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## **The Tour de France: a Pre-Modern Contest in a Post-Modern Context**

**Hugh Dauncey and Geoff Hare**

### **1. The importance of the Tour**

The Tour de France is unarguably an important sporting and cultural event. Both quantitatively and qualitatively this sporting competition attracts a popular attention that every year confirms its status as one of the premier sporting events in the world. Equally however, the Tour's scale and social and cultural significance demands the academic attention that it has not always received. As France's pre-eminent sports competition enters its second century, the studies brought together in this volume hope to provide some understanding of how and why the Tour is so important.

Quantitatively, the Tour is annually a huge event in terms of the logistics of its preparation, organization, running and reporting. Every year, the Tour's route has to be re-invented over nearly 4,000 kilometres of French (and neighbouring countries') roads. Every year, a score of teams and some two hundred riders have to be engaged to compete. Every year, a travelling village of some 4,000 people and 1,000 vehicles wends its way through three weeks of French summer. Every year, millions of spectators line the roads near their homes, or make extensive pilgrimages to the key points of the Tour's route to watch the bunch of riders (*peloton*) and its leaders pass by. Every year, the Tour is reported in ever increasing detail and accomplishment by the written press, radio, television, and the internet. Financially and commercially, the Tour involves significant amounts of money, and in terms

of rewards for the competitors, total prize money amounts to some 2.5 million dollars.

Qualitatively, the Tour de France remains after a century, unarguably the greatest cycling race in the world. No other country or sporting organization has been able to invent and stage a cycling competition which matches the Tour. Amongst countries where cycling has traditionally been a sport eliciting mass interest, such as Italy and Spain, the national Tours (the Giro in Italy and the Vuelta in Spain) have (until recently when major riders have opted to concentrate solely on riding the Tour de France in a given season) often been seen as secondary races, to be ridden in preparation for an assault on the Tour de France, rather than competitions of equal standing. Other countries where cycling has a strong popular following, such as Belgium and Holland, have been unable - for obvious geographical reasons - to produce similar races, and in the United States (the traditional home of sporting gigantism, in many ways) the relatively recent upsurge of interest in cycling towards the end of the twentieth century (encouraged by the Tour successes of Greg LeMond and subsequently Lance Armstrong) has only created competitions such as the Coors Classic.

The quantitative and qualitative uniqueness of the Tour goes some considerable way to explaining its special status in France. Above and beyond the fanatical interest shown in the race annually by amateur and recreational cyclists (an interest which focuses as much on the race itself as on individual favourite riders, and very little on the commercially-sponsored teams), the Tour has traditionally captured the imagination of the French people. The imagination of French society is sufficiently engaged every summer by the Tour for it to be said that the Tour de France has acquired a symbolic significance in French culture, based on its scale, its scope and the nature of the exploits ('mythically heroic') of its iconic heroes. To give some indication of the passion aroused by the Tour, the victory of a French rider in 2003 would be welcomed in the same way that an English public would greet England beating Germany at soccer, Australia at cricket, and the All Blacks at rugby (all during the space of a three-week summer of sporting success). Although the US public remains largely indifferent to the Tour (even if Lance Armstrong was voted sportsman of 2002) French

fervour approaches that of Americans for USA victories over the USSR or Russia in ice hockey or basketball in the Olympics. The days the stage goes up the Alpe d'Huez or the Tourmalet climbs or down the Champs-Élysées are the equivalent of the British Grand National horse race or the soccer Cup Final in Britain, or the Superbowl or World Series finals in the USA.

To adapt a lyric from The Beatles, the Tour de France has become a 'Magical mystery tour' in which sport, culture and politics coalesce. The Tour is mystery and magic through the ways in which it represents and performs (rather than the biblical themes of English and French medieval mystery plays) subjects which describe, define and redefine the nature of sporting exploit, heroism and celebrity within the context of a France (past and present, social, cultural and political) which is also performatively created and recreated. The Tour de France is a kind of 'memory machine' which every year projects from the dusty roads of summertime France a repeated screening of France's epic sporting soap-opera.

The France that is performed and celebrated by the Tour as guardian of French sporting, social, political and cultural memory is a complex composite. The France represented by the symbolism and myth of the Tour is both France as nation and France as Republic, and it is arguably the riders who stand at the centre of the overlapping value-systems. The Tour interprets France as nation and Republic in the ways in which its route annually maps out the traditional physical boundaries of the Frances of both the Ancien Régime and post-Revolutionary Republican eras. The way in which the Tour is presented by its media coverage as an exploration of France's historical, cultural and political heritage leaves those who follow it in little doubt as to the significance of castles, rivers, mountain passes and battlefields. Although it is indeed the 'Republican' boundaries of France which have attracted the greatest attention from the Tour (especially those of Alsace and Lorraine disputed with Germany during the Third Republic), it is arguably more in terms of its ethos and sporting principles than in terms of a geographical itinerary that the Tour interprets French republicanism. As a product - most directly - of late-nineteenth century France, not

only was the Tour pre-occupied by the territories lost to Germany after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, but it also shared - implicitly at least - some of the beliefs and values which France's elites hoped would ultimately allow 'la revanche' (revenge). At the forefront of such beliefs was the idea that French men should improve their physical fitness in order better to perform in war, and it was during the Third Republic that a vogue for physical fitness (typified by *la gymnastique*) grew up, encouraged by a republican State which saw the responsibility of citizens to keep themselves prepared to help defend the Republic. The fact that 'revanchism' in the late-nineteenth century was shared by both left and right, republicans and anti-republicans indicates one way at least in which the Tour negotiates a space between Republic and nation: French sporting heroes celebrate France in all its guises.<sup>1</sup>

As Georges Vigarello has pointed out - quoting from the description given by *L'Auto* itself of the role of the race - the Tour presented itself from its inception 'a self-consciously modern project in which sport was to become a "gigantic crusade", a herald of progress and discovery'.<sup>2</sup> Cycling and the Tour were instruments for the definition of France and for the improvement of French society through technology (the industrially mass-produced cycling machine) and the athletic prowess of her menfolk. In this way, 'modern' concerns with the instrumental role of sport and technology coalesced with the fundamentally 'pre-modern' gladiatorial contest of riders pitted one against the other and against thousands of kilometres of badly-surfaced roads. Now that sport, society, culture, technology, the politics of the body, international relations (especially Franco-German) and the media have significantly departed from the ways in which they structured the Tour in its early and even more mature years post-1945, the Tour finds itself negotiating not only a space between nation and republic within French society and culture, but also, in world where even the cleanest of cycling champions are tainted by suspicions of doping, re-inventing the role of sporting hero.

The Tour de France is a complex and at times contradictory sporting event. In its current version, and as it adapts to the changing constraints of sport, business, media and

politics in the 21st century, it can sometimes appear that rooted as it is in the society and culture of 1903 and 1946/47, it has been, is, and will be increasingly a 'pre-modern' contest conveying 'modern' values in a 'post-modern' context. Self-consciously aware of its own status as a media construction, the Tour de France has always been actor, director, producer, audience and critic for its own heroics.

## **2. The Centenary 1903-2003: looking backwards and forwards**

During the three weeks between the 5th and the 27th July 2003, the Tour de France celebrates its Centenary. In a prologue and twenty stages, over a total distance of 3350 kilometres, 22 teams of 9 professional riders will produce the latest version of France's annual summer sporting spectacle. In France itself, the Tour will be subject to more than even the usual media-frenzy, and the media coverage world-wide of the competition via the written press, radio, television and the internet is set to break new records. 2003 has already seen the launch of a new logo for the Tour de France and the appearance of a commemorative medal produced by the Monnaie de Paris (the Paris Mint) and a postage stamp from La Poste (the French Post office). The 2003 Tour looks backwards over the twentieth century and forwards to the future of the Tour in the years to come.

The Tour 2003 is the ninetieth to have been staged since 2003; only the First and Second World Wars (and the difficulties of France under Occupation, when various kinds of substitute races were organised) prevented the Tour being run. Whatever the problems of the Tour in the past - whether caused by politics and society, such as in the rebuilding France in the late-1940s or by the changing organisation of the race itself such as the shifts between national and commercial teams - until the late 1990s the Tour seemed to have become an unshakeable sporting institution. However, in 1998, the explosion of doping scandals in the Tour itself and in professional cycling in general led many to doubt whether the competition would ever reach its centenary. But the Tour has survived, and continues

into the 21st century. As part of its self-conscious and self-referential post-modernity, the Tour is acutely aware of its own history, and the 2003 race will even more than usual engage in a dialogue with the competition's past.

## **2.1 The symbolism of the 2003 Tour route**

The Tour de France of 2003 is to take a route which follows in the tyre-tracks of the inaugural Tour of 1903, but which, at the same time, takes into account the ways in which sport and society have evolved over the century of the Tour's existence. As the organizers of the race state in their presentation of the Tour on the Tour website, the contemporary race has to balance its history and its future and to reconcile sporting ethics with the search for racing which will enthuse the spectators: 'We couldn't - the rules being what they are - and didn't want to revolutionize the race [for 2003], and thus disrupt the balance and rationale which contribute to its credibility. So there will be neither more mountain stages than usual, nor fewer time-trials, nor any unnecessarily lengthy stages or excessively demanding ones. Moderation and reasonableness are the spirit of the day, and what is nowadays expected of the Tour de France is that sporting ethics should not be flouted simply in order to produce a spectacularly interesting race'.<sup>3</sup> Such reasonableness in the design of the 2003 route is in many ways the mirror-image of the outrageous physical demands imposed on riders in the early years, which led to the invention of the term 'les forçats de la route' (forced labourers of the road) and culminated in the protests of competitors such as that of the famous Pélissier brothers in 1924.

The 2003 Tour will make its initial departure in the Paris suburbs from the famous Réveil-Matin café in Montgeron from which the original Tour departed on 1 July 1903. However, there will also be a detour to pass in front of France's newest and most prestigious sporting monument: the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, associated with France's famous football World Cup win in 1998 and a central feature of future bids for hosting other

international showcases such as the Olympic Games. The major cities which welcomed the Tour in 1903 will also host it in 2003: Lyon, Marseille, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Nantes, no longer as the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century isolated urban, industrial centres representing the future of France's transformation from rural and agricultural backwardness, but as modern, de-industrialized, multi-ethnic conurbations open to European transport axes. The route will include Alpine and Pyrenean mountain stages which have come to symbolise the superhuman demands placed by the Tour on its riders: le Galibier, l'Alpe d'Huez, l'Izoard, le Tourmalet, Luz-Ardiden.

The 1953 Tour (the fortieth Tour to be run) but the anniversary of fifty years of the race was a considerably less self-conscious self-celebration of the competition, whereas, departing from the 1903 route, the 2003 Tour will make detours to celebrate its founding fathers Géo Lefèvre, Henri Desgrange et Jacques Goddet.

### **3. The Tour: Origins, Nature and Complexity**

'[I]t is the job of the press to magnify. Enthusiasm became its normal tone. It did not seek to persuade its readers but to impose its point of view. The marketing logic was impeccable: L'Auto organised a race that only a newspaper could report.' (Vigarello).<sup>4</sup> The Tour was an event invented by a newspaper, *L'Auto*, as a marketing tool in its competition for readers with its older rival, *Le Vélo*, published on green paper. *Le Vélo*'s editor, Pierre Giffard, is credited by Vigarello<sup>5</sup> with inventing a new kind of specialist sports paper in 1892. He concentrated on reporting results of sports events, and indeed financed competitions, increasing the number of events, not just cycling but pigeon racing too for example. In 1900 a rival, published on yellow paper, was founded, *L'Auto-Vélo*, later forced to change its name to *L'Auto* having lost a law suit brought by Giffard. *L'Auto-Vélo*'s editor Henri Desgrange, had a dispute with Giffard over the Dreyfus Affair, the political scandal that rocked the Republic at the turn of the century and divided Left and Right, families and colleagues into pro-Republicans and anti-

Republicans. Dion and the paper were anti-Dreyfus and so in a sense against the parliamentary Republic.

As part of this rivalry, the young head of the cycling desk at *l'Auto-Vélo*, one Géo Lefèvre, came up with an idea to outdo Giffard's organisation of big road races such as the Paris-Brest-Paris and the Bordeaux-Paris – a race that would include France largest towns and be called the Tour de France. Knowing the demand for road races to pass through provincial towns, Desgrange, a former holder of the world cycling one-hour record, consulted the newspaper's accountant Victor Goddet to see if they could afford to organise such a race and quickly decided they were on to a winner. And indeed during the first Tour in summer 1903 circulation of *L'Auto* rose from 20-30,000 to 65,000 daily. Within a few months of the second Tour they had so eaten into *Le Vélo*'s readership that Giffard was bankrupted and *Le Vélo* disappeared.

### **3.1 Desgrange and the 'confected' nature of the Tour**

The Tour was a 'confected' event, both a media event and a commercial event aiming to sell papers and bikes, and the complexities of its organisation and management turned its organisers, initially Desgrange, into iconic figures just as much as its riders.

Many stories, the folklore of the Tour, portray Desgrange imposing tough rules on the racers to protect the difficulty of the event, to ensure that its winners, even those who just managed to finish, were seen as heroes, and the race itself as the stuff of legend, the triumph of the will over nature and human frailty. The distances were immense; regulations banning help were draconian; when mountain climbs were included, the conditions could be atrocious – wind, rain, snow; tales of Pyrenean bears stalking the route added a hint of further danger. One quote sums up the image Desgrange wished to portray: 'The ideal Tour would be a Tour where only one rider managed to complete the event.'<sup>6</sup> Gaboriau examines the early Tours below in much greater detail.

In a further chapter below, Campos show how the very idea of a Tour of France appeals to a collective memory of the French about earlier notions of tours of France that historians and novelists, even school textbooks, had used to define and describe the geography and history of the new nation. The Tour appeared designed to appeal to 'memory'. If this was the cultural overlay that gave a symbolic national, indeed nationalistic dimension – going up to and later into the 'occupied' territory of Alsace and Lorraine had strong political overtones, there were two other principles on which the Tour was founded, as Vigarello has pointed out<sup>7</sup>. The first of these principles was that the race brought together in one event three burgeoning social phenomena: modern sport, mass circulation newspapers, and modern advertising strategies. The newspaper financed the event and had two client audiences in mind: it sold papers to readers wanting to follow a race they could not otherwise see; and it sold advertising space (especially to the expanding cycle industry) made available only by the existence of the race. Modern techniques speeding up news gathering and its circulation were of course crucial to this.

The second principle on which the Tour's popularity was built was the use of a form of press reporting, a style of writing, that appealed to the imagination, and created a mythology and a legend of the Tour that turned its exploits into an epic, its protagonists into heroes. Wille, in his chapter below looks at this phenomenon, and how it has been taken into the modern era via television. The organisers knew instinctively that the Tour should not remain static. It transformed itself, changed its route, adapted to the spirit of the times, but in doing so came back regularly to certain key features of previous races, particularly difficult climbs for example, and ending in the capital city or its environs, in the Parc des Princes velodrome or more recently on the Champs-Élysées. The rules of the competition were gradually refined and complicated allowing aficionados to build up a whole Tour culture. It was a classic invention of tradition.

### 3.2 Goddet, *L'Equipe* and the reinvention of a tradition

The Second World War, the collaborationist regime of Marshal Pétain and German Occupation were almost the death of the Tour. While a weak and ageing Desgrange insisted on announcing the 1940 route during the phoney war, the German invasion and the Armistice prevented the Tour from being held. He died in August 1940, in the depths of the 'débâcle'.

Jacques Goddet, son of *L'Auto's* financial director, succeeded Desgrange as editor of *L'Auto*, having regarded his predecessor as his spiritual father and journalistic mentor. He had taken over the directorship of the Tour in 1936. Goddet was determined for the paper to start appearing again in the autumn of 1940. In 1941 the majority shareholder had sold out to a German consortium. In his autobiography, Goddet described his role in this period as having led his newspaper through the 'minefields of the Occupation' without too much damage. Goddet did not go so far as to try to organise a Tour under the Occupation, when encouraged to do so by the German occupant in the later period. In the atmosphere of collaboration and resistance attempts to restore 'normality' had political and ideological overtones. A socialist organisation organised a smaller race called 'Circuit de France' (1942). *L'Auto*, to mark their territory, organised a 'Grand Prix du Tour de France' (1943 and 1944), not a stage race but a classification based on results in nine classic one-day races.

On the Liberation of Paris and the establishment of a provisional government, *L'Auto* fell under the orders coming from de Gaulle that all newspapers appearing during the period of Collaboration must cease publication. Studies suggest that while the paper had certainly been Petainist, it had not been ultra-collaborationist.<sup>8</sup> This could easily have been enough to prevent Goddet and his newspaper from seeing the light of day again. However, the tribunal that tried the paper and its director found them not guilty of collaboration. Goddet had taken an active part in the liberation of Paris, as an eleventh-hour resister (earning him the Médaille de la Résistance). More importantly, apparently unknown to him, his print workshop had been a long-term centre of resistance, even printing de Gaulle's posters and tracts. Two of

his journalists had been known resistance workers. A factor in his immediate post-war survival seems to have been his bringing into *L'Auto* as co-director and administrator, Patrice Thominet, another active resister. The key to his success in being allowed to build up a new sports paper, to be called *L'Equipe*, to fill the gap left by *L'Auto*, was support from an influential pillar of the resistance, Emilien Amaury, later to become one of the biggest press barons of post-war France.

Marchand recounts how there were three main sports dailies champing at the bit to start publishing in early 1946.<sup>9</sup> *Sports* had the support of the Communist Party, *Elans* was backed by some Socialists in the wine trade, and *L'Equipe*, fronted by all the resisters mentioned above, while Goddet remained in the background. After one hundred days *Elans* merged with *L'Equipe*. Just as *L'Auto* had proclaimed its apolitical stance to distinguish itself from its rival *Le Vélo* in 1903-4, so did *L'Equipe* against its communist-backed rival in 1946. What seemed to have been the main factor in *L'Equipe's* success however was its experienced sales and distribution networks inherited from *L'Auto*. A second front in this press war, Marchand tells us, was the organisation of major sports events, particularly cycle races. The rights to the Tour de France name were still held in official sequestration along with other property of *L'Auto*. The Tour was the open-sesame to the sport-press-advertising market, the event was so well known.

In 1946 lack of equipment and logistical difficulties led the French Cycling governing body to ban races of more than five stages (five days). Both *Sports* and *L'Equipe* organised one such small event. Again, experience from *L'Auto* meant that the Monaco-Paris stage race pitting Vietto against Robic, went well, showing that *L'Equipe* was capable of organising the Tour de France. Géo Lefèvre, now working for *L'Equipe*, was able to re-establish the old commercial links with old advertisers. Financially, *L'Equipe* was doing well. The final element was when Amaury, by now *patron* of the major Paris daily, *Le Parisien libéré*, called in his moral debt, persuading Goddet to partner him in a joint bid for the Tour to be run by a new company the Société du Parc des Princes, of which Amaury and Goddet were to be the

principal shareholders. Thus, Amaury became 50% owner of the Tour, and Goddet inherited a co-director of the Tour, *Le Parisien's* Head of sport, Félix Lévitan.

### 3.3 The Amaury Group, Goddet and Lévitan

The 1947 Tour was not only successfully organised, and an exciting race, but it was won by a Frenchman, Robic, thus increasing popular interest. *Sports*, expressing support for ideas of sport as enjoyment in opposition to the commercialisation of professional sport, lost readers and income, and did not last beyond the end of the year. *L'Equipe* had established its monopoly as the French sports daily.

Lévitan and Goddet dominated the Tour for forty years. From different social backgrounds, they did not apparently get on well personally. Lévitan was always on time, Goddet always late. Somewhat grudgingly they shared the organising role, Lévitan the administrator, the innovator, Goddet the Tour's conscience, sensitive to its traditions. Lévitan made himself indispensable to the smooth running of the Tour de France machine. Under his trademark colonial helmet, Goddet directed the race from his car that for the three weeks of the Tour was his office.<sup>10</sup>

Two long court cases marked their later careers and rocked the Tour. The Amaury press empire having gained control of *L'Equipe*, and of the Tour, Emilien Amaury was killed in 1977 in a horse-riding accident. After six years of legal battles over his will, his son Philippe Amaury gained control of the press empire and, in collaboration with Goddet, sacked Lévitan in 1987. The ensuing court case ran until 1995 when the appeals system exhausted itself in a compromise. Goddet had by then left the position of Race Director in 1989.<sup>11</sup>

La société du Tour de France, part of Amaury Sport Organisations, is the current organising body of the Tour, Jean-Marie Leblanc, its managing Director, is responsible for

the race, its organisation and its running. While a moderniser in terms of sport as a television spectacle, Leblanc is from the Goddet-Lévitan stable. He is an ex-media man, but has the advantage of having raced in the Tour. He knows and respects the traditions of the Tour, and can see the point of view of riders, the media and the organisers. In reflection of the crucial influence of Jean-Marie Leblanc, the next chapter of this volume is an extended interview with him, in which he discusses how the Tour has changed as it has become more and more the object of media coverage.

### **3.4 Understanding the Tour as a Sporting Competition**

Most people picking up this book will already have a good idea of what the Tour de France constitutes in terms of cycling competition, but it is nevertheless useful to review a number of its fundamental characteristics.

In terms of competitions and riders, the Tour is an overall competition which includes a variety of competitions for different prizes, the most prestigious of which is that for the overall Tour lead and overall Tour victory at the end of the three weeks of racing. The winner of the Tour is the rider whose overall aggregate time for the total distance (including all stages, whether they be prologue, normal stage, individual or team time trial) is the smallest. A yellow jersey (maillot jaune) to mark the rider with the current shortest aggregate time is given out at the end of each day's riding, to be worn on the following day's stage. The further the race progresses (and the greater the variety of stages encountered) the more the yellow jersey reflects its wearer's overall strength in the different kinds of riding (flat-land riding, mountain-riding, time-trialing). Riders who are more competent in a particular kind of riding - such as mountain climbing, or sprinting for stage finishes - can figure in the King of the Mountains competition (the red polka-dot jersey - maillot à pois - attributed for the leading points tally in hill-climb finishes and various *primes* along the route of each stage) or the sprint competition (the green jersey - maillot vert - rewarding the greatest tally of sprint

points). A white jersey competition rewards the best placed young rider under the age of 26, a *prix de la combativité* marks the most aggressive rider, and the aggregated times of the riders in any one team determines their position in the team competition.

The Tour is thus a race in which there are a number of competitions running in parallel. It is also a race in which individuals and teams are pitted against each other, and although individual riders of exceptional abilities in all the skills required may do well in the race overall, success for even such riders often depends on the support of their team. Team strategies in defence of their leader's position in the yellow jersey competition for overall leadership of the Tour, or other competitions, or in defence of the team's specialist sprinter or hill climber, may lead to collaboration with other teams who have shared interests in blocking breaks away from the peloton of various competing racers.

In terms of teams, currently, the Tour peloton is made up of some twenty professional teams, each containing nine riders. The teams allowed to compete in the Tour de France are selected by the Tour organizers in the spring of each year, according to the Tour's own procedures and the overall rankings established by the sport's governing body, the International Cycling Union (UCI). In 2002, the twenty-one participating teams were AG2R Prévoyance (Fra); Alessio (Ita); Bonjour (Fra); Cofidis Le Credit Par Telephone (Fra); Credit Agricole (Fra); CSC - Tiscali (Den); Domo - Farm Frites (Bel); Euskaltel - Euskadi (Spa); Fassa Bortolo (Ita); Fdjeux.Com (Fra); Ibanesto.Com (Spa); Jean Delatour (Fra); Kelme - Costa Blanca (Spa); Lampre - Daikin (Ita); Lotto - Adecco (Bel); Mapei-Quick Step (Ita); ONCE - Eroski (Spa); Rabobank (Hol); Tacconi Sport (Ita); Team Deutsche Telekom (Ger); US Postal Service (USA). Of these six French, five Italian, four Spanish, two Belgian, one Dutch, one Danish, one US and one German teams, sixteen were chosen to participate in the first round of the organizers' choices (the team of the previous year's overall winning rider, the leading teams of the 2001 Tour, Giro d'Italia and Vuelta de Espana, the leading team in the 2001 UCI World Cup competition, the leading ten teams in the UCI rankings), and the remaining five were invited to enter the Tour in early May 2002.

As can be seen from the team names and the banking, insurance, telecommunications and other businesses they represent, the contemporary Tour is based on a corporate team format. Before 1969, the Tour was run at different periods according to either a national team (and French regional teams to make up the numbers) or corporate team format. The businesses sponsoring the teams have not always been dominated by financial institutions and - generally - industries with no direct connection to either cycling or sport. Originally the Tour itself and teams were associated with bicycle manufacturers and other sports-related companies, but progressively, team sponsors have become 'extra-sportifs'. Whereas the official sponsors of the Tour de France tend still to be predominantly French, the teams demonstrate a wider European - and in the case of Lance Armstrong's US Postal Service squad, American - range of financing. Although they are financed by French, Italian, Spanish or other companies, the team squads contain riders of various nationalities, with a predominance, nevertheless of members from the sponsor's home country; it was thus that the Spanish ONCE team employed the star French rider Laurent Jalabert for many years in the 1990s. Part of the reason for employing riders of different nationalities is that each team needs a number of specialist competitors - in addition to the team leader (supposed to challenge for the yellow jersey) - in order to figure in the various competitions which run in parallel to the General Classification for overall race leadership, such as the Sprint and King of the Mountains classifications. Each team's star riders are supported by the rest of the team members, who have no ambitions for individual success in the Tour, and are employed to serve as 'domestiques', looking after and protecting the team's challengers for the yellow, green and polka-dot jerseys.

#### **4. The Tour and Identity**

Holt, Mangan and Lanfranchi (in their volume *European heroes: Myth, Identity, Sport*) identify the Tour de France as 'indisputably heroic' and suggest that 'it has come to define the very

idea of the hero in Europe'.<sup>12</sup> They emphasise the particular significance of cycling heroes in Continental Europe, and how in the Tour French, Flemish, Swiss and Italian riders have had (nationally) 'transcendent moments and personalities'. The Tour forms identities both on the level of individual sporting heroes and on the level of nationality and national stereotyping. As the Tour has become increasingly internationalised - particularly with the success of American competitors - these issues have become more complex than traditional rivalries between France and Belgium for mastery of the yellow jersey.

#### **4.1 Heroes**

The American rider Lance Armstrong who will be riding as the leader of the US Postal team in 2003 has already won the Tour de France on four successive occasions. Added to his victories in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002, a win in 2003 will place him on an equal footing with the Spaniard Miguel Indurain (who took the yellow jersey in 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995). Only Jacques Anquetil (France), Eddy Merckx (Belgium) and Bernard Hinault (France) have also won five Tours, but not in succession. Armstrong is both typical and atypical in the extraordinary nature of his cycling success. He is typical of Tour winners in terms of his athletic and racing abilities: he is an excellent climber and time-trialler, has an unflinching determination to win and commands the respect of his team mates. He is untypical of Tour winners in terms of his nationality (only Greg LeMond has previously been a US winner - 1986, 1989, 1990) and because he has returned to professional cycling after recovering from cancer.

Armstrong is the archetypal figure of a contemporary hero or star of the Tour de France, but he is not a star whose heroic qualities are go unquestioned. It is this doubt to which the 'heroism' of Armstrong and other riders are subjected which characterises their 'modernity' as stars of the Tour in the late 1990s and now at the beginning of the Tour's second century. Armstrong has emerged as the leader of the Tour peloton in the wake of the 1998 'Tour of Shame' marked by doping scandals, the withdrawal of riders and whole teams

and the subsequent disgrace for drug-taking of its winner the Italian Marco Pantani. The more Armstrong declares his aversion to drug-taking amongst the professional riders, the more the (French) media seem to question his honesty, suggesting that his performance is incompatible with someone who was once underwent long treatment for cancer.

Two chapters in this volume deal with French and 'foreign' cycling heroes of the Tour de France and what their representations demonstrate about both 'heroism' and 'identity'.

#### **4.2 The Tour de France and National Identity**

The role played by 'nationality' in the Tour de France has been changing and complicated. At different periods in the history of the Tour, riders have competed as mere individuals, as members or regional teams, as members of national teams, or (as currently) as members of commercial teams. Whatever the principles under which competitors have registered to ride, however, it is clear that the Tour de France has always been an arena in which national rivalries have confronted each other, less as feuds between individual riders than as conflicts between national self-perceptions and stereotyping by other nations. For France – for whom the Tour is a 'national' competition although it is run as an international contest – the success and failure of French riders on French soil seems to be felt even more keenly than the expectation and pride heaped by countries such as Belgium and Holland on the competitors who yearly represent them in France.

It is worthwhile considering in a little more detail the principles which have governed the registration of riders to compete in the Tour. Originally, the competitors were accepted as individual contestants (of varying nationalities, even in the inaugural Tour of 1903). In 1910 teams became sponsored by businesses (Alcyon, Le Globe etc. etc.), until in 1930 five national teams of eight competitors each (France, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Germany) were entered as well as 60 other contestants in regional teams (1939 – no participation by Italian, German and Spanish teams). Between 1930-39 and 1947-1962 the Tour was run with

national teams, with German riders only returning post-war in 1955 in an international team (until 1960 German riders were included in Luxembourg or Swiss teams). From 1962 commercial teams were again introduced, prompting the pithy headline in *Le Miroir du Cyclisme*: 'Tour des Patries, Tour des Patrons?'

Wieting (2000) in an analysis of the ways in which the drug scandals affecting the 1998 Tour have brought about 'the demise of unambiguous athletic performance' (or as he puts it in the title of his article the 'twilight of the hero in the Tour de France') underlines just how 'French' the Tour can appear. Naturally, the Tour is French in terms of origin and location (although there is obvious symbolism in its detours to neighbouring countries), but less predictably, the competition is also predominantly French in terms of the nationalities of victories, since France (36 victories) is well ahead of Belgium (18), Italy (9), Spain (8), the USA (7) and Luxembourg (4). But, additionally, as the somewhat intimate gathering of former champions at the presentation of the route of the 2003 Tour demonstrated in November 2002, the number of champions (or heroes) is even more restricted and even more French. In effect, over the 92 runnings of the race so far, there have been 55 winners, some of whom won more than once, such as the multiple champions Anquetil, Merckx, Hinault, Indurain, and Armstrong; 21 of these 55 winners have been French. An issue for the French public however is that the last French win came in 1985.

Apart from the early years of 1903-1909, when there were only French winners of the race, the Tour has exhibited French domination in the 1930s, 1960s and 1980s (five or more 'home' victories in each decade) a strong national showing in the 1950s and 1970s (four victories in each decade), and weakness in the late-1980s, 1990s and 2000s. During this latest barren period for France, her only hopes have been the immensely popular 'nearly-champion' Laurent Jalabert (who never seemed to fulfil his all-round potential) and the 'flawed-favourite' Richard Virenque, the grimpeur tainted by the Festina drugs scandal of the 1998 Tour of Shame. It is difficult to see any French rider challenging credibly for the maillot jaune in 2003.

It is however possible that viewing the Tour as a theatre – amongst other things – of national sporting conflict is too simple, or too anachronistic an approach to the analysis of a cycling competition which has evolved considerably since its early years as an example of French society's late-nineteenth century angst. It would seem probable that a sporting spectacle such as the Tour de France would particularly lend itself to national struggles between riders and teams in periods of international tension within Europe. Thus, throughout the early decades of its running, as Europe prepared for the Great War, then suffered an armistice of twenty years (to borrow Marshall Foch's description of the Treaty of Versailles) during the inter-war period, champions in yellow were very likely to be national heroes as sport served as the continuation of war by other means.

However, after the Second World War, as European integration developed momentum (and German riders were absent from the Tour until 1955), and then as growing prosperity and Franco-German amity defused the most geopolitically founded of sporting rivalries within the ranks of Tour teams, it would seem likely that the 'national' element of riders' heroic status would have receded in importance. In fact, German riders returned to the Tour in 1955 only as members of an international team, and until 1960 German riders were included in Luxembourg or Swiss teams rather than making up their own national formation. So as the national selections gave way to commercial teams in 1962, the absence of Germany in the Tour in an official capacity during the post-war years was marked. Such an interpretation of the contemporary Tour at least – as a competition which is less marked by discourses and behaviours of nationalism and national conflict – finds some support in Georges Vigarello's contention – in his analysis of the Tour as one of France's *lieux de mémoire* - that 'As democratic societies develop, one finds less of a search for federation, less of an impulse to unification'.<sup>13</sup>

### 4.3 The internationalisation of the Tour

In the post-war period, the Tour began – geographically – to extend itself beyond the ‘beating of the bounds’ of France (to borrow the terminology of Christophe Campos, in this volume) by including starts and other stages in neighbouring countries, and as Vigarello again briefly points out, this can be seen as an indication of diminishing ‘national concentration’, although he emphasises that such a trend must be considered within the context of a race which is still very much ‘rooted in French soil’. As well as the excursions abroad, during the contemporary period the ‘national concentration’ of the Tour has been diluted by the arrival of competitors from countries not traditionally involved in internal European national rivalries, such as Colombia, Paraguay, Chile and Brazil, Ireland, Australia... and the USA. The exotic contribution of South American riders (mostly pure grimpeurs who never figured prominently in the overall competition) has probably been less significant in terms of the development of the Tour as a theatre for the negotiation of national sporting identities than the presence of what the French call the ‘Anglo-saxons’. Pociello has suggested that the fundamental generative principles of ‘French’ sporting characteristics are to be discovered in the interactions between French and ‘Anglo-saxon’ culture.<sup>14</sup>

Anglo-saxon culture has been represented in the Tour most strongly by American riders (Australians, New Zealanders and the Irish are generally perceived by the public as plucky ex-colonials or Celtic underdogs rather than ambassadors of Anglo-American values) such as LeMond and Armstrong. Apart from the tragically famous Tom Simpson, and most recently Chris Boardman, neither of whom was really successful enough to provide a direct embodiment of what the French see as Anglo-Saxon sporting culture (essentially a blend of ‘le fair-play’ and physical effort as opposed to resourcefulness and ‘French flair’) in the Tour itself British riders have been rare. Indeed, the absence of significant British competitors in the Tour has made it an interesting example of a competition in which French and ‘Anglo-saxon’ sporting values interact without direct contact, unlike in sports such as rugby and

soccer.

## 5. Academic Approaches to the Tour

There is a considerable literature on the Tour de France, but this literature is very preponderantly journalistic in style and hagiographic in analysis. It would seem, in fact, that the serious material on Europe's greatest annual sporting event - now a truly world competition - is actually severely limited.

### 5.1 Existing academic studies

The relatively few properly academic studies that do exist constantly refer to the same exclusive list of works, amongst which the following authors figure most prominently.<sup>15</sup>

It was Roland Barthes whose 1957 volume of essays entitled *Mythologies* arguably first started the intellectual analysis of the Tour de France. In a series of studies of aspects of French popular culture during the 1950s, *Mythologies* provided an approach which unravelled and unpacked the hidden assumptions and meanings of subjects as diverse as the Guide bleu restaurant guide, the DS Citroën saloon, wrestling and the Tour de France.<sup>16</sup> In the essay 'Le Tour de France comme épopée' ('The Tour de France as epic') Barthes applied his technique of essentially semiological literary analysis to the organization of the Tour and (although he does not state it explicitly) the media representation of the race. Thus Barthes considers the ways in which riders are represented, and how their images (regional stereotyping) and names (diminutives and nicknames) are created and modified to create a system of references and relationships which mirrors that of the literary epic (and the ways of thinking that accompany it). Equally, 'The Tour de France as epic' considers how the 'geography' of the race is presented in epic terms through the personification of nature (stages are 'burning', the Mont Ventoux is compared to an evil demon) and the

'naturalisation' of the competitors' struggles (they can become 'bogged down' in some stages and 'refreshed' by others, depending on the geology and climate). Barthes also discusses doping, suggesting that those riders who depend on drugs to provide the 'inspiration' for their moments when they go beyond simple 'physical conditioning' to produce miraculous exploits can be seen as a 'sacrilegious' act, whereas those riders who accomplish their miracles through communion with the gods are blessed: '[...] an adept of physical conditioning, Bobet is a wholly human hero who owes nothing to the divine, gaining his victories from simply terrestrial qualities enhanced by that most human of qualities: will. Gaul embodies the Arbitrary, the Divine, the Marvellous, Chosen-ness and complicity with the gods [...]'. These examples provide a flavour of the way in which Barthes - predominantly a literary critic - approached the Tour. The conclusion to his essay is what he describes as 'Lexique des coureurs (1955)' which lists a number of the major riders and - as in a presentation of the *dramatis personae* of a play (or, doubtless, an epic) - presents their fundamental characteristics (or essences), but before this, he provides a typically Barthesian aphorism: 'Le Tour est un conflit incertain d'essences certaines' and a (somewhat) more accessible explanation of what he sees the Tour to mean: 'I think that the Tour is the best example we have encountered of a total and thus ambiguous myth; the Tour is both a myth of expression and a myth of projection, and therefore realistic and utopian at one and the same time. The Tour expresses and liberates French people through a unique fable in which traditional impostures such as the psychology of essences, the ethics of combat, the magickery of elements and forces or the hierarchies of supermen and servants mix with forms of positive interest, with the utopian image of a world searching obstinately to reconcile itself through the staging of a totally clear portrayal of the relations between man, men and Nature.' Such a 'literary' reading of the Tour as a competition of heroic deeds and epic narratives fits well - for all its unnecessary convolutedness - with analyses of much of the journalistic reporting of the Tour, in which epic feat and heroic stories are invented as ways of communicating and selling stories which may be much simpler, but it does little, really, to help us understand the

Tour as politics, commerce and culture rather than merely emotion.

Eugen Weber has a dual importance for anyone wishing to take the Tour de France seriously as an object of academic enquiry. Students and researchers of sport in general, and French sport in particular owe much to seminal articles written in the early 1970s by Eugen Weber, drawing attention to the social, cultural and political significance of French sport.<sup>17</sup> The verve and style of Weber's prose, combined with impeccable research and vast knowledge of nineteenth-century France did much to introduce the topic of sport as a valid subject for historical and cultural investigation by academics. As well as helping legitimise the academic study of sport as a social and cultural phenomenon, Weber has also devoted himself to analyses of cycling, perhaps the most easily accessible of which is the chapter 'La Petite Reine' (an affectionately casual term for a bicycle) in his cultural history of France in the 1880s and 1890s, *France, Fin de Siècle*.<sup>18</sup> Weber's approach is a characteristically wide-ranging and well-informed survey of the social, economic and cultural dimensions of cycling as a leisure pursuit of the moneyed classes (both male and female) and as a sport practised by working-class professionals.

Georges Vigarello's chapter in *Les Lieux de mémoire* (translated as *Realms of Memory*), entitled simply 'The Tour de France' quickly became - after its publication in 1992 - the central work of synthetic analysis of the Tour and its cultural importance to France. Vigarello's approach is that of the cultural historian, identifying the ways in which the race functions as a 'memory tour', how it has become a national institution and how it has created its own memory and mythology. As he states in his introductory paragraphs, the histories of France and of the Tour itself coalesce to touch the national consciousness: 'The course of the Tour is as much a symbol of the national heritage as it is the route of a bicycle race. The history of the Tour's setting is as important as the history of the race itself. The memory of the race combines two histories, one long, the other short, and together these two histories define its meaning'.<sup>19</sup> Vigarello shows not only how the Tour was created in the image of other traditional tours of France undertaken by sovereigns and journeymen or by

schoolchildren in republican primary schools but also how it proposed a proselytising mission of progress, health, technology and modernity. He demonstrates how the route of the Tour marked out a territory in which the physical landscape of France became a backdrop to a sporting spectacle and where France's history was constantly evoked through reference to figures of glorious national memory such as Joan of Arc, Napoleon and Clemenceau.

Vigarelo rapidly traces the developments in the organization of the race from the early days to the era of intense television coverage, asking the question whether in an era of lesser regional disparities and decreased 'national concentration' within an increasingly unified Europe the Tour ultimately become an 'anachronism'. The answer to this is to be found - as Vigarelo illustrates - in the Tour's own memory of itself, and its capacity to recreate interest in itself, no longer as a race which marks out a territory of republican France, but which self-referentially engages in a dialogue with its own myths and history.

Philippe Gaboriau (one of the contributors to this current volume) is one of the foremost analysts of the Tour de France and of cycling in France. He has published a number of articles and chapters on the Tour, concentrating especially on the early years of its creation and development. The work that is most referred to is his book *Le Tour de France et le vélo : histoire sociale d'une épopée contemporaine* (1995).<sup>20</sup> Much of Gaboriau's stimulating analysis centres around the changing nature of cycling as a practice throughout the early decades of the Tour, and linking this to the developing technologies of transport, to the social, political and cultural significance of cycling and the Tour. Gaboriau's thinking explains how cycling and the Tour have been dominated by popular (i.e. 'working-class') influences by showing the ways in which cycling was initially the preserve of the bourgeois middle-classes who alone could afford bicycles (for leisure riding), before progressively becoming accessible to workers (for transport purposes) and then subsequently providing a leisure pursuit to the working classes, as their prosperity and access to free-time gradually increased. Much of Gaboriau's argument links the bicycle and the car, in showing how driving replaced cycling as the preferred leisure of the rich and as cycling became a widespread

practice of the workers during the first half of the twentieth century, until cars became affordable to them also. Another major aspect of Gaboriau's path-breaking work is his constant reference to the newspaper reports of the Tour itself, thus tracing the invention - in the media coverage of the racing - of the competition as 'epic'.<sup>21</sup>

Paul Bourry's *La France du Tour : Le Tour de France - un espace sportif à géométrie variable* (1997) is an interesting study which provides a comprehensive overview of the Tour's history, development and functioning, focusing on the role played by the riders in building the Tour as it has become.<sup>22</sup> Bourry's wide-ranging and sensitive analysis investigates all kinds of writing on, by and about the Tour, covering literature as well as sociological approaches, and through an attention to the different dimensions of the race - sporting, technical, economic and literary - brings out the multiple meanings of the Tour.

## **5.2 Publications aimed at a more general readership**

What comes into the more serious category of study are first-hand accounts by Jacques Marchand, the veteran sports writer who worked closely with Goddet on the Tour and for L'Equipe and for rival papers. These include an authoritative biography of *Jacques Goddet* (Anglet: Atlantica, 2002). Another work of interest on the journalistic side of the Tour, dealing with Giffard, Desgrange and Lefèvre among others, is Marchand's *Les Défricheurs de la presse sportive* (Anglet: Atlantica, 1999). Less easy to get hold of now is Goddet's autobiography, *L'Equipée belle* (Robert Laffon-Stock, 1991, edited by D. Mermet).

For the uninitiated reader, the following popular introductions give engaging and reliable information and analyses. Serge Laget's *La Saga du Tour de France* (in Gallimard's *Découverte* series, first published in 1990, but since updated) gives a heavily illustrated history of the Tour both in terms of its organisation and of course its sporting aspects. *L'ABCdaire du Tour de France* (Flammarion 2001) by Jean-Paul Ollivier ('Polo la science'), French television's race consultant, gives a history of the Tour via thorough run-through of

the iconic names and places of the Tour – again well illustrated. Radio-France’s veteran Tour reporter, Jean-Paul Brouchon (he has covered 37 Tours), concentrates on the post-war period, and gives a succinct analysis of the racing side of the Tour in *Le Tour de France. Les secrets, les hommes, l’évolution* (Editions Balland/Jacob-Duvernay, 2000).

On the bookshelves in France appear numbers of biographies and ghosted autobiographies of the stars of cycling. Among the autobiographies are *Moi Bernard Hinault, champion des champions*, (Calmann-Lévy, 1992). The market for popular biographies in France seems to have been cornered by Jean-Paul Ollivier – among his books are *Tom Simpson : Un champion dans la tourmente* (2002), *Laurent Fignon* (2001), *Louison Bobet* (1998), *Bernard Hinault* (1998) *Fausto Coppi* (1998), *Bernard Thévenet* (1997), *René Vietto* (1997), *Eddy Merckx* (1996), *André Darrigade* (1996), *Jacques Anquetil* (1994), *Raymond Poulidor* (1994) (all in the *La véridique histoire* series of Editions Glénat), plus *Celui qui soufflait contre le vent... Jean Robic* (1992, Editions de l'Aurore). (It is to be hoped another Frenchman wins the Tour soon.) He has additionally published more general histories: *Le Tour de France : Lieux et Etapes de légende* (2002), *Le Tour de France et les Alpes* (2002), *Maillot jaune* (2001). A popular study of the Anquetil – Poulidor rivalry is *Duel sur le volcan* by Christian Laborde (Albin Michel, 1998).

Large, lavishly illustrated coffee-table books abound. One containing short texts from good writers and important protagonists, plus some fine black and white photographs, is M. Milenkovitch (ed.), *Cyclisme, 50 histoires du Tour de France* (Editions du sport, 1997). Ahead of the centenary *L’Equipe* has published the three volume (784 pages, 2500 photos) *Tour de France 100 ans* (Editions de l’Equipe, 2002), an important source of the iconography of the Tour.

From the British side of the Channel, an important recent study, aimed the general reader, is William Fotheringham’s biography of Simpson, *Put Me Back on My Bike: In Search of Tom Simpson* (Yellow Jersey Press; 2002). Other quality popular writing about the Tour comes from Graeme Fife: *Tour De France: The History, the Legend, the Riders* (Edinburgh:

Mainstream Publishing, 2002, and republished updated for the last three years), which gives feel for the difficulties of racing in the Tour as well as an accurate and lively history; and *Inside the Peloton: Riding, Winning and Losing the Tour De France* (Mainstream, 2002), a study of key British and French riders. Other books deserving of mention are: Matthew Rendell, *Kings of the Mountains: How Colombia's Cycling Heroes Shaped Their Nation's History* (Aurum Press, 2002); Richard Yates, *Master Jacques: the Enigma of Jacques Anquetil* (Mousehold Press, 2001); a translation of Philippe Brunel's, *An Intimate Portrait of the Tour De France: Masters and Slaves of the Road* (Buonpane Publications, 1996), and Phil Liggett's *Tour de France* (Virgin Books, 1989). The annual *Tour de France 2002: The Official Guide*, by Jacques Augendre, is now published in English (Velo Press, 2002).

## **6. Analysing the Tour**

As we have seen in the discussion so far, any consideration of the Tour involves thinking about the relationship of sport and commerce, the relationship between sport and politics, sport and society in its historical development, cultural issues (especially the expression of identity through sport), ethical issues, and constantly and increasingly the relationship between sport and the media. It is thus that this current volume addresses at different points the key role played by the media both in the invention of the Tour and a century later, as the Tour is arguably a media event more than anything else. The modern mass media are central to most of the other issues raised by study of the Tour. For convenience, we have split the volume into two main sections, the first dealing with the organisation of the Tour, some historical considerations, the economics of the Tour and its changing relationship through the years with the media. The second half deals with cultural issues and values: issues of national identity, of stars and heroes, of sporting ethics and doping, and of the value of the Tour to protesters and supporters of extra-sporting causes. There is finally a brief chronology of key aspects of the Tour's first one hundred years.

## 6.1 Organising, Reporting, Watching

The Tour Director Jean-Marie Leblanc, specially interviewed for this volume by Dominique Marchetti, gives a privileged insider's view of how the Tour is organised, for the benefit of the riders, and the fans but especially for the media, and the audiences of press, radio and television. As someone associated with the Tour since he rode in it in 1968, and then reported on it, Leblanc is able to reflect on organisational changes that have come about in the last thirty-five years. As the third most mediatised sports event world-wide (after the football World Cup and the Olympic Games - both founded, also, by Frenchmen), the Tour illustrates the evolution of television, and has been in the vanguard of the increasingly close symbiotic relationship between sport and commerce. The Tour has always been seen as a vehicle for selling things, initially papers and bicycles, and later extra-sporting goods and services, with riders' more and more appearing like sandwich-board men, as the competing teams need sponsorship to exist just as the lavish television coverage is driven by the amount of support coming from advertisers and sponsors. What is interesting from a cultural point of view however is that French TV coverage has remained in the hands of the public service television channels rather than the private companies. Reviewing these themes, Leblanc addresses the issues of the increasing size of the event (financially, logistically, and from the security point of view) and the more recent doping 'affaires' and legal issues. He has particularly interesting insights into the changes in approach of modern-day sports reporters and the relations between the written press and television.

Philippe Gaboriau looks at the origins of the Tour and its founding years, detailing the role of the press and particularly of course of the sports daily, *L'Auto*, and its editor Henri Desgrange and his chief cycling reporter Géo Lefèvre, in their circulation war with the rival *Le Vélo*. He also looks at the early image of the Tour in numerous passages of purple prose quoted from the sports papers of the day. It emerges, from the narratives that stress the heroic character of the riders' battle with nature, that some enduring traditions were firmly

established before the First World War: the enormous numbers of spectators who lined the route, the desire of riders to be well placed when going through their home town or village, its essentially popular attraction that made this free spectacle the working man's sport *par excellence*, and the self-consciously patriotic nature of the event as it traced and publicised the nation's boundaries and iconic places, while visiting the home areas of the spectators. The Tour as a marriage of bicycle, sport and popular mass-circulation press is seen as essentially carrying modernist values to deepest France.

Christopher Thompson's look at the history of the Tour in the inter-war years situates the Tour within the ideological debates of the time. He takes the case of the French champion Henri Pélissier, the most celebrated rider of his era, who abandoned the race in 1924 in a protest that became a *cause célèbre*, particularly as it was famously written up by the writer-journalist Albert Londres under the idea of the Tour riders being *forçats de la route* (convict labourers of the road). It was also taken up by the Communist press, who compared the treatment of professional Tour riders by the commercially driven race organisers to the exploitation of workers in general in capitalist society. Thompson examines this debate which was also about views of the modernisation of industrial society, Taylorist working patterns and new views of the human body as machine. Thompson finally examines the contradiction posed to the organisers who understood the widespread appeal of the race was the heroic challenge it presented to competitors, while also making the organisers vulnerable to charges of bourgeois exploitation of working class athletes. The Tour thus found itself at the centre of the great social and political debates of the inter-war years

Eric Reed presents a history of the business side of the Tour and the modernisation over more recent years of the economic aspects of a competition that was created from the start as a commercial, for-profit event but which had important cultural ramifications: At the intersection of business and culture, the Tour's evolution is an example of how commercial interests have shaped France's mass culture in the twentieth century. Reed looks finally at

the transformation of the Tour into an international commercial phenomenon illuminating the French relationship to cultural and commercial globalisation.

The important impact of television on the Tour is examined in detail by Fabien Wille. He looks particularly at how the Tour has been an agent of change in media production in France. Part of the chapter is a history of the changing technologies and logistics of reporting and covering the race - which was seen by French television as a test bench for outside broadcasting techniques and innovations in sports reporters' professional practice. The other aspect of this chapter examines how modern audiovisual media adapted their coverage to reflect the major attraction of the Tour – its capacity to create heroes and recount epic struggles. The Tour is after all an itinerant competition that hardly any spectator sees live more than fleetingly and whose very invisibility encouraged sports writing based on imagination and fostering myth and legend. How did television combine realism and imagination into the gripping annual three-week Odyssey that it has become?

## **6.2 Meanings, Metaphors and Values**

Issues raised by Wille bring us straight into the cultural issues associated with the Tour de France. Christophe Campos shows how the Tour has been an important (ideological) vehicle defining French identity. The five million French citizens who annually turn out in their village or go to a nearby or distant vantage point to watch the peloton pass when they could see the race better on television are well aware that they are participating in a celebration as much as a sporting event. After looking at earlier national 'tours de France' – from Royal tours to craftsmen's tours in the Middle Ages and the famous late-nineteenth century school textbook featuring two French children's in search for their identity, Campos uses the metaphor of an annual 'beating the bounds' to clarify the cultural origins and the contemporary importance of the Tour to ordinary French men and women.

The Tour also produces cultural icons, media stars and heroes who stand for different aspects of French identity. Hugh Dauncey examines the key French sporting heroes to have emerged from the Tour. He looks particularly at the images and careers of four post-second-world-war cyclists who are still the benchmarks for the mythical future French winner of the Tour: Bobet, Anquetil, Hinault and the eternal second, Poulidor, whose status as French sporting hero is all the more important culturally for his never having worn the famous yellow jersey. Their heroic status is discussed as representative of their eras.

If the media coverage of the Tour helps create icons of French identity, then the reception of foreign stars sheds light on French attitudes to its neighbours, another way of defining identity. John Marks looks at the way the Tour has become internationalised and studies in some detail how the Italian Fausto Coppi and the English rider Tom Simpson were integrated into the Tour and its system of values. He situates their star status within the framework of the French desire to integrate into the democratic and forward-looking 'European' project that the Tour implicitly supports and symbolises. As the wider internationalisation of the Tour gathered pace in the 1980s, Marks studies the difficulty of American riders to fit into this framework, raising the issue of French attitudes to globalisation in general.

Doping or drug-taking has been an issue in different eras of the Tour. Simpson's death in 1967 was attributed partly to drug abuse and led the Tour organisers to institute regular drug testing. The 1998 Festina 'affaire' was the Tour's lowest point in recent years as Leblanc evokes in the interview mentioned above. Patrick Mignon examines the politics and ethics of performance enhancement with particular reference to the post-Festina period of the Tour.

The final chapter by Jean-François Polo looks at how the Tour, as media coverage of the competition has grown, has been increasingly 'ambushed' by supporters of political and social causes. He identifies however the limits of such disruptions of the race that protesters ignore at their peril, limits governed by the Tour de France's very popularity and iconic status

particularly among the French working class. This gives trades union protesters, for example, a fine tightrope to tread in using the Tour as a sounding board for their own causes. Polo show too the various ways the Tour organisers have attempted to cope with potential disruptions, for example by incorporation of trades union organisations into the Tour caravan.

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The authors of this book on the Tour's centenary have had to complete their work some months in advance of the peloton once again leaving the Réveil-Matin café at Montgeron. Other studies of the Tour will doubt emerge in the meantime before the book sees the light of day which we would have wished to take into account. What seems clear however is that the 2003 celebratory circuit will tour a France which is now securely committed to a European future, where questions of identity are more concerned with ethnicity than with regions, and where the idea of the Republic is more in need of renovation than construction. We can only hope that the Centenary Tour will be neither a Tour of Shame nor, too much, a Tour of Suffering, although the pre-modern gladiatorial contest has always been a pre-requisite for the creation of heroes that has made the Tour so popular. New French identities and political aspirations doubtless suggest that the improbability of a French winner will not be too traumatic for French followers who turn out in their thousands along the route. Initially a symbol of industrialised modernity, but always a commercially oriented media creation, the Tour is now firmly set in a post-modern context, and exists more on television than in the two-minute bubble that floats seamlessly along French roads. If - as everyone suspects - Lance Armstrong equals Indurain's record of five successive Tour wins, it will be interesting to see how such a heroic exploit is received by a French audience that has so far appeared as reluctant to accept American domination of a globalised economy as American domination of what - even in the twenty-first century - they still consider *their* race.

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## Notes and references

- <sup>1</sup> Space here precludes a more detailed discussion either of the complexities of nationalism, republicanism and anti-republicanism in late-nineteenth century France or of the ways in which French sporting heroes are perceived. However, the success of the multi-ethnic French national soccer team in the 1998 World Cup gave rise to much debate over the values represented by soccer players of immigrant origin, some of which issues are discussed in H. Dauncey and G. Hare (eds) *France and the 1998 World Cup: The National Impact of a World Sporting Event* (London: Frank Cass 1999), translated as *Les Français et la coupe du monde* (Paris: Nouveau monde, 2002).
- <sup>2</sup> G. Vigarello, 'Le Tour de France', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Volume II, *Les Traditions*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1992). Translated as *Realms of memory: rethinking the French past* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1997), volume 2, p. 471.
- <sup>3</sup> 'La course, nous ne pouvions pas - les règlements sont ce qu'ils sont - et nous ne voulions pas non plus la révolutionner, briser ses équilibres et sa logique qui participent à sa crédibilité : il n'y aura pas plus de montagne, ni moins de contre la montre ; pas de longueurs intempestives ni de difficultés excessives. Les temps sont à la mesure et à la raison. C'est ce qu'on attend du Tour de France aujourd'hui, dans le droit fil de l'éthique sportive, qu'il ne convient pas de provoquer, au profit du seul attrait du spectacle.' See <http://www.letour.fr/2003/presentationfr/index.html>
- <sup>4</sup> G. Vigarello, 'Le Tour de France', in P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, Volume II, *Les Traditions*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. 481.
- <sup>5</sup> G. Vigarello, *Passion sport. Histoire d'une culture*, Paris: Editions textuel, 2000, p. 123.
- <sup>6</sup> G. Fife, *Tour de France*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2002, first edition 1999), p. 112.
- <sup>7</sup> G. Vigarello, *Passion sport*, pp. 136-137.
- <sup>8</sup> See J. Marchand's biography *Jacques Goddet*, (Anglet Atlantica, 2002), and F. Pierre, 'Le journal l'Auto sous l'Occupation (1940-1944)' Maîtrise (MA) thesis, Université de Bourgogne, cited by Marchand pp. 53-64.
- <sup>9</sup> Marchand, op. cit. pp. 72-77.

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- <sup>10</sup> Marchand, op. cit. p. 126, and 137-156 on the relationship of Goddet and Lévitan.
- <sup>11</sup> Marchand op. cit. p. 150.
- <sup>12</sup> R. Holt, J. A. Mangan and P. Lanfranchi (eds) *European Heroes: Myth, Identity, Sport* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).
- <sup>13</sup> G. Vigarello, 'The Tour de France', p. 487.
- <sup>14</sup> C. Pociello, *Les cultures sportives : pratiques, représentations et mythes sportifs* (Paris: PUF, 1995), p. 118.
- <sup>15</sup> Most recently, the Tour has, recently, become an object of interest to media studies researchers in France. In *Réseaux* (1993, issue no. 57.), B. Grevisse looked at narrative technique and identity in media coverage of the Tour. Fabien Wille's doctoral thesis in Nanterre University's Info-Com Department, took the Tour de France as a case study of the way televised sport drives change within television production. A number of publications have emerged from Wille's work - one, on the evolution of media coverage of the Tour, in P. Gabaston and B. Leconte (eds), *Sports et télévision, regards croisés* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), which also contains articles on television coverage of the doping scandals (A. Arnaud and M. Chandelier), and on the fine detail of TV coverage of a stage of the Tour (B. Leconte).
- <sup>16</sup> R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957). Translated 1972 (by Annette Lavers) as *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape), but as a selection without the essay on the Tour de France...
- <sup>17</sup> See for example E. Weber, 'Pierre de Coubertin and the Introduction of organised Sport into France', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5(2) (1970), pp. 3-26, and 'Gymnastics and Sports in fin-de-siècle France: opium of the classes', *American Historical Review*, 76 (February 1971), pp. 70-98.
- <sup>18</sup> E. Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambs. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), chapter 10, pp. 195-212. See also E. Weber, 'La petite Reine', prologue in P. Arnaud and J. Camy (eds) *La Naissance du mouvement sportif associatif en France: sociabilité et formes de pratiques sportives* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1986), pp. 11-25.
- <sup>19</sup> Vigarello, 'Le Tour de France', pp. 469-70
- <sup>20</sup> P. Gaboriau, *Le Tour de France et le vélo : histoire sociale d'une épopée contemporaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).

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<sup>21</sup> Amongst other studies, interested readers should look at P. Gaboriau 'Le Vélo : lenteur des riches, vitesse des pauvres' in *Sport et Société* (Saint-Etienne: Université de Saint-Etienne/CIEREC, 1981), pp. 153-162., 'L'Auto et le Tour de France. Regard critique sur l'histoire du cyclisme et l'année 1903' in T. Terret (ed.), *Histoire des sports* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), pp. 39-49., and 'Sport et culture populaire : le Tour de France cycliste', *Histoire sociale des pratiques sportives* no. 8, (Paris: INSEP, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> P. Boury, *La France du Tour : Le Tour de France - un espace sportif à géométrie variable* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997)