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Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class: the Victorian Mountaineers

David Robbins

Introduction

Recently there has been an increasing interest in the middle class. Theoretically, this has taken the form of attempts to develop class theory in order to better 'place' different white-collar workers in relation to the two fundamental classes of industrial capitalism (Poulantzas, 1975; Wright, 1978; Abercrombie and Urry, 1983). Empirically, a concern with middle-class social and political movements has been noticeable (Parkin, 1968; King and Nugent, 1979; Cotgrove and Duff, 1980). Despite this, the middle class is still much less studied than the working class and, in particular, middle-class culture remains largely unexplored territory. Despite a growing recognition of the diversity of the contemporary middle class (Bechhofer et al., 1983) many introductory sociology texts continue to give the impression that middle-class culture is adequately portrayed as the secularized version of the protestant ethic originally outlined by Weber. Explanations of contemporary middle-class culture appear to be largely limited to the examination of political values (King and Nugent, 1979; Cotgrove and Duff, 1980), to journalistic ethnography (Deverson and Lindsay, 1975) or to the study of the lifestyle of particular occupational groups (Pahl and Pahl, 1971). In historical work the same pattern is repeated. Social historians and sociologists have had more to say about the culture of the nineteenth century working class than that of the middle class in the same period. Explorations of middle class culture have remained the province of historians of ideas and art who have, traditionally, provided accounts of intellectual and artistic movements which decontextualize them from the 'lived culture' of their creators.[1]

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Sport, Culture and Hegemony

This relative neglect of middle-class culture extends to the study of sport, leisure and recreation and is the more surprising given the growth of an impressive literature dealing with the social history of popular culture in general, and sport and recreation in particular (e.g. Bailey, 1978; Cunningham, 1980; Walvin, 1978). In that much of this literature adopts a 'cultural studies' approach it marks a considerable advance in the sociological study of sport. Its strengths are several.

First, it treats sport as culture, insisting, unlike much policy-oriented leisure research, on the importance of its symbolic dimension: the meanings that sport signifies to both participants and spectators.

Second, sport is placed firmly within the context of class relations. Preferences for watching or participating in different sports vary with class and are significant features of class cultures. Conversely, however, sport may be an arena in which members of different classes and class factions come together, giving rise to relations characterized by varying degrees of co-operation and conflict. Drawing on Gramsci's work, the cultural studies approach directs attention to the contribution that sport may make towards securing bourgeois hegemony. Hegemony is secured in sports, as elsewhere in civil society, through the coming together of the classes under the institutional and cultural leadership of alliances of middle- and upper-class fractions. At the same time attention is drawn to the difficulties of articulating working-class interests to those of the rest of the 'historic bloc', the consequent contradictions within the ideologies that underpin bourgeois leadership and the continuing tensions and conflicts that result.

This appropriation and development of Gramsci's ideas has helped to lessen, if not entirely avoid, two of the more problematic aspects of cruder forms of Marxist analysis: determinism and class reductionism. Emphasis on the conflicting and potentially contradictory meanings signified by sport means that it cannot be dismissed as an ideological state apparatus which necessarily programmes participants for their place in the mode of production (Althusser, 1971; Brohm, 1978; Rigauer, 1981). Nor, given that the mass sports have been shaped over time by a process of compromise between a variety of interest groups, can they be interpreted as the straightforward manifestation of the interests of a particular class (c.f. Hoch, 1972).

More generally, the Gramscian approach has important implications for the study of sport as culture, since much existing work tends to overemphasize the coherence, uniformity and 'one-dimensionality' of sport subcultures. In non-Marxist analyses this typically takes the form of aligning subcultures either with or against mainstream 'respectable' culture. Pearson's (1969) study of the cultures of surf lifesavers and surfboard riders in Australia provides a typical example. The former are portrayed as competitive, masculine, instrumentally oriented to nature and are, therefore, in tune with the dominant culture. In contrast, the surfboard riders are hedonistic, non-competitive, reject masculine stereotypes, take an aesthetic view of nature and thus constitute a part of the counterculture. This tendency to emphasize the homogeneity of sport and leisure subcultures is also evident in those Marxist analyses criticized by Stedman-Jones (1983) in which they are seen either as manifestations of social control or, conversely, as forms of class expression. In contrast the cultural studies approach, particularly as exemplified by the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, suggests that the most revealing and significant features of sport and leisure subcultures are likely to be found in the tensions and conflicts that exist within them and in the ways in which these are resolved by assembling potentially contradictory cultural elements into 'teeth gritting' harmony.

The value of the cultural studies approach, then, lies in its attention to historical context, treatment of sport as culture, its avoidance of determinism and class reductionism, and its sensitivity to the tensions and contradictions within cultural forms. Nevertheless it is possible to identify areas in which this approach or, more obviously, empirical work related to it, are problematic or underdeveloped. Two such areas are of particular relevance.

The first arises from the relative neglect of middle-class sport and leisure outlined earlier. The preferred object of study has been the working class and the central problem its acquiescence in, or resistance to, capitalism. This is reflected in a concentration on those areas of leisure and recreation which involved the bringing together of the middle and working classes. Distinctively middle-class leisure and sport has not been given sufficient attention as a topic of interest in its own right.

This is problematic in several respects. It is particularly disabling in the study of the emergence of modern sport in the nineteenth

century, given that all sports were initially middle- and upper-class pursuits and that many remained so. Hence the most significant work on the origins, as opposed to the development, of modern sport has either been purely descriptive or embraces alternative theoretical frameworks (Mangan, 1981; Elias, 1971; Dunning, 1971). Second, an over-concentration on the relationship between the working class and the rest of the 'historic bloc' entails a one-sided development of the concept of hegemony which glosses over the problem of differences and conflicts between different fractions of the upper and middle classes. At its crudest this takes the form of an implicit assumption that they are unproblematically united by 'bourgeois' or 'dominant' ideology. In reality conflicts between different bourgeois class fractions are expressed and 'resolved' in the cultural sphere as well as those between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Indeed, Williams' (1963) work in *Culture and Society* documents just such conflicts and tensions: those centred on the concept of culture itself. Despite programmatic acknowledgements of the relevance of such issues to the study of sport (Hargreaves, 1981; Bourdieu, 1978) they have not tended to inform empirical work on sport and leisure in the cultural studies tradition. A fully developed conception of hegemony must include an account of the processes by which disparate middle- and upper-class fractions come together in the formation of an 'historic bloc' and the role that sport and leisure may play in the process.

A second area of underdevelopment results from a lack of attention to the ways in which sporting practices are structured. A culturalist emphasis on the meanings embodied in sport and leisure has often gone hand in hand with a lack of emphasis on how such meanings are generated or constrained by the various ways in which sporting practices are institutionalized. Again it is probably significant that it is orthodox sociology of sport which has devoted most attention to the detailed typological examination of different types of sports association (Williams and Jackson, 1981; Dunning and Sheard, 1976). Study of the forms in which sport practices are institutionalized is particularly important in the case of middle-class sport, where participation rates are highest and where participation is generally mediated by involvement in some sort of sporting association.

This issue is closely linked with the question of how the structuralist tradition can most fruitfully contribute to the study of

sport as culture. It is certainly arguable that many culturalist studies, particularly historical studies of working-class culture and leisure,[2] suffer through their neglect of the insights that the structuralist tradition offers: the most important being the central role that the structure of cultural forms plays in the signification of meaning. This is not to endorse the implicit functionalism of some structuralist and capitalist logic approaches (Beamish, 1981) in which the 'sports form' in capitalist societies is structured so as to necessarily represent participants to themselves in ways consistent with bourgeois ideology. It cannot be assumed that there is a simple correspondence between discourses about a sport and the way its practice is structured; nor should it be denied that individuals can decode the meaning of their involvement in different ways. A more fruitful assimilation of structuralism would seem to involve careful examination of both the consequences of and contradictions between the organization of sport discourses and the institutionalized structures of sporting activities, in order to understand how both can share or limit the possible ways in which subjects make sense of their participation.

This paper presents a case study of the emergence and development of one middle-class sport, mountaineering in Victorian Britain, which draws on the cultural studies tradition, but attempts to avoid some of the limitations outlined above. It combines an emphasis on the often conflicting meanings that mountaineering signified to participants in the period 1860–1914 with parallel attention to the form in which the sport was institutionalized. At the same time this internal process of institutional and cultural development is related to the class location of participants and the wider culture.

The Growth of Mountaineering in Britain, 1850–1914

Like so many modern sports, mountaineering was invented by the British in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Prior to this it is not possible to draw a distinction between mountaineering and the other activities, science and tourism, of which it was an aspect. The earliest ascents of the highest peaks of the European Alps had been undertaken for purposes of scientific research and cartography and it subsequently became fashionable for adventurous tourists to include an ascent of Mont Blanc or some other notable viewpoint in the itinerary of their European or Alpine tour. In the 1850s, however, the practice of visiting the Alps specifically

to climb the peaks and cross the passes was for the first time recognized by participants as a distinctive form of activity.

Institutionalization followed with the establishment of the Alpine Club in London in 1857 and the publication in 1858 of *Peaks, Passes and Glaciers*, a collection of accounts of the British and their guides in the 1850s. Two further volumes were published in 1862, followed from 1863 onwards by the regular publication of the *Alpine Journal*. This precedent was widely emulated in other European countries in the following decade. Subsequent developments in Britain include the founding, around the turn of the century, of several other clubs, each devoted to the pursuit of mountaineering in the various mountain areas of Britain[3]; clubs which were the forerunners of hundreds more. For the period 1850–1914, therefore, the history of British mountaineering is primarily the history of the Alpine Club and secondarily that of these other 'senior' clubs.

The development of the sport has given rise to an extensive primary literature which includes the journals produced by the clubs, books by mountaineers about their activities and a large number of 'climbing guides' — the sport's characteristic literary product. A fairly extensive secondary literature also exists, consisting of popular histories and reflective essays, again usually written by participants. The academic literature, by contrast, is sparse and has been dominated by psychologists' interest in risk-taking. Sociologically informed work is limited to analyses of interaction among expedition members (Emmerson, 1966; Lester, 1969) and descriptive or interactionist accounts of climbing subcultures (Tejada-Flores, 1978; Hamilton, 1979; Donelly, 1979, 1981a, 1981b; Czikszentmihalyi, 1969). There appears to be a lack of sociological work which attempts to relate the emergence and development of the sport to the wider social and cultural context (but see Donelly, 1982).

The Social Background of Victorian Mountaineers

The development of industrial capitalism in Britain had by the mid-nineteenth century created both an industrial bourgeoisie and an expanded professional middle class. The established professions of the church, law and armed forces were augmented by the newer ones of teaching, the civil service and the reconstructed medical profession. Such professional strata provided many of the founders and early recruits of the Alpine Club. Statistical analysis

of the club's early membership shows that of more than 800 members, two-thirds were drawn from the professions of law, teaching, civil and public service, the church, medicine and the arts (Mumm, 1921; Lunn, 1944; Blakeney, 1951). By contrast the landed upper class could be said to be under-represented in relation to their social prestige and political importance. Less than 12 percent of the club's early membership falls under the generously broad category of 'Landowners, rentiers and those of no profession' (Blakeney, 1951). Contemporary accounts make it clear that most of the prominent members of the club were actively engaged in the worlds of work and public affairs and had only limited holiday time. The ethos of the club was also at odds with that of the gentry, early issues of the *Alpine Journal* containing a number of disparaging references to blood sports, a characteristic bete noire of the mid-century middle class.

If the club was not dominated by the landed gentry, neither was it obviously representative of the emergent industrial bourgeoisie. Although 22 percent of its early members are classified as having occupations in 'trade and commerce' (Blakeney, 1951), a number of these would be London-based and engaged in banking and commercial services linked to the City of London. It is also clear that most early mountaineers were public school and Oxbridge educated (Mumm, 1921: 3) and that the club progressively acquired a distinctly anti-bourgeois ethos, to the point that it could be rumoured that it was his occupation as a manufacturer that had disqualified the leading mountaineer of the 1880s from membership.[4]

The class basis of recruitment to the Alpine Club thus appears clear: the bulk of the membership was drawn from various fractions of the professional middle class, old and new, mixed with a smaller number of individuals from the landed, financial and industrial sections of the bourgeoisie and from the middle classes employed in industry and finance. The general pattern of recruitment appears to remain fairly stable over the 1863–1914 period with only a gradual increase in members recruited from 'trade and commerce'. Among professionals the sport seems to have had a particular attraction for academics, teachers and 'intellectuals' of all sorts. Their prominence is remarked on in various accounts[5] and the club numbered Stephen, Arnold, Tyndall, Huxley and Ruskin among its members.[6]

The social changes associated with industrialization were,

therefore, a necessary condition for the emergence of the sport in that they produced an expanded professional, and largely urban, middle class with the inclination, leisure and financial resources to take it up. Technological development, in the shape of the extension of the railways through France to the Alps, was an additional prerequisite. Unlike the landed gentry who had figured so prominently as 'grand tourists', the professionals of the Alpine Club had limited holidays: six or eight weeks seems to have been typical, so not until the Alps became readily accessible in the 1850s could the sport take off.

The Pattern of Institutionalization

The original explorers of the Alps had been largely motivated by a scientific interest in such matters as glaciology, geology, mountain botany and cartography. The continuation of this tradition meant that a significant number of Victorian mountaineers had a predominantly scientific interest in the Alps. This was reflected in the fact that the early membership of the Alpine Club included some of the leading scientists of the day and in the sub-titling of the *Alpine Journal* as 'a record of mountain exploration and scientific observation'. Not only did this have cultural implications (discussed below) but it was also of considerable significance for the way in which the practice of mountaineering was institutionalized. In effect, the Alpine Club constituted itself in the image of a learned society. Members would read papers about their activities to club meetings, and these were subsequently published in the *Alpine Journal*. Such publication established a climber's claim to a particular route; for just as priority is a matter of intense concern and frequent dispute in science, so it is in mountaineering.[7]

Sociologists have explained the frequency and ferocity of priority disputes in science in terms of their linkage with the social control system, in which recognition and rewards are granted in exchange for contributions valued by the scientific community (Merton, 1957; Hagstrom, 1965). By this means conformity to the shared standards of the 'scientific ethos' is maintained. A similar argument can be applied to mountaineering which, unlike most sports, has neither a centralized body to formulate the 'rules of the game' nor a system of refereeing to enforce them. Mountaineering, like science, is characterized by a set of complex and largely tacit rules (compare Kuhn, 1970 and Taylor-Flores, 1978), which are sustained by awarding recognition to those activities which most closely conform to them and withholding it from those that do not. The mountaineering journal and climbing 'guide' play the same role in maintaining social control within mountaineering as do scientific journals and textbooks in science.

That the practice of mountaineering came to be institutionalized in a similar fashion to that of science was neither accidental nor an inevitable consequence of the nature of the activity.[8] Sports are socially constructed in particular historical contexts. The Alpine Club was established at the point where the new tradition of mountaineering as sport was evolving out of the older tradition of mountain exploration as science. At its inception, therefore, it contained members who saw their Alpine activities as science, those who viewed them as sport and those to whom they were both. The mix of scientific and non-scientific articles in early issues of the *Alpine Journal* confirms the point. A 'scientific' pattern of institutionalization emerged not only because of the club's scientific antecedents and the generally intellectual bent of its members, but also because it proved capable of accommodating both scientific and sporting interests. It was equally well adapted to competition over the discovery and publication of new climbs, as it was to competition over the discovery of novel scientific phenomena. Once established, this pattern provided a model of social organization which was emulated by later clubs and associations and which persisted long after their scientific aspirations had disappeared. The significance of these parallels between the organization of science and mountaineering may, however, be of more than purely historical interest, in that close similarities have been reported between the personalities of mountaineers and research scientists (Lester, 1969) and it has been suggested that scientists and engineers are particularly likely to take up the sport.

Victorian Mountaineering as Culture: Scientism, Athleticism and Romanticism

To analyse a sport as culture is to establish what its practice signifies to adherents, to examine the ways in which the sport is invested with these meanings and how they may change over time. This does not imply that it is necessarily possible to isolate a single or consistent set of significations. In the case of the Victorian mountaineers the most interesting and revealing feature of their cultural world is the coexistence of three different and potentially

conflicting discourses or 'structures of feeling'[9] which can be conveniently labelled scientism, athleticism and romanticism. Each provided the Victorian mountaineers with alternative ways of thinking and feeling about their activities and the mountain environment in which they took place. All three remain present in the culture of the Alpine Club throughout the whole of the 1860–1914 period, though the relative importance of each changes over time. Although particular individuals or groups of mountaineers may exemplify one 'structure of feeling' at the expense of others, all three typically coexist within the consciousness of individuals and the culture of the group. Despite this coexistence the Alpine Club members were well aware of the tensions between different ways of talking and thinking about their sport and acted them out in long-running debates and disputes.

Scientism

Given the scientific interest of many early members and the prominence of articles dealing with straightforwardly scientific topics in early issues of the *Alpine Journal*, it is hardly surprising that 'scientism' offered an influential way of making sense of the club's activities. Such men as Tyndall, Forbes, Bonney, Adam-Reilly and Hastie saw their Alpine excursions in scientific terms and were critical of the idea that they could be justified as mere sport. It was perhaps John Tyndall who best exemplified the spirit of scientism. His book, *The Glaciers of the Alps* (Tyndall, 1861), dedicated to Faraday, combines accounts of his Alpine climbs with lengthy discussions of scientific issues, particularly those relating to the formation, structure and movement of glaciers. Although the book is divided into 'narrative' and 'scientific' sections, each runs into the other and the author expressly wished to show 'the mode of life as well as the scientific objects of a mountain explorer'. To the modern reader this fusion of two genres that are now distinct, the adventure book and the scientific text, seems strange. Placed in the context of the time, however, it becomes a logical outcome of the spirit of scientism.

The manifestations of scientism were not limited to the tendency for the early Alpinists to make scientific observations during their climbs or otherwise engage in scientific researches. It had a much more general influence on the way in which members of the club perceived and recorded their activities. Accounts of climbs in the early issues of the *Alpine Journal* are typically written in the style

of scientific articles. Dry and often obsessively factual, they contain a mass of detail concerning such things as the altitude of the points reached at different stages of the climb, the exact times taken between them, the compass readings made and the number of times the party stopped. In contrast to the dramatic and humorous narrative styles that subsequently became popular, the tone of these early accounts tends to be objective and impersonal: the subjective feelings of the participants are rarely referred to.

The significance of science and scientism in early mountaineering tends to be discounted both by popular histories of the sport and the more academic treatment by Donelly (1981b, 1979). These accounts assume that mountaineering in the 1860s was 'really' a sport in the modern sense and that its association with science in the minds of its practitioners was the result of conspiracy or confusion. Either participants were attempting to make the sport more respectable by disguising it as science or they had simply muddled sporting satisfactions with scientific ones. This imposition of modern ideas about the necessary incompatibility of science and sport on to the mid-Victorian era is historically unsatisfactory. It is true that the early history of mountaineering is the story of the gradual evolution of a recognizable modern sport out of earlier activities which today would be described as 'scientific', but that process was certainly not complete when the Alpine Club was established in 1857. Scientism was an active element in the culture of the early Alpinists whose influence lasted into the 1880s.[10] To recognize this is to be alert to the significant institutional and cultural continuities between the sport of mountaineering and the scientific activities that preceded it.

Athleticism

A characteristic feature of the culture of the early Alpine Club was the tension between scientism and another discourse about the sport, which in other contexts has been dubbed 'athleticism' (Mangan, 1981). This denotes the view that mountaineering is purely and simply a sport and its virtues lie in the moral and physical improvements that derive from its pursuit. It remains a 'rational' recreation, not because it increases the individual's knowledge and appreciation of the natural world, but because it cultivates such qualities as physical fitness and courage in the face of danger and adversity.

T.S. Kennedy (1863) furnishes an early, but otherwise repre-

sentative account of the athletic credo. He acknowledges the diverse satisfactions to be derived from mountaineering, noting, in particular, that 'scientific observation is of the utmost importance'. Nevertheless the greatest satisfaction, and the basic justification for mountaineering, results from:

> difficulty overcome, of success attained by perseverance . . . I believe that mountain excursions produce not only a highly beneficial effect on the physical character . . . but that they produce an equally beneficial effect on the mental character, that they excite a thoughtful foresight, that they improve self-reliance in the moment of danger . . . I am therefore justified in claiming for alpine climbing first rank amongst athletic sports as a nourisher of all those varied elements that go to form all that is commendable in the Anglo-Saxon character!

While many members of the club saw science and sport as complementary aspects of the club's activities, others felt that this obscured the fact that mountaineering was simply a sport and the Alpine Club an association of sportsmen. Leslie Stephen, for example, a noted adherent of athleticism (Haley, 1978) satirized the accommodation between science and mountaineering in his account of reaching the summit of the Rothorn (Stephen, 1866).

> And what philosophical observations did you make? Will be the inquiry of one of those fanatics who by a reasoning process utterly inscrutable to me have somehow irrevocably associated mountain climbing with science. To them I answer that the temperature was approximately (I had no thermometer) 212 degrees Fahrenheit below freezing point. As for ozone, if any existed in the atmosphere it was a greater fool than I take it for. As we unluckily had no barometer I am unable to give the usual information as to the extent of a deviation from the correct altitude.[1]

The plausibility of scientism was ultimately undermined by the professionalization of science and the disappearance of the amateur scientists, hence it was athleticism which provided the dominant framework through which the mountaineers conceived, described and justified their activities. Defined as a sport, mountaineering was a competitive activity centred in the attempt to execute new and increasingly difficult climbs. Among the early Alpinists this spirit was most obviously represented by Edward Whymper; fiercely competitive, immersed in the technical problems of achieving more difficult climbs, entirely unromantic in his attitude to the mountains, he was 'terrifyingly modern' in outlook. That mountaineering was institutionalized in the image of science made for significant cultural continuities between the two activities

in that both linked the struggle for mastery over nature with competition between individuals. These constitute the twin themes of Whymper's *Scrambles amongst the Alps* (1871) and enable him to range from a description of his own climbing achievements to those of the engineers engaged in the construction of the Mont Cenis tunnel.

Alpinism, then, was increasingly centred on a discourse of rewards for hard and resolute effort, manliness, physical and moral fitness, competition and mastery over nature. As such it is recognizably a product of the mid-Victorian bourgeoisie.

Romanticism

Although athleticism came to be the predominant way in which mountaineers made sense of their activities, its supremacy did not go unchallenged. With the decline of scientism, an alternative set of meanings was provided by romanticism.

For the romantic, nature, especially wild nature, is invested with moral or spiritual significance. To relate directly and perceptively to nature is to gain access to fundamental truths touching on the human condition. For the romantic, mountaineering takes on a mystical significance. It becomes a means of penetrating to realities deeper than those encountered in everyday life. The mountains themselves are anthropomorphized, perhaps even deified; they teach wisdom and offer solace.

Romanticism was a pervasive, but generally subordinate, influence on early members of the Alpine Club. For most, romantic impulses complemented their scientific or, more usually, sporting interests. In their writings it is quite usual to find elements of romanticism articulated to discourses of athleticism or scientism. The notion that a romantic appreciation of nature might be at odds with mountaineering as an organized sport seems to have originated among non-climbing lovers of the Alps. Ruskin, although an honorary member of the Alpine Club, was a bitter critic of mountaineering:

> The Alps themselves which your own poets used to love so reverently you look upon as soaped poles in a bear garden which you set yourselves to climb and slide down again with shrieks of delight . . . (quoted in Lunn, 1943: 72; see also Ruskin, 1899: 438)

Such criticisms intensified in the 1870s, in parallel with more general attacks on the ominence sport had achieved in the public

schools and a growing disenchantment with the ideology of athleticism (see Mangan, 1981: epilogue). This, in turn, was a symptom of wider changes in the dominant culture: the emergence of a romantically inspired critique of the utilitarian culture that industrial capitalism had produced (see Williams, 1963; Wiener, 1981; Hughes, 1959).

Initially, the Alpine Club defended itself against the charge of philistinism and justified the sport on the grounds of the moral and physical virtues it supposedly produced. From the late 1870s onwards, however, a markedly romantic emphasis developed within the culture of the club itself. Increasingly, mountaineering was justified on the grounds that it was not just a sport but had an additional, deeper significance. This was judged to lie, not in its contribution to science, but in its capacity to satisfy and refine the spiritual and aesthetic needs of its adherents.

From the 1880s to the eve of the First World War the cultural life of the Alpine Club and the newly formed Climbers' Club reflected the tensions between athleticism and romanticism; between the straightforward sportsmen and those 'who take a high line about climbing', between 'cold philosophy' and 'mountain mysticism' (Lunn, 1943: 70–83). The exemplary figure of this period is Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, one of the sport's most successful practitioners and, at the same time, one of its most romantic. His writings and poetry reflect the tensions and conflicts between mountaineering as a romantic quest and mountaineering as an organized sport (Young, 1936; Hankinson, 1977):

> For I have seen so much can come between
> the heart of hills and mine,
> record and route, rivalry, quick report,
> all the cloud screen
> of human witness, dictionaried sport.

He derided the increasingly technical approach to climbing that necessarily accompanied competition to achieve more difficult climbs:

> . . . long grey valleys of technique
> Where the dry bones of dead sport wait us,
> Graphs, formulae and apparatus.

The romantic view persists well into the twentieth century:[12]

> It is probably the modern spirit of competition that inspires this eagerness to classify climbs . . . and to give mountaineering the status of a regulated competitive sport. In fact it is this confounding of mountaineering with sport that is at the bottom of so much misunderstanding. It is the failure to realise that mountaineering is a pursuit in which the sporting instinct may at times enter, but that the deepest motives behind it are a longing for adventure, a love of nature and a sentiment that can only be called mystical. (Meade, 1941: 100)

The romantic's dilemma was acute. For the romantic the essence of mountaineering lay in an unmediated and intensely personal relationship between the individual and the mountains, on which competition and technicality were unwelcome impositions. Taken to its logical conclusion this implied the rejection of mountaineering as an organized sport and the radical recasting of its institutional practices and cultural traditions. Above all it implied an end to the publication of details of new climbs, in order that each individual might approach the mountains afresh. Such radical changes proved impossible. Although leading members of the uniquely romantic Climbers' Club insisted, until 1907, that no climbing guides to Wales should be published, the expansion of the sport made it impossible to maintain this position. If they did not publish, others would (Hankinson, 1977: 155–68). Despite the tensions, romanticism was contained within the established institutional and cultural traditions of the sport. It remained a distinctive but subordinate strand within mountaineering culture.

Mountaineering, Hegemony and Culture

It remains to explore the contribution that Gramscian ideas can make towards an understanding of the relationship between the development of mountaineering and the wider society and its culture.

In the first place it is clear that the concept of hegemony, as normally employed, has no relevance. The working class were not significantly involved in the sport until well into the twentieth century; prior to this mountaineering was clearly not a site at which cultural links could be formed between that class and its superiors. Much more significant, however, is the part that the sport played in bringing together individuals from different fractions of the upper and middle classes, helping to cement the sort of social alliances required by a Gramscian analysis. The earlier discussion of the membership of the Alpine Club suggests that the club brought together members of the landed upper class, the industrial bourgeoisie, the old and new professions and a sub-

stantial array of intellectuals. More anecdotal evidence conveys the same impression. Edward Whymper, unlike most early members of the club, was of lower middle-class background and was known to lack social graces. He was a sharp businessman who capitalized on his mountaineering successes through books, articles, illustrations and lectures, using them as a means of social advancement. His climbing companions, however, included an aristocrat, a senior civil servant and Oxbridge-educated clergymen. It seems plausible therefore to argue that the Alpine Club, along with other leisure organizations, did play a part in constructing and sustaining the 'historic bloc' which was central to the period of hegemony characteristic of the second half of the nineteenth century.

To sustain and develop this argument requires the demonstration that the Alpine Club, and its successors, did more than simply bring different class fractions together. The concept of hegemony suggests a process whereby the political, moral and intellectual objectives of diverse class fractions are articulated to those of the hegemonic class through cultural struggle. These struggles are not limited to the level of intellectual and political argument but extend to a wide range of 'commonsense' ideas and values and the practices associated with them. Given this it becomes essential to explore the ways in which the arguments and conflicts over mountaineering, outlined earlier, are related to wider cultural struggles taking place in late nineteenth-century Britain.

The composition of the early Alpine Club would suggest such a relationship. Not only were academics and intellectuals very prominent in the membership, but also some of those central figures in wider cultural debates (e.g. Stephen, Tyndall, Huxley, Arnold, Ruskin) were more or less closely connected with the club. In view of this it is perhaps not surprising that there are obvious parallels between the debates within the Alpine Club and the wider culture. The first half of the nineteenth century is characterized by the prevalence of bourgeois ideology based on philosophic radicalism and embracing such themes as individualism, utility, competition, materialism, agnosticism, belief in rationality and science and an assertive attitude to nature. The underlying assumptions of this world view are reflected in the discourse of both 'scientism' and 'athleticism', which were dominant in the early Alpine Club. Both were utilitarian in viewing mountaineering as a rational recreation wh brought either

intellectual or moral and physical benefits; both saw sustained effort as the necessary precursor of reward; both centred on competition between individuals. Above all the Alps were seen in essentially unromantic terms; they were the raw material which a confident bourgeoisie could master through the exercise of its intellectual and physical powers.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the erosion of the more radical aspects of the utilitarian and liberal traditions and the revival towards the end of the century of 'romantic' sentiment in politics, art and religion. These changes had pervasive effects which extended to the least likely areas of cultural activity. In particular, they influenced the way in which nature was to be understood. Some physicists, notably J.J. Thompson and his associates at Cambridge, lost faith in the empiricism, materialism and utilitarianism which was the prevailing ideology in the physical sciences as represented by such figures as Tyndall and Huxley. Responding to a sense of crisis, which they attributed to 'industrialism and its materialistic credo' they sought a more metaphysical approach which emphasized the 'organic unity and harmony' to be found in nature. They made the ether a key physical concept, seeing it as 'the universal connecting medium which binds the universe together', justified science education in liberal rather than utilitarian terms, and dabbled in psychic matters (Wynne, 1979).

It was not only scientists who were concerned with how nature should be approached and appropriated. The upsurge of romanticism in the Alpine Club was part of the same process. Reacting against both scientific and sporting definitions of their activities, some mountaineers sought to reconceptualize them in a mystical way. Far from being a backdrop against which a bourgeoisie could demonstrate its powers, mountains were seen as a repository of truths, harmonies and sensibilities which had been lost with industrialism, and mountaineering was viewed as a way of recovering them.[13] Humility replaced assertiveness as the predominant tone: in Mallory's words, 'whom have we conquered? None but ourselves'. It is clear that nineteenth-century debates about man, society and nature were not confined to the realms of philosophy, art and science but extended to the realm of leisure and provide the key to understanding the arguments over the meaning and significance of mountaineering.

Of central importan to the concept of hegemony is the way in

which such cultural conflicts are resolved. The broader picture seems clear enough. While romanticism became a ubiquitous component of both high and popular culture (Wiener, 1981), its critical thrust was contained within existing social and cultural frameworks. The oppositional potential of a cultural critique of capitalism was not realized. Relatively few intellectuals followed William Morris into political activism and the Victorian middle classes preferred his fabrics and furniture to his politics. Likewise, it was not the speculative physics of Thompson at Cambridge that emerged predominant but the empirically-based approach of Rutherford and Bragg at Manchester. Among the mountaineers the outcome was similar. The romantic critique did not result in the abandonment of mountaineering as a competitive sport; rather romantic themes were articulated to the ideology of athleticism. It was precisely this fusion of the disparate themes of competition, reward for effort, innovation and masculinity with those of aesthetic improvement and mystical enlightenment that enabled the sport to appeal to and bring together such diverse sections of the Victorian middle and upper classes. In particular it maintained the sport's popularity with traditional intellectuals whose 'bourgeois anti-capitalism' (Lovell, 1983) would have made them unsympathetic to more conventional sporting activities.

It is important to emphasize that these different cultural elements did not meet on equal terms. Despite the shifts in mountaineering discourse through the 1860–1914 period, athleticism remained dominant, and the residual and emergent themes of scientism and romanticism subordinate. Although this mirrored the situation in the wider culture, the containment of romanticism should not be seen in purely cultural terms. The way in which the practice of mountaineering had been institutionalized was clearly significant. The form of institutionalization, taken over from science and adapted for sport, has an obvious commonsense fit with a discourse organized around competition, effort, technicality and progress. Taken to its conclusion, romanticism entailed not only the reworking of cultural traditions, but the overturning of established practices, above all the publication, description and grading of new climbs. In the absence of such a transformation romanticism necessarily remained subordinate. As in the wider context, the romantics proved cultural critics rather than revolutionaries.

Given the preceding discussion it is tempting to argue that the debates among Victorian mountaineers and the manner of their resolution simply reflected wider cultural struggles and the changing nature of hegemony over the 1860–1914 period. While this is partially true, leisure activities should not be seen as a straightforward reflection of understandings constructed elsewhere in society. Mountaineering brought together different fractions of the Victorian middle and upper classes and different conceptions of leisure, of relations between individuals and between individuals and nature. In resolving such conflicts, the sport did not so much reflect the common sense of the Victorian period as provide one of the many sites at which it was constituted. If this is accepted, it implies that the cultural content and institutional structure of sports need to be subject to more sensitive and serious analysis by sociologists and historians.

Notes

1. The work of Raymond Williams exemplifies the movement away from the 'history of art/ideas' tradition towards a sociologically informed approach. For a recent example of a contextualized treatment of Victorian middle-class culture, see Seed and Wolff (1984).

2. Work of, and influenced by, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies is an obvious exception in that it has quite consciously sought to draw on both the culturalist and structuralist traditions.

3. The Scottish Mountaineering Club, the Climbers' Club (based in North Wales) and the Fell and Rock Climbing Club of the English Lake District.

4. It has been suggested that A.F. Mummery was 'blackballed' because of his association with 'trade'. An alternative account indicates that the incident occurred because of personal antipathy between Mummery and some existing club members: see Unsworth (1981: 148–9).

5. Unsworth (1981) for example, remarks that 'the Club was founded by the affluent, highly literate middle classes. These were people who not only read books but wrote them too.' See also Hankinson (1977: 95, 123–8) and Mumm (1921: 9).

6. Ruskin, an honorary member of the club, was not an active mountaineer but attended club dinners.

7. All climbing guidebooks give very critical information about the first ascent of every climb; who made it and which climber took the leading role. All of little practical use to the user of the guidebooks but of considerable sociological significance.

8. Although Hamilton (1979) notes the parallels between science and mountaineering, he takes them to be a natural consequence of the nature of the sport, thus begging the questions discussed here.

9. The phrase is Raymond Williams': see Williams (1977).

10. Not only did scientific articles continue to appear regularly in the *Alpine Journal*, but it was suggested in the 1880s that as all the major Alpine peaks had

been climbed, members of the Alpine Club might consider devoting more time to scientific pursuits. See for example, C. Packe (1886).

11. Tyndall took Stephen's remarks as a personal insult and resigned from the club.

12. Among post-1914 writers the romantic view was most prolifically expressed in the writings of F.S. Smythe: see, for example, his interpretation of the origins of mountaineering (Smythe, 1946) and Lunn's demolition of his romantically-oriented biography of Whymper (Lunn, 1944: 189–214).

13. A later, and classic, restatement of these themes can be found in Lunn (1943: 67), for example; 'Materialism is a disease of the great cities and does not flourish amongst men who are in close touch with nature'.

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David Robbins 1946–1986 David Robbins' paper was in its final draft when he left for an expedition to the Himalayas in the summer of 1986. He was killed in a fall on the way down from an unofficial first ascent. David would have been the first to recognize that his own attitudes to climbing combined many of the themes, and some of the contradictions, so skilfully dissected in his article. Originally trained as a chemist at Manchester, where he took his PhD, David had moved from a concern with heavy metal pollution and the controversies surrounding its measurement into the field of Sociology of Science and then more broadly into the study of culture and ideology. He was particularly interested in the exploration of Gramscian concepts and their relevance to understanding science. Characteristically, he brought such intellectual concerns to bear on his everyday activities, whether these were

political or recreational, or part of his work as a Lecturer in Sociology at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

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