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Intimations of Postmodernity in Sports Tourism at the Tour de France

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Abstract

Despite the burgeoning literature on sports tourism research in the area is dominated by descriptive and anachronistic typologies. Consequently, some scholars have called for greater connectivities between sports tourism and related academic specialities. Accordingly, this paper uses a case-study of the 2011 Tour de France to suggest how sports tourism research can benefit from the sociological perspective of postmodernism. We support our argument by focusing on processes of embodied subjectivities and perceived authenticity among members of a commercially organised cycling and spectating trip.

Keywords: sports tourism, Tour de France, ethnography, dedifferentiation, postmodernism, authenticity, mobile subjectivities, embodiment, liquid modernity

Introduction and Objectives

Sports tourism has an ambiguous academic status. It has a specialist journal (*Journal of Sport & Tourism*), dedicated textbooks (Higham & Hinch, 2009; Standeven & DeKnop, 1999; Weed & Bull, 2009) and logical affinities with cultural studies, cultural geography, sociology of sport and tourism studies. Although the latter fields are characterised by theoretically informed empirical studies of postmodern identities and relations, sports tourism research is dominated by descriptive and anachronistic typologies. Consequently, some scholars have called for greater connectivities between sports tourism and related academic specialities (Gibson, 2004; Weed, 2005; Weed & Bull, 2009). In this paper we use a case study of sports tourists' experiences of the 2011 Tour de France via an organised cycling and spectating tour to suggest how a postmodern outlook can advance knowledge about sports tourism practices.

The possibilities for applying postmodernist concepts to this context is quite broad, and could extend to perceived authenticity, subjectivities, embodiment, mediation, nostalgia, purity, and grazing behaviour. However, we can only effectively cover a narrow spectrum of concepts in this paper. Our approach is suggestive rather than prescriptive in that we examine two interlinked processes that were deemed most salient to the context of this research: *mobile subjectivities* and *perceived authenticity*. As will be shown, mobility underpinned the Tour de France as a fluid sporting phenomenon that traverses the French landscape. Concomitantly, mobility inherent in the case study tour itinerary also facilitated the participants' perceptions of authenticity relating to the Tour de France.

Literature Review

Postmodern Tourism

We cannot investigate in detail myriad debates surrounding contested concepts like ‘detraditionalisation’, ‘modernity’, ‘late modernity’, ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodernity’ (for erudite overviews see Featherstone, 2007; Heelas, Lash & Morris, 1996). However, we contend that both Bauman’s (1996a, 1996b, 1997, 2004, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2011) sociological perspective on ‘liquid modernity’ and the ‘coexistence thesis’ of detraditionalisation (Heelas et al., 1996; Luke, 1996; Thompson, 1996) are vital for understanding the global dynamics of contemporary tourism. A fundamental feature of Bauman’s oeuvre is his contrast between everyday life under ‘solid modernity’ and ‘liquid modernity’. In the former context, social identities and relations are relatively fixed, while in the latter milieu they tend to be fluid, accelerated, contingent, disposable, and fragmented:

... if the *modern* ‘problem of identity’ was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *postmodern* ‘problem of identity’ is primarily how to avoid fixation, and keep the options open. In the case of identity, as in other cases, the catchword of modernity was creation; the catchword of postmodernity is recycling (Bauman, 1996a, p. 18).

Bauman has frequently used evocative metaphors of travel and tourism to contrast daily life in modernity and postmodernity. An example is his concepts of the *pilgrim syndrome* and the *tourist syndrome*. In a pilgrimage, ‘the significance of every stage is derived fully from the diminishing distance separating the traveller from the previously selected destination’ (Franklin, 2003, p. 200). By contrast, the *tourist syndrome* is characterised by a pattern of ‘looseness’, ‘grazing behaviour’ and ‘frailty’ (Franklin, 2003, pp. 207-209; also see Heimtun, 2007). Bauman elaborated that:

When speaking of the ‘tourists’ or ‘tourism’ as metaphors of contemporary life, I have in mind certain aspects of the tourist condition and/or experience – like

being in a place temporarily and knowing it, not belonging to the place, not locked into the local life ... That condition is shared with the modality of ordinary daily life, with the way we are all 'inserted' in the company of others everywhere – in places where we live or work; not only during the summer holidays, but seven days a week, all year round, year by year. It is that characteristic of contemporary life to which I primarily refer when speaking of *the tourist syndrome*. (Franklin, 2003, p. 207).

This 'touristification of everyday life' (Franklin, 2003, p. 206) typifies the broader pattern of *dedifferentiation*: the disintegration, blurring and merging of spheres that were once relatively autonomous (Lash, 1990). For instance, Franklin and Crang (2001) noted that:

Tourism is no longer a specialist consumer product or mode of consumption ... [it] has broken away from its beginnings as a relatively minor and ephemeral ritual of modern national life to become a significant modality through which transnational modern life is organized ... tourism is now such a significant dimension to global social life that it can no longer be conceived of as merely what happens at self-styled tourist sites and encounters involving tourists away from home (p. 6).

However, some scholars caution that such trends do not necessarily signal the end of traditional customs. In proposing a coexistence thesis of detraditionalisation, Luke (1996) and Thompson (1996) argued that ontological oppositions like old/new, past/present, traditional/modern and authentic/artificial have become increasingly obsolete in mass-mediated societies where citizens constantly challenge and modify conventional beliefs and practices. But they also pointed out that traditional and modern patterns can be coextensive. According to Luke (1996),

'there are actual intra-plays of many other identities and differences in which one finds tradition-in-modernity or modernity-as-tradition' (p. 120). Similarly, Thompson (1996) argued that, 'Tradition is not necessarily abandoned in the quest for "bread and enlightenment" but is, on the contrary, reshaped, transformed, and perhaps even strengthened through the encounter' (p. 103). This coexistence standpoint has obvious implications for understanding how tourists experience authenticity. For instance, Thompson (1996) asserted that:

... traditions which rely heavily on mediated symbolic forms are not *ipso facto* less authentic than those which are transmitted through face- to-face interaction ... the uprooting and re-mooring of traditions does not necessarily render them inauthentic ... (p. 103).

Correspondingly, Luke (1996) claims that, 'people construct tradition and modernity in thought, speech, feeling, and action, whose authenticity can be judged only in these actually lived terms' (p. 120). The use of up-to-date technologies, especially communication apparatuses and networks like mobile phones, PCs, DVD players, social media sites, tablets, GPS devices and travel blogs, has been integral to changing perceptions of authenticity (Månsson, 2011). Thus Urry and Larsen (2011) argued that the long-established practice of sightseeing is now part of a fluid visual regime that includes the *romantic gaze*, the *spectatorial gaze*, the *anthropological gaze*, the *reverential gaze*, the *environmental gaze*, the *mediatized gaze*, the *family gaze*, the *collective* tourist gaze and the *photographic gaze*. Thus, people go to 'retro' baseball parks, attend 'legends' games, participate in online fantasy sports leagues, visit sporting museums and halls of fame, drink at nostalgia-themed sports bars, participate in memorabilia fairs, embark on dedicated sports tours and shop at *Niketown*. Such activities are undoubtedly motivated by

connections with tradition, given people's fascination with old uniforms, equipment, trophies, photos, film clips and sporting 'cathedrals'. But such visitors also have complex motivations and expectations and their interpretations of nostalgia and tradition are mediated by sophisticated technologies (e.g., interactives, large plasma TV screens, replicas, simulations and multimedia exhibits).

Postmodern Sports Tourism: Missing In Action

With a few notable exceptions (Arnould & Price, 1993; Berger, Greenspan & Kohn, 2007; Cloke & Perkins, 1998; Higham & Hinch, 2009; Sheehan, 2006; Spinney, 2006) there has been scant research on postmodernism in sports tourism experiences. In an evaluation of sports tourism research published between 2000 and 2004, Weed (2006) reported that no studies had taken a postmodernist perspective *per se* and research had concentrated on the 'what' instead of the 'why' of sports tourism practices. Bouchet, Lebrun and Auvergne (2004) authored one of the few discussions linking sports tourism and postmodernism. They argued that the supply side of sports tourism had failed to keep pace with the self-actualising, individualistic and diversified needs of contemporary sports tourists. They also identified two sub-groups of postmodern sport tourists. These included passive observers, who visited 'infrequently travelled regions in order to appreciate the culture, the beauty of nature and its surroundings and to provide a change from daily routines' (p. 129). There also were physically active sports tourists, whose travel was geared around relieving stress by visiting 'a paradisiacal and contrasted environment' (p. 129). However, they offered no empirical support for their binary model.

Bouchet et al.'s (2004) dichotomy also exemplifies another problem with sports tourism research: a fixation with abstract typologies that construct active and

passive sports tourism as mutually exclusive modes. Standeven and De Knop (1999), for instance, proposed a typology in which 'sport tourists may be *active* or *passive*' (p. 12, emphasis in original), thus negating a combination of both experiences. Gibson's (1998) review of sports tourism research led her to conclude that there were 'three distinct types of behaviour associated with sport tourism' (p. 49): active sport tourism, event sport tourism (as a passive spectator) and nostalgia sport tourism. Although Gibson acknowledged that relationships may exist between these three forms in speculating that, 'One might ask ... whether active sport tourists are likely to be event sport tourists and nostalgia sport tourists, and vice versa' (p. 63), the notion of integrated active and passive participation in sports tourism has gone largely unnoticed to date. Gibson's conceptualisation has attracted some attention with Fairley (2003) drawing on her framework in a study of nostalgia sports tourism and Ritchie and Adair (2004) adopting her trichotomy in their sports tourism text. However, Weed (2005) argued that sports tourists perceive themselves to be more than passive spectators because of their interactions with both active and passive co-participants. Weed and Bull (2009) maintained that *vicarious* participation involves conceptualising sports tourism as a highly heterogeneous activity, making 'activity-based models problematic, as it becomes increasingly difficult to include the full range of issues within a model that is simple enough to be useful' (p. 111).

We agree that one-dimensional models are inadequate for capturing the complex repertoire of sports tourism experiences. Consider amateurs and professionals competing in running events, with the New York and London Marathons being examples of events likely to attract high proportions of runners who are tourists. Whilst participating in their dedicated segment of the event, amateurs can also glimpse elite runners, especially on out-and-back courses. Thus it is

possible for amateurs to assume a dual role: primarily as active participants and secondarily as on-course spectators. Moreover, runners can also be tourists (Sheehan, 2006).

Research from a variety of contexts and disciplines – battlefields (Hannaford & Newton, 2008), museums (Chronis, 2006), gastronomic tourism (Everett, 2008), resorts (Andrews, 2005), music tourism (Saldanha, 2002) and adventure activities (Arnould & Price, 1993; Cloke & Perkins 1998; Kane & Zink, 2004) – has elucidated how postmodern subjectivities are *embodied* via seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching artefacts and people. As Crouch (2000) indicated in his 'lay geographies' approach to leisure and tourism, such embodied practices are both complex and heterogeneous:

'Embodiment' is a process of experiencing, making sense, knowing through practise as a sensual human subject in the world. The subject engages space and space becomes embodied in three ways. First, the person grasps the world multi-sensually. Second, the body is 'surrounded' by space and encounters it multi-dimensionally. Third, through the body the individual expresses him/herself through the surrounding space and thereby changes its meaning (p. 63).

Sociologists have also demonstrated numerous ways whereby sporting and recreational bodies are both mediated by, and produce, postmodern representations, lifestyles and identities (Atkinson, 2008; Brevik, 2010; Butryn & Masucci, 2003; Sparkes, 2004; Woodward, 2009). Yet embodiment has received meagre attention in sports tourism research. A noteworthy and relevant exception is Spinney's (2006) 'kinaesthetic ethnography' of ascending the legendary Tour de France mountain, Mont Ventoux. Using concepts from cultural geography, philosophy, history, tourism

studies, phenomenology, semiotics, postmodern anthropology and sociology, Spinney explained how multifaceted interactions among bodies, landscape, mobility and representations constructed a heightened sensory immersion in this iconic and formidable landmark of the Tour de France.

Myriad modes of mobility also have a profound influence on postmodern tourists' experiences. According to Urry (2002, p. 256), 'being "on the move" is a "way of life" for many' and he uses the term 'hypermobility' to emphasise both the scale and intensity of contemporary travel. He also illustrates how experiences are determined by the bodily demands of what he designates as 'face-to-face', 'face-the-place' and 'face-the moment' contexts. Similarly, Hutchins (2012) has shown how sport is also 'on the move' with mobile and wireless communication technologies transforming in complex and sometimes capricious ways both how and where consumers access their information about sport. However, we know little about how these fluid relationships among between physical motility and mobile technocultures operate among sports tourists.

We will return to these processes of dedifferentiation, authenticity, embodiment, mobility and visual consumption in our analysis and discussion, but at this point it is important to note that 'postmodern tourists' (or 'post-tourists') tend to be affluent, mobile, reflexive and technologically-savvy consumers with fluid subjectivities (Allon, Anderson & Bushell, 2008, Jansson, 2007; Molz, 2010; Muzaini, Teo & Yeoh, 2007; Munt, 1994). For instance, some people begin battlefield excursions as tourists but wind up as secular pilgrims who empathise with former enemies (Gatewood & Cameron 2004; Hannaford & Newton 2008; West 2008), while others undertake tours that combine elements of travel, sporting competition, 'dark' tourism, intercultural understanding and humanitarianism (Berger et al., 2007;

McKay, in press). Crouch and Desforges (2004) encapsulated this fluid and reflexive postmodern scenario in stating that, 'the tourist is not only "a tourist" and draws upon complex significations in her/his practice of space through events and encounters' (p. 10). We now turn to our case-study of sports tourists seeking to experience the 2011 Tour de France.

Methods

The core purpose of this study was to generate empirically derived understandings of sports tourism participation from a postmodernist perspective. Consequently, the study was informed by the constructivist paradigm. This approach to producing scientific knowledge is based around a relativist ontology, under which multiple, subjective realities are acknowledged as constructed by individuals, all of which are equally valid (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivist research uses an inductive logic to generate theory, and research is conducted in natural settings where the researcher and participant(s) co-create understandings (Jennings, 2010).

In the present study, an ethnographic research design was adopted. Holloway, Brown and Shipway (2010) define ethnography as "... the description and interpretation of a culture or social group; its aim is to understand social reality by focusing on ordinary, everyday behaviour, and to provide an in-depth study of a culture" (p. 76). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) have noted the usefulness of this approach in studying the actions of people in their ordinary, naturalistic contexts. They further explain that ethnographers overtly or covertly immerse themselves in people's daily lives, employing a range of methods to explore the phenomena under study. Given this study's focus on understanding sports tourism experiences in the context of a global sporting event, ethnography was deemed appropriate "because it explores the meanings of events for the participants who experience and are

involved in them” (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 82). Participant observation and in-depth interviews with sports tourists constituted the data collection methods in this study, the procedures associated with each are described below.

Study Context

The context of this study was a commercially organised coach tour encapsulating the final six stages of the 2011 Tour de France. The excursion was delivered by an organisation specialising in packaged tours to major participatory and hallmark sporting events worldwide. The company specialises in tours geared around cycling, running, triathlon and golf with an emphasis on active participation. Opportunities to participate actively in sport are also woven into the company’s itineraries of spectating tours to major sporting events.

The travel party, consisting of approximately eighty participants, initially met in Paris. They were then transported along with their bicycles by coach to the French Alps and accommodated in a ski lodge for five of the seven nights. In 2011, the Tour de France *peloton* traversed the country in an anti-clockwise direction so the four alpine stages were strategically positioned for a climactic end to the three weeks of racing. Consequently, participants were able to take in the decisive alpine stages, the final individual time trial in Grenoble and the final processional stage on the Champs Elysees in Paris.

Data Collection Methods: Participant Observation and In-Depth Interviews

After obtaining ethical clearance, permission to undertake the research was sought from the tour operator, who was fully cooperative. In their discussion of ethnographic research design, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stated that the researcher must

collect 'whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry' (p. 3). Therefore, data were collected using multiple methods, those being participant observation, and in-depth interviews with tour group members.

Participant observation. As an 'insider' and full-paying customer, the researcher participated in the full range of activities as fellow tour members. This included cycling excursions to various locations in the French Alps and visits to a range of Tour de France venues such as stage finishes, and key points along the race route. Consequently, the researcher participated as active cyclist, participating alongside fellow tour members in cycling excursions incorporating significant distances and difficult mountain climbs. This active participation as an insider is akin to the kinaesthetic ethnography described by Spinney (2006) in his account of cyclists on Mont Ventoux. He argued that embodied research is crucial to understanding human engagement with and movement through space, as this approach acknowledges the human body as "the primary repository of the sense organs" (p. 713).

Further, Spinney points to the advantages of this kinaesthetic, embodied and participatory approach in researching the experiences of cyclists in contrast to relying upon secondary, textual representations: "... this approach allowed an embodied and participatory interpretation where my whole body was employed in understanding the meanings of the ascent" (p. 716). In the present study, this participatory approach was useful in developing an empathetic understanding of the participants' experiences. The approach was also advantageous in developing rapport with prospective research participants, and provided contextual backdrops for discussion in subsequent in-depth interviews.

The researcher observed dynamics within the tour group, noting conversation themes during group rides, interactions between tour members, their behaviours in relation to engaging with the Tour de France, and reactions to pivotal moments during the tour (e.g. reaching the summit of significant mountain climbs). Contemporaneous notes were recorded during each day, which were summated into a detailed journal each evening. The researcher also reviewed photographs and video footage collected each day, and used voice recognition software to record his thoughts in a word processing document. This daily process allowed for detailed recollection of, and reflection upon each day's events.

In-depth interviews. Given Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) caution that successful ethnographies depend upon the researcher developing rapport with prospective research informants, an email from the researcher was forwarded to members by the tour operator one week prior to departure. This email introduced the researcher, the aims of the study, and sought to develop rapport by declaring the researcher's identity as a fellow cyclist.

Late in the tour, the researcher began approaching tour members with whom he had developed rapport and sought expressions of interest about being interviewed in-depth for the study. Most were enthusiastic and contact details for 19 tour members were obtained. A main goal of the study was to elicit participants' reflections about the excursion, however, most departed France immediately after the Tour de France's final stage. Consequently, two interviews were conducted on the final day and 11 after the tour, either face-to-face or by telephone/Skype. In an effort to overcome limitations of telephone interviews, the researcher also travelled interstate to interview four tour members who resided in Melbourne, Australia.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used, though conversations were allowed to deviate in order to explore emergent issues. Telephone interviews were significantly shorter than face-to-face interviews, attributable to an absence of verbal and visual cues (Amis, 2005). Moreover, interviews conducted with small groups (i.e. pairs) tended to generate the richest insights. Tour members were questioned about their motives for participating in the tour, their expectations and reactions, pivotal moments, treasured memories, and perceptions of seeing the Tour de France in person.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

In discussing participant recruitment, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) cautioned that ‘... access cannot be assumed to be available automatically, relations will have to be established, and identities co-constructed’ (p. 4). Indeed, only a limited window of opportunity presented late in the tour in which to recruit participants. Due to this temporal constraint, purposive selection of participants was prohibitive; therefore the style of sampling used is best described as convenience sampling.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using a three-stage coding procedure consisting of open, axial and selective coding (Neuman, 2006). Field notes documenting the researcher’s observations were subject to the same analysis procedures. In an effort to enhance trustworthiness of the data, a member-checking procedure (Merriam, 1998) was employed, in which a copy of the interview transcript was returned to each interviewee for verification. Interviewees were invited to add any additional information they felt was relevant. Since no feedback was received it was assumed that the transcripts were a true account of the issues discussed in each interview.

For this paper, data collected via in-depth interviews with 13 tour members constitute the primary source of evidence. Demographic information was collected by way of a brief questionnaire. However, two interviewees did not return their questionnaire. Eleven of the 13 cyclists were male and two were female. Among those who did return a questionnaire, their ages ranged between 23 and 57 with a mean of 43.5 years. Almost all interviewees had Anglo-Saxon backgrounds and were in professional occupations, although one was a retiree. The sample consisted of eight Australians, three British, one American, and one New Zealander. Five travelled on the tour individually, whilst the remainder travelled either as pairs or as part of a family group. All but one interviewee identified as a regular cyclist, with the mean length of involvement in cycling being 19 years. Although this sample was comprised of predominantly white, middle-class males, it is reflective of the socio-demographics of cycle tourists generally. Indeed, Lamont and Buultjens (2011) also found that that cycle tourists in Australia tend to be from middle to upper class professional backgrounds.

Analysis and Discussion

Context: The Tour de France as a Dedifferentiated Mega-event

The Tour de France was first held in 1903 as a vehicle for reinvigorating sales of the sports newspaper *l'Auto* (Amaury Sports Organisation, 2011). It has since developed into 'the largest annual sporting event in the world' (Bull & Lovell, 2007, p. 230), attracting two billion viewers in 175 countries and an estimated 12 to 15 million spectators, some of whom are tourists on numerous independent and packaged excursions (Amaury Sports Organisation, 2011; Lamont, 2009; Terret, 2005). The three-week, 3,600km professional cycling race involving approximately 180-190

male cyclists in 21 teams has also been called the 'most gruelling sporting event in the world' (Thompson, 2008, p. 140). The Tour de France is a good example of both coexistence and differentiation. According to Dauncey and Hare, (2003), it 'has been, is, and will be increasingly a "pre-modern" contest conveying "modern" values in a "post-modern" context' (p. 4). Dauncey and Hare and fellow historian Thompson (2008) have also shown how the Tour de France has evolved into a complex and contradictory amalgamation of various values and practices: an international sporting contest; a lucrative advertising, marketing and tourism event; a global media spectacle; a reinforcer of gender stereotypes; a symbol of suffering, nationalism, militarism, social class, social Darwinism, racial regeneration, and scientific and technological progress; and a site of worldwide moral panics about drugs and cheating (hence headlines like 'Tour de Farce' and 'Tour de Shame').

Likewise, Palmer's (1998, 2010) ethnographic work revealed the intricate and paradoxical nature of the Tour. She showed how *Le Tour* is an important national icon and vehicle for showcasing France to global audiences. Hosting a stage-start or finish of the Tour de France is so alluring that prospective communities must be prepared to heed organisers' directives to undertake extensive works, such as removing roundabouts and repaving poor road surfaces. However, this commitment means that communities undergo a process whereby civic space is re-ordered into 'Tour space' in preparation for the event (Palmer, 2010, p. 875). Structures are erected, including the *Village Depart* and *Salle de Presse* and roads and public spaces such as parks are embellished with sponsors' and Tour livery. Palmer (1998) concluded that, 'In every possible way, "normal" life is suspended or displaced to accommodate the "abnormality" of the Tour' (p. 268).

Palmer further argued that the Tour de France, and professional cycle racing in general, is a unique sporting event because of the closeness of spectators and competitors. Unlike sporting stadiums, the Tour de France takes place on closed public roads, meaning that it can 'be glimpsed, literally, from one's own doorstep' (Palmer, 1998, p. 267). This proximity of spectators and competitors, along with identities synonymous with the Tour de France add elements of the carnivalesque to the Tour de France. German bicycle designer Didi Senft, otherwise known as 'The Devil, is renowned for his trident-bearing roadside antics (see International Business Times, 2011). A search of Youtube.com for 'Dutch corner Alpe d'Huez' reveals around 60 videos documenting the spontaneous collective acts of thousands of Dutch spectators who camp and party on the Alpe d'Huez mountain, awaiting *Le Tour's* arrival. We now analyse how this differentiated context dovetailed with mobile subjectivities and perceived authenticity among the tour members.

Mobile Subjectivities

As Higham and Hinch (2009) note, 'The forces of accelerating globalization and heightened mobility have resulted in new forms of sports mobility' (p. 48). However, the role of mobility in subjectivities linked with sport, is to date, relatively unexplored. Yet in the present study, mobility was a fundamental aspect in the construction of the tourism experience among individual tour members at both a macro and micro level.

At a macro level, tour participants were initially mobile by virtue of having flown great distances to join the expedition. They were then inserted into a flexible itinerary. A unique aspect of the tour was the opportunity for members to be both participants and spectators throughout. Two chartered coaches each towed a custom-built trailer designed to carry approximately 40 fully-assembled bicycles in a secure, weather-proof encasement. This was advantageous because bicycles could

be stowed and retrieved on demand, without disassembling and packing them into individual travel cases, a time-consuming and tedious task. Members also had the daily opportunity to cycle either to a stage-finish town or a strategically selected point along that day's Tour route. As the tour predominantly took place in the French Alps, routes were typically mountainous and in some cases incorporated long, steep climbs that had featured in previous Tour courses. Upon reaching an agreed meeting point, the coach waited and became a transition point where participants changed, stowed their bicycle and switched from cyclists to spectators.

At a micro level, the tour company's mobile schema enabled participants to cycle parts of the official Tour de France route, including some of the hallowed alpine mountain passes that had constituted the course in previous years. Participants were therefore able to see the race entourage pass, along with its associated festivities, before being transported back to the hotel at day's end. However, there was no obligation for tour members to adhere to the published itinerary. Indeed, some took days away from the larger group to experience the Tour in their own way, for example, cycling famous mountain passes and thereby forfeiting opportunities to view the Tour de France *peloton*. Thus the tour was not just about cycling, seeing the race or engaging with French culture. Instead, a complex system of travel motives and strategies adopted by each individual member was evident, with individuals leveraging flexibility in the scheduled itinerary to construct customised experiences of the Tour de France. The following field notes excerpts provide insights into this system of motives and strategies:

The organised group ride was a ride from the hotel to Sestriere, one of the main climbs the professional cyclists would scale that day. This ride was a

distance of approximately 40 km, taking in the Col de Montgenevre, and Sestriere.

Many stopped for photographs with the official Tour embellishment that signified the top of the Col de Montgenevre [and for another] at the Italian border. Approximately halfway up the climb to Sestriere I came across an icon of the Tour: The Devil. He was extremely popular with every person walking past stopping and asking for a photo.

Upon reaching the summit of Sestriere climb, I arrived at the tour coach, left my bicycle in the trailer and went about getting changed out of my cycling clothes in preparation for the afternoon of spectating ahead. People were exchanging ideas about where they might view the race from, although people tended to go their own way once they had got changed and left the coach.

After waiting some time, the Tour publicity caravan began to weave its way up the mountain. The caravan was blaring music, and most vehicles were throwing promotional items to the crowd.

Approximately one hour after the publicity caravan had made its way through, aircraft began circling in the skies above signifying that the cyclists' arrival was imminent. Excitement amongst the crowd of a few hundred, intensified.

People started moving on to the road in search of a good vantage point.

As there were still approximately 60 km for the cyclists to reach the finish line, as soon as they had passed by us, there was a mass exodus off the mountain as spectators sought out bars or cafes that might be showing the remainder of the stage on TV (field notes, 20th July 2011).

Despite this flexibility, interviewees emphasised that opportunities to cycle *in situ* was a strong motive for joining the tour. As we shall see, whilst the high

mountains held a strong visual appeal, participants wanted to do more than gaze at other people, objects and sites; they also wanted to engage in authentic, individualised, self-actualising and mentally and physically challenging experiences. Tess explained that, '... for me it was a dual purpose; it wasn't just to go and observe the Tour and the athletes, it was also to see if I could do it.' Meanwhile, Michael noted that the physical difficulty inherent in climbing high mountains on a bicycle enabled a contrast between his physical capabilities as measured against professionals riding the Tour de France: 'You know what it's like when you're riding up the climbs. You see all the painting on the road and all the guys' [Tour de France cyclists] names, and you think how do the cyclists do this day after day?' Frank took a similar stance in his description of wanting to explore his physical limits through cycling the high mountains on this experience: 'I've not reached somewhere where I've had to push right into the depths of myself and try and approximate to what these guys are going through. I know the depths, I've not reached that yet.(David)

Indeed, this theme of kinaesthetic connection resonated with Spinney's (2006) argument that mediated representations are insufficient if one seeks to appreciate the brutal landscapes where heroes of *Le Tour* have carved out their reputations:

I knew that if I was to understand what Mont Ventoux meant to the cyclist, to uncover the nonreflexive and prerepresentational sensations and experiences of doing, I would have to go there, observe, talk, and ultimately participate in riding the mountain myself (p. 711).

Kinaesthetic submergence in the sportscape was expressed often as both a motive for participating in the tour and as a vehicle through which satisfaction and fulfilment could be derived. Given that the expedition took place in the French Alps, mountain passes where professionals had etched their name into Tour de France

history featured prominently in members' experiences. Much attention was focused on the legendary mountains Alpe d'Huez and Col du Galibier. Both climbs were expected to, and in fact did, play a pivotal role in determining the overall winner of the 2011 event. Kevin stated that Alpe d'Huez was a notable attraction in his decision to attend this tour. However, passively experiencing this aspect of the Tour de France route as a spectator was insufficient. He felt the need to embody the climb by cycling to the summit, before watching the race unfold later in the day: 'It's that historic climb. Every time you see the Tour you always think about [Alpe] d'Huez ... it's just one of those climbs you watch everybody go, I just wanted to do it in real life and see how hard it actually was.'

Further, anticipation of cycling a legendary, mythical mountain pass was so important that some members were almost inconsolable when police closed the road to Col du Galibier due to snow on the day we were scheduled to ride it. Earl stated that cycling Galibier was going to be the highlight of his trip because of the mountain's historical significance: 'I'm very interested in cycling history and Tour [de France] history and the Galibier was literally going to be my high point, so it was a bitter disappointment.' These empirical insights lend further weight to the argument that the tourist gaze perspective is insufficient for analysing and understanding tourism experiences *per se* (e.g. see Andrews, 2005; Cloke & Perkins, 1998; Franklin & Crang, 2001; Perkins & Thorns, 2001). However, our insights suggest that the gaze perspective is especially deficient for understanding sports tourism experiences in which tourists assume multiple, reflexive roles, as evident in this tour, where participants actively sought embodied experiences through cycling, and also engaged in gazing behaviour as passive spectators of the Tour de France at other times.

Cycling some of the iconic mountains intensified some members' admiration for the professional racers. Earl stated that, 'it astounds me what they put themselves through and it is I feel, on the high cols that they are the ultimate test ... of mental strength because the terrain is so hostile.' Similarly, Craig was stunned that the record for ascending Alpe d'Huez by Italian Marco Pantani was so fast: '... my mind was wandering back to Pantani when he set the record in '97, I think it was. I was thinking "How did he get up here in 37 minutes?"' Spinney (2006) offered an explanation for understanding such motives by positioning pain as a necessary ingredient in masculinity, as evident in these tour members' desire to compare their ability with professional sportsmen, in which '... pain constructs the hero as part of masculine endeavour ... the meanings of the mountains proposed and circulated by events such as the Tour de France ... play upon narratives of man against nature and of the Olympian and masculine hero' (Spinney, 2006, p. 726).

However, comparing personal ability with the professional cyclists was not a motive for all. As Casey explained, 'I wasn't there to race. That's what the pros get paid for so I stopped a number of times to take photos, to ask other people to take photos ... I'm not going to regret I got up in 36 mins versus 42. I mean, who cares?' Participants also admired both the physical ability and mental toughness of the Tour de France cyclists, simultaneously gaining a deeper appreciation of the dangerous nature of their profession. Having embodied an alpine mountain descent for the first time, Mitchell came away with both an appreciation of the danger involved and the skills of the professional athletes:

... it was pretty scary riding down as well ... It was a bit more daunting than what I thought when we were descending, down the hairpins too ... When you see the guys descending you think they're pretty skilful for going down there

but seeing how quick they go down there without having to handle the brakes much and they're just flying through there is just ridiculous. One slight hiccup and you're off the side of the bloody mountain.

The dispersed and mobile aspects of the Tour mean that spectators often had to jockey with hundreds of other spectators and wait patiently roadside for a view, only to glimpse a blaze of cyclists and carbon fibre whiz by in a few seconds. Casey explained the dilemma:

One of the things, and I guess this comes from the experience, is that sometimes you can feel not connected to the race, whilst going on tour it becomes a part of you and even then you might not know who is actually leading.

Being technologically-savvy, however, Casey anticipated this problem. Typifying the trend among postmodern tourists to plan meticulously in order to maximise their experiences (e.g. see Molz, 2006), he hatched a sophisticated plan to overcome this constraint, drawing on his professional background in information technology:

... you can get a thing called a virtual private network which basically is the kind of thing that you would use if you were at home to connect to university, it's a tunnel to university. Well in this case it's a tunnel and I had one to the UK and one to Australia. I'd also research data plans on the phone over there to get an Orange [French telecommunications company] sim [card]. The point is in preparations I really wanted to get the English commentary because I love the Phil Liggett and Paul Sherwen commentary personally. Some people hate it, I love it. It makes me feel connected to the race and feel part of the race.

Casey's strategy, though by far the most sophisticated, was representative of attempts by many members to connect with the Tour de France in a mediated fashion. In fact, almost all members combined both direct and mediated ways experiencing the action. Internet-enabled mobile phones were used, but the most common of viewing the race 'live' was on TV sets in local bars and hotel lobbies.

In summary, throughout the itinerary tour members oscillated fluidly between kinaesthetic and (direct and mediated) spectating modalities. These multiple styles of touring both validated previously mediated experiences of the Tour de France in their home environments and facilitated individuals' construction of their experiences of the event as authentic or otherwise. This process subsequently feeds into our analysis of how the tour members perceived their experiences as authentic.

Perceived Authenticity

Tour members' accounts implied attaining an authentic experience as an underlying reason for participating in this tour. Indeed, most tour members spoke of having followed the Tour on TV for many years so there was a sense of excitement about seeing and cycling its landscape. Frank enunciated his desire to climb the Alpe d'Huez with its formidable 8.1% average and 21 switchback corners that have determined many outcomes of *Le Tour*:

I've been following the Tour de France on TV here since probably the late 80's and the two key greatest mountain stages always seemed to be [Mont] Ventoux and Alpe d'Huez. I think just the history about it, it just seems to have a real aura about it. And also [the] 21 switchbacks as well ... In terms of the experience of riding up, just the sheer numbers. It was just unbelievable how

many people were up there and also the Dutch village ... it's just got a real aura about it obviously. I just found that quite amazing (Frank).

Access to happenings 'behind the scenes' and encounters with Tour cyclists and identities also enhanced authenticity of the experience. Tess described how a happenstance encounter with well-known British cyclist Mark Cavendish injected an unexpected dose of genuineness into her experience:

... as we were walking past this hotel a car pulled up and Mark Cavendish came out. He was interested in getting into his hotel so it was neat because it was totally unexpected and I just saw this person, very famous person just walk right in front of me. Instantly when he came out tonnes of people wanted to get his autograph.

Of note was the energised atmosphere generated by large crowds of partisan spectators. As Earl noted, this atmosphere invoked feelings of 'being there', which enhanced his connectivity with the event. He felt that his direct connectivity with the Tour de France was superior to watching televised reproductions, which is often accompanied by limited interaction with others: 'there is an atmosphere; going around Bend 7 on Alpe d'Huez, Dutch Corner and it is a great experience which you won't get on TV. Casey also likened the atmosphere on Alpe d'Huez waiting for the Tour *peloton* as party-like:

... there are so many people there; they're partying, they're drinking, it's a good atmosphere, everyone's happy, everyone's in a good mood, there's always a party atmosphere.

Indeed, that tour members were able to cycle on some of the roads comprising the Tour de France route further evoked feelings of authenticity. Cycling underneath banners and past other embellishments of 'Tour space' signified to

members that they were experiencing the event first-hand. For example, Michael explained that cycling past a number of official markers along the route which the professionals would take later that day, evoked feelings of authenticity for him: 'Especially where it had the banners up, "three kilometers to go", [to] arrive and all that. That was really nice'.

Alternatively, Leigh explained that the animated atmosphere mentioned previously, enhanced feelings of authenticity for him:

It was just cool to be riding up a hill with 100,000 other people. It's just crazy being in the middle of nowhere riding up a mountain and riding down a mountain after Alpe d'Huez, after we rode up to the summit and being at walking pace because there were so many people riding up.

These fluid and multiple touring modes produced rich, multidimensional experiences and a heightened connectivity with the Tour de France. For many interviewees, this was their first time seeing the event live after many years of following it on TV and via other media resources. Thus Carl affirmed that attending the Tour the company of 'kindred spirits of people who are also interested in cycling' was an attraction. For most members, the camaraderie and kinaesthetic and mediated immersion in the Tour evoked feelings of immediacy and belonging:

You were actually part of that Tour. You felt part of the race because it was happening there in front of you and you had all the interaction with whoever and you were talking about it at night and thinks like that. To me it felt I was part of the race in that perspective. You weren't a million miles away just watching it on TV by yourself is how I tend to view it. Sitting up late at night in my bedroom and watching it by myself with no interaction with anyone else. (Mitchell).

In summary, manifestations of authenticity in this study can be understood in terms of constructive authenticity. Wang (1999) describes this perspective as taking a constructivist view in stating, 'For constructivists, multiple and plural meanings of an about the same things can be constructed from different perspectives, and people may adopt different constructed meanings dependent on the particular contextual situation or intersubjective setting' (p. 354). Indeed, perceptions of authenticity among those interviewed were highly heterogeneous. Some emphasised kinaesthetically connecting with the Tour de France sportscape as evoking the most intense feelings of authenticity, while others identified chance encounters with Tour de France identities as the constituents of authenticity for them. Further, media representations clearly influenced their constructions of authenticity by shaping preconceived notions about the reality of the Tour de France.

Conclusion and Implications

In this article we argued that the static dichotomies and taxonomies that dominate sports tourism research are inadequate for capturing the fluid identities and relations characteristic of postmodern tourism. We contended that like virtually all forms of tourism, sports tourism has become increasingly dedifferentiated and globalised in order to cater for affluent, mobile, reflexive and technophilic consumers. We also maintained that sports tourism research has largely ignored the key role that embodiment plays in tourists' experiences. As an alternative to this moribund situation, we suggested that a postmodern perspective is better suited to studying contemporary tourists' identities and relations. We supported our claims by an empirical case-study of sports tourists experiencing the Tour de France. We showed how a motile and multinational group of cycling tourists segued smoothly into a

flexible itinerary, alternated fluidly between kinaesthetic and gazing modalities and combined traditional and postmodern practices to obtain what they perceived to be authentic experiences.

We conclude by reemphasising the need for closer links between sports tourism and other academic specialities and encouraging researchers to use postmodern sociological viewpoints to investigate sports tourists in other contexts. This could involve, for instance, further studies of touristification, globalization, dedifferentiation, coexistence, embodiment, mediations, use of communication technologies and various forms of gazing. Moreover, we could only deal with a few postmodernism concepts, while Bauman's work alone is redolent with themes directly relevant to sports tourism (e.g., mixophobia and mixophilia, social inequalities, ethics, morality, re-enchantment, waste). Summarily, in a state-of-the-field article about tourism studies Franklin and Cragg (2001) asserted that, 'It seems all too clear that the theoretical net needs to be cast much wider so that tourist studies is constantly renewed by developments in social and cultural theory and theory from other disciplines' (p. 6). Over a decade later this advice is still very apposite to sports tourism research.

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