain inextricably involved with the events of the race. Each night of the Tour de France, Bernard Hinault, in his capacity as *conseiller technique*, speaks to a journalist from *L'Equipe*, responding to readers' questions. The next day, his answers make up one column of the newspaper's coverage of the Tour. Jacques Anquetil wrote this column up until his death in 1987, now Hinault continues the tradition of

past masters commenting on the modern race. Other media contribute to the maintenance of cycling heroes. Historical footage is broadcast through newsreels and feature films. *Pour Un Maillot Jaune* (1965) and, more famously, *Vivre Le Tour* (1968) by the late Louis Malle, are two such examples.¹⁵ There is also a whole industry devoted to novels that reconstruct a particular episode or exploit from the Tour de France. Jean-Paul Olivier (1993) has authored a series of biographies of a number of the race's key figures- Charly Gaul and Fausto Coppi amongst others- while Louis Nucera has penned *Mes Rayons du Soleil* (1987), detailing his life as a professional cyclist, particularly the great riders whom he encountered during this time. Post-Tour *critériums* also help to keep the heroes in the public gaze well after the last Sunday in July has passed. Known amongst the *peloton* as 'collecting the rent', the key riders from the Tour (the wearers of the three jerseys and winners of important stages) are invited to compete in a series of lucrative street races throughout France and elsewhere in Europe. In these *critériums*, riders get to wear their yellow, green or polka dot jerseys, and they are introduced to the public to talk about their performance in the Tour.

But it is, above all, in endorsing a *cyclo sportive* race that the presence of Tour heroes is kept in the forefront of local memory. *Cyclo sportives* are a unique form of racing in that entrants do not have to be licensed by Le Fédération Française de Cyclisme. With this restriction lifted, *cyclo sportives* attract literally thousands of competitors. Indeed, in 1994, 'L'Étape du Tour' saw more than 4,000 entrants sign on, 'La Marcel Bidot' had 1,000 cyclists, while 'La Ronan Pensec' attracted 1,500 competitors to raise money for AIDS awareness. Each *département* throughout France hosts one or more races, and each race carries a certain amount of points. The idea is that cyclists will travel all over France to compete in the various races; the prize being Le Trophée d'Or. Importantly, *cyclo sportives* embody a mythic dimension in that they venerate the heroes of the Tour de France, both living and dead. Races are named after Bernard Hinault, Lucien van Impe and Jacques Anquetil, and these namesake races serve as perpetual reminders of the greats of the Tour de France, as aspiring amateurs vie with each other for Le Trophée d'Or. The races attract significant attention in the specialized cycling press, the coverage reflecting the intimacy and familiarity that amateurs claim for the relationship they have with the professionals. 'La Bernard Hinault' for example, was described in *Le Cycle* as "sale temps pour les blaireaux" (July/August 1994: 98).

¹⁵Coquet (1993) details the place of the bicycle in French cinema more generally, examining its use in films as diverse as *Au Revoir Les Enfants* and *The Vanishing*.

Narratives of cycling

As Bouvier (1980) notes, the Tour de France has a rich oral tradition. Its text conceals an abundance of interpretive possibilities through and by which Isèrois cyclists can enjoy their extended appreciations of the race. The polysemic nature of the Tour produces a storehouse of anecdotal lore upon which local riders draw to make meaningful their experiences of cycling. Isèrois cyclists are gifted *raconteurs* when elaborating sagas of cycling: there is constant interjection and reminders as they finish each other's sentences and stories. Indeed, situations as diverse as when passing landmarks on a training ride, when reading an article in *L'Equipe*, or when engaging in routine cycling chatter, all provide the opening for an anecdote.

Frequently humorous in nature, these accounts provide a particularly potent means of expressing commitment and belonging to the local cycling order. As Carr notes, "a community exists by virtue of a story which is articulated and accepted...A community exists where a narrative account exists as a 'we' which persists through its experiences and actions" (1986: 128-130). In Isère, every cyclist has a favourite bar or café, where they can recount the tale of a dreaded climb, a story of intense pain, or the memory of one great ride, "when the road rose up to meet me and the wind was at my back all day." One's territorial familiarity and awareness of the difficulties of cycling in Isère impose an informal ordering of struggle upon which favourite stories are ranked: "The Col d'Ornon?" says one rider, "That's nothing! The hardest day I ever had was when it snowed on the Glandon and I was out of my mind with exhaustion. The cold started to really hurt. I was frozen. Even two or three days later I was *still* cold!" The apparent good humour and banter of an anecdote translates into a powerful narrative discourse that orders and systematizes the sagas of suffering. Humour makes light of what was previously profound, and in so doing, the event is made all the more significant. Indeed, the verbal transmission of cycling's sagas serves as a means by which much social finessing is done. There is an "art of saying" to cycling narratives and "one must grasp a sense other than what is said" (de Certeau 1984: 79).

Such a conscious, explicitly articulated, celebration of the saga, both of cycling generally and of the Tour de France specifically, contrasts with Sartre's assertion that "history is made without knowing of its making" (1960[1982]: 29). The Tour de France is a carefully considered social history of France. By

dipping into the vast inventory of stories that comprises the historical heritage of the Tour de France, Isérois cyclists author a particular account of France's past. From its origins through to its contemporary enactment, the Tour represents, not just the story of cycling, but a story of France. As Wolf (1982) and Hastrup (1992) demonstrate, no society is without or outside history. For Isérois cyclists, events such as the two World Wars, the crisis of May 1968, and the formation of the European Economic Community, have been appropriated into the annals of the Tour, with the significance of historical junctures being routinely acknowledged in the shaping of their local narratives. As one elderly rider recognizes,

during the war [World War Two], life was very hard, but then, in 1947, the Tour came to Grenoble and Robic won. It was a great event. We forgot our cares and people danced in the streets. The Tour made people happy again, even though we had lost many, many lives in the Vercors.

By invoking images and legends of a heroic past, cyclists create a framework within which to interpret the significance of the present. Reminiscences and retellings reverberate along the roads of Isère, with cyclists endlessly elaborating the tales of the Tour de France. Climbing the Col Bayard one training ride, Thierry turned to his partner Franco: "Remember Ocaña?" asked Thierry, referring to the decisive moment when the Spaniard, Luis Ocaña, took the stage between Grenoble and Orcières-Merlette from Eddy Merckx in 1971. "Of course I remember," replied Franco, "it was a great stage, but it was not as exciting as Hinault and LeMond in 1986." Their difference in opinion triggered a lengthy narrative between the two riders that spanned decades, weaving together exploits and accomplishments, as Thierry and Franco debated *les géants de la route*. Connerton notes the historical dimension to narrative, writing that "images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order" (1989: 3). Amongst local cyclists, the Tour de France is known as 'the serial novel of real life', for it presents and reflects moments of national crisis and celebration. As White recognizes,

narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or may not be used to represent real events in their aspect as developmental process but rather entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications (1987: ix).

Itemizing a chronology of heroic struggle is perhaps the most effective means of conveying the tales of greatness that surround the Tour, for as Rabinow asserts, "symbolic analysis must always be historically oriented. To understand the present state of a set of core symbols in a culture, one must first move regressively back to trace their development" (1975: 3). Some of

the richest sagas of the Tour de France come from *le temps héroïque*- the time of heroes- in the everyday parlance of local riders. The 1920s and 1930s were critical years in the making of the Tour myth. Henri Pélissier, the winner of the 1923 Tour, coined his phrase '*les forçats de la route*' in 1924 which captured the essence of endurance that continues to captivate Tour audiences. In *le temps héroïque*, stages of more than 400 kilometres were raced over dirt roads, with a single speed bicycle and no support: it was a time when stages often started at night or before dawn, and it was not unusual for riders to dismount and push their bicycles up the muddy paths of the mountain stages. Two of the most powerful moments from my fieldwork were when I met two of the last surviving riders of this time; the Frenchman, Roger Lapébie, a professional from 1932 to 1939 and the winner of the Tour in 1937, and the Belgian, Jean-Luc Protin, who rode the Tours of 1923-1925.

For Monsieur Lapébie, *le temps héroïque* were a time of unsurpassed physical agony: as he remembers, "I was in so much pain when I finished. I had sore hands, sore eyes, sore ankles, a sore arse." When I asked him to recount his worst memory of the Tour, Monsieur Lapébie replied, "when my frame broke and I had to walk. During a descent in 1932, I ran into a mule and broke a wheel. I had to walk fifteen kilometres. It was dark when I finished. That was a bad day." As such reminiscences signal, the theme of exceptional physical hardship is an enduring one in the myth of the Tour de France.

In recalling his memories from *le temps héroïque*, Monsieur Protin articulates another theme that continues to dominate contemporary appreciations of the Tour- that of landscape and territory. The last Tour he rode covered close to 5,500 kilometres in three weeks:¹⁶

The roads were terrible because we'd just had the war and they hadn't fixed them. There was no asphalt, there was nothing. There were 15 stages and the longest was nearly 500 kilometres. There were stage starts at 10 pm; we rode all night and all day- 20 hours on the bicycle without stopping. There were roads that we used to call 'birds nests'; pebbles, dust and gravel. In those days we were given 25 pairs of shorts and 25 jerseys [for twenty stages]. We got lots of saddle sores because of the dirt and the cow dung, it was easy to get infected.

Experiences of the Tour, both past and present, are closely linked to the territory that it traces. Spatial landscapes are turned into a temporal sequence of events, as the territory of the Tour is incorporated into the myth it then

¹⁶Contemporary Tours are nearly 1,500 kilometres shorter on average.

evokes. As Barthes recognizes, "the geography of the Tour is necessarily subsumed by the epic event" (1957 [1987]: 154).

For Isérois cyclists, *le temps héroïque* particularly appeal to their collective imagination, with riders prone to say, "those were the great years...now the Tour is just a big stroll." For the older members of the Isérois cycling community, who grew up listening to the radio or reading about the race in the paper, the feeling of suspense was wonderful: as one man claims, "the Tour was better when it was on the radio because you could imagine." Before the advent of television, the results of each day's stage were posted in shops, town halls, schools and cafés.¹⁷ Local men remember going to bars with their fathers to see the posting of the results. There, men gathered around and exclaimed when the winner's name was written in. It was a small but suspenseful gesture. For older Tour aficionados, the race provides a mechanism to go back in time, to cast their memory back to the good old days. Talking about the Tour always conjures up images from a distant era. Global media coverage however, has brought an immediacy to the Tour. As Fabrice's uncle deftly identifies, "there is so much talk of memory because there no longer is any." Indeed, live broadcasts from the Tour capture events instantly: notions of time and space have been compacted: winners can now be identified in the blink of an eye.

The juxtaposition of the old and the new, of the past and the present, informs local commentary on the Tour de France. From technical talk involving tactics or equipment through to musings on possible winners, commentary on the Tour is always contingent on events or examples from previous Tours. Linkages are made between and throughout *éditions* to give a continuous power to the Tour de France. The predicted battle between Miguel Indurain and Tony Rominger in 1994 was seen in relation to the 'great' duel between Jacques Anquetil and Raymond Poulidor some 30 years ago. Their historically famous battle on the climb to Le-Puy-de-Dôme was used to contextualize the neck and neck climbs of Indurain and Rominger between Serre Chevalier and Isola 2000 in 1993, which became a precedent for the race the following year. In reactivating the memories of the key players in the epic of the Tour, the Tour de France is continually reconstituted as successive generations both reproduce and transform the sporting traditions that they have inherited. The exploits of yesteryear have become and remain a referent by which Isérois cyclists contextualize their understandings of cycle

¹⁷GAN Assurances- a long time Tour sponsor- still posts the daily stage results in the windows of their offices.

racing. The myth of the Tour de France is ever evolving. It is a story both to be told and one that is constantly being told.

Indeed, the myth of the Tour is far from arbitrary. It is adaptive and mercurial, accommodating the ever changing routes and riders. It involves a turnover in which essential themes are reproduced while supplementary and/or complementary ones are introduced. As Barthes recognizes, "there is no fixity in mythical concepts; they can come into being, alter, disintegrate, disappear completely" (1973: 130). Far from being static, the Tour de France is an invented tradition that is augmented or added to every year. By 'invented tradition', I follow Hobsbawm and Ranger in their view that 'tradition' is best approached as

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable heroic past (1983: 11).

This recognizes the socially constructed nature of history. The annual rebirth of the Tour brings with it new heroes, sagas and tales which all serve to amplify further the unique importance of this event.

While these perceived connections with the past are wholly appropriate to my project, the notion of an invented tradition should be approached with caution. Briggs (1996: 435) is particularly wary of the ways in which scholars have approached the invention of tradition, arguing that the romance of the invented tradition has led to a tradition of invention. As Briggs argues, the discursive authority of an invented tradition does not come from its interpretation, rather from the local actors who talk and write of past events. Certainly, these events are 'invented' or 'imagined', but their authority comes from the highly subjective cultural work that is consistently done to maintain their discursive power.

Indeed, talking about the Tour is done so as to fit with particular ways of connecting with the past. Narratives of cycling, particularly those in which the protagonist triumphs over the apparently impossible, inform the local cycling domain. The professional riders who possess a Lazarus like ability are incorporated into Isèrois narratives. The Danish rider, Jesper Skibby, who fractured his skull in the 1992 Tirreno-Adriatico, only to rise from the dead and win a stage of the 1993 Tour de France, and the Savoyard, Charly Mottet, who cracked two vertebrae in the 1993 Paris-Nice, only to suitably recover to

complete his final year on the professional circuit in 1994, are two riders whose exploits are woven into a narrative of tenacity. Particular nicknames reflect the doggedness so central to the making of the Tour myth. Jean Robic, the winner of the 1947 Tour, is known locally as '*Tête de Cuir*' or '*Trompe-la-Morte*'; both nicknames have their origin in the 1945 Paris-Roubaix, where Robic split his head open. By the time he crashed in this *édition* of the Paris-Roubaix, Robic had already suffered serious injury in 1944, when he fractured his skull; in 1946, when he cracked his skull again and broke the bones in his right hand; and in 1950, when he fractured his left collar bone and four vertebrae.

Importantly, such instances become reference points for the local cycle world: a super fast descent from the Col Luitel during one training ride prompted Dominique to recount the tale of Jean Robic, who was given a feeding bottle full of lead at the top of the Col du Tourmalet in 1953 to make him descend faster. When Pascal, normally a non-drinker, engaged, for the first time, in the popular pre and post-ride tradition of downing a shot of very strong Chartreuse liqueur, he was reminded of the misfortune met by the Algerian rider Abd el Kader Zaaf. 'The Lion of Chebli' was included in a North African team racing in the 1950s. During one very long stage across the baking hot fields of Provence, he was refreshed by glasses of rosé supplied by the spectators. As popular opinion has it, Zaaf fell asleep. When he awoke, he set off in the wrong direction and was eventually disqualified from the race. When I broke my wrist watch in a crash, Christophe was quick to make the connection with the crash of the Dutch rider, Wim Van Est, in the 1951 Tour. Falling 70 feet over the edge of the Col de l'Aubisque in the Pyrénées, Van Est miraculously survived. When he had recovered from his numerous injuries, Van Est was featured in a newspaper advertisement for the Swiss watch company Pontiac. The copy read: "I fell seventy feet. My heart missed a beat, but my Pontiac never stopped ticking." Such stories are deposited in the collective bank of anecdote upon which local riders draw to sustain and make meaningful their cycling presence.

The juxtaposition of 'old' and 'new' is not, in itself, peculiar to cycling. Indeed, the oscillation between 'then' and 'now' is reminiscent of Zonabend's work in Minot, Burgundy. Concerned with notions of time and memory, Zonabend argues that "all stories and opinions about the life and behaviour of people 'nowadays' are spliced with a commentary on what used to happen

'in the good old days'" (1984: 2).¹⁸ In moving between historical contexts, cyclists, like Zonabend's peasant families, create a framework within which to locate and articulate their enduring memory. As de Certeau points out, "the dispersion of stories points to the dispersion of the memorable as well" (1984: 108).

Coda

This chapter has detailed the centrality of suffering to local representations of both the Tour de France specifically and of cycling in Isère more generally. The theme of suffering is inextricable from narratives of the Tour, whether reconstructing events of the immediate or distant past. The degree to which such a repertoire of cycling lore exists as common knowledge is truly staggering. Conversations are continually premised on a shared understanding of the events, both past and present, of the Tour de France. This common appreciation of cycling's 'greatest adventures' is such that I was forever saying "hang on, what did happen in the blacksmiths"?, or "who on earth is Robic?" For local cyclists however, these tales were both implicitly understood and explicitly articulated. The year long concern by Isérois cyclists with the sagas of the Tour is, to borrow from Geertz, "a story they tell themselves about themselves" (1973: 421). An apposite comment from one rider confirms the acutely self-reflexive nature of the relationship between local and national cycling experiences: "when we talk of the Tour de France, we talk of ourselves." It is a means by which cyclists can maintain their cultural distinctiveness, for their inside knowledge and appreciation of the sport allows them to construct the race in very particular cultural terms indeed. As I have discussed in this chapter, pain lies at the core of cycling. It is a critical marker that identifies commitment to the culture of the sport. A local maxim often used in jest, encapsulates the centrality of suffering to cycling: "if it doesn't hurt, then you haven't really cycled."

¹⁸The work of Fernand Braudel on the notion of *long durée* is central when considering the social production and recollection of historical events. For Braudel, contemporary events only become apparent by bringing together "movements of different origins, of a different rhythm: today's time dates from yesterday, the day before yesterday, and all former times" (1980: 34).

CHAPTER FIVE MYTHOLOGIZING THE MOUNTAINS

“La montagne est une fabrication de l’esprit.”
Roger Canac

Introduction

As I indicated in chapter two, the most defining feature of Isère is the Alps. Affecting tourism, development, employment, agriculture, regional economy and local identity, the mountains shape and focus life in some very profound ways. While I noted that an awareness of the mountains as significantly shaping of social life is not, in itself, peculiar to being a cyclist- indeed, their presence is inescapable when living in Isère, irrespective of whether one cycles- in this chapter, I propose to itemize the ways in which the mountains shape cycling lives specifically. The familiarity with the landscape that is needed to construct the mountains in cycling terms is particular to the sport; it separates cycling knowledge from other forms of knowledge regarding the history and geography of the region. For cyclists, the mountains represent cultural beacons that illuminate the distinctiveness of their lives. The mountains provide particular sites at or towards which distinctive, cycling specific, rituals and behaviours can be enacted and directed. The mountains become important meeting places for an otherwise disparate collection of cyclists. From every corner of Isère, they descend upon (and then ascend) particular *cols* and *côtes*. The mountains serve as sites at which cyclists can be universally united. Riding in the mountains, particularly the act of climbing, provides a mechanism by which the various threads of cycling life can be woven together.

While climbing certain *cols* binds cyclists together in a common situation, it also brings together the various themes that I have been addressing in my ethnography of Isérois cycling life. Territorial familiarity, particular mythologies concerning both the Tour de France and the men who ride it, the physicality of cycling which is manifested in specific sagas of suffering, and the sport's dependence on equipment, all combine as a complexly connected bundle of narratives when cycling action is directed towards the mountains.

Importantly, riding in the mountains also allows the articulation of new narratives and behaviours. The bundle of cycling narratives now includes a highly particular mythologizing of the mountains themselves. Just as *le grimpeur* is privileged over and above all other types of cyclists, the mountains occupy positions of symbolic pre-eminence in the Isérois cycle domain. It is the aim of this chapter to identify and elaborate the ways in which local cyclists construct the mountains as being places of communal gathering and identity formation.

Just as bike shops, club rooms, cafés, pizzerias and the like represent sites at which cycling stories can be told, the mountains serve similar functions of mythic elaboration. The key difference however, is that, where the mountains are concerned, cyclists are engaged in a continual process of construction and reconstruction as they imbue them with a mythic status. While bike and coffee shops are significant for cyclists, they remain a vessel into which meaning is decanted, rather than the site at which it is produced. It is only when cyclists return from a trip to the mountains that these places become important. Having dealt elsewhere with the bike and coffee shop as sites of communal recollection, it is the aim of this chapter to explore what happens when cyclists embark on a session in the mountains; to look at how particular myths are made through the act of cycling in Isère. For Isérois cyclists, the mountains, most notably Alpe d'Huez, the Col du Galibier and the Col d'Izoard, become, in Rojek's terms, "performance sites" (1992: 147); places towards which they can routinely direct a range of behaviours peculiar to their sport. The mountains are key locales in which the "leisure form directed towards the site thrives on the repetition, compulsion, duplication and the imitation of the experience being sought" (Rojek 1992: 147). Riding in the mountains provides the opportunity for cyclists to demonstrate and replicate certain practices through which they can constitute their group identity.

One of the ways in which Isérois cyclists construct their cultural presence is to enact an extreme fetishization of place whereby they imbue the mountains with an enigmatic or a mythical quality. For Isérois cyclists, landscape becomes socialized. As Bender notes, landscape is "drawn into the domain of human intervention. As time goes on, social relations become increasingly dependent on these pre-established physical structures" (1993: 11). Once socialized, the mountains have the presence to impinge on a cyclist's life by their very presence; they are viewed with awe, respect and trepidation. To develop this argument ethnographically, I examine the ways in which the

mountains are spoken of as being places of extreme risk and danger. This means of organizing cycling conversation systematizes a set of expressions that grants the mountains with extraordinary capacities indeed. As Duncan notes, "landscapes are communicative devices that encode and transmit information" (1990: 4). It is when directed at one mountain pass in particular-Alpe d'Huez- that this fetishization of the mountains becomes most pronounced. As I argue throughout this chapter, Alpe d'Huez represents a regional shrine that commemorates and celebrates particular cycling accomplishments; it is a key axis in the cycling cartography of the region. Given that Alpe d'Huez is mythologized over and above all other mountain passes, the ethnographic material drawn on throughout this chapter needs to be situated in a description of the mountain. In the following section, I provide a geographical account of Alpe d'Huez that I then draw upon when discussing cycling constructions of the mountains *vis-à-vis* their sport.

Sacred sites

In the social imagination of cycling, certain mountains rise out of the general alpine topography as being "*les lieux sacrés*"- sacred places. Invariably the scene of a decisive battle in the Tour de France, these *monuments aux vivants* are imbued with an enigmatic quality. Le-Puy-de-Dôme in the Massif Central and Mont Ventoux in the Vaucluse are shrouded in this aura, while *le Cercle du Mort*- the climbs of the Perysourde, Aspin, Tourmalet and the Aubisque in the Pyrénées-, is packaged and promoted as possessing animate qualities.¹ Amongst cyclists, the mountains are capable of inspiring fear and awe. Recollections of the introduction of The Circle of Death to the route of the Tour de France circulate in local memory. As popular opinion has it, these mountains were so wild that bears still roamed and the roads to the summit were little more than rutted mule tracks. On the day that the race was to complete The Circle of Death, Henri Desgrange waited with other officials at the bottom of the Col du Tourmalet for several hours past the expected arrival of the Tour. Finally, one rider emerged from the darkness, but he was so exhausted he could not speak. Fifteen minutes later, Octave Lapize, the Frenchman who was to win that particular *édition* of the Tour appeared. According to the cyclist recounting this tale, Lapize simply stared at Desgrange

¹As Vidal (1987, 1990) and Augendre (1991) note, the mountains have been regular fixtures on the Tour route since 1910. The first climb was the Ballon d'Alsace and then the high passes through the Pyrénées were introduced. When Henri Desgrange first included the Col du Galibier in 1913, his decision was described in a letter to *L'Auto* as an "act of adoration." In *cyclotourisme* guides such as *Guide du Vélo en Montagne* and *Cyclisme et Cyclotourisme* these mountains are routinely identified as being 'must visit' destinations.

and spat out the single word *'assassins'*.

Since those early years, the mountains have evolved as being fundamental to the saga of the Tour de France. In 1994, the race included five consecutive stages at high altitude. If each *col* were added together, then the riders would have completed more than 32,000 metres of climbing. While it is important to situate contemporary practice in historical memory, Le-Puy-de-Dôme, Mont Ventoux and The Circle of Death nonetheless remain outside the territorial bounds of my thesis. Thus, I focus instead on *le lieu sacré* most regularly encountered by Isérois cyclists: Alpe d'Huez in the Massif de l'Oisans. In many ways, my fieldwork represents an ethnography of Alpe d'Huez, for much of my material was culled there. It was the interactions between cyclists both on the way to and at Alpe d'Huez that commanded most of my ethnographic attention.

Situated sixty kilometres from Grenoble, Alpe d'Huez is a mecca for cyclists lured by the mystique of the mountain. Described by cyclists as "*un institution véritable*" and "*la montagne le plus bien connu en France*," Alpe d'Huez serves as the gauge by which local riders measure their cycling competence. 13.8 kilometres in length, from Bourg d'Oisans (the market town that sits in its shadows) to the resort village at its summit, the climb of Alpe d'Huez is lung searing. With an average grade of 8.5 per cent, the climb to Alpe d'Huez is rated *hors categorie*, an important criterion in designating a mountain as a sacred place.² Alpe de Huez serves, in many ways, as an "international evangelical centre" (Dahlberg 1991: 35), for it remains one of cycling's holiest lands, towards which local, regional, national and international cyclists make their frequent pilgrimages.

On Saturdays and Sundays, particularly in summer, a snake of chrome and colour inches its way to the summit, as hundreds of cyclists make their way painstakingly to the top. Upon arrival, the Maison du Tourisme issues a diploma to all who finish. The various tourist shops in the village of Alpe d'Huez sell T-shirts, refrigerator magnets, key rings and bumper stickers emblazoned with the slogan *'Je suis monté Alpe d'Huez'*. To help cyclists reach their goal, the residents from Huez and La Garde- the two villages along

²Mountain roads are given a grade which indicates their steepness. Ranked from category one to four (one being steepest), these grades are calculated as the level of rise per one kilometre of road. Mountains which are steeper than this classification are deemed to be *'hors categorie'* or *'beyond category'*. Most climbs in Isère fall into the first or second category. Alpe d'Huez is classified as *hors categorie*, its steepness positioning it in a class of its own.

the climb- offer encouragement from the deck chairs that they have set up along the road's edge, or they yell support from their balconies that overlook the road. One particularly enthusiastic couple supplies the riders with fresh drinking water and quarters of oranges, and they offer sheets of newspaper to stuff down one's jersey as insulation against the wind chill experienced on the steep descent.

While the attraction to Alpe d'Huez is phenomenal, luring cyclists and ardent supporters alike, the expressions of Alpe d'Huez by cycling enthusiasts are, overwhelmingly, couched in terms of the mountain's regular inclusion in the route of the Tour de France. As Philippe claims, "the stage is to the Tour what the semi-finals are to Roland Garros." The start of the climb is marked by an enormous placard- in French, English and Dutch-³ which signals its centrality to the Tour de France: "The ascent to Alpe d'Huez. 13 kilometres, 21 corners, 1100 metres of vertical drop. One stage of the Tour de France." For Isèrois cyclists, Alpe d'Huez has a monumental quality. It has a timelessness in that its beauty and presence are enshrined forever.

Like much of the Tour de France, historical precedents figure heavily in the making of the myth of Alpe d'Huez. As popular opinion has it, the legend of Alpe d'Huez was born in the *édition* of 1952, the year that television footage was first broadcast live from the Tour, when the Italian rider, Fausto Coppi, won the stage there. Going on to win the Tour de France by nearly twenty seven minutes, the highest post-war winning margin, Coppi proclaimed that "it is winning at Alpe d'Huez that a rider knows he has become the *campionissimo*⁴ of the world." In spite of this testimonial, the mountain was dropped from the Tour itinerary until 1976, when the Belgian rider, Lucien

³While my thesis is most directly concerned with Isèrois appreciations of the Tour de France, the presence of Dutch spectators at Alpe d'Huez deserves consideration. For a country significantly lacking in mountains, the Dutch have had remarkable success at Alpe d'Huez, and every year a contingent makes the trip from Holland to lend support to their riders. Most arrive by car- the road is lined with vehicles carrying yellow six figure registration plates- and they camp out on the mountain for several days before to make sure that they have a front row seat when the race arrives. Several coach companies from the Netherlands also offer packages which cover the long trip and two or three nights accommodation at Alpe d'Huez. An attraction of opposites draws 'The Rembrants', as Dutch fans are locally known, from the low countries to Alpe d'Huez. Referred to as 'the southernmost town in The Netherlands' and 'Holland's only mountain', both Dutch spectators and French media share in the same colloquial presentations of Alpe d'Huez. Dutch flags hang from the trees and are painted onto the road, while in places, there is a sea of scorched faces painted orange. Visiting the "Dutch mountain" is, as Martin, a man from Spijkenisse on the outskirts of Rotterdam, describes, "something special for a Dutchman because there are four or five of us who have won this stage."

⁴A rider of great class and dignity.

Van Impe, claimed victory. Since then, it has been included in all but the 1980, 1985 and 1993 Tours. In 1979, to make up for its omission the following year, it was climbed twice in consecutive days! Alpe d'Huez is so firmly entrenched in the iconography of the Tour that when it was omitted from the route in 1993, local cyclists wrote both to Le Société du Tour de France and to *L'Equipe* protesting at this oversight. The omission of Alpe d'Huez was reported in *Le Miroir du Cyclisme* as "*Inconsolable! Pas du Tour de France cette année à l'Alpe d'Huez*" and, as an "*indiscrètion*"; as a form of infidelity or cheating on Tour audiences. As both press and popular sentiment agree, "it wouldn't be the Tour de France without Alpe d'Huez." Such perceptions serve to memorialize Alpe d'Huez in that they evoke its past, albeit a selective and partial one, in their representations of it in the present.

When the Tour de France passes through Isère, the centrality of Alpe d'Huez to the race is made most apparent. As Thierry Claveyrolat remarks, "that's a point where the spectators outdo all other spectators." Nearly 500,000 fans line the route. Thousands of cars, bikes, campervans and motor homes are jammed end to end along the road's edge. In most places along this climb the crowd is within striking distance of the riders, egging them on, slapping them on the back, photographing them and offering advice. As Stephen Hodge claims, "there is a sea of people in front of you. You have got no idea where the road goes, they open up at the last minute and you just follow the opening. You have to have faith and expect that they're going to open up." Thierry Claveyrolat concurs, "it's a tremendous feeling...There are so many people that it's like the World Cup stadium but they're within two feet of you for ten kilometres. It's awesome." Nonetheless, the close proximity of the spectators is of concern to some riders. Jean-Claude Colotti is less than enthusiastic, claiming that, "it breaks my concentration. I'm always afraid that someone might be a little crazy. He might take a punch at me or try to knock me down." Indeed, as popular opinion has it, an overzealous fan lobbed a handful of black pepper into the face of a Belgian rider as he rode up Alpe d'Huez in the 1986 *édition* of the Tour de France.

Overwhelmingly (although not exclusively), spectators throughout the mountain stages of the Tour de France are cyclists themselves. The commitment of the cycling spectator to the sport that they are watching is evidenced most obviously through their dress. During the flat stages of the Tour, the spectators who line the roads wear casual clothing, occasionally slipping the jersey of a trade team over their jeans or shorts. Such actions parallel a football fan wearing a team scarf to a match; their allegiance is to a

team, rather than to the sport. In the mountains however, spectators are increasingly devoted to cycling itself. Their allegiance is demonstrated by their wearing of full cycling regalia; the shoes, the shorts and the jersey that identify the committed cyclist. Some spectators even go to the elaborate length of donning the distinctive polka dot jersey of the King of the Mountains. Active engagement in cycling by those standing roadside is further evidenced by their possession of a high priced bicycle and an equally enviable set of sinuous, sun tanned legs. Such gatherings atop mountains like Alpe d'Huez enact a period of 'communitas', in which "an undifferentiated *comitatus*, community or even communion of equal individuals submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (Turner 1969: 82, italics in original). In these demonstrations of mountain top communitas, cycling fans are locked into a relationship of shared appreciation that is overseen by the ritual elders who are embodied and institutionalized in the form of professional cyclists.

Viewing the Tour from Alpe d'Huez requires dedicated effort. The difficulties of parking (and a respect for local flora and fauna) mean that motorized access to the upper reaches is forbidden on the day that the Tour is scheduled to pass through. Only the official vehicles from the race entourage are allowed access. To reach their vantage points, spectators must arrive several days in advance to park their car or, if arriving on the day, they must either climb by foot or bicycle from a designated parking area in the Romanche Valley below. Given that those standing roadside often have ample time to kill, spectators have developed a range of strategies to while away the hours and days. While some play *pétanque* or throw frisbees, and while others set out a picnic spread or go for a ride themselves, a practice that is of especial note is that of 'road writing'; graffiti in which the names of teams and riders are inscribed on rock faces, bollards, embankments, tree trunks and on the road itself.

While 'road writing' is my coinage- there is no local equivalent-, it nonetheless remains a phenomenon peculiar to the mountains. The function of road writing is to mark out cycling's sacred sites. The main road from Grenoble to Alpe d'Huez is rendered distinctive by the series of hand painted numbers that indicate the kilometres which remain until the turn-off just outside Bourg d'Oisans, and the thirteen kilometres of Alpe d'Huez itself are covered with writing. Although snow drifts cover the art work in winter, once the spring thaw melts the snow, this writing reappears as testimony to the Tour de France. Slogans in half a dozen languages are painted from foot

to summit, carefully painted *tricolores* adorn the road, while various phrases are etched into the road's embankments. On every piece of available wall, tree or barrier, even on the road itself, some sort of tribute to the Tour de France is inscribed. The messages are often written 'up' the mountain, so that the riders can read them. Amongst the mottled paint work, the phrases 'Allez les Pays Bas'...'El Diablo'...'Forza'...'Fignon' are distinctive, while the Dutch, Spanish and Italian flags are painted onto the road. The word 'Rué'- in honour of the French rider Gerard Rué-, inscribed on the cliff face of the first *virage*, marks the beginning of the climb to Alpe d'Huez, while a metre high tribute to Miguel Indurain painted on the road indicates one's arrival at the summit. At one point along the climb, a concrete reinforcing wall has been painted white, with red polka dots, symbolizing the King of the Mountains jersey. A hand painted black eagle, wings spread, sits in the centre of the mural and below, the faded words 'Thierry Claveyrolat- the Eagle of Vizille' complete the picture.

The variety of forms that road writing can take is impressive. From basic painted lettering to a stone cairn commemorating the exploits of Gianni Bugno, such artistic exaltations of the riders are perhaps the most extreme measure of spectator support. The lengths to which these artists go is staggering. For the summit finish at Isola 2000 in 1993, one man was equipped with a portable ladder and a paint roller, while at Alpe d'Huez the following year, another possessed a stencil and a spray gun, resulting in the repeated reproduction of the word 'Fignon' for several hundred metres up the mountain. What would be deemed graffiti at any other time of the year is legitimated by the carnivalesque inversion of normative behaviour that accompanies so much of the Tour de France. Whereas 'carnival' in the Rabelasian sense allows the liminal and the taboo to surface, in the case of the Tour de France, such illicit practices as graffiti, when disguised as road writing, exalt culturally honoured virtues of heroism, bravery and courage. Thus, road writing meets little objection from the police who patrol the course; they simply turn a blind eye. What, at any other time of the year, would invariably be considered a criminal act, is condoned in July.

Road writing comprises a populist account of the Tour de France. While the myth of the Tour is most frequently articulated verbally by grass roots, amateur cyclists, it is also inscribed. If, as Patrice claimed in chapter four, the mountains are where we make our heroes, then road writing represents a very public display of who these heroes are. Road writing is testimony to the *feuilleteés* or multidimensional nature of the Tour de France. It provides a

composite of history on history, of myth on myth, as the various layers of the Tour bind together with inscription replacing inscription. In many ways, road writing represents a double text, one first inscribed and then one read, by the cyclists who continue to use the mountain roads for racing and training. First and only written when the Tour is underway, the lasting presence of road writing on the road to Alpe d'Huez continues to inspire and influence local expressions and understandings of the Tour de France. The act of inscribing a rider's name onto the road creates a new passage in the history of the Tour, but by remaining on the road, it serves as a part of the Tour's already rich history.

For Isérois cyclists, road writing triggers memories, inspires conversation and provokes unceasing commentary on the Tour de France. Some writing is so faded you can barely read it, while other inscriptions are so clear you would swear they were written yesterday. In keeping with the populist tradition of road writing, local riders are dismissive of a cyclist whose name still adorns the road, yet who does not come up with the goods performance wise. Passing over a still brilliantly visible 'Bugno' written on the road to Alpe d'Huez, a group of cyclists pondered the absence of Gianni Bugno from the *palmarès* in 1994. Conversely, the presence of road writing jolts cyclists into speculation on prospective winners of the Tour de France. As Claude exclaimed when descending the Col Luitel- another mountain covered with road writing: "Virenque! It must be his year this year." Road writing represents a bricolage of bicycling legends that are trampled on a daily basis and incorporated into the local repertoire of resources with which to mythologize the mountains.

While Alpe d'Huez is cycling's most revered sacred site, there are several other mountains throughout Isère and Hautes-Alpes that are deemed by local riders to be culturally redolent locations. Most notably, the Col du Galibier on the border of Isère and Hautes-Alpes, and the Col d'Izoard deep in the Hautes-Alpes, take on mythical dimensions. Alongside Alpe d'Huez, these mountains are seen as places of pilgrimage which, in Turner's words, "exert a magnetic effect on a whole communications system, charging up with sacredness many of its geographical features and attributes...to service the needs of the human stream passing along its arterial routes" (1974: 226).

The distances that are covered when riding to these places of pilgrimage play a key part in their construction as mythological sites. From Grenoble, the Col du Galibier is approximately ninety kilometres away, the Col d'Izoard is almost one hundred and fifty kilometres away, while Alpe d'Huez is

significantly closer, being a mere sixty kilometres from Grenoble. The series of roads which cyclists negotiate in order to reach Alpe d'Huez, the Col du Galibier and the Col d'Izoard become a network of pilgrimage routes and trails along which cyclists can do some imperative cultural work for legitimating group identity.

The distances of these places from the comforts of Grenoble mean that cyclists approach their preparation very differently from a ride of a lesser distance or difficulty. In local formulations, 'going for a ride' and visiting a place of pilgrimage are seen as qualitatively different exercises and are articulated as such. "*Effectuer des cols*" or "*gravir une côte*" are talked of very differently from "*faire un tour en vélo*." For it to have any cultural resonance, one cannot simply '*faire un tour*' to a place of pilgrimage. Pilgrimages always have a staged or sensational quality: in contrast to the dramatic yet lighthearted way in which other cycling stories are shared, planning a pilgrimage is done in obsessively factual terms. Cyclists devour stories of previous climbs: they know the grade of the mountain to be climbed, the conditions of the road, the altitude of the climb and the average time taken to complete it.

Elaborate preparation is required, and cyclists get excited anticipating and planning their trip, for it carries an entirely different meaning to riding in the valleys. As McKevitt notes, "pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place which lies beyond the mundane realm of the pilgrim's daily experience" (1991: 78). Unlike other rides, where training partners usually decide the distance and the destination on the day, a ride to one of cycling's sacred sites is often arranged several days, even weeks, in advance. A notice of intent is commonly posted in the club rooms, and expressions of interest are canvassed somewhat more informally when meeting cycling acquaintances out on the road. This advance notice allows cyclists time to mobilize the considerable resources that are needed to complete a pilgrimage. Extra water bottles must be filled, and tools, spare tubes, rain jackets, arm warmers and high energy snacks need to be packed in the cyclist's arsenal. As Turner recognizes, "the mere demographic and geographical facts of large numbers of people coming at set times and considerable distance between their home and the sacred site compels a certain amount of organization and discipline" (1974: 171).

As with other pilgrim destinations- most notably sacred ones such as Lourdes- place, and the power of place, are clearly paramount. Cycling pilgrimages serve the essential function of directing collective action towards

a tangible object at a specific place. Atop each place of pilgrimage there exists some sort of memorial which commemorates an achievement in the Tour de France, and it is towards these monuments that the pilgrimage is directed. On the Col d'Izoard, a plaque recognizes the achievements of Fausto Coppi and Louisen Bobet- two of the greatest riders in the 1950s-, Alpe d'Huez is, in itself, a monument to *les géants de la route*, while, half way up the Col du Galibier, a towering marble obelisk exalts the memory of Henri Desgrange. These monuments, when appropriated by cyclists, take on altar-like functions; they become totems or tributes to the greats of the Tour de France. They serve as both the focus of the gathering who assemble before them and also the justification for that same gathering. Once the cycling group reaches their destination, its members pat the statue or monument that sits atop the *col*, photographs are taken of the view and, importantly, of the riders alongside the plaque or commemorative statue. The walls of club rooms are lined with framed photographs of their members atop one of these *monuments aux vivants*. Cycling in Isère is, in many ways, a cult of nostalgia, in which cyclists project themselves into the personalities, events and ways of life that have disappeared. Conceived as such, Alpe d'Huez, the Col du Galibier and the Col d'Izoard provide important sites at which cyclists can do some imperative interpretive work on the roles that the mountains play, both in the Tour de France itself and, far more enduringly, in the ongoing machinations of their social world.

Having provided a largely geographical and historical description of Alpe d'Huez, and to a lesser degree, the Col du Galibier and the Col d'Izoard, as being important landmarks when cycling in the region, it remains necessary to examine them as key discursive sites in the articulation of local cycling experiences. As I make clear in the following pages, the social practices of cyclists strikingly demonstrate Turner's criteria for a pilgrimage, it being "a social process involving preparation for departure, collective experiences on the journey, arrival at the centre, and a return journey" (1974: 167). While historical precedents and the presence of road writing are powerful determinants in the construction of the mountains as sacred sites, both practices emphasize the importance of place in constructing a mountain as a sacred site. Cyclists however, simultaneously emphasize process in defining and claiming the mountains as places of pilgrimage. The practices that are engaged in while riding to these sacred sites are critical to their definition as holy lands. In riding to Alpe d'Huez, the Col du Galibier and the Col d'Izoard, cyclists implicate the mountains in a daily process of construction and reconstruction by which they constitute their enduring cultural identity. It is

my argument that in riding to these sacred sites, cyclists adopt a particular way of imagining the mountains. For cyclists, the mountains are a place of extreme risk and danger, and it is in the process of embarking upon an alpine session that these perceptions are best expressed.

Dangerous landscapes and death-defying rides

While abseillers, hikers, mountaineers and others who use the mountains for leisure and pleasure see them as places of solace and escape, cyclists characterize riding in the mountains as a dangerous business.⁵ Local cyclists have developed a set of expressions- a discourse of danger- that acknowledges the risks of riding in Isère. Cycling in the Alps is always accompanied by risk, by the likelihood of injury and by the possibility of death.⁶ When climbing in the mountains, the risks of crashing, of mechanical failure and of 'bonking' increase dramatically, and the inevitability of these contingencies articulates with local sentiment. Climbing is described as "*aller au bourreau*"- going to the executioners- while it is said of someone who has tried and died in any attempt to do something that 'they have met their Galibier.'

As Bozonnet (1987) has noted, the social imagination of visitors to the mountains is fed on a rich diet of images depicting freedom, isolation and reverence, which is then perpetuated through the vehicles of romance novels, tourist brochures and art forms such as painting and photography. Such assertions resonate with those of Cohen and Taylor who write that,

we want a genuine escape, a flight into an area in which we can temporarily absent ourselves from paramount reality, find ourselves out in play and assemble our identity in peace or with new and more powerful symbolic resources (1976: 94).

For many, the mountains of Isère offer such a place. They are sites at which skiers, hikers and naturalists can 'find themselves out' in play. For cyclists however, the mountains present a place of peril and risk. Riding in the

⁵While mountaineers may appreciate the dangers of the mountains, as Robbins (1987) and Heywood (1994) have both argued, the important point is that cyclists do not share the view that mountains are places of escape. There is a substantial body of literature devoted to the romanticism of the mountains by alpinists and nature lovers, including Joutard (1986), Jantzen (1986), *Le Revue de Géographie Alpine*, Majastre & Decamp (1988), Loux (1982, 1990) and Van Durk (1987) that do not include cyclists in their considerations of those who visit the mountains for peace and solace.

⁶The works of Majastre and Decamp (1988), Loux (1990), Tejada Flores (1978) and Donnelly (1981) on mountain guides and mountaineers provide interesting points of comparison to my analysis of the Isérois cycling world. Like cyclists, *les guides des hautes montagnes* routinely face the prospect of injury and death. As Loux and Majastre and Decamp have both identified, it is precisely the inherent dangers of their occupation that unite mountain guides as *une solidarité difficile*. A number of cyclists from my field site(s) also worked as mountain guides with Club Alpin Français and L'Ecole d'Alpinisme which was based at Alpe d'Huez.

mountains offers a particularly compelling moment of psychic and social evaluation in which cyclists are faced with their own mortality and the limits of their human potential.

The inescapable perils and hazards that accompany riding in Isère are well recognized by the cyclists who do precisely this. The dark tunnels that periodically interrupt a ride instil a fear amongst cyclists. Nearly every rider I encountered had met with misfortune in a tunnel. Broken wrists and collar bones, severed arteries, even a punctured lung, not to mention the usual buckled wheels and broken spokes, made up this grotesque litany. Suddenly plunged into complete darkness, cyclists have developed survival strategies to negotiate the poorly lit, wet and invariably pot-hole ridden tunnels that carve through the mountains in Isère. A common tactic is to wait at the entrance to a tunnel until a car approaches from behind then, praying that the driver does not run you down, jump in front and pedal frantically until you reach daylight on the other side. Such tactics resonate with expressions of popular consciousness. The road from Les Deux Alpes to the valley below is known as "*le couloir de la peur*" - the corridor of fear- because it is so narrow and dangerous and, around every blind corner, another tunnel appears.

The environment in which they ride distinguishes the cycling order as a community in which danger is routinely faced. Constantly confronting risk, the cycling world is a precarious and perilous one. While Beck (1992) characterizes all of postmodern, post-industrial society as being inherently risky, I do not endorse Beck's gloomy vision of contemporary consumer culture in order to identify the dangers involved in cycling. While the risks cited by Beck- environmental pollution, global warming, the unequal distribution of wealth- are enforced, imposed and unwelcome, the hazards and perils that are encountered by cyclists on a daily basis are self-imposed. Cyclists voluntarily engage in the risks of their sport, and such participation in a perilous social environment provides a window to the cycling *mentalité*. To take on the dangerous landscape in which they ride, cyclists must acquire and test out their collective confidence in their abilities as bike riders.

It is here that I take up the theme of Douglas and Wildavski's book, *Risk and Culture* (1982). Drawing on a range of cross-cultural examples as diverse as the Lele of Zaire to the stratified, complex societies of Great Britain and the United States, Douglas and Wildavski argue that risks *per se* cannot be distinguished from attitudes about risk. In doing so, they show that North

American notions of causality and risk are not based on objective practical reason or empirical arguments, but are culturally constructed notions which highlight certain dangers while ignoring others.⁷ For Isérois cyclists, attitudes towards the risks and dangers of their sport are socially acquired as they become increasingly immersed in the culture of their sport. As cyclists improve their 'climbing fitness', they take on increasingly difficult climbs and they subject themselves to greater physical risks. An acquired and accumulated confidence in one's abilities as a cyclist is put to the test as he or she routinely negotiates the treacherous terrain of Isère.

The theme of risk that underpins cycling in Isère is dependent on the inherent unpredictability of the sport itself. While bad luck touches other sports- basketballers damage their ankles and tennis players injure their backs- such examples of misfortune are comparatively rare. In cycling however, unpredictability is endemic to the sport, and its consequences are revealed with unpleasant regularity when cyclists venture into the mountains.

Despite extensive preparation and training, too often mountain races are decided by unforeseen circumstances. Poor form, mechanical failure or bad weather can cut short a rider's race, while, more often than not, he or she simply loses concentration. In hot weather or at the end of a race when cyclists are tired, reflexes become muddled and riders are slower to react to the changing conditions of a race situation. Often riders are at a loss to explain the disaster. In the Tour de Vizille for example, a two day race throughout the Massif de l'Oisans, Alain, a rider from Le Vélo Club de St. Martin le Vinoux, broke away alone. Victory seemed assured until Alain reached the last corner, four or five hundred metres from the finish. His bicycle went out from underneath him and Alain was thrown to the ground. As he reflects, "I took the corner too fast maybe, or something happened with my wheel maybe and I slipped. I still don't know." In bike racing, strength alone does not guarantee survival. It is the luck of the cyclist to avoid the forces of fate or Nature that ultimately enables him or her to see another day.

Paradoxically perhaps, 'luck' is seen as a highly valued skill that one acquires socially. There are some cyclists who never crash, who never puncture, who never 'bonk' and these men and women are seen as possessing some innate ability that allows them to avoid, or control at least, the risks that their cycling

⁷For a detailed critique on the success of this cross-cultural comparison, see Marcus and Fischer (1986).

colleagues repeatedly encounter. Such instances of good fortune are incorporated into cycling conversations. Local riders activate an entire realm of interpretation built around the balance between control and circumstance, organization and contingency. Folkloric appeals to chance drive the basic cosmology of Isérois cycling, with insider accounts of cycling action having the element of 'the one that got away'. Poor performances are always contingent on bad weather, acts of God or some other form of external intervention. Jean-Marc claims that "I was feeling really good and then we got to the last climb and I suddenly met *'l'homme au marteau'*" ... Didier concedes that "I had too much air in my tyres to cope with the wet roads on the descent from the Col du Glandon", and Marie-Claire cites "the wind messed me up" as the reason for her poor performance in the Challenge du Dauphiné-Libéré.

While the risks of their sport loom large within the Isérois cycling community, it is only when a rider has a close call him or herself that the perilous nature of their world is revealed with chilling clarity. While every cyclist knows of a friend of a friend who has been injured in an accident, the acutely self-reflexive nature of cycling means that when the same fate befalls you, the fear of 'that could have been me' becomes the reality of 'that *was* me'. Perhaps revealing my own experience is the most effective way to convey the importance of self-evaluation to the risk society that is the Isérois cycling world. When descending a mountain road on a training ride, a bird flew into the spokes of my front wheel, sending me face first into the road, chipping my front tooth, tearing the tendons in my right foot and shaving most of the skin from the left side of my body. Once the pain subsided, I had to question, 'why me?' I had been riding with three others, yet I had been singled out. I had been in the wrong place at the wrong time; a chance happening with profound consequences nonetheless.

Indeed, the chief symbolic appeal of cycling is the ability of a rider to triumph over natural fate or contingency. That I was back cycling as soon as my bike and body had mended was essential to confirming my position in the informal hierarchy of local cycling. I had scars, I had a story to tell; I had the cultural attributes that are socially valued as marking commitment to cycling. Given the severity of my injuries, I missed nearly a month of on-road interaction with my riding companions. On my first day back, I was greeted by Fabrice with a "welcome back- you are hard, like us." The acknowledgement of a cyclist returning from injury concedes the inevitability of its occurrence; it concedes that cycling is, indeed, a risky sport. The pride with which cyclists wear their scars and scrapes is testament to the fact that

falling foul of the risks of their sport is more important than evading them. Injuries have the potential to become narratives in their own right, and in a community which is bound together by talk, 'kissing death' provides a key discursive constituent when elaborating the sagas of suffering that distinguish cycling in Isère.

The unforgiving terrain of the mountains increases the physical dangers of local cycling. Known as "*les cols du courage*," the mountains inform and influence Isérois understandings of the unpredictability of cycling. It is not so much the fear of overshooting a corner and disappearing into a chasm, as the sheer effort of controlling the handle bars on the undulating descents, that leaves a rider weak and shaking by the time he or she reaches the valley below. While unsteady road surfaces demand fine bike handling skills, it is the steepness of the climbs that prompts cyclists to reflect upon the physical challenges that are consistently issued by their chosen sport. With grades often exceeding ten per cent, and with distances from foot to summit running anything between ten and twenty kilometres, the climbs to cycling's sacred sites are relentless, as described by Henri: "it is like you have set your body on a mission to reach the top and it is running on autopilot." Indeed, reaching the top is monotonous and frequently disheartening. As Lucienne reflects, "you can look at your computer and you are going at ten kilometres and someone passes you doing twelve, you can't follow them. It sound stupid, but that's how it is." When the larger races such as La Marmotte or the Brevet du Randonnée climb the region's *cols*, some riders say that it demoralizes them to realize that an out of shape spectator can run at least as fast as they can pedal.⁸ Given the repetitive and relentless nature of climbing, cyclists have necessarily developed strategies to relieve the monotony. Some periodically stand and sprint to a land mark ahead, a manoeuvre which relieves the muscle soreness that sitting in the same position inflicts. Nonetheless, such games and strategies make public a rider's individual suffering. While a glance around a cycling coalition informs a rider that his or her co-riders are hurting, the games are a group legitimation of the acceptability of suffering; they are an attempt to moderate the suffering of cycling, while acknowledging its sheer inescapability.

That most cycling events are raced regardless of weather conditions is further testimony to the sport's unpredictability. Climatic variations, more than any other factor, increase the risks that a cyclist may face. Whereas the roof of a

⁸Puffing and turning red, the fans who line the climb of Alpe d'Huez in particular, will often run hundreds of metres uphill alongside the riders, screaming encouragement and pouring water over their heads.

tennis stadium can be closed in bad weather, or cricket matches can be stopped due to bad light, cycling continues rain or shine.⁹ Riders often pedal through the rain, howling winds and heat that melts the asphalt. In the mountains, the uncertainty of climatic intervention is harder to predict. Despite preparation, it is often impossible to see bad weather closing in, for the mountains block out long range views, and riders frequently get caught out, seeking refuge in the bars and bus shelters that dot local cycling routes. Although cyclists attempt to control their *climbing* environment through extensive preparation, they cannot control the natural environment in which they ride.

The unpredictability of cycling however, does not mean that it is unmanageable. Cyclists have developed a range of strategies to try and reduce the uncertainty and dangers of their sport. A complex infrastructure is put in place to try and eliminate the risks of cycling. Prior to a long session in the mountains, cyclists complete a series of stretching exercises to prepare their bodies for the rigours of their undertaking, and most cyclists stretch daily to keep their muscles supple. On the day of a mountain session, cyclists will telephone the *Centre Information Montagnes et Sentiers* for an update on the accessibility of particular *cols* and, in addition to making sure that they have adequate food and water, cyclists will undertake a thorough appraisal of their bicycle. Such actions strike a tension between conceding the inevitability of uncertainty and trying to control it. To some degree, minimizing the possibility of risk by controlling equipment and the body has rendered the activity more manageable. However, too many external variables such as human frailty and the weather mean that the cycling environment is inherently unpredictable. As Pascal notes, "the one thing you can say for sure about cycling is that you never know what is going to happen."

Co-operative strategies

The shared appreciation of the risks faced when riding in the mountains addresses the key issues of trust and camaraderie. In cycling, there is a strict performance etiquette which privileges, above all else, the need to co-operate. It is when cyclists embark on a session in the mountains that these social relations become indispensable and paramount. It is when riding in the mountains that cyclists must depend on their training companions for pure

⁹Although outside of the bounds of my ethnographic enquiry, one stage of the Paris-Nice race in 1995 was abandoned because black ice on the roads throughout the Massif-Central made conditions extremely perilous for the *peloton*.

survival as much as any prospect of competitive success. An awareness of the contingencies of cycling unites the members of training and racing coalitions in very particular ways. Friendships are forged out of adversity, as riders watch their partners struggle through pain and profound humiliation. While one particular ascent may see a rider race to the top in record time, the next may see him or her retching over the handle bars, barely half way up, yet unable to continue.

Indeed, climbing is extraordinarily and consistently difficult.¹⁰ It is an experience that produces a range of emotions under circumstances or conditions of extreme physical challenge. The act of climbing releases a flood of drama and exhilaration as riders routinely come to terms with the limits of their own human potential. The emotion that is displayed by cyclists is done in very public arenas. While rides along the Grésuvidian Valley are often solitary sessions, a regard for personal safety means that, when embarking on a session in the mountains, cyclists invariably seek a companion. As such, there is a communal nature to the emotion produced during difficult rides. For cyclists, emotion is subject to group legitimation, and in many ways, it produces a symbolic reversal of conventions regarding appropriate gendered behaviour. Women cyclists hock, spit and swear, while male cyclists frequently acknowledge and articulate their weaknesses. Far from being a macho, emotionally void environment, the cycle domain is one in which expressions of emotion are publicly voiced. In post-ride conversations and reminiscences, it is not uncommon for male cyclists to acknowledge their weaknesses, as Didier attests to: "when I finished my first Brevet [du Randonnée], I lay on my bed after I had finished, unwashed and distressed to the point where I *cried* for hours" (my emphasis). Jacques continues, "I crashed coming down the Col d'Ornon and I broke my collar bone. The pain was so great I had tears running down my face the whole way home. It hurt so much that I didn't care who saw me crying." Amongst Isérois cyclists, expressions of human frailty become markers of engagement to their exceptionally arduous sport. The structural ambiguities and contradictions that such symbolic reversals bring about, is reminiscent of Turner's notion of 'liminality'. Cyclists are very much "threshold people" (Turner 1969: 81) living on the edge, who "slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space" (Turner 1969: 81).

¹⁰Designations of 'difficult' and 'easy', it should be noted, are internal to the cycling world. What a practising cyclist defines as 'easy' must surely be phenomenally difficult to a non-cyclist. A ride covering between 50 and 80 kilometres, at an average speed of 35 kilometres an hour, is deemed suitably easy by Isérois riders.

Climbing etiquette dictates that riders must always assist their colleagues. Strong support systems evolve which guarantee the survival of a training alliance. Struggling riders are buoyed by words of encouragement and, wherever possible, stronger riders will provide physical support by pushing a frayed cyclist up a climb. Such actions are part of an articulated undertaking that one commits to upon entering a training coalition. Should one's companion 'bonk', it is expected and understood that the stronger rider will slow his or her speed to accommodate the faltering comrade. If a rider is cautious on a descent, then the leading rider will slow through the *lacets* (hairpins), periodically glancing over his or her shoulder, to ensure that the following rider has not crashed. Such actions function to keep the sport safe. Rather than rush a rider into performing skills that are beyond his or her technical competence, the modulation of one's individual effort to stay in tune with that of others maintains a safe environment. Here, the ubiquitous cycling gaze adopts a utilitarian as well as an aesthetic function. In being looked at, cyclists know that they are being looked after. Indeed, the cooperative practices of cyclists enact a form of 'normative communitas', in which there is the "need to mobilize and organize resources to keep the members of the group alive and thriving" (Turner 1974: 169).

While those who exercise control over their bike and their body when descending at high speed are referred to as "*les descendeurs*," those who show complete disregard are referred to as "*kamikazes*." Zonabend notes that workers in a nuclear waste processing plant in La Hague adopt the same term when characterizing the co-workers who "approach radioactivity quite fearlessly (or perhaps unwittingly), regardless of any 'doses' they may accumulate" (1993: 105). The hyper-sensitivity of cyclists to the competence or confidence of their riding partners contributes to the making of some very real friendships. Isabelle and Sandrine, two local triathletes, claim that they can sense the other's weaknesses- an intuition developed from over a decade of dedicated training with one another. Sandrine maintains that she knows when Isabelle is tired or sick. "She doesn't sit so well on her bike, you know. So I'll say, 'lets do an easy ride today. You can kick my arse tomorrow'... I don't get angry at her. I know her better than that. If I've had a hard race, then she'll drop the pace until I've recovered." While many cycling friendships develop with time, many more are forged out of exceptional circumstances of suffering and adversity. The intensity of climbing is well recognized by Isabelle, who continues that "our friendship was made in the Alps. Mountains can do that, you know." The knowledge that a bad day can strike a rider at any time underpins most cycling friendships. Cycling social relations

are thus played out in highly particular cultural terms that skilfully juggle competition and accommodation.

In addition to being where a cyclist hones his or her technical skills, the mountains are where a cyclist learns an ideology internal to the racing world. While socialization into the world of bike racing involves acquiring the knowledge that any sports recruit must necessarily learn- rules, equipment use, training routes and argot- cyclists must also internalize an ideology peculiar to their sport in which out-right competition between opponents becomes flexible.¹¹ Although it could be argued that all sports, be they football, cricket or rugby union, possess their own codes of camaraderie or 'team spirit', there is a unique quality to the sort of co-operative alliances that develop between cyclists. While training networks depend on riders co-operating with one another for the continued survival of their coalition, it is imperative to note that, in highly competitive *racing* situations, the acts of co-operation engaged in by training companions extend to one's opponents. Although most sports typically pit two opposing teams in open conflict against one another, competitive cycling continually constructs itself in terms of mutually beneficial alliances and informal norms of co-operation that relate to racing and its rewards.

The recognition and appropriate use of such informal codes provide cyclists with, not only the resources for producing and maintaining social order, but also with a mechanism for differentiating insiders from outsiders. To a non-cyclist, it is difficult to grasp this informal code of cycling, as it diverges from the commonly held belief that a competitive athlete must expend maximum individual effort to beat his or her opponents. In cycling, particularly when climbing, an enforceable balance is constantly struck between individual interest and collective resourcefulness which helps to maintain an essential working relationships amongst competitors. As Christophe maintains, "there is a developed sense of *esprit de corps* amongst cyclists because everyone has to suffer over the same mountains or ride in the same wind or rain and this creates a lot of respect amongst cyclists." The dangers and perils that the mountainscape of Isère introduce mean that co-operative alliances, whether training with friends or racing against unknown cyclists, are constantly put in place.

¹¹Granskog (1992) and Hilliard (1989) have both provided interesting accounts of the processes of socialization into the subculture of triathlon racing in the United States that offer a point of comparison and contrast to the particularities of cycling social worlds.

The mountains make the importance of co-operative relations maximally visible. In stage races such as the Tour du Nord Alpes or the Tour de Vizille, both of which traverse particularly mountainous terrain, a range of mini alliances are struck between competitors. The most important of these coalitions is "*l'autobus*";¹² the formation of riders who work collectively to ensure that they complete a stage inside its time limit, beyond which they will be eliminated.¹³ *L'autobus* is made up of weak, sick or injured riders, and the sprinters whose hulking, muscular frames are not suited for climbing, and who thus run a greater risk of being eliminated. The time limit is the proverbial sword of Damocles hanging over the riders in any stage race, but in the mountains, the difficulty of finishing inside the cut off time increases ten fold.

To moderate the difficulties of climbing in the mountains, *l'autobus* pools its collective resources with the common aim of finishing the stage inside the time limit. While most riders in Isère are good climbers, races are national and they attract riders from all over the country. As Adam, a category one racer riding for the Paris based Aubervilliers '93, makes clear, co-operation within cycling coalitions transcends regional pride:

when I race in the mountains I don't try to burst myself because I know it won't make very much difference and I could waste reserves trying a bit too hard one day when I could try a little less and save a bit for the next day or the day after that. Then I may have to dig deep just to get inside the time limit. I think there's a lot of riders in the same position and we know we've got to stick together.

Food, water, words of encouragement and importantly, the workload, are shared by *l'autobus*, while one rider- the 'bus driver'- is given the responsibility of calculating the pace that the group must ride at to finish inside the time limit. The bus is united by shared agony and self interest. It is a veritable circle of suffering which demands that opponents work together to successfully complete the stage. Whether training partners like Isabelle and Sandrine or anonymous passengers in the bus, once races reach the Alps, the need to co-operate becomes paramount and indispensable. The formation of *l'autobus* and the instances of mutual respect when riding in the mountains thus exemplified both capture and respond to the precarious nature of the cycling society.

My emphasis on the codes of co-operation upheld by cyclists is not to deny

¹² Amongst the professional *peloton*, this group is also known as 'the laughing group' and the 'grupetto'.

¹³ In stage racing, each stage has a time limit imposed within which the riders must finish. The time limit is usually calculated as between 15% or 20% of the stage winner's time.

that other sports have developed ways of systematizing how their athletes are expected to behave. As Peace recognizes with regard to Formula One car racing,

there is a distinctive occupational code, a morality which tempers and contains the ambitions of these supermen...Wherever possible, even the most intense of rivals are expected to warn one another of suddenly emergent hazards such as a broken down vehicle or oil patch round a 'blind' bend (1991: 104).

I would argue however, that such examples of gentlemen's courtesy in car racing are induced purely by a regard for driver safety. In cycling, such circumscribed interpersonal relations are guided by very different motivations. Certainly, a respect for rider safety underpins the behavioural expectations of co-operating with one's apparent enemies,¹⁴ however, where cycling remains unique is that the manoeuvres that facilitate on-road co-operation are those that, in fact, most endanger the lives of the riders. Many situations, such as the dark, wet tunnels that cut through the Alps, are easier and safer to negotiate alone. The close proximity of the riders, with only centimetres separating their wheels, goes against the interests of rider preservation, but is absolutely central to the execution and articulation of the morally informed behaviour so central to the sport of bike racing. Riders have to trust each other's ability in situations that are often incredibly dangerous. The ability to co-exist in an environment of risk and tension is part and parcel of riding in the mountains.

Death and cycling

The death of a cyclist offers a situation in which the individual can dramatically, if fatally, distinguish him or herself from the crowd. As with most heroic myths, to maintain the heroic myth of cycling, some have to die. When they do so, as with all other aspects of their careers, their death must be treated in culturally prescribed ways if their memory is to be properly honoured.¹⁵ Here I address some of the ways in which cyclists respond to a death within their ranks.

¹⁴Stephen Hodge identifies one of the reasons why cyclists hold a high regard for the welfare of their colleagues: "If you do something stupid that endangers a rider- if you break a rider's leg for example- you cut off his income. That shapes a lot of the mentality of being straight and not being stupid." While Hodge is referring to the income gained from professional cycling, amateur cyclists realize that foolhardy or selfish behaviour can result in an accident that reduces a cyclist's earning capacities in the work force. Pascal confirms this reason at the local level, claiming that "I saw death close up and I wouldn't put anybody at risk."

¹⁵I borrow this idea from Peace (1996b) who makes the same point in his formulation of photojournalists as contemporary cultural heroes.

The death of a rider brings together the twin themes of co-operation and danger which distinguish the social order of cycling. The death of a rider, and the rituals that accompany it, provide a particularly moving demonstration of cycling opponents colluding to suspend competition out of common respect for their dead colleague. While crashes in cycling are an everyday occurrence, deaths are fortunately rare. During my time in the field, only one rider died. In the 1993 *édition* of 'Le Moucherotte', a nineteen year old rider from Club Seyssins-Sassenage slammed into a road sign on the last descent into Seyssins, fracturing his pelvis, rupturing his spleen and splitting his skull. He died twelve hours later in hospital. The race was renamed Le Souvenir du Eric Flaubert the following year in his honour. But it is stage racing, particularly events as well organized and publicized as the Tour de France, that provide witness to the enactment of certain rituals of respect. In the ninety three year history of the Tour de France, only three riders have met their deaths in actual competition, the most recent occurring during the fifteenth stage of the 1995 race, when the young Italian rider Fabio Casartelli sustained massive head injuries in a high speed fall on the descent from the Col de Portet d'Aspet in the Pyrénées. Although out of the bounds of my ethnographic enquiry, Casartelli's death makes a fitting epilogue, and deserves some consideration here.

The death of a cyclist carries exceptional cultural weight. It provides tangible evidence of the codes of co-operation and processes of self-regulation that distinguish the sport of cycling from others. The day following a death, the *peloton* tacitly agrees to a "*jour sans*"- a day without-, when all racing is suspended and the *peloton* enters into a day long symbolic pact of mourning and withheld competition. The frenetic pace of active racing is then resumed the following day.

Before the start of their *jour sans* in the 1995 Tour, the *peloton* agreed that the A\$61,000 in prize money available for that stage would go to Casartelli's widow, rather than to the would-be winners. The *jour sans* then began with a minute's silence, after which the *peloton* simply covered the course at a leisurely pace. Remaining together for the eight hours of the stage, no-one contested the intermediate sprint bonuses or the mountain climbs. Instead, the *peloton* allowed the team mates of Casartelli to claim these incremental bonuses. No official results were posted for the *jour sans*, and there was no change in the overall classification. In the final kilometres of the stage, the team mates of the dead rider- all with black ribbons pinned to their jerseys- were allowed to move, unchallenged, to the head of the *peloton* to cross the

line together. One of Casartelli's team mates on the Motorola squad sustained a puncture a few kilometres from the finish, but the *peloton* slowed so he could drop back for a replacement wheel and then move to the front again. The remaining riders on the Motorola squad then restructured themselves so that Casartelli's room mate and fellow Italian, Andrea Peron, could take the 'victory', such as it was.

Rituals of respect of this type can only occur in a stage race where there is usually a day of racing scheduled to follow the stage when the rider died. While these practical considerations enable a *jour sans*, this symbolic stage also serves important expressive functions. Without the *jour sans*, the *peloton* is left with no outlet to collectively show their grief. They are, after all, in the middle of an immensely competitive race, with much media and sponsor interests at stake. Indeed, it is the climate of professional sport that makes such gestures all the more remarkable. It is hard to imagine another sport honouring one of its own in such a genuinely sincere and human way. A Super Bowl Game played as a tribute, with no final score, a Formula One race held at half speed, with no-one trying to win?

It is the 'play on' ruling of competitive cycling that, in a sense, motivates these rituals of respect. Whereas other sports interrupt the flow of the game to remove an injured player from the field or to enforce penalties for 'unsportsmanlike' behaviour, cycling is raced regardless. Incredibly, the *peloton* is only made aware of the death of a colleague at the completion of a stage. During competition, more often than not, the following riders simply swerve around the pile up on the road and continue racing, praying that the crash was not serious. It is only afterwards that the gravity of the situation is made apparent, and nothing can steel a rider against this revelation. As the final television footage from the day Casartelli died revealed, hardened professionals wept like babies and embraced their colleagues, mourning the loss of their comrade.

The collective sense of shock that the *peloton* feels propels them into symbolic action. On learning of a fallen colleague, an overwhelming feeling of 'that could have been me' rips through the *peloton*. 'If I had hit that pebble on the road or overshot the corner'... 'If I had been travelling a second faster'... 'If he had been going a second slower, then it could have been me'. The natural contingencies of cycling are such that barely seconds and centimetres separate life from death, and the awareness of human frailty becomes a critical discursive element in consolidating the all-important ties

of cycling camaraderie. The dead rider becomes emblematic of collective emotion, of feelings surely beyond comprehension to a non-cyclist. As Stephen Hodge recognizes, "no-one who is not a cyclist can understand what we do. That's why the *peloton* is so together."

The emotive force that the prospect of death carries was made most apparent by the death of Eric Flaubert. On hearing of his accident, many of his club mates rode directly to the hospital from the race and were present when he died. Others, including myself, repaired to La Table Ronde, to mourn the loss of our friend and colleague. It is precisely at times of grief that the perilous and precarious nature of cycling is opened for inspection and reflection. Cyclists experience a period of extreme angst brought on by the recognition of their own mortality. As Dominique identifies, "it makes you look at what you do. You realize that your life is fragile and precious and you can't take it for granted." Eric's death brought about a noticeable shift in the 'rhythm' of cycling. For a period of several months, riders became more aware of risks that they took; racing speeds dropped and training partners were increasingly conscientious of their obligations to their co-riders. Some became resigned to the fact that death and injury are very real prospects for any competitive cyclist: Jean-Marc concedes that

Eric died, but you can have other accidents when you could be paralysed or seriously injured. It's on my mind when I race, but in a positive sense, if you can say that. It doesn't change my attitude to risk, but maybe it motivates me to seize the day because you don't know what will happen the next day, and Eric doesn't have the chance to.

While the memory of a fallen rider is honoured in these rituals of respect, it is similarly remembered in the 'memorialization' of the spot at which he died. Wreathes of flowers and a photograph of the rider in his club uniform were laid at the site where Eric Flaubert died, a monument has been erected on the Col de Portet d'Aspet in honour of Fabio Casartelli, and, atop Mont Ventoux, a monument commemorates the death of the British rider, Tom Simpson. This preservation, in marble or granite, of the memory of a cyclist locks it into cycling consciousness. Its cultural resonance is sealed in the interpretive milieu within which cyclists operate.

As Rojek has noted, "fatality is a striking feature in the landscape of postmodernism" (1992: 136). Death sites, particularly those involving celebrities or large numbers of people, take on a monumental quality in our culture. The increased commercial development and interest in grave sites

or places where celebrities have met with a sudden or gruesome death have become lucrative tourist destinations. 'Grave Line Tours of Hollywood' takes tourists past the suicide sites, assassination points and other places of death involving stars from the entertainment world, while the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris attracts a steady stream of visitors to the graves of such greats as Jim Morrison and Edith Piaf. And, as Rojek states, "when news of the explosion of PAN AM Airlines Flight 103 over Lockerbie in Scotland on December 21, 1988 was broadcast, one of the immediate effects was the arrival of scores of sight-seers to the scene of the catastrophe" (1992: 137). The 'black spots' of the world have their own morbid notoriety, with voyeurs and mourners alike seeking self-gratification in their trip to the death site.¹⁶

In many ways, sites of cycling death share this same ghoulish quality. The twisted road sign that Eric hit provides a chilling landmark in the local cycling cartography, and hundreds of cyclists compete in a *cyclo sportive* that takes in Tom Simpson's death spot on Mont Ventoux. An important difference however, is that it is only cyclists who visit these monuments to their dead heroes. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, cycling heroes are internal to the cycling world. Whereas people from all walks of life are attracted to other black spots, the death sites of cycling attract their own. No one but a cyclist would visit these monuments. Cycling is an arch fraternity which distinguishes itself most poignantly in death.

Pedagogic places

The dangerous landscapes and death-defying rides that cyclists routinely engage with and in suggests a 'deeper' reason for embarking upon these extremely demanding alpine sessions. In keeping with the Geertzian theme of this thesis, it is my contention that climbing is, in fact, a form of 'Deep Play'; "play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from [a] utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all" (Geertz 1973: 432).¹⁷ While Geertz invokes the image of Jeremy Bentham and recognizes that 'Deep Play', as first coined by Bentham, was a product of monetary utility, he concedes that, for the Balinese situation, it is not financial, but social stakes

¹⁶Reader and Walter (1993) similarly examine the ways in which Graceland and Arnfield Stadium are constructed as ghoulish places of pilgrimage in contemporary society.

¹⁷The concept of 'Deep Play' has been variously used. Oates (1992) and MacAloon & Czikszenmihalyi (1983) use it to make sense of the seeming irrationality of boxing and rock climbing respectively. Its meaning, however, as Geertz explicitly warns us, cannot be assumed, but must be discovered through specific (and deep) ethnographic description (Stevens 1992: 256).

that are being played for. This is my argument for the Isèrois cycling world. I am not concerned with financial wagers, more the question of why cyclists engage in an activity in which the odds seem to be stacked against them.

Given that cyclists encounter risk, injury and even death when negotiating the dangerous landscape of Isère, it is necessary to explore why they are prepared to take the risks that they do. It is my contention that 'deep riding' reflects and exemplifies important themes that resonate deep within the Isèrois cycling world. From the outside, the extremity of climbing is a form of morally controversial leisure (Fine 1992). From within, it is the means by which social relations are enacted and displayed. The resources- both discursive and performative- that cyclists draw upon to make sense of their world are provisioned in ways that legitimate its internal machinations. Climbing in the Alps is a form of 'Deep Play' in that it involves an extreme wager- sometimes even the rider's own life- which acts as a vehicle for the deeper personal and cultural interests of the participants who risk it.

While I embrace the spirit of Geertz's formulation of 'Deep Play', I do not endorse it unequivocally, for I would question whether the 'Deep Play' of cycling is, in fact, 'play'. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, it is only at a superficial level that competitive cycling is, in any way, play. In Isère, cycling is approached with a seriousness that seems, at once, to contradict existing expectations of sport as being fun. For Bentham (and indeed later critics such as Baudrillard), the explanation for participating in deep and dangerous activities is that "such men are irrational- addicts, fetishists, children, fools, savages, who need only to be protected against themselves" (Geertz 1973: 433). For cyclists however, like Balinese cockfighters, engaging in such play is "less a measure of utility than it is a symbol of moral import, perceived or imposed" (Geertz 1973: 433). It is precisely the purpose driven, obsessional and competitive nature of cycling that makes it deep. The sheer irrationality of repeatedly subjecting oneself to the excessive physical rigours of cycling thus begs for a deeper understanding, and this is what I turn to now; an examination of what cyclists acquire- symbolically and demonstrably- through journeying to these pedagogic places.

Like all places of pilgrimage, the mountains of Isère offer prime sites of self-reflexivity and self-evaluation. While the journey is seen as a perilous and risky one, the moment of arrival is seen as powerful and transcendent. As places of pilgrimage, the mountains provide locations at which cyclists can do some highly subjective work on themselves. Places of pilgrimage

represent a touchstone through which the authenticity of the cycling experience can be validated. Regularly riding to the Col du Galibier, the Col d'Izoard or Alpe d'Huez has an instructive function. Described by Eric as "a hard school", riding in the Alps initiates local riders into the technical aspects of cycling. It is in the mountains where a rider learns to spin a smooth cadence, where a rider learns to descend in close proximity to others, where a rider learns to suffer and, where a rider learns the etiquette involved in such practises. As Jérôme identifies, "the mountains are where you become a cyclist." Cycling lore is transmitted from seasoned performers to neophytes, with one's knowledge of his or her training and racing environment being an important marker of wisdom and respect. When I asked Frédéric- the winner of the last three *éditions* of 'Le Mouche'- what one could gain from looking at the mountains, he replied,

where the wind blows, what the gradient is, where the little steep bits are, if it suddenly goes a bit flat around a corner. You know not to attack, because there's a little flat bit and others will come up to you. You can learn a lot from which way the wind blows, because it always blows the same way in the mountains depending on the time of day. If it is a headwind climb, you know to stay in the wheel. If it is a tail wind, you know you're going to suffer. On the descents, you can find out where the holes are. You learn from training, because when you are racing, you are so intent on it, you're concentrating and you don't see so much.

His knowledge of, and intuitive feel for, the nuances of climbing elevates Frédéric to the position of local legend. A mountain guide with Club Alpin Français, Frédéric's familiarity with the mountains is believed to give him an advantage in reading the road and therefore the race. Territorial familiarity is a highly valued skill; it is seen as a key marker of belonging that confers status within the local cycling world.

Regularly riding to places of pilgrimage teaches a cyclist a tremendous amount about, not only their sport, but also themselves. To gain and test their fitness, riders 'work the route'; they climb and re-climb the same *col* until they are familiar with its contours and undulations. Riders such as Dominique or Eric can point out the precise moment where the gradient increases sharply, for it is here that they know they can "*s'asseoir*"- sit up-; relax for a moment before returning once more to "*aller sur la jante*." There is a credo of athleticism which is embraced when riding in the mountains. Fitness, perseverance and self-reliance are emphasized, and qualities such as strength and stamina are valorized. Riders talk of the difficulties in climbing, of the relentless ascents, and of the need to diet and train in ways that minimize the inescapable agony of climbing. Relating back to my theme of

suffering, the regularity with which the mountains feature in such narratives is testimony to the need for the athlete to be at the peak of his or her physical abilities in order to execute an assault on the peaks of Alpe d'Huez, the Col du Galibier or the Col d'Izoard. Riding in the mountains provides a range of opportune sites, most notably Alpe d'Huez, at which notions of athleticism, camaraderie, risk and knowledge can be expressed and embellished. In other words, every aspect of cycling life comes together in the one place at the one time when cyclists descend upon these pedagogic places.

What is imperative to note however, is that the instructive and reflexive properties of reaching a summit are never articulated atop the mountain. While the moment of arrival is certainly poignant, it is, in fact, a time when worlds fail, when cyclists become stuck for a language which can express the thrill, exhilaration and personal transcendence that reaching a summit affords. Spending hours climbing a *col* knowing that it will take a matter of minutes to descend is a rare thrill that only a cyclist can appreciate, and the significance of this highly subjective, introspective activity cannot be verbalized. Indeed, the words uttered atop summits such as Alpe d'Huez, the Col du Galibier and the Col d'Izoard are, in Geertz's terms, "banal tautologies of affect" (1973: 449). The expressions "*Incroyable!*" ... "*C'est belle*" ... "*Man*" and "*Oh là*" that are often articulated upon arrival at a summit belie the emotive force that drives cyclists to the top. The physical condition of the riders atop a mountain certainly contributes to the trite nature of their dialogue. Given that a cyclist could be delirious with fatigue, it is not surprising that conversations atop *cols* are mundane and monosyllabic. As a social anthropologist however, it is not so much the linguistic emptiness as the specific reflexivity of this intensely introspective experience that I wish to explore.

While the moment of arrival is reduced to shallow phrases, the significance of the experience is nonetheless verbalized in other, less introspective situations. The sensory pleasures, the feeling of freedom and the sense of accomplishment that standing atop a mountain pass inspires are, in fact, expressed when cyclists descend from the mountain. When gathering in bars and cafés, the introspection of an alpine adventure is made public. Following a ride to a place of pilgrimage, cycling talk at sites of communal recollection takes on a romantic quality. Having returned from Alpe d'Huez one afternoon, Isabelle reflected, when gathered at the Latin Quartier later in the evening, that "I've never seen so many beautiful sunsets, so many beautiful sunrises, so many unbelievable scenes as when I ride. It's just incredible.

That's what I love about cycling." While excruciatingly painful, cycling is equally liberating, as Christophe recognizes: "cycling gives me a sense of freedom. I can go out on the bike and relax and mentally do whatever I want." Similarly, Eric enthuses, "sometimes when I ride I just feel euphoric. It's exhilarating. When I get home, my body has had such a work out and I'm puffing so hard, I feel great!" More revealing however, is an account one local rider wrote for me, reflecting on her reasons for cycling:

One of the reasons I ride is because it hurts. There have been times when my heart is about to jump out of my chest and I'm sucking in air like a vacuum cleaner. When every nerve in my body is screaming 'Stop!', somebody makes a break, so I take off after him, forgetting the pain. After it is over, I look back and wonder how in the world I could have ever chased him down. Later, when I look inside myself, I see things a little deeper, a little wider and a little clearer. I realize that I can do things I never thought I could. This discipline spills into other areas of my life. My dreams get a little bigger, my hopes get a little stronger, my dares get a little more courageous. Then, when trouble, difficulty or hurt come into my life, I know I've got what it takes to cope with it.

In many ways, the supreme rush of a death-defying ride, and the moment of introspection and personal transformation it produces, represent the antithesis of the safety and security of the non-cycling life. Ascending the Alps by bicycle becomes a means of penetrating to realities deeper than those encountered in daily life. As Simmel notes, "the uplift which a view of the high Alps gives is followed very quickly by the return to the mood of the mundane" (1991: 96). Climbing to a pedagogic place is, to borrow from Turner, "a transient humility" (1969: 82). It is for this reason that cyclists cannot find the words to express the significance of the moment when actually experiencing it, for it stands outside the usual set of provisions which local actors are equipped- socially and linguistically- to deal with. As Turner notes, "communitas exists where social structure is not" (1969: 113). It is for this reason that narratives become longer, that emotions become greater, that play gets deeper, when cyclists are not completing a pilgrimage. It is only once social structures are put back in place that conventions of linguistic expression return. To bring out the depth of deep play, cyclists must be engaged in ordinary, everyday activities such as having a drink with friends. The risks and perils of the cycling life are always seen in counterpoint to the stability and rationality of the non-cycling life.

Fetishization of space

The endless reconstruction of inanimate mountains into places of pilgrimage

steeped in pedagogic properties turns upon a profound fetishization of space. In channelling narratives of risk, co-operation, death and danger towards their places of pilgrimage, cyclists empower the mountains with extraordinary capacities indeed. The great mountains such as the Col du Galibier and Alpe d'Huez take on an enigmatic quality that permeates all around them. Such mountains have the power to impinge on a cyclist's life by virtue of their sheer presence. As Natalie maintains, "there are some mountains that are really outstanding, they just tower above you and they are the ones that you remember more than others."

While the immense height of a mountain like Mont Blanc is recognized by riders in Isère and Savoie (it is commonly described as "*le monarque aux montagnes*" and "*l'esprit de l'univers*"), it is not so much a question of height, as one of shape, that provides the opportunity for the fetishization of the mountains. The Col du Galibier for example is known as the '*casse déserté*', a reference to its lunar-like landscape. Meditatively silent, the Col du Galibier is a waste land of rocks and shining veins of mineral deposits. It is an open air shrine where Fausto Coppi, Eddy Merckx and Miguel Indurain, "all those who count in cycling's *annales*," as Valérie puts it, "have proven themselves." As Valérie continues, "only those who have crossed the *casse déserté* are great winners." While talking about the Tour always conjures up images from a different, romantic, era, it also conjures up images of a landscape that is profoundly shaping of the Isérois cycling world.

It is precisely the shape and form of the mountains that provide the opportunity for a particular kind of fetishization- that of anthropomorphism. Just as it is believed that configurations of clouds take particular shapes, Isérois cyclists believe that certain mountains embody attributes of animate objects. The Dentes de Crolles in the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse- a sheer cliff face that runs flush against the Grésuvidian Valley- is known locally as '*Dents aux Chats*', the needle-like crags of the cliffs believed to resemble the teeth of a cat. Also in the Massif de la Grande Chartreuse, the Chamechaude is referred to as '*l'Aigle de Quaix*', so named for its resemblance to the extended wings of a bird in flight. In the Massif du Vercors, the overhanging Moucherotte is described as '*La Guillotine*', while in the Massif de l'Oisans, '*Le Diable*'- the Devil- towers above the already impressive (2189 metres) ski resort of Les Deux Alpes. These anthropomorphic ways of imagining the mountains most obviously demonstrate the fetishization of place and space. Constructed in such terms, the landscape is recontextualized so that it takes on a life of its own.

In enacting the process of anthropomorphism, local cyclists imbue the mountains with animalistic qualities. A mountain can become a cat, a bird in flight or the Devil. Conceived as such, the mountains are invested with the capacities of doing and being. They can pounce like a cat- as Georges notes, "Alpe d'Huez lies in wait"-, soar like a bird and instil fear like the Devil. Far from being perceived as tame and domesticated creatures, the construction of the mountains in these animalistic terms reflects the ruthless, even barbaric side of the animal kingdom. Granted the powers to be and do, the mountains are seen as 'killers', capable of ending life through the power that they exert. The stages from Villard-de-Lans to Serre Chevalier and Serre Chevalier and Isola 2000 in the 1993 Tour de France were described in the popular media as "*massacre dans les alpes*" (*Le Parisien*, July 25, 1993: 21). In such formulations, the physical might of the mountains is pitted against the mere mortality of the cyclist. One might suspect that when Octave Lapize spat out 'assassins' in 1910, he was not referring to Henri Desgrange but to The Circle of Death itself. When reflecting on the death of Eric Flaubert, his club mates and co-riders never entertained the possibility that Eric might have lost concentration or mistimed a corner. It was the supreme powers of '*La Guillotine*'- Le Moucherotte- that cost Eric his life. For local cyclists, riding in the mountains is conceptualized as a duel with a superior master. As Béatrice claims, "climbing is always a battle between the rider and the terrain."

This recognition of the killer qualities of the mountains is evidenced most clearly in the preparation that riders undertake before embarking on a session in the mountains. When confronted with the raw brutality of the mountains, cyclists exhibit signs of self-preservation. At the beginning and end of the season, cyclists take great care to rug up against the elements.¹⁸ Thermal overboots, neoprene long jackets, full gloves and long knicks are worn, a cyclist often preferring to be overdressed than to suffer a chill or frost bite. These precautionary measures are noted by local riders. Florian maintains that "you never know what the mountains are going to do," a sentiment shared by Marie-Claire, who advises that "you must always take precautions in the mountains." While cyclists can diet and train to ensure that they reach optimal physical condition, the natural environment is seen as being external to the body- the prime site of discipline- so they cannot harness or control it. Cyclists thus concede the superiority of the mountains over and above their

¹⁸Running from March through to the end of October, the cycling season in Isère closely follows the professional calendar. The professional season opens in mid-March with 'The Race to the Sun' as the Paris-Nice is locally known. The season concludes with 'The Race of the Falling Leaves'- the Tour of Lombardy- in late October.

physical reserves.

The uncertainties which climatic variations impose upon the Isérois cycling milieu activates a mini discourse of reverence in which the mountains are spoken of in terms that recognize their physical might. Nearly every cyclist has had a terrible day in the saddle, and their recollections of these experiences are done in terms of their conquering an essential elemental beast. Stories of the sun beating down relentlessly, of pedalling through howling gales and driving rain, and days when a rider's hands and feet became numb with cold circulated amongst Isérois cyclist. Fabrice remembers his first ride at high altitude: "I didn't have any long gloves, so my hands were frozen when I climbed off my bike. I was in real agony. I lost the feeling in one of my fingers for three weeks afterwards." One account relayed by Laurent dramatically articulates the relationship between cyclists and the mountain environment in which they ride:

coming up [the Col d'Ornon], I could feel the sun on my arms and sweat dripped into my eyes. I could feel my head pounding in my helmet. Coming down, it was so cold. My feet were numb, and every bump went straight through my body. I couldn't help but think 'this is what cycling is all about.' It's about a rider and the elements. I climbed higher than I've ever climbed that day. I've never climbed so high or for so long. The view was superb. I've never felt so alone. Every so often a car would pass, and then I would be alone again.

For cyclists, alpine adventures have a pleasure that can only be experienced through a self-reliance that is both internal and external to oneself. Cyclists in Isère have to cope with a unique set of circumstances that constitute not only their conceptualization of Nature, but also, their position within or against such conditions.

The ways in which cyclists invest the mountains with a distinctive cultural significance was strikingly displayed when, several days after the route of the Tour de France for 1994 was announced, a group of cyclists were discussing the inclusion of the 'new' mountains of the Col de Croix-Fry and Val-Thorens in the Alps, and Hautacam in the Pyrénées, to the race's itinerary. I participated at length in these exchanges about the difficulties that each mountain would pose before the thought occurred to me: how can a mountain be 'new'? Mountains have, after all, been a fixture of the landscape for hundreds of thousands of years. Cyclists were using the word 'new' to denote that these mountains had never appeared in the context of the Tour de France. This recontextualization of the landscape as a part of the Tour's territory raises the question of what constitutes an 'old' mountain. If a 'new'

mountain is one that is yet to be graced by the presence of the Tour de France, then 'old' mountains must be those like Alpe d'Huez, Col du Galibier or Col d'Izoard; those mountains steeped in the saga and history of the Tour de France. The passage of the Tour over particular mountains defines them in precise cultural terms indeed. Here, social actors invest the mountains with the human properties of aging. The mountains are incorporated into a linear sequence of time which follows the span of a human life.

When fetishizing the mountains, sexual metaphors are especially colourful, with many cyclists straying into sexual imagery to define their cycling experiences. The thrill and exhilaration of descending at high speed is described by one rider as "*le vélo orgasmique*", while climbing is, for some, "the biggest turn on." Alpe d'Huez is referred to- by male and female cyclists alike- as "*une femme capricieuse*" or "*une taquine*"- a tease- while others talk of 'climaxing' when they reach a summit. In drawing on a language which emphasizes sexual gratification, cyclists articulate the incredible physical and emotional release that riding in the mountains affords. Intense physical exertion activates the production of endorphines, naturally occurring chemicals that trigger a euphoric high, and it is the effects of these chemicals that cyclists often crave. Indeed, many complain that they become edgy if they go for more than a few days without a hard climb.

The art work on T-shirts, coffee mugs, key rings, postcards and stickers, amongst other things, articulates the sensual and tactile quality of the mountains. A poster for the *fête d'alpage* at Alpe d'Huez features a bikini clad woman perched atop a bicycle proclaiming ' *Bienvenue à l'Alpe d'Huez*', while one particular T-shirt on sale in the numerous resort wear boutiques depicts two mountaineers standing at the base of Alpe d'Huez, looking wistfully towards the summit. The caption reads: "like all women, she's hard to conquer." In populist media accounts, the mountains are employed to perpetuate particular images of sexual conquest, romance and excellence. In one particular television advertisement for Levi's jeans, a romantic couple is featured running over a series of Levi-clad bottoms, the row of denim swathed mounds resembling a mountain range, while a newspaper advertisement for J&B whiskey, which incorporates a man and a woman in evening dress atop a moving train headed towards a looming mountain range, adopts the phrase "*ne rentrez pas chez vous ce soir- J&B pour la nuit*" (*Elle*, June 1993: 16). The semiotics of such advertising are easy to decode: to go to the mountains (atop a train) is to embark on a journey more exotic, romantic and extraordinary than anything this couple may encounter in their

daily, urbane life. Many advertisements incorporate mountainscapes when working with the notion of the pinnacle of product excellence to promote their goods. Evian mineral water is advertised as "*l'eau de là-haut*," (*Voici*, September, 1993: 12), while advertisements for '33' Export beer feature a rugged looking man, ascending an impressive mountain range. In one hand he clutches a pick and a rope, in the other, a bottle of '33' Export; the reward for his assault on the towering mountain range. (*L'Equipe*, July 24, 1994: 23). Metadent toothpaste makes use of the image of the mountains to illustrate the insurmountability of tartar build up: "*faites quelque contre le tatre, avant qu'il ne vous en fasse une montagne*" (*L'Equipe*, July 24, 1994: 17).

While the fetishization of the mountains is demonstrated in the exchanges between cyclists, it is equally elaborated in the daily encounters between cyclists and commodities. The ongoing encounters of cyclists and goods fetishize the mountains on an enduring basis, for a welter of tourist trinkets and cheap commodities "brings the monument closer to the masses" (Rojek 1992: 196). *Cyclisme International* features a running fiction story entitled '*Qui a tué le maillot jaune?*' The opening paragraph reads: "the story so far...Claude Revillion, the wearer of *le maillot jaune* in the Tour is found dead in his hotel room at Alpe d'Huez." The image of Alpe d'Huez is similarly incorporated into travel brochures, post-cards, T-shirt images, transfers, key-rings and other such commodities. In these reproductions of Alpe d'Huez, much is made of its symmetry. Although standing at a relatively modest 1800 metres, Alpe d'Huez is widely regarded in cycling circles as the *greatest* climb, and it is the proportion or the aesthetic of the mountain that contributes to this perception. The twenty one *virages* or 'switch backs' of Alpe d'Huez are considered by many to be "*l'ascension parfait*." The symmetry of the climb is precise. From the floor of the Romanche Valley, it is possible to see the whole of the ascent traced out in a zig-zag pattern etched into the face of the mountain. The shape of Alpe d'Huez is instrumental in the packaging and promotion of local culture. Products such as T-shirts, post-cards, coffee mugs and souvenir pens reproduce images of the road to the summit, the picture invariably accompanied by phrases such as 'The Long and Winding Road'- this coffee cup featuring the face of John Lennon!- or 'The Twenty One steps to Hell'. Media coverage especially picks up on the form and structure of Alpe d'Huez. In detailing the itinerary that the Tour de France would follow through Isère in 1994, *Le Dauphiné-Libéré* described Alpe d'Huez as "from the air, the climb to Alpe d'Huez wraps around the mountain like a chest crushing python" (July 12, 1994). Alpe d'Huez lures aficionados to it by the

overpowering visual statement that it makes, a statement that, in turn, encourages and enables an extreme fetishization of the mountains.

Coda

The concern of this chapter has been to detail the ways in which the mountains that Isèrois cyclists routinely encounter, particularly Alpe d'Huez, are constituted as sites of mythic elaboration. For Isèrois cyclists, the mountains are places at which a disparate collection of cyclists can meet and share in the reproduction of a range of narrative themes. The mountains offer a situation in which particular ways of imagining the local riding environment can be articulated. As I have argued throughout this chapter, the mountains provide key points at which to moor the ever mobile collectivity of cyclists. The mountains are, as Gupta and Ferguson characterize, "remembered places, which serve as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people" (1992: 11).

However, the inescapability of the mountains when in Isère must surely invite the question: if riders encounter them on a daily basis, why are mountain sessions seen as having such symbolic properties? Why does climbing in the Alps have greater cultural currency than other cycling achievements? Riding in the mountains represents a far greater register of accomplishment than any other discipline of cycling. Mountain sessions demand and display complete cycling competence, and such a recognition articulates with local sentiment. Jean-Claude maintains that "real cyclists ride real mountains", while Celine recognizes that "climbing is the purest test of stamina and judgment." As this chapter has shown, the mountains reveal a great deal about cycling. Mountain sessions symbolize quintessential cycling; they are both the essence of cycling and the key process through which that essence is derived. Riding in the mountains serves as a kind of giant glass retort into which all of the diverse elements that make up the sport of cycling are placed and then raised to the boil. This process yields the very spirit of cycling, whether it be in the form of technical specifics, like climbing or descending or, as embodiments of honoured human behaviour, like courage, bravery, tenacity, resignation, even grief. Riding in the Alps represents a magnificent dramatization of cycling life. The peaks and valleys of the terrain mirror the physical and emotional responses of the riders: one day you are up, the next day, you are down. A session in the mountains satisfies the physical, spiritual, aesthetic and competitive needs of those who regularly embark on such endeavours.

To return to the earlier theme of cycling as a form of 'Deep Play', it is the very real prospect of injury and death that represents the social stake which cyclists risk. In taking the risks of cycling, cyclists gamble with far more than financial wagers or subjective gratification. The stakes are self-esteem, honour, dignity and respect. Just as in the cockfight, where the fighters are attracted to the excitement and exhilaration of the match, cyclists are attracted to the thrill of the climb and the risks that this holds. In both situations, adherents find enjoyment in commitment and comradeship. The skill that it takes to train a cock is matched by the skill that it takes in knowing how to climb. Cyclists see the archetype of status virtue in climbing: to climb well is to suffer publicly, to take risks, and to demonstrate technical skill and physical competency. The overriding importance of such social and technical skills to being a good cyclist more than compensates for the danger and pain of their sport.

As this chapter has shown, the chief symbolic appeal of cycling lies in the mountains. It is when riding in the mountains that cycling takes on a pedagogic value. Nature is a cruel master, and it is when faced with the uncertainties of terrain, the climate and the human condition, that a cyclist learns the limits of his or her endurance. And, as the fatalities of Fabio Casartelli and Eric Flaubert illustrate, it is in the mountains where a cyclist learns about death. As Robbins identifies, "to relate directly to nature is to gain access to fundamental truths touching on the human condition" (1987: 591). Riding in the mountains provides a moment of intense personal evaluation in which the authenticity, validity and legitimacy of cycling experiences are routinely questioned and confirmed.

CHAPTER SIX

TAKING THE BRAKES OFF; MOVING FROM LOCAL TO NATIONAL

“Even if there was another Chernobyl disaster
twenty kilometres from Paris, the Tour de France
would still go on. The race is unstoppable.
You almost don’t need the riders anymore.”
Jean-Claude Colotti

Introduction

The previous chapters detailed the various conversational and performative elements that go into creating and maintaining a distinctive social world for Isèrois cycling aficionados. Throughout my thesis I have demonstrated that the markedly vicarious relationship between the professional cyclist and the amateur aficionado sets the sport of cycling apart from all others. While the Tour de France is indeed distant from the on-road activities of cyclists in Isère, the proximity of the professionals ensures that it remains immediate and relevant to the amateurs. For local riders, cycling is an acutely reflexive enterprise with their personal experiences being measured and validated in terms of the Tour de France. Every aspect of cycling life is made maximally visible by its annual return. The Tour presents a dramatization of social action that is routinely appropriated by local riders to give meaning to their experiences of cycling.

But the return of the Tour de France brings into play a range of cultural transformations that are of importance to the non-cyclist and the non-Isèrois too. Here, my analysis shifts from local to national. It is the concern of this chapter to elaborate the cultural consequences that are effected by the Tour as it moves across the country. It is my argument that the extreme commercialization of the event presents a range of images of ‘Frenchness’ through which consumers can construct an enduring cultural identity. The Tour de France involves a deep transformation of everyday life that is inextricable from the practices of consumer activity.

The emphasis placed on the central role of consumerism in transforming national culture points to a need to shift the focus of anthropology so as to

take into account the cultural climate of postmodern times. As Kellner notes, a media culture has emerged in which images, sounds and spectacles help to produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the material out of which people forge their very identity (1995: 1).

The ubiquity of the media, and the sheer quantity of commodities which circulate in contemporary society, offer a new set of provisions for articulating identity. Through their ongoing encounters with goods, commodities and the media, consumers are continually presented with images of their nation.

Certainly, human involvement remains central to the construction of national identity,¹ however, it is now mediated by consumer agency. This being the case, anthropologists must focus their attentions on those sites of experience which are saturated by commercial activity, for it is here that members of nations collectively produce versions of themselves. As Peace recognizes, there is a

need to eschew the cliché ridden, metaphor replete formulae which reify national cultures and national identities to the point of inaccessible abstraction. The analytical focus must shift towards the ethnography of events, processes and encounters (1996a: 4).

It is precisely the collective and commodity rich nature of contemporary ceremonies, be they rock concerts, art expositions or sporting contests, which provide valuable data with which to orient ethnographic inquiries into 'national identity'. At these events, consumers are provided with an especial opportunity to work through what it means to belong to a nation. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the national festival of the Tour de France provides a fine example of the interpretive potential that grand-scale events can hold for reading culture.

Seeing the construction of national identity as a product of constant accomplishment on the part of those who live in the nation strikes a chord with Geertz's interpretive project. Concerned with notions of force and compulsion, Geertz is drawn to explore why people are propelled to act in ways that are particularly resonant, meaningful or symbolic; to address how particular events and institutions can capture and magnify the integrity of the culture(s) in which they occur. Following on from Geertz, I would argue that it is in the ongoing, everyday encounters with advertising, goods and commodities that images of national identity are created and capitulated. It is

¹Richard Handler (1988), for example, provides a compelling analysis of the social processes which are employed by the Québécois when constructing their national identity.

through the agency invested in producing and consuming images of a nation that the salience of the experience is reinforced. As Hannerz and Löfgren (1994) recognize, it is precisely through reading, interpreting and reappropriating icons and images used in advertising that enduring impressions of national identity, in their case that of Sweden, are produced and reproduced. The repertoire of symbolic goods that are worked upon by producers and consumers alike articulates the distinctiveness of the culture that it is intended to exemplify. In this sense, Hannerz and Löfgren can be seen as postmodern ripostes to Clifford Geertz. The detail that Geertz identifies in the minutiae of the cockfight as revealing of Balinese life can be found in grand-scale, commodity and media rich events such as the Tour de France. Far from dated, Geertz's rationale for interpretive anthropology remains an influential paradigm: anthropologists such as Hannerz and Löfgren recognize the role that human intervention continues to play in producing and maintaining national identity, however they acknowledge that social agency is both determined and mediated by consumer activity. Although writing some thirty years ago, the relevance of Geertz's understanding of the nature of social life still holds for the increasingly complex nature of contemporary cultural imagination.

This emphasis on the importance of human intervention reactivates a key theme of my thesis. In detailing the symbolic capital that cyclists invest in constituting their cultural distinctiveness *vis-à-vis* the Tour de France, I have underscored the centrality of social agency in framing the Tour in these highly particular cycling terms. I have also suggested repeatedly that the Tour de France dramatically alters landscapes and territory as it moves around France. The logical progression from these assertions is to develop the argument that far from being pre-given and inalienable- there simply to be traversed-, landscape and territory are socially constructed and are the product of sustained involvement and accomplishment by those who live in the nation. As Bender recognizes, "landscapes are created by people- through their experience and engagement with the world around them" (1993: 1). The landscape of France is repeatedly worked upon by the producers and consumers of public culture to yield a range of narratives that are brought into being and progressively elaborated by the Tour de France. Its annual return provides a particularly compelling account of the ways in which the spatial landscape of France is constructed by social relations. In moving around the country, the Tour presents an unfolding cartography that ultimately fetishizes France by defining her composition, aesthetic and ambience. The Tour reorders, reframes and restructures the cultural territory

of France; it gives the landscape a life of its own. Through commercial activity the Tour capitulates and reinvents a particular social map of France; a specific construction of 'Frenchness'. The Tour embodies, in the one symbolic form, both the commodification and the consumption of national culture.

This chapter has two concerns: to trace the Tour as it transforms the spatial landscapes it encounters and then, to elaborate the ways in which this social mapping of France promotes particular imaginings of the nation. In packaging and presenting France through a range of stock images of national identity, the country is invested with style, flair and sophistication; attributes of 'Frenchness' that are reinforced by the annual return of the Tour. Being French is distilled in commercial activity, and the Tour de France provides an ideal site from which to attempt a reading of this construction.

The calm before the storm

Before addressing the representations of Frenchness that are articulated by and through the Tour, it is necessary to first provide some sense of the commercial activity which enables and inspires these imaginings of national identity. The Tour brings to France a barrage of media personnel and an avalanche of commercial activity which trigger a manifest transformation of her social and spatial landscapes. To illustrate the capacity of the Tour to redefine territory through consumer intervention, I pay particular attention to the transformation of those stage or host villages which oversee the arrival and departure of each of its daily stages, for it is these *villes-étapes* that most notably bear the brunt of its power: it is these towns which provide important sites at and towards which the fetishization of the Tour de France can be both enacted and directed. In detailing the progressive take over of a stage village, I focus on the transformation of urban space. By sustaining a veritable pummelling from the Tour, the stage villages that it visits serve to spatially record the history of the event through the rich tapestry of social relations that unfurl in each village.

My privileging of the stage villages to highlight the effects of the Tour upon France is not to deny its impact upon other towns, nor is it to deny that towns and villages exist independently of the Tour de France, for like any community, they are involved in a daily process of self-construction. While the five hundred or so towns that the race simply passes through suffer a trampling at the hand of the Tour, these effects nonetheless remain quite ephemeral. It is the encounter between the itinerant circus of the Tour de

France and the static *ville-étape* that highlights the more enduring social consequences that the Tour has for France, so I devote extended analysis to these stage villages. Certainly, the Tour operates as an imperative cultural force when moving throughout the country, however, its social, economic and political ramifications are most obvious for those towns who host its arrivals and departures. It is in response to these social, political and economic influences that indigenous actors- be they spectators, shop owners or local dignitaries- articulate their impressions of the Tour in France. Host villages most obviously (although, of course, not exclusively) provide a stage upon which local actors can do some highly interpretive, culturally constitutive, work on being both proudly parochial and publicly French. The stage villages that the Tour de France visits provide a succession of sites for the "cultural praxis of national identity" (Löfgren 1989: 105).

To illustrate the take over of urban space I use as my case studies those stage villages in Isère and in the neighbouring *départements* of Savoie, Haute-Savoie and Hautes-Alpes who welcomed the Tour in 1993 and 1994. I include the townships of Villard-de-Lans, Serre Chevalier, Alpe d'Huez, Bourg d'Oisans, Val-Thorens, Moûtiers and Cluses. Regularly riding to such places enabled me, with my fellow cyclists, to witness the progressive transformation of these stage villages as they geared up for the show of shows. By undertaking periodic cycling excursions to these stage villages, it was possible to trace their systematic reconstruction as they prepared for the arrival of the Tour de France.

Having detailed the culture and geography of Isère in chapter two, I do not propose to provide a comprehensive description of these towns prior to the arrival of the Tour de France. There are, nonetheless, certain features that make their encounter with the Tour all the more remarkable. While stage villages can be major metropolitan or urban centres such as Bordeaux or Montpellier, those in Isère and the neighbouring *départements* are characteristically small, provincial towns, often betwixt and between alpine serenity and the incursions of consumer culture. Alpe d'Huez, Serre Chevalier and Val-Thorens are custom built ski resorts, while Bourg d'Oisans and Villard-de-Lans are market towns which service the smaller *communes* dotted throughout the Massif de l'Oisans and the Massif du Vercors. Although small in size, these *villes-étapes* remain parochial landmarks that provide key sites for the production, distribution and, above all, the consumption of cultural products associated with the Tour de France. The *villes-étapes* throughout Isère and elsewhere represent important places at

which to manufacture and sustain, through the agency of the Tour de France, a particularly commodified representation of the country it embodies on a national level.

As I noted in chapter two, much of Isère is intensely isolated, with tourist images particularly trading on the 'aesthetic of the infinite.' Brochures advertise Isère as an 'alpine oasis' or 'the ideal place to get away from it all', and it is against the customary backdrop of leisurely paced life in alpine France that the supremely commercial nature of the Tour de France stands in starkest opposition. The instalment of *le géant écran* of France 2/3 Télévision (an enormous television screen which covers 20 square metres) atop mountain passes such as Alpe d'Huez or Serre Chevalier provides palpable evidence of the juncture at which the tranquillity of the local landscape is displaced by the 'mediascape' (Appadurai 1990) of the national event.

The calm air of alpine serenity that characterizes life in Isère and neighbouring *départements* is shattered as the arrival of the Tour de France becomes increasingly imminent. From the month of May onwards, both cultural and commercial landscapes are razed and replanted with the seeds of the Tour de France. An enormous swathe of consumer activity precedes the Tour, which once put in place, then leaves the landscape 'pure' for the race action itself. The order in which the Tour unfolds is a theme I will pick up on shortly, suffice it to say here, the coming of the Tour triggers a period of high consumerism in which its imminent arrival is elevated to a position of pre-eminence in the material concerns of daily life in France. The iconography of the everyday is surrendered to the Tour. Most notably, a veritable flood of advertising saturates the prosaic backdrop of routine life with images of the Tour de France. As Foster notes, "any commodity, under certain conditions, can function as a medium for objectifying the nation" (1991: 249), and the flurry of media activity that surrounds the Tour de France provides many examples of the ways in which commodities can produce new cultural trajectories for a nation.

In the month before the event, television, radio and newspaper advertising becomes increasingly Tour oriented. Every conceivable product or business is given a second use value; to promote the Tour de France. *Télécartes* and a special issue of the 100 and 500 franc note feature the faces of past Tour greats, while a set of commemorative dinner plates, made in conjunction with Michelin Maps, is embossed with the route of the 1993 Tour. A survey of advertisements in the French popular press reveals that Coca-Cola becomes

'la boisson officielle du Tour de France,' Festina watches are now 'les chronomètres professionnel,' while France 2/3 Télévision defines itself as 'l'image du Tour' when featured in newspapers such as *Le Dauphiné-Libéré* or *Le Parisien*. Television advertising is similarly packaged to promote the Tour. In one commercial for the Quick hamburger chain, a young girl is featured riding her bicycle into a Quick restaurant wearing the distinctive red and white polka dot jersey of the King of the Mountains. The text which accompanies the widely screened commercial for the then newly released Coupé and la Punto Cabrio models of Fiat cars reads:

Cette année, avec 47,7km/h de moyenne nos croma ont battu un record. Rouleur au ralenti sous un soleil de plomb, pendant des heures, descendre le col d'Izoard à la poursuite d'un coureur échappé à 120 km/h, puis attaquer la montée d'Isola 2000 à fond de seconde. Nous remercions donc les hommes du Tour, et surtout les coureurs, qui nous permettent chaque année d'aller un peu plus loin. PARTENAIRE OFFICIEL DU TOUR DE FRANCE.

The semiotics of this text are easy to decode: attempting to follow the riders in the Tour de France has given Fiat a nation-wide test track for its cars. Commodity fetishism lies at the heart of the interpretive structure of all advertisements, and this one is no different. Here the Tour is granted with the powers of being and doing. Thanks to the Tour de France, these cars have become better than ever. If it was not for the descent from the Col d'Izoard or the climb to Isola 2000, then Fiat would not be able to showcase the stylish handling of its Coupé and Punto Cabrio. The Tour de France has injected new life into Fiat; it has created opportunities for which advertisers are publicly grateful. Supporting newspaper advertising picks up on this notion of commercial reciprocity: the closing sentence in one advertisement reads: "Le Tour de France aime Fiat, Fiat aime le Tour, la Grande Boucle est bouclée" (*L'Equipe*, July 24, 1995: 9). As Goldman notes, "a dialectic of interpretive contestation and ideological reincorporation unfolds in a commodity culture" (1992: 2).

Both the Internet and Minitel become the servants of the Tour de France. The expansive properties of such technology are well recognized by advertisers who exploit them to get maximum market exposure. On Minitel, under the code of 3615 Le Tour, users have the opportunity to purchase clothes, key rings, coffee cups and cuff-links from La Boutique du Tour. On the World Wide Web, a range of cycling magazines, as well as *L'Equipe* and La Société du Tour de France, have their own web sites which provide daily results, exclusive interviews with the riders and expert race analysis from past professionals such as Bernard Hinault and Bernard Thévenet. In addition,

L'Equipe's web site provides information concerning equipment and 'gossip' (team transfers and sponsor changes), it features stories relating to team strategies, and it offers profiles of the riders. It is also possible to post questions to the professionals regarding training or racing or to send a congratulatory or commiseratory note to any of the riders. The inescapable involvement of the media, particularly the technology of Minitel and the Internet, provides, as Appadurai notes, "direct sources of new images and scenarios for life possibilities" (1991: 198).

While the increase in media coverage is not, in itself, peculiar to stage villages- indeed, it is nationally omnipotent- the incorporation of consumer products into everyday streetscapes is. The landscape of a host town is peppered with images from the Tour. Billboards, posters, advertising in bus shelters and promotions in store windows are all dominated by representations of the Tour de France. Clothing shops hang cycling uniforms on their mannequins, and the cover sheets from old editions of *L'Equipe* are included in the window displays of *tabacs* and cafés. Even haberdashery and lingerie stores get in on the act, with lengths of material draped over bicycles and scantily clad models posing across their bikes. Corporations such as Coca-Cola and GAN Assurances offer promotions and special deals, while Crédit Lyonnais touts itself as '*la banque du maillot jaune*'. Castorama features 'yellow jersey specials', and Supermarché Champion, the PMU, Bricomarché and Bosch all shape their advertising campaigns in terms of the Tour de France. The most mundane of commodities are used to promote the Tour, with groceries in supermarkets being incorporated into this commodity bricolage. Frozen dinners are endorsed by the Chazal racing team, while brands of fruit juice and soft drinks are similarly supported by other teams including WordPerfect and GB-MG Boys.

Given the sheer quantity of images to choose from, it is interesting to note which goods and icons are selected to promote the Tour, and which are ignored. The privileging of certain commodities over others provides an index of national identity in which the selection of certain images reflects salient national archetypes. As Braudel notes, "a nation will consistently recognize in itself certain stock images" (1986: 23). Most notably, the theme of sophistication- in both fashion and technology- is repeatedly amplified in the media. Commercials and advertisements for France Télécom and France 2/3

Télévision elaborate the hi-tech vision of France,² while the esteemed virtues of beauty, finery, elegance and physical perfection are espoused in advertisements for everything from cars to perfume. In one series of television advertisements for Chanel No. 5, a woman, dressed in the style of *haute couture*, exudes luxury and elegance. With blood-red lipstick, glittering jewellery and no doubt smelling a million bucks, she embodies the stereotype of a chic and sophisticated France. While I noted in chapter two that the interests of leisure oriented cyclists are not necessarily included in this stereotype, it nonetheless remains a characterization of France more generally that has resonance with a great many advertising campaigns.

When promoting the Tour de France, advertisers employ a range of iconic images which perpetuate the notion of a sophisticated and sexy France. As in most western commodity cultures, *la pub* in France trades on the maxim that 'sex sells'. When advertising everything from sunscreens to telephones, romantic and sexual imagery is customary. Cellular 'phones from Motorola are the ideal way to say '*je t'aime*', Cacharel is 'the forbidden fragrance', while Tendre Poison is advertised as a 'playful and seductive' perfume. In both print and electronic media, thin, languid and semi-naked bodies abound, with *doubles entendres* plentiful. A television advertisement for Perrier mineral water, for example, features a female hand with long red talons caressing the neck of a bottle. Above the steamy soundtrack, punctuated by heavy breathing and moans of pleasure, the bottle begins to grow until it blows its top; an unashamed allusion to ejaculation. Such images grace French screens and pages on a daily basis, confirming the centrality of sex to imaginings of a general "French cultural style" (Chartier 1985: 687).

Publicity in French cycling magazines reinforces this notion of a sexy and sexual France. One widely featured advertisement for Michelin tyres is accompanied by the caption: "just what you need for an exciting weekend. Ribbed rubber." Such explicit sexual associations could only appear to promote French products. Indeed, the Italian brand of tyre- Vittoria- is advertised as a 'traditional' tyre, appealing to a commonly perceived Italian cultural trait. Advertising in cycling magazines emphasizes the sensuality of the sport. The skin-tight lycra suits worn by the models in many

²Since the brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière made their first motion picture in 1895, France has prided herself on her technological vision. In recent years, the developments of the microchip driven *telecarte*, the nation-wide information system Minitel, nuclear energy programmes, digital flight control systems in the Airbus 320 jet liners, and the SPOT imaging satellite that gave the world its first detailed look at the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the former Soviet Union, have positioned France at the cutting edge of the technology and information service industries.

advertisements for products including dietary supplements, clothing and footwear accentuate the curves and contours of their bodies. Many a photograph is taken from the rear, the angle emphasizing the behinds of the subjects who, glistening with sweat, underscore the raw physicality of cycling. One campaign for Giant bicycles features a tasteful black and white photograph of a cyclist, his legs lathered with shaving foam, removing the hair from his legs. Unquestionably sensual, the photograph captures the unashamed narcissism of the sport.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, sexual metaphors are one way in which Isérois riders articulate their experiences of cycling. The Tour de France attracts similar expressions of sexual behaviour from the professional riders. Thierry Claveyrolat describes the Tour as, "fascinating, like a woman. She can be the best mistress imaginable or she can reject you at any moment. That's why she's exciting", while another professional claims that "the pleasure you feel when you enter Paris and see the Eiffel Tower is better than any sex." In promoting the Tour de France, the populist press trades on both the sensuality of cycling and the sophisticated nature of French society at one and the same time. A newspaper advertisement, again for Fiat cars, features a woman, clad in evening wear and a pearl necklace, drinking out of a *bidon* and wearing a pair of cycling gloves. The accompanying text reads:

l'élégance, c'est savoir faire les choses les plus folles et les faire jusqu'au bout. Personne ne sait si l'auteur de cette définition était un amateur de cyclisme, toujours est-il qu'elle convient admirablement aux héros du Tour. (L'Equipe, Monday 24 July, 1994: 9).

The juxtaposition of cycling and elegance in this advertisement is striking: a common strategy when packaging and promoting the Tour de France for popular consumption. Similarly, tourist pamphleteering exploits sexual imagery in the selling of the Tour de France. Publicity brochures for the stage finish at Serre Chevalier- *le Toit du Monde*- invited one to "*monter au septième ciel*"- to climb to seventh heaven-, while one women's magazine featured the young French riders Richard Virenque and Jacky Durand in a pictorial spread entitled "*les mecs à saut*"- literally 'guys to jump'. In each example, the sexual connotation is explicit, reinforcing the carnal and hedonistic nature of life in France.

My use of terms such as 'choose' and 'select' when discussing which images become representative of the Tour and of France is deliberate, for it highlights the necessarily brokered quality of much of the Tour de France. As I mentioned in chapter one, La Société du Tour de France operates as a

cultural intermediary, choosing and producing the symbolic capital consumed by Tour audiences. In this same vein, the goods, images and commodities that are chosen to promote the Tour de France are strategically brokered by publicists, journalists and advertising agents. While the vast quantity of goods and commodities available for consumption suggests that the Tour de France is a postmodern playground for the seriously hedonistic, the range of goods is, in fact, far more limited, for it is carefully mediated by a range of cultural intermediaries. Appadurai recognizes the limits of the consumer, claiming that he or she is, in fact, fetishized:

as for the fetishism of the consumer, I mean to indicate here that the consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows (and the mediascapes especially of advertising that accompany them), into a sign, both in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum which only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent; and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production. Global agency is the key technology for the world wide dissemination of a plethora of creative and culturally well chosen ideas of consumer agency. These images of agency are increasingly distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact, he or she is, at best, a chooser (1990: 306-307).

It is for this reason that those goods promoted as representative of the nation and the event are all the more significant. As Van Elteren recognizes, "marketing strategy is to insert the message of advertisements into the connotations of the (intrinsically problematic) stocks of knowledge that constitute particular 'national cultural identities'" (1996: 29). The selection and provision of key commodities can be seen as a colonization of national identity which reinforces the key role that the merchandising of commodities plays in crafting images of national culture. The appeals to sex and sophistication, and the incorporation of information technology into the selling of the Tour, are reflective of a sexy and technologically sophisticated France; cultural characteristics that, if not endorsed by the social practices of cyclists in Isère, were at the very least, acknowledged as being representative of a general French cultural style.

Transformation of place and space

The flood of Tour-oriented media advertising that saturates a stage village gives way to a transformation of place and space as the encounter between the travelling circus and the *ville-étape* draws near. There is an almost tangible sense of anticipation as a town awaits the race. Crowds gather outside store windows to watch the televised race inside, people move leisurely towards

the projected route, and life in general gears up in anticipation of the Tour de France as the finish line or *l'arrivée* becomes the new (albeit temporary) focus of life in the town. For its arrival in 1993, Perpignan, a busy tourist town in the south of France, had installed in its major department store, Gallérie Lafayette, an *Espace du Tour* which featured a display of the history of the race in the region. It included photographs, newspaper cuttings, old rider jerseys and a couple of antique bicycles that were ridden in *les temps héroïque*. A television set broadcast the current Tour, and there were two rows of chairs set out from which viewers could watch the race. As the action grew closer to Perpignan, the sales assistant from the perfumerie came over to watch the race, the man from the Mister Minute key/shoe repair store emerged from his basement workstation, the store security guards milled around the *Espace du Tour*, and customers sat in the chairs, watching the race on television. The normal processes of buying and selling were temporarily suspended as the Tour raced into town. Small businesses closed, a simple note announcing '*fermeture exceptionnelle cette après midi en cause du Tour de France*' sticky taped to the locked door. Life in Perpignan was hung, pending the arrival of the Tour de France.

A town awaiting the race is totally restructured as Tour space. Prior to its arrival, Le Société du Tour de France submits a detailed report on what transformations need to be made, right down to how many tables and chairs, flower bouquets and telephone lines will be required. When the race arrives, bollards, sign posts, benches and rubbish bins are taken out for the time that the Tour spends in a stage town. In Moûtiers in 1994, it was decided that the road surface would be a hazard for the riders, so local officials roughened the surface of the cobblestones in the finishing straight to provide the necessary grip, while in Montluçon in 1993, the town was ordered to take up fifteen traffic islands and roundabouts.³

The physical transformation of urban space by the Tour de France is striking as entire towns become engulfed by the race. Common garden areas metamorphose as the Village Départ, car and furniture show rooms become

³While the Tour de France is given unlimited access to the roads that it uses and the towns that it visits- as Jean-Marie Leblanc boasts, "*généralement, on passe partout*"- for safety reasons, and the difficulty of mass pedestrian access, the course is routed away from the *autoroutes*, and practical considerations such as the narrowness of a road for a sprint finish when in a stage village determine where the Tour goes. Given these considerations, plotting the race route involves much negotiation and calculation. Overseen by the *Commisariat Général*, the command centre of La Société du Tour de France, the routing for the 1993 *édition* began in October of 1992 and it was finished in May of 1993.

the *salle de presse*, and soccer pitches and rugby grounds are turned into helicopter landing pads. Differently coloured arrows strategically placed throughout the town direct the media and other vehicles towards the finish area. Press cars park haphazardly on the footpaths and technical vehicles scream recklessly through the streets. In Cluses, a few shoppers grumble, and one elderly woman shakes her fist at the latest driver to jump the curb. He just smiles back, knowing full well that the bicycle race comes first, far ahead of such mundane concerns as being able to pass on the footpath. The entire landscape of a town is transformed by the presence of the Tour. Streets are closed off, traffic is diverted and barricades are erected, marking the route of the riders through the town. To quote Jean-Marie Leblanc- the Directeur Général du Tour-, "we close towns for a living." For one stage finish in 1994, the funnel shaped church in the ski resort of Alpe d'Huez had been converted into the press room. Notre Dame des Neiges was probably the only church where, for one day of the year at least, there were ashtrays in the nave, a bar in the vestry and where, as local opinion has it, an organist was asked to leave because he was disturbing the journalists' concentration. In every possible way, 'normal' life is suspended or displaced to accommodate the 'abnormality' of the Tour de France.

The instalment of the central structure of the 'Tour Village' is largely responsible for overwhelming and transforming each stage village that the Tour de France visits. The Tour is a movable feast that mobilizes massive cultural and commercial resources, and it is in the Tour Village where they are directed and then dispersed. While the notion of a village implies a contained, bounded community, in the case of the Tour Village, this is not necessarily so. Although self-contained and self-sufficient, the Tour Village is nonetheless a mobile mass of inter-connected and inter-relating personnel who land in and disrupt the lives of the towns that it visits.

Known as '*la famille du cyclisme*', the Tour Village is indeed an extended one, with over 4,000 members occupying it. In 1993, the Village consisted of the 420 riders and team personnel, the 880 members of the publicity caravan, the 1500 vehicles accredited for the race, the 1800 strong press corps, the 1200 police who marshalled the race each day, and assorted technical and medical staff, translators, interpreters, photographers, drivers, mechanics, publicists, caterers and vendors. This extended family travels together for the three weeks of the Tour. Rather than choosing local staff as the Tour moves through each *département*, the entire Village lives and sleeps together for the

duration of the race.⁴ Inevitably conflicts erupt, as various interests are asserted and threatened. Security guards bully caterers who have misplaced their accreditation passes, sponsors fall over one another to sign riders, and media personnel display outright hostility to one another as they vie for interviews. In 1993, a rivalry developed between the Australian and Belgian television crews after it was alleged that the Belgian camera operator had blocked the view of his Australian colleague when shooting a post-stage interview. The simmering tensions came to a head in the final week of the Tour when the Belgian broke the nose of the Australian with a well aimed punch; a response to the warning by the Australian that "if you don't move I'm going to shove this camera up your arse." Equally, romantic liaisons—usually lasting for the three weeks of the Tour—develop between the press and publicity girls, *gendarmes* and medical officers, caterers and photojournalists. In this respect, the Tour Village displays the patterned conflicts and relationships of village life as it is customarily imagined.⁵

In each stage village, a range of sites is provided from which to experience the enormous and ever-expanding nature of the Tour de France. In addition to permanent bars and cafés, food and drink stalls are set up selling over-priced Kronenbourg, Coke and Evian and, in merchandise stalls, T-shirts, windbreakers, pull-overs, posters, mini bicycles, maps of the route, videos, bottles of commemorative wine and copies of team jerseys, including *le maillot jaune*, can all be bought and flaunted as evidence of participation in this supremely entrepreneurial event. Around these stalls, a veritable army of workers busy themselves by erecting scaffolding, placing port-a-loos and installing tiers of seating in anticipation of the swell of people that will wash over the stage village. In keeping with the commercial carnival of the Tour,

⁴The logistics of accommodating all four thousand personnel associated with the Tour Village demand the use of outlying towns. The actual stage may travel from Villard-de-Lans to Serre Chevalier, as was the case in 1993, but because all the hotels in these towns were full, the towns of Grenoble, Voiron and Meylan were co-opted into playing a part in the Tour. Even though these towns were not specifically 'Tour towns' in that they did not host a stage start or finish, or even that the route passed through them, the inhabitants of these towns were nonetheless reminded of the presence of the Tour by virtue of the fleeting appearance of strangers— and significant numbers of them— in their towns.

⁵The spatial dimensions of the Tour Village are as impressive as the number of people it contains, and the selection of a town as a stage village is largely determined by its capacity to provide the room that is needed to hold the Tour Village. It covers nearly two square kilometres. Some 1,500 square metres are required to accommodate the Village Départ alone, an open space about the size of a football field is needed to accommodate the *zone technique* from which the media broadcast their transmissions around the globe, suitable buildings for the press rooms and race head quarters must be found, and 300-400 metres of space behind the finish line are needed for vehicle parking and a helicopter landing pad.

pubs and clubs offer Tour promotions such as cheap drinks and half-priced entry passes. After dark activities include street parties, fireworks displays and concerts by prominent French and international artists such as Jean-Michel Jarre, Roch Voisine and D:REAM. The restructuring of a *ville-étape* to accommodate not only a vast numbers of personnel, but also the sound systems, lighting rigs, stage scaffolding and fireworks detonators that they bring, demonstrates the transformative capacities of the Tour to impact upon territory by annually introducing a complex web of inter-linked social relations to new (and old) regions of France.

The impact of the Tour upon territory was evidenced with striking clarity when it visited the alpine community of Serre Chevalier in 1993. A bustling winter ski resort but a summer ghost town, the ski station looked decidedly odd without the expected trappings of winter. The metal footings and pylons of the *châlets* and ski resorts were exposed, the ice rink was a barren concrete crater and the car park- now *le zone technique*- without the necessary snow and ice to pack the dirt, was a veritable dust bowl. *Téléphériques*, normally weighed down with skiers and snow boarders, ferried summer tourists to the high summits, while motels, hotels, restaurants and nightclubs all become Tour space, overrun by riders, officials and out of towners. In fact, a *ville-étape* becomes recognizable as Tour territory because of the appearance of strangers in the streets. Riders dine in local restaurants, resplendent in their team track suits, and the foreign press are noticeable by their presence in the various bars and nightclubs. In 1993, Villard-de-Lans hosted a rest day and a stage start, so on the *jour repos*, the press took over the town, drinking in its bars, ice skating at the local rink, gift shopping and doing their washing. The sudden materialization of strangers in a town reinforces the inescapable impact of the Tour de France, as Tour personnel displace and overwhelm the volume of usual people in the streets. The co-existence of the race entourage and established town personnel was brought home most clearly when the Tour visited the pilgrimage destination of Lourdes in 1994. Alongside the old, frail and the obviously unwell making their pilgrimages to the *caverne des apparitions*, strapping young cyclists roamed the streets on their rest day. The contrast between the infirmed and the superbly fit young men from the Tour served as a very real demonstration of the reordering of a town by the Tour de France.

Major urban space is reclaimed and recontextualized by the presence of the Tour, with hotels and motels being especially susceptible to the velocity of the Tour machine. With several teams often sharing the same hotel, buildings

are completely taken over by Tour personnel. Huge team buses and official vehicles fill their car parks, where bikes are spread from one end to the other, and mechanics cover the asphalt with grease and soap suds in their daily cleaning of the bikes. Coffee bars and piano lounges swarm with journalists conducting interviews. Wherever Miguel Indurain is staying, the hotel lobby is besieged by teenage girls with their faces painted red and yellow, and the incessant chanting of the Indurain fan club fills the air. Banners advertising the teams are draped across the front of the hotel, or are suspended from balconies, and lists of the riders are posted at the hotel's entrance. Inside, a key hanging from a door knob is tantamount to saying, 'a rider sleeps here'. Quickly and inexorably, the hotel is transformed into the team's space.

The next morning, glistening bikes are lined up outside the hotel, rows of suitcases and bags of laundry wait to be stowed by *soigneurs* onto the team buses, while the *directeur sportif* polishes the paintwork and chrome of his team car. The drivers pull foliage from the undercarriage of their buses- a souvenir from the landscaped gardens that they ploughed through when negotiating the tight parking bays in the hotel's car park. Inside, the hotel's restaurant is filled with the various teams 'carbo loading' for their big day ahead. Cyclists, in full regalia, walk, splay footed out of lobbies, only to be waylaid by autograph hunters and well-wishers. The team buses, cars and vans assemble as a mini-convoy as they make their way to the Village Départ. The presence of the Tour entourage, in all its various forms, testifies to the power of social relations to transform spatial landscapes. Like some surreal, postmodern battleground, the territory of France is claimed and conquered by a miscellany of personnel.

The overwhelming enormity of the Tour may suggest a tension between the interests of La Société du Tour de France and those of the stage villages as they gear up for the arrival of the race. What is striking however, is that the right of the Tour to take over public roadways, to add enormously to the duties of the police and to generally disturb the peace of a nation for three weeks every July is never questioned. The litter, the inconvenience, the noise and the loss of income and production never cause complaint. As a national institution, the Tour de France is well and truly secure. Jean-Marie Leblanc, in an interview with *Cycle Sport* recognizes that,

we are lucky because we take advantage of the Tour de France's media influence and economic weight. If I say to a mayor, "to have the Tour de France you must take up those three roundabouts and alter those two" he will do it. If you ask him to do the same thing for the Classique des Alpes or the Tour de l'Oise he won't do it (July 1996:

32).

The very stature of the Tour de France rests on the presence of a bureaucratic monolith that is conceived of as being indispensable. As one Tour follower articulates, "if anyone was annoyed at how big and important the Tour had become they would never say it." People allow and accept the Tour de France, first and foremost, because it is the Tour de France.

The presence of the Tour in a town is enormously appealing from an economic or political stand point: a councillor from Cluses in the *département* of Savoie, a region that received the Tour for four days in 1994, admits that "the Tour has served, beyond our expectations, to prove our town as one of dynamic ability, which is much appreciated in attracting new business and employment to the area" (*Le Dauphiné-Libéré*, July 30, 1994: 14). For a social anthropologist however, it is the wider cultural consequences that warrant analysis over and above the perceived economic prosperity that it may offer for a *ville-étape*.⁶ For me, the shared engagement in a period of carnival and *communitas* has greater symbolic import than the monetary rewards that the Tour de France is believed to bring. Certainly, the Tour increases the profile of a region, but I suspect the fiscal potential is not as great as is eulogized by local officials and councillors such as the one in Cluses. The capital invested in the event does not necessarily create new wealth in its own right. As Taussig has pointed out, the linguistic elaboration of the ability of money to grow and create is integral to the power of a developed capitalist culture, "wherein capital and worker's products are spoken of in terms that are used for people and animate things" (1980: 31). The largely mythical ability of the Tour to inject new life and money into a stage town reinforces its ever-expanding nature which, so far, I have restricted to a discussion of the movement of the riders and their entourage around France. The rhetoric of councillors, politicians and local officials is a fetishization of capital; an attribution of extraordinary powers indeed to an inanimate object. Such processes of fetishization grant the Tour with the capacity to multiply profit, to expand industry and to increase production. When cast in these terms, the Tour de France becomes a veritable saviour for operators and planners who

⁶The contributions that a stage village may choose to pay vary, depending on how much exposure it wishes to receive. Simply to welcome a stage finish, a town pays a flat figure of 400,000 francs (about A\$100,000). *Villes-étapes* can also buy a variety of other packages from La Société du Tour de France, from seeing off a stage start in the morning to playing host to the race for several days. Rouen in eastern Normandy has been announced as the start town for the 1997 Tour de France. The town has an agreement with La Société du Tour de France for around 7 million francs (nearly A\$2 million) to host the team presentation on July 4, the *prologue* on July 5 and the start and finish of the first stage on July 6.

unequivocally accept the good- and the goods- that the Tour brings to their town.

La caravane publicitaire

While the transformation of urban space and place is continual with workmen progressively remodelling the 'ethnoscapes' (Appadurai 1990) as Tour territory, to some degree, 'normal' life continues, as best it can, around these on-going changes to the territory of France. The arrival of *la caravane publicitaire* however, literally stops life in its tracks. It signals the road closures and marks, in a very tangible way, the increasing imminence of the riders themselves. At the start of each day's racing, *la caravane* sets off one hour ahead of the riders to tantalise the fans standing roadside, warning them that the cyclists are bearing down. With horns blaring, lights flashing, disco music pulsing from speakers, and voices crackling from loud hailers, the publicity caravan provides a garish harbinger of the Tour de France; it announces that within the hour, the streets will be filled with team buses, official cars and lycra clad riders. Within the hour, the streets of a stage village will be trampled and transformed by the Tour de France.

The publicity caravan is a kilometre long caterpillar of commercial activity. Consisting of nearly five hundred exhibitors, *la caravane* is a surreal consumer world. Featuring huge cereal boxes, cans of vegetables, telephones, ice cream cones, a rocket, a cob of corn, a giant hot dog, a roof top profiterole, a computer floppy disk and over four hundred other floats, the publicity caravan is an extraordinary depiction of consumer goods. While grossly commercial, it is nonetheless seen by all as an inextricable part of the Tour de France. Although not the financial mainstay that it was when first introduced some sixty years ago, the publicity caravan still contributes significantly to the revenue of the Tour. With nearly five hundred vehicles in *la caravane*, each paying an estimated A\$2,000 per day, it represents a major source of income for La Société du Tour de France.

For those standing roadside, *la caravane* is central to the total Tour experience. On a flat stage, the race can take only a couple of minutes to pass any given point, so it is the caravan that whiles away the hours for the thousands of supporters who line the route. While the passage of *la caravane* seems a small distraction for those who may have waited for anything up to three days for the race to arrive, spectators are indeed rewarded for their patience. The pay-off comes from the vehicles in *la caravane* who hand out

plastic carry bags of trinkets and cheap commodities advertising their product or company. The Coca-Cola vans are first through, flinging baseball caps and mini cans of Coke and Fanta into the crowd. Crédit Lyonnais gives away lapel pins, National Geographic hands out maps of the route, and L'Association National de Lutte Contre le SIDA, the red ribbon of AIDS awareness. When the Festina float passes, heads bow like dominoes as those standing roadside check their own watches against the enormous digital watch that is the float's centrepiece. Most teams give away cotton caps which, given the oppressive heat of a summer afternoon, are promptly worn by those lining the route, to be captured soon after by the camera crews following with the race proper. When it is all over, a paper trail of litter and lolly wrappers, of publicity pamphlets and thrown away product samples, marks the passage of *la caravane*.

Particularly notable about the passage of the publicity caravan is the often frenzied response of the spectators who line the route. People are knocked to the ground, give-aways are snatched from unsuspecting hands and, when the bigger floats roll past, the crowds surge towards the road's edge, some blushing at the handful of free condoms that they have scooped up. Invariably there are casualties. In the 1994 *édition*, a crowd had gathered by the road's edge on the outskirts of Bourg d'Oisans. A woman was sitting in the middle of the road, deeply shocked, having been struck by a Tour car. Such is the rabid excitement of the fans who claw at the cars and pounce on discarded wrappers that several vehicles have developed their own strategies for coping with the crush. The driver for the WordPerfect float- a giant computer floppy disk on a flat bed truck- employs the tactic of never throwing anything while his car is stationary: "you'll be mobbed. If you see a group of kids, throw several caps in the general direction and let them fight it out. If it is a 'real' cyclist, throw it directly at him. He'll put it on his head immediately. Instant publicity for us!"

While the crudity of the spectator scrum is at times frightening, the sheer size of the Tour and its necessarily fleeting progression around France demands this behaviour. Because it rushes past with such speed, the experience of the Tour is made to endure in more tangible ways. At the end of the day, even if it is only a sticker, a lapel pin or a swap card that one is left clutching, it is nonetheless a reminder of the passage of the Tour de France through a town. The publicity caravan as a zone of commodity fetishism provides an opportunity for corporate interests and consumer interpretations to intersect, in that the spectator is provided with a range of durable commodities from

which to make meaningful his or her experience of the Tour. The passage of *la caravane* thus triggers a specific reflexivity which is mediated by consumer activity. While the grand-scale commercialization that surrounds the Tour effects tangible changes to the spatial landscape of a stage village, it also transforms what is largely a fleeting encounter into a far more enduring experience. As demonstrated by those who pounce upon the give-aways distributed by *la caravane publicitaire*, spectators search for ways to prolong their encounter with the Tour. By hanging onto jettisoned commodities, consumers of the Tour salvage the experience. What is ephemeral becomes enduring. By maximizing their encounter with the Tour, spectators extend the Tour beyond the boundaries of its original performance. The host community is thus presented with an acutely self-reflexive mechanism with which to prolong the passing of the Tour de France.

While the range of sites from which one can experience the Tour de France is indeed diverse, the arrival of the riders refocuses the gaze that the transformation of place and space disperses. Whether perusing the merchandise stalls, ogling the scantily clad publicity girls or 'talking Tour' with one's neighbour in the beer tent, all conversations stop and all enthusiasms are redirected towards the *race* action the moment Daniel Mangeas, 'The Voice of the Tour' announces that the riders have entered a town. For all its extravagances, the transformation and commercialization of space by the entourage of the Tour is no more than a necessary preface to the arrival of the riders themselves.

The order with which the package of the Tour unfolds is critical, for having dispensed with commercial activity, the road is then left clear, literally, for the riders to enact a contest that is surely one of unsurpassed sporting authenticity. Amongst Isèrois aficionados, the quality of the athletic performance is undisputed. The 'mega-event' is now the territory of 'mega men'.⁷ The flood of advertising, the removal of street signs, the take over of hotels and restaurants, and the sheer extravagance of the publicity caravan, set the stage for the arrival of the riders- the central actors- and their supporting cast of team managers, drivers, *soigneurs* and publicists.

As the prime performers, the riders get the biggest reaction when they descend upon a stage village. The repeated cry of '*allez! allez!*' echoes throughout the stage town as the riders race towards *l'arrivée*. When they

⁷I borrow the term 'mega-event' from Little (1995) who uses it in relation to the Rio Earth Summit. 'Mega men' is my coinage, and I use it to denote the exceptional physical abilities of the riders in the Tour de France.

appear in the finishing straight, the thousands of fans pressed into this section of roadway beat their hands against the barricades that keep them from spilling into the road. The din is deafening and crescendic, climaxing in an explosive roar of approval and applause as the jostling sprinters surge across the finish line. Place and space as customarily imagined is reinstalled—barricades and scaffolding are dismantled, and the start and finish areas, the television commentary boxes, the race jury headquarters, the medical centre and portable toilets are all removed. Even the row of Fiat logos stencilled onto the finishing straight are blasted off with a high pressure water hose. The riders are now elevated to a position of symbolic pre-eminence in the unfolding order of the Tour de France. Interviews with the winning riders and the key players in the day's racing become the main focus, with television and radio commentaries being presented from the finishing straight, the commentator often appearing breathless and windblown, as if to simulate the frenetic pace of the race itself. The Tour has a building momentum which culminates with the arrival of the riders themselves.

One race, one nation

So far, this chapter has focused on the commercialization of place and space that the Tour de France brings to and imposes upon stage villages. By paying particular attention to the towns that the Tour visits in Isère and neighbouring *départements*, I have shown the ways in which it recasts spatial landscapes in new cultural and commercial terms. While the ways in which commodities and advertisements are employed and fetishized to denote a *ville-étape* as Tour territory provide a compelling account of the transformative capacities of the Tour de France, they also provide an indispensable means of articulating a particular French cultural style. The absence of traditional rituals of national representation—there are no national colours, no national flags and no national anthems—mean that those who follow the Tour's progress in France must draw upon other resources to articulate their cultural identity. It is through reading, interpreting and reappropriating the icons used to promote the Tour de France that this is most consistently done. The remaining sections of this chapter are concerned to examine the Tour de France as a key site for both the commodification and the consumption of national culture. Drawing on the ethnographic terrain covered when examining the transformation of place and space, this chapter now looks at the ways in which the blitz of media activity that accompanies the Tour supplies a range of images and representations of 'being French.' The customary assumptions of the French as being stylish, exuberant,

xenophobic and politically committed are borne out in the annual return of the Tour de France. The Tour is a distinctly French focus of distinctly French interests, and it is through commercial activity and media coverage where these cultural traits become most pronounced.

The recognized ability of the Tour to produce a social cartography of France is of especial note when detailing French appreciations of the Tour de France. As de Certeau notes, "any map is a manipulation of space" (1984: 119), and it is the ways in which the Tour manipulates the map of France that contribute to the making of a distinctive social reality. Through the annual return of its emblematic bike race, France is constructed through a range of complementary cartographies against or through which the elaboration of French national character can be done. The Tour provides a map of France, drawn anew daily, which engages its followers in a variety of ways through which commitment and belonging to the nation can be conferred. The various narrative threads produced in commercial and media activity come together in the one race, the one nation. It is the aim of this section to identify and elaborate the dimensions of this national map of France which are constructed and negotiated by the Tour de France.

The physical movement of the riders and their entourage across the countryside provides the first grid in this Tour-mediated map of France. The progress of the Tour around France is clearly charted. In its daily coverage, *L'Equipe* features a 'progress to date' map, while tourist offices, *tabacs* and cafés post the expected times that the race will pass through the various towns and villages on its itinerary. When it moves into each new *pays*, the local newspaper prints a listing of the roads that will be closed as the race steams through. While the progress of the riders is charted by media sources, it is also mapped by the strategic placement of personnel along the course. Road closures, for example, are policed vigilantly, with a *gendarme* covering every crossroad to ensure that no unauthorized personnel stray onto the course. France as a territorial construct is now the hostage of the army of workers who ensure the safe passage of the Tour de France. Local roads become national roads, the Tour's intended take over clearly stated to the public. According to Didier, an Isérois cyclist and part-time *pompier* who has marshalled several Tours, "when we see the *pilote* we know that the right of way is given to every car carrying a Tour sticker."⁶ Such expressions give

⁶In each *département*, local police and *pompiers* are brought in to boost the core of troops (La Garde Républicaine) who travel with the race proper. The *pilote* is the first officer from La Garde Républicaine who signals the arrival of *la caravane publicitaire* which marks the arrival of the Tour itself.

voice to the power of the Tour to transform the landscapes of France. Roads, streets and other territorial features are recast as Tour space.⁹ The landscape of France becomes an 'ethnoscape'; "a landscape of persons" (Appadurai 1991: 198), that is totally dependent on social relations for its geographical definition. France as territory does not exist without the agency of individuals. It is not a neutral spatial grid, but a space charged with cultural salience which is made visible by the extravagant excesses of the Tour de France.

Of course, the movement of Tour personnel could not be charted if it was not for the inescapable involvement of the media in packaging, promoting and presenting the Tour de France. The progress of the riders throughout France constitutes one dimension of the cartography of France that is augmented and amplified by the intense media coverage that the Tour receives. The inescapability of television, radio and newspaper coverage produces another cartography against or through which the elaboration of French national character can be done; a landscape of people exists alongside a landscape of images which are routinely negotiated and appropriated in ways that reflect national identity. As Blair (et al) note, "the media take aspects of sporting competition and reconstitute them into a wider cultural and ideological construction of national stability" (1993: 52).

Considering the role of the media is unavoidable in any discussion of a sporting event and the Tour de France is no exception.¹⁰ The Tour could not exist without the media: it is an event induced by the media and by which the media are seduced. Journalists from just about every major sporting newspaper and magazine in the world fill the Tour Village. Mobile radio studios carry the race into the homes of people in Bogota, Madrid, Adelaide

⁹The public transport system is also utilized to increase the speed at which the map of France is drawn. In 1993, the two rest days saw the riders commandeer the domestic air and rail lines as they were shuttled from one end of the country to the other. In 1994, the crossing of the Channel after two stages in England extended the mapping to the sea as the media and members of *la caravane publicitaire* made the journey by ferry. The riders, their team managers and Tour officials made the crossing by air. By mobilizing public transport, the time taken to map France is compressed. By using plane, train and ferry connections, the extent to which the Tour can map France is maximized.

¹⁰The electronic media particularly has had a profound effect on the construction of other sporting events. The American National Football League, for example, cut its half time intermission from twenty to fifteen minutes so that programmes would fit more comfortably into a two and a half hour segment, tennis introduced the 'tie break' to end drawn out deuce games and the National Hockey League in the United States changed its centre line to a broken line so that it would show up better on television (Parente 1977: 129).

and cities world wide, while television networks from the United States, Japan, England, Australia and of course, France, transmit their images around the world. While the 'global ecumene' (Hannerz 1989) within which these images circulate warrants discussion in itself, the concerns of this chapter lie elsewhere. I am more interested in the ways in which the *French* media coverage both constructs and confirms particular messages and motifs of national belonging. As Hargreaves notes,

a sense of unity, conferred by the feeling of belonging to the nation, cutting across class, ethnic, gender and other loyalties, is perhaps the very linchpin of a hegemonic system, and the media are, arguably, the most important instrument of reproducing national unity today (1986b: 154).

Despite the internationalism of media personnel and sources, the Tour de France exists as a uniquely French event in that the media coverage provided in France offers, for those who reside there, a range of national (and transnational) character types through which they can constitute a distinctive cultural presence. The vast communications network which carries the Tour around the globe does not diminish the ability of the French media to foster a particularly insular view of national importance, for those who receive these images ultimately control their interpretation in ways that reflect salient national archetypes.

As I noted in chapter two, the media in Isère is intensely parochial, emphasizing local events over national ones. However, the horizons of media consumers are significantly broadened with the arrival of the Tour de France. On the first Saturday in July listeners tune into Radio Tour which is transmitted across France, while supporters now read *L'Equipe* in preference to *Le Dauphiné-Libéré*, for as Laurent notes, "I feel like I know what is happening wherever the Tour is in France." The standardization of media coverage across the nation functions to mediate the partial and provincial nature of regional media sources. The local becomes national, with followers, irrespective of where they reside, all receiving the same information. And they receive vast quantities of information: television coverage alone attracts between 3.3 million and 4.6 million viewers who tune in daily for the live finishes. Broadcasting begins- *en direct*- at midday and continues uninterrupted until 9pm, alternating between the channels of TF1, France 2 and France 3. Highlights from the stage, interviews with the riders and excerpts from Vélo-Club are packaged for late night programmes, giving a perpetual, inescapable quality to the Tour. Radio and newspaper coverage are equally comprehensive. Europe 1- Radio Tour- is broadcast across France, providing live commentary as the events of the Tour unfold, and the

circulation of *L'Equipe* is estimated at over 500,000 copies for each of the twenty three days of the Tour. Like all "media events" (Dayan and Katz 1992), the coverage that the Tour de France receives is monopolistic in that "all channels switch away from their regularly scheduled programming in order to turn to the great event" (Dayan and Katz 1992: 5). In doing so, they compel viewers to tune into the Tour. The unanimity of the networks in presenting the same event underlines the worth, even the obligation, of viewing.

The sheer volume of media coverage is acknowledged by the media themselves and incorporated into advertising campaigns to comprise yet another dimension of the Tour-mediated cartography of France. A four page newspaper advertisement for France 2/3 Télévision charts the comprehensive mapping of France by the media:

Pour suivre 180 mecs qui ne pensent qu'à s'échapper, il fallait bien 9 motos, 40 voitures, 6 cars-vidéo et 3 hélicoptères. Avec 3800km parcourus et 10 millions de téléspectateurs, ça fait 2632 téléspectateurs au km. 120 techniciens, 25 caméramen, 22 journalistes qui parlent alors que 180 coureurs pédalent pour 3800km de route, il faut 80 heures de retransmission en direct et 3 rendez-vous quotidiens. Finalement, à quelques détails près, le Tour de France est une véritable histoire de vélos. France Télévision...le plus grand terrain de sports (Le Parisien, July 25, 1993: 9-19).

As detailed in this advertisement, a vast cavalcade of personnel and technology are introduced to the territory of France when charting the Tour's progress around the nation. The distribution of media personnel, and the images that are created by them, comprise what Appadurai defines as a 'mediascape'; "an environment in which events are experienced as a "complicated and interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens and billboards" (1990: 299).

The effect of the unfolding and overlapping cartographies that are designed and traced by both the riders in the Tour de France and the media personnel who chart their every movement is to produce an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) in which the members of the nation-state of France are bound together by shared cultural imaginings of sameness. Popular sentiment particularly reflects the ability of the Tour de France to unite the nation as one: Jean-Luc, a category 3 rider in Isère maintains, "it is a race that we all have in common. It is a communion between us that has lasted since the time of Maurice Garin." Whether watching the race from a vantage point along the route, reading about it in the newspaper or discussing it in a bar or a café, the annual return of the Tour connects people in ways that customary links cannot. "The triumph of the Tour de France" is, as Vigarello notes, "the

image of a France unified by the soil, stronger, without a doubt, than the France unified by language or morals" (1989: 163).

The idea of the nation as one is the leitmotif *par excellence* of the Tour de France. The populist media pick up on the power of the Tour to unite multiple personnel across multiple registers of interpretation. An article in *Le Parisien* describes the Tour as producing "*une France réconciliée*" (July 24, 1994: 10), while an advertisement for France 2/3 Télévision in the same newspaper announces: "*France 2/3 Supervision. Super! La boucle, encore plus grande sur France Supervision, l'arrivée du Tour comme si vous y étiez*" (*Le Parisien*, 26 July, 1993: 5). The text reads: "France 2/3 Supervision... the biggest lap is on France Supervision. The arrival of the Tour is like you are there." Journalists from *L'Equipe* adopt phrases such as "all of France is speaking of Virenque"... "a nation rejoices"... or "a nation is plunged into despair", when reporting on the unfolding events of the Tour de France. If, as Anderson suggests, the nation is an imagined community, then the media play important roles in the process by which this community is constructed. The sheer inescapability of the media provides an "arena in which individuals who have never met, can feel part of a wider community" (Blair et al 1993: 51). The ubiquity of the media, particularly advertising, provides an important basis for interaction when the Tour comes to France.

The Tour de France provides a fine example of not only an imagined community, but also ways of imagining community. The circulation of commodities and media images are constituent features of this process. It is when people interact with the goods of *la caravane publicitaire*, discuss the events as reported in *L'Equipe* or buy the products endorsed by the professionals that they share a sense of being in common, of a 'we-ness' despite their dispersal throughout France. A person in Grenoble can have a sense of familiarity when in Bordeaux or Paris, for he or she is surrounded by the same advertisements, listens to the same radio personalities and watches the same television programmes when moving between these very different sites of experience. As Hannerz notes, "the defining feature of the media is the use of technology to achieve an externalization of meaning in such a way that people can communicate with one another without being in one another's immediate presence; media are machineries of meaning" (1992: 26). The media products which are routinely appropriated by consumers do not disappear when he or she enters a new cultural space; they circulate in a wider system which people move in and out of. The importance of social agency is again stressed, for it is when working with media texts that one's

sense of belonging to a community is both felt and expressed. While cultural membership in France is formalized and institutionalized at the level of the State, it is in the everyday encounters with advertising, goods and media products where this imagining is most consistently done.

Indeed, the media offer a key mechanism by which to fabricate a sense of cultural unity out of massive regional diversity. As Braudel writes, "France is a "dazzling triumph of the plural, of the heterogeneous, of the never quite the same, of the never quite what you find elsewhere" (1986: 38), and it is precisely this variety that the movement of the Tour around France magnifies. While there are major cycling Tours in most European countries, it is the Tour de France that consistently employs geographical variations for dramatic advantage.

In mapping France, the Tour both exploits the geographical features of individual regions and links each with France at large. National identity is mediated by local experiences to construct the nation as one; a nation that is built out of geographical and cultural diversity. Described by Vigarello as a "valorization, above all, of the landscape" (1989: 163), the Tour de France is the perfect showcase for cultural and regional diversity. The tranquillity of the Alps stands in opposition to the urban landscape of Paris, the dramatic coast line of Brittany is most pronounced when compared to the lapping shores of the Mediterranean, and the single story whitewashed villas of Rousillon are distinctive in opposition to the gaudy hi-rise complexes that line the Côte d'Azur. The climate and terrain of each region presents it with its own individual character which is elevated by virtue of global media coverage to a position of international prominence. As it moves across the countryside, the Tour highlights the contrasting landscapes of France; it constructs a variety of 'Frances' for popular consumption.

The cultural and geographical diversity of France is, of course, made most visible by the media. As the Tour unfolds, a range of new archetypal images are highlighted, the cumulative effect producing an enduring pattern of Frenchness. Each day the television program *Autour du Tour* features a segment entitled '*Le Découverte de la Ville de Sa Région*' which provides an overview of the towns and regions which come under the Tour spotlight. By mentioning its food, produce and notable historic sites, each region is elevated to a state of temporary pre-eminence as the Tour moves across France. When the Tour returned to Brittany from its two day sojourn in England, the television cameras for France 2/3 zoomed in on a field of

artichokes growing along the road's edge. The commentator mentioned that artichokes were one of the great crops of Brittany's productive farmland; their export being the catalyst for the foundation of Brittany Ferries who returned the Tour from Britain. The distinctive qualities of individual *départements* are placed under the national spotlight as the Tour moves through each *pays*.

The tourist industry particularly picks up on these impressions of regional identity, incorporating them into brochures and pamphlets. The various leaflets, newsletters and magazines that detail the Tour's itinerary contribute to the cultural cartography of France. One brochure available from the tourist office in Limoges offers a *menu du jour* of local specialities. Through such representations, one discovers that *perdreau* (partridge) and *pineau* (a brandy fortified wine) are delicacies of the Limousin region, and that Pau, at the foot of the Pyrénées, is the centre of the Armagnac industry. Other pamphleteering advises that "while in Perigord, one must sample the regional delicacies of *foie gras* and *foie d'oie*," and "while waiting for the riders, perhaps one could spend the morning searching for the elusive 'black diamonds' [truffles] of the region" (*Les Evénements du Limousin, été 1994*: 1). When the Tour travelled through Provence in both 1993 and 1994, the local *vignobles* seized upon the opportunity to contribute to this culinary cartography of France. A general brochure announcing road closures, accommodation listings and the names of local restaurants was put out by the wine makers from the Côtes du Rhône under the heading: "wines here are like the ambience- light and sunny- but are best enjoyed in their native environment, so raise a glass to the passing *peloton*." Given that wine is, in many ways, emblematic of France, the juxtaposition of the national bike race and the national drink is a particularly appropriate means of uniting one nation through the one race.

As befitting this national festival of France, these iconic imaginings of regional identity culminate when the Tour reaches the nation's capital. In the popular imagination, Paris equals France; it is the centre for the production of French cultural style. It is in Paris where the national stereotype of chic sophistication is expressed and embellished, as wealthy Parisians parade their *haute couture*, *haute cuisine* and *savoir vivre*. While the stage villages that the Tour visits- and the regions that it passes through- provide a succession of sites for nation building, it is Paris that provides the supreme site for the cultural praxis of national identity. The movement of the Tour around France peaks in Paris, for it is here where understandings of being French are most obviously distilled and displayed.

The Tour de France has always finished in Paris. For 93 years, the nation's capital has received this final, largely ceremonial, stage finish. While the precise location has changed over the years- from the Parc de Princes of its early days, to La Cipale in 1968, and since 1975, the Champs-Élysées-, the city of Paris remains a central feature in the iconography of the Tour de France. The landmarks of Paris become crucial for marking the conclusion of the Tour de France. Jean-Claude Colotti remembers that "my suffering melted into the past the moment I entered the Champs-Élysées in Paris", while Paul Sherwin, a former rider and now commentator for the British television station Channel Four, remarked in his commentary for the 1996 race: "the riders have waited for three weeks to see that sight [the Eiffel Tower]. They've been all over France, and finally, when you see that sight, you know that you've made it."

On reaching Paris, the riders head towards the Champs-Élysées where they complete seven laps of this boulevard. The normal chaos of traffic attempting to negotiate the ten lane confusion around the Arc de Triomphe, the noise of the late night drag races up and down the Champs-Élysées, and the wealthy extravagances of the many *flâneurs* promenading along this grand boulevard disappear when the riders cross the Place de la Concorde and clatter onto the cobblestones of the Champs-Élysées. For the last Sunday in July, the Champs-Élysées becomes Tour territory, the sacred space of the riders. They glide across it, not once, but seven times, their actions given strength through repetition. The Champs-Élysées, such an integral part of Parisian iconography, is imbued with a different set of meanings once the Tour comes to town. As one elderly gentleman remarked to me, "I'm glad it's cyclists and not tanks here today." In following the banks of the River Seine, in turning in the shadow of the Arc de Triomphe, in racing along the Champs-Élysées, the landscape that the Tour negotiates is so familiar that it could only be Paris and thus France where this event is raced. By incorporating such internationally recognizable symbols of France into its repertoire of icons and images, the Tour presents itself in a manner that is self-evidently and unmistakably French.

Media accounts in particular inscribe the significance of Paris for the Tour de France. *Le Parisien* writes of "*une grand finale sur les Champs-Élysées*" (July 24, 1994: 3), while *L'Equipe* predicts "*la course au podium*" (July 25, 1994: 1). The emphasis placed on the events that will unfold in Paris mean that the three weeks spent mapping France are concertedly directed towards the victory dais on the Champs-Élysées. The regional diversity previously

highlighted by the media is now replaced with an emphasis on this very recognizable symbol of France. The media constructs a sense of national belonging out of local distinctiveness by appealing both to provincial sentiments and to the image of Paris at one and the same time. In reporting the win by Eddy Seigneur in 1994, *L'Equipe* described it as "*le dernier vainqueur d'étape français sur les Champs-Élysées, en 1982, s'appelait Hinault. Hier, le Beauvasien lui a succédé. Un bonheur fou pour ce débutant sur le Tour.*" (July 25, 1994: 3). Here, Tour fans can be both proudly parochial and publicly French as they read of the victory claimed by this Beauvasien along the Champs-Élysées. Cultural unity is fabricated out of regional diversity by simultaneously appealing to Seigneur's home *département*, the French hero Bernard Hinault, and the Champs-Élysées; a symbolic juxtaposition that strikes at the heart of French national sentiment. As Thierry Claveyrolat maintains, "for a Frenchman, there is no greater stage to win than the Champs-Élysées. It's a 'champagne' stage, better even than Bastille Day."

Paris remains an enduring location for, not only the itinerary of the Tour de France, but also for representations of being French. Given that Paris is, in many ways, the point of reference for stereotypes of French style, class, flair, romanticism and excitability, it can perhaps be anticipated that sponsors and advertisers play with these images of France to promote their products. The stereotype of the French as being excitable and enthusiastic is incorporated by the PMU to advertise its latest system of horse race betting. The pamphlets distributed by their float in *la caravane publicitaire* read: "*Un peu de calme, voyons, le Tour est là!*" which translates as 'calm down, the Tour is here'. Along the Champs-Élysées, publicity girls for Mercier Champagne dispense free tastings and distribute leaflets proclaiming (in English): "what better way to celebrate the end of a Tour than with a glass or two of champagne? Mercier Champagne- *C'est le Tour, c'est la France, c'est la vie.*" Being French is distilled in these consumer driven iconic imaginings of national identity. The ready availability of commercial products provides a resource through which one can imagine, recognize and articulate belonging within a complex commodity culture such as France.

Like all national stereotypes, the bundle of cultural characteristics that is used to define 'Frenchness' unravels in opposition to a range of cultural Others. What is French is articulated in terms of what or who is not French. Media coverage of the Tour when in Paris picks up on these cultural imaginings of belonging and otherness. One cartoon in *Aujourd'hui* (July 24, 1994: 2)

features a triumphant Spanish cyclist emerging from under the Arc de Triomphe. One voice bubble from the crowd contains the phrase, "after the Germans, there are the Spanish on the Champs-Élysées. A second voice retorts, "yes, but we are yet to be reconciled with the Germans." As Blair (et al) notes, "media coverage of sport attempts to construct a sense of social stability by offering an experience with which individuals can relate in such a way so as to encourage them to work out one country from another" (1993: 43). The media coverage of the Tour, whether it be in the form of factual reporting in *L'Equipe* or in humorous accounts such as that displayed in *Aujourd'hui*, unites the imagined community of France in a collective heartbeat that evokes a loyalty to the nation through highlighting its position within the wider European community.

Political potential

The previous section detailed the means by which the Tour de France is constituted so as to enable the French to imagine their nation as one. It is imperative to note however, that the race is equally appropriated by members of disenfranchised communities in order to articulate their cultural integrity in opposition to the nation-state of France. The Tour de France represents a major opportunity to express discontent; it provides a key site at which belonging, identity, difference and otherness can be simultaneously asserted. The Tour's inherently polysemic nature means that it can be equally contested and accommodated, for it offers an abundance of interpretative possibilities through which differing personnel can make meaningful their encounter with the bike race. While the nation shares the symbol of the Tour de France, they do not necessarily share the same interpretation of it. Its use of public roads, and its massive media coverage, make the Tour an especially vulnerable target of protest groups. The map of France that is designed by the Tour is manipulated by several interest groups to articulate and publicize their grievances. As I argue in this section, the ethnoscapes and mediascapes negotiated by the Tour exist alongside a series of 'ideoscapes'; "concatenations of images that are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it" (Appadurai 1990: 299).

The extent to which these Tourscapes can be manipulated is well recognized by various factional groups who appropriate them to draw national (and international) attention to particular regional problems. Just as the Tour highlights the geographical distinctiveness of each *pays* when it moves across

the nation, a number of ideological concerns that affect specific regions are elevated to positions of social and symbolic pre-eminence as the Tour moves throughout France. The issue of ethnic independence is one that is repeatedly asserted through the conduit of the Tour de France. Alongside the usual billboards and advertising which constituted its mediascape in 1993, posters in the host town of Perpignan read: "welcome to Northern Catalonia- a nation in fight for freedom and unity", while along the coast of Brittany, a number of placards tied to trees and erected in fields were written in Breton; pleas for cultural separation from the centralized government of Paris.

Most notably, the militancy of the pro-Basque independence group- the ETA- frequently manifests itself in the actions of those standing roadside when the Tour reaches the Pyrénées.¹¹ The red, white and green Basque flag is strategically painted onto the road, and it is waved whenever the riders, and importantly, the ever present television cameras, pass by. Again, the media serve as machineries of meaning, universalizing knowledge that is otherwise partial and particular. When reading *L'Equipe* in Grenoble, I was struck by its front page photograph for the stage from Andorra to Saint-Lary in 1993. The three riders labouring up the Col du Tourmalet- deep in the Basque heartlands- were dwarfed by the enormous Basque flag that swung centimetres above their heads. Spectators with Basque hats, Basque banners and Basque T-shirts filled the image; the iconography of Basque separatism overshadowed the race action. Reading on, an article on page three detailed the "tapis drapeaux aux couleurs de l'Espagne et de la France; d'autres, plus nombreux encore, vert, rouge, blanc, d'Euzkadi" (*L'Equipe*, July 22, 1993: 3). While the waving of a flag or the wearing of a T-shirt are certainly symbolic demonstrations of political anger by marginalized groups, they are nonetheless fairly benign. Sometimes however, such symbolic actions manifest themselves with far more dramatic or violent consequences. At the *prologue* of the 1992 *édition* in San Sebastian- the capital of the Basque region- members of the ETA placed an incendiary device under the car of a leading cycling commentator.¹²

Statements of discontent however, are not the sole preserve of explicitly

¹¹ *Euzkadi, ETA, Askatasun'* means Basque and Freedom. During my fieldwork, the issue of Basque independence directly intersected with the cycling world. In 1994, the first Basque professional cycling team was installed. 3,5000 cycling enthusiasts in the Basque region confirmed their support for the Euzkadi team by paying 10,000 pesetas to become members of Fonacion Euzkadi who run the team. 350 Basque companies and councils have contributed financial support, with some of the contributions well in excess of one million pesetas.

¹² Heiberg (1989) examines the often violent forms by which belonging to the Basque nation is expressed and embellished.

political factions such as the ETA. In Isère, the plight of a group of coal miners was given national publicity in the 1993 and 1994 *éditions* of the Tour de France. Facing the imminent closure of their mine at La Mure, a village seventy kilometres from Grenoble, the miners and their supporters publicly condemned the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT)¹³ for their apparent inertia in preventing the closure of the mine. Epithets were scrawled onto an exposed cliff face along the Route Napoléon, upon which the publicity banner for the Europe 1 radio station had been hung, and above the town's most prominent café, a banner proclaiming '*Balladur...Ordure*' - Balladur...Rubbish- swung in the breeze. When the Tour travelled from Valréas to Alpe d'Huez in 1994, it passed through La Mure. The ongoing resentment towards the CGT was broadcast to the three million *téléspectateurs*, half a million readers of *L'Equipe*, and innumerable members of the global media audience who were estimated to have followed this stage. In addition to the usual tributes to the riders, road writing now included expressions such as '*Les Charbons, Les Chômeurs*' - Coal miners- The Unemployed. Through their own ingenuity, imagination and boldness, these miners manipulated the passage of the Tour de France to their own advantage.

Such expressions of dissent reflect the stereotype of the French as being a politically committed and volatile people. Public protest is a consummately French affair, indeed, since the overturn of the *ancien régime*, France has had a long history of revolutionary and inflammatory activity. As I noted in chapter two, strike action and protest marches in the streets of Grenoble occur on a weekly basis, mobilizing teachers, industrialists, nurses, students and the unemployed, amongst others. While I made the point that such actions linked individuals through a common expression of regional issues and interests, it is the particularly French nature of these practices that is of concern here. Irrespective of whether one is Isérois or Basque, Catalan or Breton, the means by which they articulate their distinctiveness are distinctively French. To badger, protest, mutiny and revolt in order to preserve rights and beliefs that are threatened is a distinctively French means of asserting displeasure.

It is in opposition to the cultural Others of neighbouring countries however, that the volatile and expressive stereotype of the French is best expressed. On a street corner in Grenoble that had been blocked by a procession of protesting

¹³The CGT is the contemporary manifestation of the Communist Trade Union which rose to prominence in the 1960s, and has a strong attachment to the French Communist Party. Perceived as a "*mouvement de masse et de classe*", the CGT has a long tradition of protecting workers' rights.

students, I met an English friend. Waiting for the demonstration to pass, Sarah remarked to me, "what's this one for then?" The regularity with which such protests occur is reflected in Sarah's comment. More telling however, was her next sentence: "this would never happen back home." Such statements succinctly establish and perpetuate international cultural differences. The stereotype of the French as being "revolution happy", in the words of Sarah, becomes most obvious in opposition to the stereotype of the British as being calm, ordered and politically passive. When examining French cultural traits, it is important to recognize that the national community of France exists not only in itself, but also in explicit contradiction to other countries, and it is always rooted in ideas and imaginings of what Europeans have about themselves and each other.

The reclaiming of the Tour de France to express dissent marks important historical junctures, and can be used to trace a cultural cartography that reflects important political moments in French national history. The nation of France is constantly in flux, and as Touraine (1990) notes, members of this nation-state have always seized upon events such as those of May 1968 and, of course, the French Revolution, to affirm their national sovereignty. The idea of revolution is, as Touraine points out, "at the heart of Western representations of modernization" (1990: 121), and at the heart of modernization lies the ability of a nation to accommodate and accept change. While modernization "provides confidence in the progress of the human spirit" (Touraine 1990: 121), when change is too fast or too partial, people look for ways to overturn, or at least stabilize, these transformations to their culture. Indeed, the aggressive political action demonstrated by Basque separatists and Isèrois miners provides a key means of strengthening the solidarity of a group which is eroded when the boundaries of their community become either blurred or undermined through modernization. Boissevain points to the revitalizing of rituals in the Val di Fassa and Andalusia as examples of the ways in which Laddins and Andalusians can be accepted as "cultural and political formations in their own right" (1992: 12). Similarly, the rights of the Basque, Catalan, Breton and Isèrois communities to establish and consolidate their cultural, economic and political presence are asserted by the ritualistic return of the Tour de France.

The Tour has a long tradition of triggering protests, strikes and manifestations that articulate French fears of a changing France. In 1982, striking steel workers in Denain blocked the road and forced the Tour to cancel a stage. In 1987, fishermen in Brittany and aerospace workers in

Toulouse both appropriated the Tour to publicize concerns regarding the conditions of their labour. When the Tour entered Paris in 1988, supporters of the ultra-Right 'National Front' used its massive media coverage to highlight the slim margin by which President Mitterrand had been re-elected to his second seven year term. While such incidents have much anecdotal mileage amongst Isérois cyclists, it is the events of the 1990 Tour that provide a recurring point of conversation for them. Here, the third stage from Poitiers to Nantes was seized by militant sheep farmers angry at the quota system for mutton imports from eastern Europe. Intending to bring the race to a stop- not out of hostility to the Tour, simply to publicize their grievances- the farmers blocked the road with felled trees and waved banners proclaiming '*Liberté, Moutoniers. Fraternité. Miterant (sic)- ruine des paysans et de la France*'.¹⁴ The race was brought to a halt at the 86th kilometre while a detour was worked out by the local Gendarmerie and La Société du Tour de France. At which moment, popular opinion has it, a local youth on a *vélocoteur* stopped and offered to guide the riders through the side lanes of the Vendée. While it seems highly unlikely that the race direction and the Gendarmerie did not have a map between them, and that they could not have found their own way, the popular version is that the Tour accepted the offer of the '*sauveur mystérieux*.'

Such expressions of dissent testify to the expansive capacities of the Tour de France. The 'scapes' of the Tour are enlarged to include the ideoscapes of disenfranchised peoples. In many ways, the Tour de France represents a conduit through which to make regional plights more widely known. By mobilizing the pulling power of the Tour, local political groups can elevate their grievances to a national platform. Issues that are of regional interest are made to strike a chord with all of France. Rural migration, unemployment, the collapse of political borders and ethnic independence; issues that have, at various times, been subjects of political protest in the Tour de France, are made to be issues of ongoing national concern. That strikes in Brittany and protests in Toulouse and Paris have anecdotal merit in Isère is testimony to the capacity of the Tour de France to transform micro sites of experience across multiple territorial sites. While the ability of the Tour to link the local and the national is evidenced in the exploitation of regional social dislocations so that they appeal to France at large, the popular assumption of political volatility is similarly exploited by appealing to the nation at large. The Tour de France provides exceptional publicity for the articulation of a distinctly French stereotype, and by linking the local to the national, the

¹⁴As Didier notes, "the eyes of a nation were watching and they couldn't even spell his name!"

characterization of the French as politically committed can be paraded for a global media audience.

The inescapability of the media transforms what is a sporting event into a wider ideological process, as ideoscapes become terrain to be negotiated by the Tour de France. While this function of the media is gaining wider currency—indeed, political protest is becoming increasingly synonymous with the Olympic Games—, the media-induced ability of the Tour to articulate political dissent strikes a particularly resonant chord with what the French perceive themselves to be. The significance and potential of the Tour is differentially engaged across a range of different spatial perspectives. Nonetheless, they are articulated in ways that become archetypically French, for irrespective of where the disenfranchised live, political volatility and protest are consummately French means of imagining themselves.

Coda

This chapter has been concerned with the extreme commercialization of the Tour de France and the physical and social transformation that this effects. The commercial activity that surrounds the Tour serves three key functions: to forewarn its arrival, to justify and prolong its existence, and to create and reinforce particular imaginings of Frenchness. The rampant consumerism from May and June onwards forewarns the coming of the Tour. Such advertising gives an advance life to the Tour de France. As the race becomes increasingly imminent, the alignment of commodities with the Tour de France gives the race a preliminary or a preceding power. The advance life of the Tour is, in no sense, a plea for legitimacy; its totalizing and transformatory capacities are taken as self-evident in a fully capitalist society. The mass-scale preparation is further testimony to the expansive and diffuse properties of the Tour de France. In every sense, the Tour overflows the boundaries of its original performance. The widespread commercial attention that the event receives presents an unfolding imagining of both the Tour and of France that is realized when the race finally arrives.

As months shrink to days, the role that commercial activity plays takes on a qualitatively different function. Once the Tour is in place, its media rich and commodity replete nature mobilizes particular lines of fetishization through which the race can be brought to life. The encounter between the local and the national in the *villes-étapes* provides an important site at and towards which the fetishization of the Tour de France can be both enacted and directed.

Through the transformation of cultural and commercial landscapes, the extreme commercialization of the Tour de France empowers it to effect extended social consequences. Through the rhetoric of councillors, advertisers and race officials, the capacity of the Tour becomes such that it can multiply profit and create new wealth and opportunities.

The fetishization of the Tour de France however, manifests itself most strikingly in the transformation of place and space. The Tour in motion is explosive, effecting both sudden, almost alchemic, transformations of place and space, and far more enduring changes to the cultural and commercial face of France. Of particular concern for this chapter, it is in recontextualizing and restructuring urban landscapes that the Tour de France asserts its extraordinary cultural privileges. The Tour represents the intersection of macro and micro politics. It is where the local meets the national and where the national meets the local. The provincial and parochial worlds of French towns are brought into constant engagement with national interests and concerns as introduced and exemplified by the Tour de France. It is the particular effects of these incursions upon the stage villages that most cogently support this line of argument. As this chapter has shown, spatial landscapes cannot be treated as pre-given, and it is the encounter between the itinerant circus of the Tour de France and the static *ville-étape* that brings into play a unique set of social relations.

The idea of 'scapes' demonstrates the notion of people intersecting with territory. Through media and commercial activity, the Tour de France impacts upon and creates new landscapes of France- what Appadurai defines as ethnoscaapes, mediascaapes and ideoscaapes. It is not just the race, but France itself that is given a new life with the passing of each Tour. In other words, the Tour does not just represent, but it actively constitutes a map of France. As this chapter has shown, the blitz of media and commercial activity that surrounds the Tour redefines the aesthetic and the ambience of France. The immediate and more enduring effects can be easily traced as the Tour moves across France, for they inscribe upon the nation the constituents of "cultural difference, historical memory and social organization" (Gupta & Ferguson 1992: 7).

Importantly for this chapter, the extreme commercialization of the Tour de France reinforces images of Frenchness. It is where subjects interact in a world of commodities that particular representations of national identity can be produced. The sheer quantity of commodities and media images produced

and consumed by the Tour de France provide important means through which these imaginings of Frenchness can be done. The commodities presented for national consumption are carefully chosen representations of national identity, for they promise nothing less than the appropriation of qualities deemed essentially 'French'. The qualities of sophistication, political volatility, style and exuberance are all reflected in the Tour de France. The Tour thus becomes a site of extreme self-reflexivity; an event to which people can turn to make sense of themselves. In moving around the country, the Tour experiences France and France experiences the Tour; it provides an annual occasion for a very public period of reflection and contemplation. As Myerhoff and Ruby note,

all societies have created occasions for reflecting upon themselves, regularly engineered crises, collective ceremonies, celebratory rites of passage, public performances and the like- times when the society tells itself who it is (or how it would like to be) or should have been (1982: 3).

The Tour de France provides a resource through which what it means to be French can be annually articulated and authenticated.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TOUR, CULTURE, NATION

"Local cultural patterns provide
space for global cultural forms"
(Fox 1991: 12).

Introduction

While it unquestionably represents a key means by which a collective national identity is maintained and invigorated, the global nature of much of the Tour de France is hard to deny. The Tour is fully international in that transnational corporations build the bikes- Caloi comes from Brazil, Peugeot from France, Colnago from Italy and Gazelle is produced in Holland-, they fund the event- Coca-Cola comes from the United States, Crédit Lyonnais from France and Fiat is based in Italy-, they welcome the Tour across their borders and they sponsor the teams. American and German telecommunication companies sponsor outfits, Spanish banks finance teams, while Italian supermarkets, Belgian lottery agencies, French insurance companies and international brands of food, drink and clothing all back professional cycling squads. The most intriguing sponsor is that of the Amore e Vita team. Meaning 'love and life' in Italian, these riders are sponsored by the anti-abortion lobby of the Vatican, with the Pope himself being on the board of directors. The Tour de France is indeed a global endeavour, which raises a number of questions for the construction of distinctly French sentiments and behaviours.

Given that the goods and personnel of the Tour move across boundaries and borders, how can the nation of France imagine itself when it is increasingly exposed to a "cosmopolitan cultural regime" (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988: 6)? While the previous chapter itemized a number of ways in which commodities and advertisements are employed and fetishized to articulate national identity, I did not consider their situatedness within the larger, implicating forces of global culture. I argue in this chapter that it is precisely the global character of much of the Tour de France that provides an especial opportunity for reading its distinctly French properties. The Tour is

transmitted throughout the world to such a degree that I can be writing this thesis in Australia and simultaneously watching the Tour in France. By reflecting on my own position in the 'global ecumene' (Hannerz 1989) within which the Tour circulates, it is possible to extract its quintessentially French qualities. By drawing on my post-field experiences of the Tour- as an Australian cyclist watching it on Australian television- it is possible to illustrate how this distance enables me as a social anthropologist to identify and elaborate its salience as a national festival of France. While this particular 'mega-event' could only be performed in France, it is when apprehended outside of a French context that this becomes fully evident.

As I argue in this chapter, global popular culture includes a number of sites, happenings, incidents and events which offer unique points of entry for anthropological analyses into the relationship between nation and culture. While this association has been a long standing concern for anthropologists, the cultural climate of postmodern times provides an unprecedented range of sites from which to explore the interdependence of nation and culture. These sites are the terrain of the 'mega-event'; international happenings that are highly mediated, publicly performed and popularly consumed by and for a global audience. Major happenings such as the Olympic Games, soccer's World Cup, Formula One Grand Prix, the inauguration of political leaders, international rock concerts, and especially the Tour de France, typify the mega- event in that each is ephemeral, sensual and dominated by spectacle. As Little, who applies the concept to his analysis of the Rio Earth Summit notes, "these events are new human phenomena that have emerged on the world stage during the past fifty years" (1995: 265). While the Olympic Games and the Tour de France have been around longer than this, it is only in recent history that they have emerged as mega-events that are dramatically shaped and globalized by the central presence of the media. As mega-events, they offer an overload of excitement and entertainment for a mass audience, they occur in a specific location, they have a clear timing, a distinguishable personnel, and critically, they attract a sizable media following. These mega-events provide ideal sites from which to explore the relationship between nation and culture in ways that are readily accessible to social anthropologists. The ubiquity of the media, and the sheer quantity of commodities which circulate at these events, provide a new set of provisions for reading and interpreting the global flow of meanings which cuts through cultural life. By paying particular attention to the mega-event of the Tour de France, this chapter explores a number of possibilities by which the relationship between nation and culture can be expressed and embellished.

As well as representing new terrain for anthropologists to negotiate, mega-events such as the Tour de France offer a number of challenges to the epistemological assumptions of our discipline. Most notably, the notion of reflexivity upon which anthropological endeavours are premised is increasingly problematized by the global spread of popular culture. The resources through which people reflect upon themselves are increasingly found across a range of spatial perspectives, and anthropologists must come up with ways of doing fieldwork that can accommodate this flow of meanings. As I argue in this chapter, anthropological studies of the mega-event signal one possibility by which to meet these new challenges.

Multiple sites, multiple personnel- a global interpretation

I began my thesis with a plea that anthropology redefine itself in such a way that it can more adequately accommodate multiple sites and subjects. The social territory of postmodern times is increasingly fluid and cosmopolitan, so an urgent issue in anthropology is to formulate an ethnographic strategy that confronts this flow of images, objects and people. Throughout my thesis, I have argued that the social practices of Isèrois cyclists must be considered across a range of ethnographic sites in order to adequately reflect the complexity of their cultural world. In recognizing the need to shift ethnographic practice so as to include multiple sites and multiple personnel, my fieldwork amidst this mobile social world has raised a number of questions for the theoretical imperatives of anthropology. The limits of restricting ethnographic description to single locales, the broadening of the anthropological horizon to include new subjects of inquiry and the enduring legacy of Clifford Geertz are all subjects to be taken seriously when viewed through the prism of cycling lives. My participation in Isèrois cycling social life provided, not only an effective illustration of how sports can and do offer a looking glass into the wider society in which they occur, but also an insight into the increasingly multiple and mobile nature of cultural life more generally.

Given that the defining feature of the late twentieth century is that public culture is transmitted for global consumption at extraordinary speeds indeed, what can be made of this mobility of personnel and goods when it shifts to the global arena? In the time that it takes to 'log on', open a magazine or book a plane ticket, one can experience the constituents of popular culture across truly diverse registers of interpretation. Just as the multiple sites and multiple

personnel of Isère point to a number of emergent issues in anthropology, the fluidity and mobility of the global situation highlights the need to reconsider our most basic assumptions concerning both the nature and subjects of ethnographic inquiry. As the exponents of postmodernism have rightly pointed out, many of anthropology's existing paradigms are no longer appropriate for the sorts of projects that anthropologists are now engaged in. The 'village fetish' that our discipline has long participated in is increasingly that of the global village, a social setting which brings with it a range of challenges to anthropology as it is customarily or traditionally practised.

Ethnographic territory is now that of "global ethnoscares" (Appadurai 1991); "the multiple worlds which are constituted out of the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (Appadurai 1990: 297). Fox summarizes the nature of this new terrain very well:

these ethnoscares are new territory for the anthropologist, quite unlike the communities and societies we thought, once upon a time, we could encompass. Partly realized through global immigration, partly imagined through media exposure worldwide, these new points of production for anthropology, Appadurai persuades us, require a 'macro' or cosmopolitan ethnography. Such an ethnography would recognize that everyday life is now lived out globally, and that the small community is the end point of a cultural jet stream (1991: 12).

Anthropology is now the study of transients and transnationals; as Appadurai writes, "relatively stable communities and networks are shot through with the woof of human motion" (1990: 297). While single site anthropology continues to provide exceptionally fine-grained analyses of social and cultural life, to appreciate it as lived by these small communities, anthropologists must acknowledge the global forces that cut through local culture. As my thesis has demonstrated, international events that are popularly consumed—particularly the Tour de France—provide ideal sites from which to read these implicating forces, for they exhibit the impact of global culture upon the small community in ways that are readily accessible to the social anthropologist.

In many ways, recognizing the situatedness of the small community within the global system represents a necessary development in the intellectual tradition of anthropology, for it directly confronts one of its most basic premises, that of reflexivity. I began my thesis with a consideration of the reflexive effect of anthropological endeavours. I noted that it has for some time been common practice in our discipline to look to the Other to explain ourselves, to generate critical questions and perspectives from another

culture in order to probe the complexities of our own world. This self-conscious critique of modern, urban life however, has always simplified the flow of cultural knowledge so that it is the anthropologist alone who draws out the distinctiveness of the small community he or she was studying in order to probe the one to which he or she must return. In these instances, the anthropologist does not, as a rule, consider outside forces and influences, or indeed, the relationship of the community under study with that of others. Social data travels one way, rarely detouring through other communities, cultures or countries that influence and interact with the one under study.

I would argue however, that in these global times, one must recognize that the reflexive effect of anthropology operates sideways and tangentially: small communities are increasingly looking to others to explain themselves, and anthropologists need to shift their gaze to include these additional and overlapping influences. The pathways of cultural life do not travel unproblematically from field site to university, but are constantly intercepted and rerouted to accommodate the growing repertoire of goods, images, commodities and personnel that the small community who comprise the anthropologist's field site engages with. The bundle of defining features that signal the integrity of one community- the resources that the anthropologist reflects upon- unravel in opposition and in tandem to those of other communities. Failing to consider this situatedness within the world system must provide a precarious position from which to reflexively view one's own culture.

It is when I consider my own position as a cycling anthropologist that the complexity of reflexive endeavours becomes most apparent. I did not cease to engage in cycling life on my return to Australia, but I continued to race and train, a circumstance that turned out to be manifestly unsettling for me as an anthropologist. The legacy of my fieldwork proves inescapable. I cannot help but now think of cycling as an alien encounter. I cannot ride or race without anthropologizing my continuing Australian cycling experiences, and I cannot engage with my cycling friends without seeing them as informants. My reentry to Australian cycling circles produced a profound culture shock that I did not anticipate. The specific reflexivity of my project is now extended into a triangulated relationship that includes my Isèrois informants, my role as an anthropologist, and my position as an Australian cyclist. The distinctive qualities of Australian social life which I experience as both a cyclist and as an anthropologist are magnified with startling clarity by virtue of my having performed as both in two very different cultural climates.

The reflexivity of contemporary social anthropology thus necessarily unsettles its practitioners sense of self, and this is further compounded by the global media exposure of those events, happenings and incidents from which the stuff of ethnographies is assembled. An analysis of cycling life must be a prime case in point since much of it is played out in global terms. Cyclists visit home pages on the Internet and watch races in distant countries on television, while many cycling magazines have international aliases. The cycling press tell aficionados about riding in China, in Italy, in Colombia, and this access to worldwide media coverage allows cyclists across the globe to share the sense of a familiar cultural style as they read about the latest equipment, paraphernalia and racing strategies.

This flow of images strikingly underscores the fine-grained differences that co-exist within the global ecumene. While the sport of cycling may appear to be the same across the globe, it was only by living as a social anthropologist, immersed in the world under study, that I discovered the cultural distinctiveness of the cycling community in Isère. It was my return to an Australian cycling context however, that magnified these differences most fully. Whereas cycling in Isère is officiously organized, with practitioners rarely riding aimlessly, cycling in Australia is a far more jovial affair. Australian cyclists do not approach training or competition with the unswerving devotion of those in Isère, referring to the members within their ranks who do as being "anals", an indication of their perceived retentiveness. Likewise, the expression "gear geeks" refers to those individuals who are overzealous in acquiring the equipment, paraphernalia and so forth that go along with commitment to the sport's culture.

Most notably, the commodities, ideologies and sentiments that are produced and disseminated about the Tour de France across the global ecumene are interpreted very differently across these spatial perspectives. Having experienced the Tour de France alongside French cyclists and through French media sources, it becomes clear when experiencing it alongside Australian cyclists and through Australian media sources that the French make use of the goods and images of the Tour in ways that Australian audiences do not, and vice versa.

Whereas French media commentators present the Tour de France as an exercise in heroism, valour, endurance and determination- cultural attributes which the French monopolize- Australian media commentators focus on the

issues of mateship and egalitarianism which are presented by the Tour de France; distinctive qualities of Australian culture. The former Australian rider Allan Peiper, now a contributor to *Bicycling Australia*, writes that "it is the friendship of the Tour that is so special. Everybody goes through their own hell, so you just help each other out. The barriers are down, ego and jealousy are forgotten" (*Bicycling Australia*, August/September 1993, Vol. 4: 40). The long suffering *domestique*, Neil Stephens- a work horse for the Spanish ONCE squad- is presented as embodying the spirit of the great Aussie battler. He is seen as unassuming and laconic in his struggle to overcome financial and physical adversity. His biography in *Bicycling Australia* begins:

Neil Stephens reckons that Australians make dedicated and powerful team helpers- he should know. Since he arrived in Europe he has slogged for others, and occasionally dropped in a win or two to keep the sponsors smiling. When he started racing he rode for the 'Make Weight Zero Boys' a team that had very little going for it except enthusiasm (1995: 7).

Interviews with 'Stevo' are marked by his use of 'mate'...'bloke'...'fair dinkum' and 'strewth'; undeniably key components in Australian vernacular. The point to emerge from these iconic imaginings of Australian culture is that the global ecumene encompasses periods of specific reflexivity which are dependent on one's cultural positioning within the larger world order. It is only when experiencing the Tour de France as mediated by Australian influences that I realize the unique character that the Tour, and cycling, take when in France.

Indeed, a signal property of the Tour de France is its ability to create a range of possibilities for reflexivity within a global situation. While self-conscious reflection is a trademark of postmodern living- the 'New Age' industry is a clear example of this- the global encompassing and highly mediated nature of popular cultural forms mean that the resources through which people make sense of themselves are increasingly found across a range of spatial perspectives. As Kellner notes, "media stories and images provide the symbols, myths and resources which help constitute a common culture for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today" (1995: 1). It is for this reason that the symbolic properties of the Tour de France can transcend multiple discursive sites. I am not suggesting that the interpretations of the symbols will be the same, simply that the *capacity* for interpretation exists across multiple sites of experience. While it is more often argued that clothing styles, television programmes and fast foods are traded throughout the global market place of popular culture, it is my argument that these commodities command near-universal appeal for the reflexive

potential they embody.

The Tour de France provides an exceptional opportunity by which differently located people can look to the event to make sense of themselves. As Myerhoff notes, some of the most persistent ways in which this is done is:

by telling stories, by dramatizing claims in ritual and other collective enactments; by rendering visible actual and desired truths about themselves, and the significance of their existence in imaginative and performative productions. How people make sense of themselves, and how we as anthropologists develop our interpretive skills in unpacking their symbolic systems, becomes a central concern in our discipline (1986: 261).

While Myerhoff locates her assertions within the single ethnographic site of an elderly citizens home, they continue to resonate when transferred to the global terrain of mega-events such as the Tour de France.

As Kellner notes, "media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil" (1995: 1). In the media rich context of the Tour de France, universal human behaviour is enacted by the riders, and such actions strike a chord with audiences across the globe. While the cyclists do not consciously consider the global appeal of their actions when pedalling around France, media exposure nonetheless carries a prevalent view of human behaviour to cities worldwide. The social relations displayed within the *peloton* are a microcosm of relationships between people more generally: confronting issues of mortality, of belonging and of group legitimation, the Tour de France provides a condensed version of issues that people routinely face in their daily lives. Rider retirement mirrors, albeit in compressed form, aging, 'burn out' reflects workplace stress, while the fragility of the human form, so often evidenced in injury and illness, is found in the precarious nature of cycling in the mountains, where too often only seconds and centimetres separate life from death. Indeed, the global Tour audience was witness to the death of Fabio Casartelli, as SBS, Channel Four, France 2/3, Eurovision, CBS, Canal 13, RCT I and MNET carried footage of his prone body lying motionless on the road to Australia, England, France, Europe, the United States, Mexico, Indonesia and South Africa. Through its sustained media coverage, the global audience of the Tour learns what it is to be human.

The codes of co-operation that underpin so much of cycling life tell audiences something of the ways in which human behaviour more generally is

codified. An international performance etiquette is established and embellished by the Tour de France, as cyclists from Colombia, Lithuania, Australia, Italy and France ride alongside one another in a travelling fraternity that transcends borders, culture and language. Conversely, ruthless competitiveness and simmering conflicts are displayed, as riders swing the occasional punch¹ or refuse to take their turn in a pace line. The ethics of camaraderie, and the informal norms of co-operation which uphold them, provide a model of an exemplary life style for a global audience. Whether one is a cyclist in Isère or watching the Tour from Jakarta, the message is easy to decode: to be a good cyclist is to be a good person.

While the Tour de France embodies every aspect of the human condition in the one highly mediated form, this is not to suggest that audiences are going to make use of its symbolic repertoire in exactly the same way. While followers across the globe may recognize and appropriate the symbolic potential of the Tour, for they all experience aging, retirement and death, the specific reflexivity of each culture guarantees that subjective interpretations are fashioned across the global ecumene. The pedagogic properties of the Tour strike a chord- although not necessarily the same chord- across the globe, as aficionados in Isère and viewers in Adelaide alike appreciate the potential that the Tour de France holds for reading culture. In evaluating the other major cycling Tours, Didier claims that the "Giro is the nursery school. The Tour de France is the university", while in Adelaide, a first time Tour viewer exclaims, "this has got everything. Guts, grit, glory. What remarkable guys they must be in real life!" Multiple personnel in multiple sites of experience are touched and transformed by the instructive nature of the event. The Tour de France serves as a prism through which to view a range of practices and behaviours, and it is its capacity to link people and places by embodying universally honoured examples of human behaviour that makes the Tour a profoundly unique event warranting detailed ethnographic scrutiny.

While the near-universal qualities of the Tour de France are indeed part of the appeal of this international mega-event, I do not wish to suggest that this brings with it uniform ways of interpreting it. The vast network of images, goods and personnel that takes the Tour around the globe does not diminish the capacities of local actors to develop a sense of community distinctiveness, for those who receive these images ultimately control their interpretation in ways that resonate strongly with local interests or concerns. While Fox (1991)

¹I am thinking here of the incident in the 1994 Tour de France when the Australian rider Neil Stephens had his nose broken by the Mexican rider Raul Alcala when a fight broke out between the two men as they began the ascent to Mont Ventoux.

and Appadurai (1991) both note that global processes flow through the most localized of communities, this movement does not mitigate the integrity of the groups who receive, interpret and reappropriate the goods and images that travel along these global cultural channels. While the global vision is certainly, as Appadurai suggests, a case of "money, commodities and persons unendingly chasing each other around the world" (1991: 194), it also provides an opportunity by which local actors and communities can articulate their own distinctive identities. While money, commodities and personnel may circulate universally, it is what individual communities do with them that is unique to each. The ways in which Isérois cyclists negotiate and appreciate the global goods of the Tour de France are particular to them, representing crucial means by which membership within the local community is both warranted and conferred.

To amplify this point ethnographically, I examined the markedly vicarious nature of cycling. Because cycling spectators are cycling practitioners, they are actively and conspicuously alert to the nuances, and above all, the difficulties of the Tour de France. As I have consistently underscored in my thesis, this is an appreciation of the Tour that only a cyclist can truly appreciate. When fatigue erodes the body and the spirit, and the riders in the Tour de France risk life and limb on lonely mountain passes, those who have climbed these brutal *cols* themselves are brought into a rare relationship of vicarious appreciation. Although a member of the global media audience can gain some sense of the cultural aesthetic of cycling through watching the Tour on television, they cannot appreciate the *mentalité* of the sport. While television viewers may see the riders fall off or suffer in other ways, it is only the sustained immersion in a cycling community that makes this truly comprehensible. The global ecumene can only handle so much, and inevitably, images, interpretations, goods and personnel spill out of it. When they do, they are seized upon by specific individuals and communities to assert their identities in the face of the perceived threat of homogenization that is offered by mass culture. While Appadurai searches for "the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world" (1991: 196), the Isérois cycling community provide a fine example of what it can look like. The imaginative resources of local experience are never threatened by global cultural forces but, on the contrary, are made all the more visible.

Local identity under pressure

While the belief that globalization amounts to the decline of local integrity

circulates amongst media commentators, politicians and church leaders, sustained scrutiny by social anthropologists reveals that there is little to fear.² This apocalyptic fear of homogeneity puts at risk the potential for local, regional and national variations in interpreting goods, commodities, images, actions and events. The fine-grained and persistent attention that we pay to the subjects of our field inquiries mean that anthropologists are uniquely placed to comment on the ways in which small communities do prove resistant to those economic, political and social pressures introduced by the global encompassing of cultural life. "The late capitalist era does not spell an end to continuing identification with locality and with community" (Peace 1996c: 100); on the contrary, the global pressures which are believed to threaten community identity are matched by displays of extreme social ingenuity on the part of local actors.

In spite of the fear that globalization weakens the symbolic potential of popular culture, the case study of the Tour de France shows that this is not always so. While it is feared that small communities become overwhelmed by the incursions of global culture, the ability of Isérois cyclists to appropriate the Tour de France in ways that are unique to them indicates that local identity is concertedly created and maintained in the face of these larger forces and influences. As I have consistently argued, aspects of the local cycling order are spoken of and acted upon in ways that empower the Tour de France with an enormous range of cultural privileges. For Isérois cyclists, the Tour de France is a complex activity, with the race itself being the centrepiece of what has been a long time coming. Whereas its capacity to enthral is engaged to the fullest for three weeks in July, cyclists anticipate the Tour de France on a far more enduring basis. By making use of the goods, commodities and media images that are offered by the Tour, cyclists craft myths and fashion sagas that are internal to their world. While the Tour de France is certainly polysemic, it is this particular reading of it that sets the cyclist's appreciation apart from all others. It is this interpretation of the Tour that marks the distinctiveness of Isérois cycling circles as they assert the creative resources by which they imagine and articulate their community. While the Tour de France is a symbolic drama on an international scale, it can be- and certainly is- appreciated at the local level.

The global media exposure of the Tour provides an exceptional opportunity by which to explore the character of a local community embedded within a

²Cohen (1985) and Peace (1996c) address this issue with detailed ethnographies. Hannerz (1991) examines it in more general terms.

larger cosmopolitan world order. The experiences of cyclists in Isère are always mediated by the internationalism of the Tour de France, and in turn, they are lived out globally as the media transmits its constituent properties worldwide. What are common experiences for cyclists in Isère now occupy a place on a global stage when enacted in the Tour de France. The mega-events which float along the fast rising sea of perceived homogeneity provide a number of port-holes through which anthropologists can view the imperative cultural work out of which communities claim and confer identity.

The television coverage offered by SBS Australia for the 1996 Tour de France mediates many of cycling's internal properties. Led through the nuances of the race by Phil Liggett- the commentator *extraordinaire* for Anglophone audiences-, Australian viewers were granted access to the insider appreciation of the Tour de France as being a show of unsurpassed heroism, valour and determination. While I am not suggesting that Australian audiences incorporated the heroic myths of the Tour de France in order to fashion their social world as Isérois cyclists so clearly do, I am suggesting that dimensions of the myth do have near-universal appeal. These dimensions are slotted into the global packaging of the Tour de France so that its symbolic potential and capacity to enthrall are realized to the fullest.

Through Liggett's commentary, Australian audiences learn that cycling is a sport where suffering is inevitable:

high on the Col de Madeline, the overall leader Stéphane Heulot was forced to stop. The pain in his knee caused by tendonitis was simply too much to bear. Heulot, unashamedly crying, was forced out of the Tour de France:

where riding in the mountains is dangerous:

on the descent from the Col de Madeline the drama continued with [a] spectacular crash by the Belgian rider, Johann Bruyneel, who plunged off the edge of a ravine. His life was almost certainly saved by landing on one of two trees that were growing out of the wall of the ravine:

and where very real friendships exist between adherents: "here come the two Frenchmen, Richard Virenque and Luc Leblanc. Team mates in 1994, they went their separate ways last season, but remain firm friends." The media carry around the world the particularities of cycling in France. What is customary knowledge for both club cyclists in Isère and those in the Tour de France is made widely and maximally available through the agency of the media. The interpretive space within which cyclists operate cannot be seen as independent or outside of global media exposure, for the key values of the

sport are repeatedly articulated by and through the media.

The media amplification of cycling life to include global audiences transcends the particularities of the sport as practised by cyclists in France. In widening the base from which the culture of cycling can be appreciated, the non-cyclist and the non-French become increasingly aware of what insiders have known all along; the Tour de France is a metaphor for life itself. The hugely variegated audience is united across the globe by the shared appreciation that the Tour de France embodies every aspect of the human condition in one symbolic form. Irrespective of whether one watches in Adelaide or Grenoble, it is the metaphor rich nature of the Tour that proves compelling. I am not suggesting that the Tour de France is the subject of global media attention because it is inherently or universally appealing in its own right: to do so would be to ignore those processes of human intervention and accomplishment whereby it is *made* to possess these qualities. This theme of social agency is one which I have repeatedly stressed in my examination of the fetishization of the Tour de France by members of a French cycling community, and it continues to have relevance when transferred to the global arena.

Finding France in the global ecumene

Although the stereotype of community fragility does not find support in the actions of cyclists in Isère, it is when it becomes one of *national* vulnerability that it becomes especially precarious. As Featherstone notes, it would be misleading to conceive a global culture as necessarily entailing a weakening of the sovereignty of nation-states" (1990: 1). While the McDonaldization of the Third World and the proliferation of Simpsonsque speech forms are cited as evidence of the decline of cultural particularity, anthropologists are amongst the few who find this situation to be remarkably exaggerated.³ Far from representing the *dénouement* of national integrity, the global system within which the Tour circulates enables the nation of France to imagine itself as one. Despite fears that "the widespread consumption of imported culture is considered subversive of hallowed qualities and enshrined characteristics of national identity and integrity" (Peace 1996a: 2), it is precisely the widespread consumption of imported culture that makes the Tour de France a distinctly French cultural experience.

³See Peace (1996a) for a detailed consideration of these themes as they are reported in the Australian popular media.

The argument that it is through the global character of the Tour that the distinctiveness of national identity becomes most pronounced is best employed to highlight the position of France within the global ecumene. While Foster asks "does the global diffusion of cultural forms threaten or enhance the means that enable the imagination of the nation as a bounded, sovereign and essentially distinctive community" (1991: 249), the diffusion of cultural products throughout the Tour de France clearly enhances the means by which the nation of France imagines itself. As I argued in the previous chapter, the sheer quantity of commodities produced and consumed at and by the Tour de France provide important means by which these imaginings of Frenchness are done. The qualities of sophistication, political volatility, style and exuberance are all reflected in the Tour, for it provides a resource through which what it means to be French is annually articulated and authenticated.

The global ecumene is not a series of unconnected market places, but a network of national, sub-national and transnational sites- largely metropolitan centres- at which nation building is consistently done. These locales are where the goods and images that travel along the unregulated pathways of global culture, and the personnel who produce and consume its resources, meet. This being the case, the situatedness of the Tour and of France within the larger implicating forces of global culture need to be considered, for it is when the French mega-event impacts upon its national metropolises that new (and enduring) cultural trajectories for nation building are most obviously achieved in the face of the external influences of imported culture.

While the image of the global transmission of popular culture is a fairly relentless one, as goods, objects, images and personnel are flung around the globe, this breathlessness is in fact tempered by moments when products and personnel are directed towards particular incidents and events. These moments are, of course, when the mega-event comes into its own. If it were not for mega-events like the Tour de France, then the stuff of global culture would flow endlessly, never being taken out of circulation or recirculated by the people who encounter it along the way. The mega-event is uniquely placed to stem the global flow, for it provides a supreme site at which "cosmopolitans and locals" (Hannerz 1990) can interact, each taking an introspective look at the innards of popular culture. The cosmopolitans of the Tour de France- the riders and their entourage, the media caravan and the sponsors who move about the world- annually impact upon the lives of the

locals as they invade their towns and villages. Such a relationship offers a privileged circumstance by which the ones who stay 'at home' can make some sense of the offerings of global popular culture. The Tour de France both mediates and is mediated by local and global forces as cosmopolitans and locals interact.

This position provides a unique opportunity for interpreting the various channels of meaning which flow through the Tour de France, for it is the sites at which cosmopolitans and locals meet that most readily open up the creative spaces through which particular representations of national identity can be articulated. As Appadurai notes,

globalization is not the same as its homogenization, but globalization involves the use of a variety of instruments of homogenization (armaments, advertising techniques, language hegemonies, clothing styles and the like), which are absorbed into local politics and cultural economies, only to be repatriated as heterogeneous dialogues of national sovereignty (1990: 307).

Indeed, it is the Tour's situatedness within the global ecumene that enables a privileged reading of its constituent properties. It is only when examined in a global context that the local character of the Tour de France comes out. National identity is mediated by local experience to construct an entity that is built out of geographical and cultural diversity. Global media exposure makes this cultural and geographical distinctiveness extraordinarily clear. By beaming 'ethnoscapes' (Appadurai (1990) worldwide, viewers in Adelaide, Madrid, Amsterdam and Vancouver take in the mountains of Isère, the urbanity of Paris, the industrialized environment of northern France, the ritz of the Mediterranean shores and the dramatic coast lines of the Basque region. Through global media exposure, the Tour de France is both nationalized and localized. The aesthetic appeal of France- and the Tour de France- becomes most evident when outside of the national context, for it is here that its localized content is displayed to the fullest. As Boon notes, "every culture appears *vis-à-vis* every other, exaggerated" (1982: 26). Whether it be done in terms of the personal introspection of when cosmopolitans meet locals, or the mediated nature of when regional identity is asserted *vis-à-vis* every other, reflexivity is, by its very nature, a comparative exercise.

Although global media exposure brings out regional identity, it can also produce an overly romantic portrayal of French life. While highlighting cultural diversity, distance can also distort. As the position of the consumer within the global ecumene shifts further away from the centre at which the

image or commodity is produced, his or her interpretation of it becomes increasingly obscured. As Appadurai notes

the lines between the 'realistic' and the fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that the further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct 'imagined worlds' which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world (1990: 299).

Despite having experienced the Tour de France for a number of years from the distance of Australia, it nonetheless looked very different when viewed alongside French bike riders, for every interpretation of another culture is, itself, embedded in a specific cultural context and historical moment.

This is not to suggest that the global diffusion of cultural forms always weakens the means by which nations imagine themselves as essentially distinctive. Indeed, media exposure proves that it can also strengthen or confirm existing national archetypes. The television coverage offered by SBS in 1996 provided a supreme opportunity by which to articulate a range of international stereotypes of France. In broadcasting the action, Phil Liggett employs a romantic and reverential language that plays out popular understandings of France. Introducing the stage, Liggett announced "onto Paris, but not before a preliminary glass of champagne," the accompanying footage revealing the *peloton* sharing a glass of champagne with Jean-Marie Leblanc. When the Tour entered Paris, and Richard Virenque made an ambitious break away on the Champs-Élysées, his actions were described as those of an "audacious Frenchman"..."Richard Virenque wants to be the first into town, and why not, it's his town, it's Paris." Shortly after, the Italian, Nicoli Bartali launched an attack, described by Liggett as: "I don't think the Italians will let the French have it all their own way, even if it is Paris." Here, all manner of national character types unravel through global media exposure to articulate the Frenchness of the Tour de France.

Being 'French' is distilled in the Tour de France, and the global media exposure it attracts provides an ideal opportunity from which to attempt a reading of this construction. In many ways, the Tour represents a condensed version of France: it has the same bureaucratic structures and complex social relations, it evokes the same regional pride and it embraces the same technological sophistication that its national equivalent prides itself on. The Tour de France is the national embodiment of a national event through which expressions of national character can be articulated. Rather than weakening the position of the Tour de France as a national festival, the global

character of the Tour in fact strengthens it. The transcendence of national borders, and the internationalism of goods and personnel that are produced and consumed by and through the Tour de France, do not mitigate, but rather consolidate the integrity of the event as a distinctly French one. As Antoine Blondin expresses it: "*Le Tour de France est une parcelle itinérante de territoire français, neutralisée sur soixante kilomètres de long et cent mètres de large, qui se déplace à quarante à l'heure*" (1979: 21).

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