

## **Odysseus as a role-model. Towards a social theory of climbing**

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Why people climb.  
The role of mountaineering in U.S. society

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## **BACHELOR THESIS**

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## **Abstract**

Climbing and mountaineering, as ideal types of adventure sports have long been and still are often mystified. Although analysed to a large extent with respect to motivations, the social causes and purposes remain widely unidentified. One common notion is that the sports is useless, which is expressed proto-typically in George Mallory's famous statement "Because it's there" as a response to the question of why he wanted to climb Mount Everest. Social theorists have only to a limited extent managed to go beyond this notion and to question underlying motivations and their social and psychological origins, as well as the functionality of the sports. The image of freedom that is commonly associated with the activity itself needs further substantialization. Climbing as an adventure sport is not useless. It serves various purposes and has social functions. Although climbing in the U.S. has not played a large role for long, this changed with the popularization of rock climbing in the Yosemite Valley in the 1960s. Nowadays both alpine and rock climbing can be regarded as established forms of outdoor recreation in the U.S. and elite American climbers are recognized internationally. In the present work the large role of this cultural field for North America and its economical importance are shown. By investigating the historical development of the sport, it can be connected with important cultural traits such as the frontier condition or the appreciation of wilderness and its philosophical exponents in thinkers like Thoreau and Emerson. The purposes and functions of alpinism and climbing for the U.S. society, as well as the motivations of people who practice them are analysed. Motivations are numerous and overlapping. For this purpose works of Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School are highly instructive in showing how modern subjectivity is constituted in relationship with nature and under socio-psychological constraints. With this approach that involves sociological as well as psychological perspectives and draws on the works of theorists such as Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse as well as on Bourdieu, it is possible to follow the thesis that mountaineering and climbing, together with several other adventure sports, serve not only the reproduction of labor power, the sublimation of socially induced suppression of instincts (drives) and the accumulation of social capital, but also, in a more general sense, the formation of modern subjectivity by the contestation with and domination of nature. Climbing can thereby be regarded as a need that is felt to compete with the force of nature and in this respect as a substitution of the functional role of war or, as specific to North America, the frontier and wilderness condition.

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# 1. Introduction

“Who wouldn't be a mountaineer! Up here all the world's prizes seem nothing.”

– John Muir

A movement that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led the European upper and emerging middle class into the Alps. Although in a smaller and different historical context, the same movement emerged on the other side of the Atlantic that led people into the mountains. It did not come to an end and today an increasing amount of people is seeking joy and sanctuary in and on top of mountains, as well as in climbing gyms, as some sort of substitute. The question for why people took part in this movement, following an “inverted gravity of mountain-going,”<sup>1</sup> has an almost equally long history. Although some might say the question for *why* would only be posed by someone who could not understand the answer anyway, the *why* is the point of departure for the present work, too. The most famous answer for why to go on a mountain, excessively quoted already and again here, was given by George Mallory concerning Mount Everest: “Because it's there.” It represents, however, a common misperception about climbing mountains: that it is useless. As will become clear in this work, that is only half the truth. In fact, climbing mountains has manifold uses and is, from various perspectives very functional. Those functions, as well as motivations for climbing are numerous, diverse, complex and inseparably overlapping. Here, a differentiation is necessary between reasons and motivations to climb and purposes of climbing. Looking closely on what drives those modern versions of Odysseus on their adventures through the mountains of this world, and on what they have to do with the Homeric hero, will provide some understanding of the functions, or in general, the role of mountaineering and climbing. The findings concern a context of American cultural history as compared with a context of its origins in Europe. To some extent, however, they can be universalized, since these social and cultural roles are very much alike in Western societies, although differing from each other in some regards and, of course, their historical development.

Mountaineering evolved in the Alps, its history is well known, has been extensively studied

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1 Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the mind: a History of a Fascination* (London: Granta Books, 2008), 162.

and widely popularized. Accordingly, most of the reknowned climbers of the world have come from Europe. The U.S., in turn, have not been an important nation in international mountaineering until rock-climbing became popular in the U.S. in the 1960s. Chris Jones attributes this to the fact that American climbers had enough to do at home, that “it was unnecessary to climb abroad.”<sup>2</sup> And as Peter Croft recognized, “North America is at once both an almost unbelievably vast arena for mountaineering and, in one way, a surprisingly small one.”<sup>3</sup> Mountains of North America have also remained less regarded by alpinists than those of South America, which is probably due to their relative remoteness and lesser heights.<sup>4</sup>

Today, however, climbing is on the height of popularity in North America. It is accepted as a sport and is now even becoming Olympic. New climbing gyms open up at enormous rates. U.S. climbers belong to the world elite and are publicly recognized, as is shown for example by former president Obama congratulating the duo Caldwell and Jorgeson for their free-climb of El Capitan’s “Dawn Wall” in Yosemite Valley in 2015. This already indicates that climbing has become a part of “mainstream” American culture, unsurprisingly, given the history of wilderness condition and the long tradition of nature conservation in North America.

The objective of the work at hand is to analyze the role, or more exact, the social dimension of climbing in modern societies and individual motivations involved which, in turn, are interrelated. For that, a critical theory of climbing will be presented, following the thesis that the rise of capitalism goes along with a shift in ways of conceiving nature and the libidinal economies of people that leads to an increased desire for adventurous activities in nature landscapes, and particularly, climbing. This shift happened in both transatlantic contexts, although at different times, and has expressed differently. To support this thesis, individual motivations of climbers found in both scholarly works and literature, as well as research on those will be analysed. The work aims at the social dimension of climbing and the interference between individuals and society, that is, on which social factors drive them to climb. That does not mean, that other approaches are not valid, but

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2 Chris Jones, *Climbing in North America* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1997), 248.

3 Andy Selters, *Ways to the Sky. A Historical Guide to North American Mountaineering* (Golden: AAC Press, 2011), vii.

4 Karl Ziak, *Der Mensch und die Berge. Eine Weltgeschichte des Alpinismus* (Darmstadt: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, 1965,) 207.

rather that they might overlap and complement each other.

Regardless of whether in scholarly works or verbal statements, an abundance of motivations for climbing can be encountered: self-realization, search for the true self, for freedom or authenticity, to name only a few. Climbing is perceived as meaningful and intrinsically rewarding, compared to a sensed alienation and meaninglessness of daily life. A rather obvious function of climbing as “recreational risk-taking” is its aspect of recreation or reproduction of workforce, which is necessary to be able to compete in work life and to preserve a “work-life-balance.” Keeping in mind this complexity and heterogeneity of explications for behavior illuminates how hard it is to really get beyond “because it's there.”<sup>5</sup> A look on the history of climbing will therefore be necessary. But first, problems of definition have to be met, before the topic can be outlined and its relevance be addressed.

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5 Cf. Alan Ewert, Ken Gilbertson, Yuan-Chun Luo and Alison Voight, “Beyond ‘because its there.’ Motivations for Pursuing Adventure Recreational Acitivities,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 44, no. 1 (2013): 91-111.

## 2. Concepts and developments of mountaineering

### 2.1. Definition and terminology

In order to adequately approach the complexity of the matter, some remarks on terminology are indispensable. The present work deals with mountaineering or alpinism<sup>6</sup> in the first place, but does not exclude rock-climbing or the term *climbing* in general, which is also often used for mountaineering, or, climbers for alpinists respectively. One reason is simply that most alpinists necessarily spend parts of their time with various forms of climbing, if only for practicing. Another reason is that my study deems itself valid also for climbing and climbers in general in their different subdivisions (rock, ice, or indoor), at least to a wide extent, and these subdivisions or disciplines are separated by fluid boundaries.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, in the course of the underlying work, different styles of alpinism and rock-climbing are illustrated and differentiated, as far as it is required. Assessment of mountaineering and climbing is undertaken by different approaches since different types of categorization are possible: approaches that understand mountaineering as a form of recreation, as a sport, or more exact, as a risk-taking or adventure sport; as a form of tourism, or adventure tourism. With regard to this form of adventure-oriented leisure activity, mountaineering can be understood as an ideal-type, since it combines different types of physical activities such as rock- or ice-climbing and hiking, but also due to its special relationship to nature. Apart from that, mountaineering is one of the “oldest” of modern outdoor sports, since it evolved more than 200 years ago, with the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786 as a starting point, led by both curiosity and scientific desire for the enhancement of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Alps came within reach of a day's travel for the adventurous pioneering British middle class that was helped to existence only by industrialization and that sought to escape from their daily constraints.<sup>9</sup>

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6 I use both terms interchangeably, since they equally and in different cultural contexts refer to the activity of mountain climbing.

7 In Chris Noble's *Why we climb* a suggestion for a list of disciplines (not necessarily comprehensive) can be found: Bouldering, Sport, Trad, Cragging, Big Wall, Alpinism, Expedition, Ice, Mixed, Competition and the additional attribute of Soloing with Roped, Deep Water, Free. Chris Noble, *Why we climb* (Guilford: Falcon, 2017), 22.

8 Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the mind: a History of a Fascination* (London: Granta Books, 2008), 15.

9 Zac Robinson, “Early Alpine Club Culture and Mountaineering Literature,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Musa Ghazali, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr (New York: Routledge, 2015), 106; Cf. David Robbins, “Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class: The Victorian Mountaineers,” *Theory, Culture &*

Although valid for the American context, too, this does not serve as a fully-fledged explication for why people started to climb mountains.

Another aspect why this work is focused on mountaineering as an ideal type, is the activity's setting. Mountains are traditionally to a much larger extent perceived as wilderness and attached with aesthetic projections and feelings than other landscapes. Alpine mountain landscapes might even be considered to be holding a cultural ideal of what nature or wilderness is in its deep core, an ideal type of wilderness. Accordingly, mountainous areas have always been the principal sites where protected areas were getting established, and not, for instance, grasslands, which are economically and ecologically highly valuable.<sup>10</sup> This is where a whole complex of ideas comes into play: the history of appreciation of wilderness, which is also one of the central pillars on which an understanding of the culture of North America must be grounded on. And although Americans might still “remain ambivalent about mountaineers, mountains themselves are regarded as sacred places in the Americans landscape, second only to battlefields,” as Isserman notes.<sup>11</sup>

That relates to the specifically American way of appreciation of wilderness and its history of the conquest of vast, relatively unsettled and wild territory along the line of the “frontier.” This wilderness condition may have led to the relative delay in the emergence of alpinism, climbing and other adventure sports. The idea of wilderness appreciation, however, which in Europe already began with Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the following romantic movement, became an important aspect of American identity. In both Europe and the US, however, wilderness appreciation was an idea that emerged in the cities, which hints to the next focal point of this work besides the assumption of climbing's functionality, namely that nature is a social category.<sup>12</sup> Cronon who stressed that nature is a social construction and subject to historical cultural change,<sup>13</sup> writes that “ideas of nature

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*Society* 4, no. 3 (1987): 579-601; Walt Unsworth, *Hold the Heights. The Foundations of Mountaineering* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1994), 53f.

10 William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, getting back to the wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996), 73.

11 Maurice Isserman, *Continental Divide: A History of American Mountaineering* (New York: Norton, 2016).

12 György Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein. Studien über marxistische Dialektik* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1988), 16.

13 William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground. Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: Norton, 1996), 25.

never exist outside a cultural context.”<sup>14</sup> The same is true for wilderness, which “is quite profoundly a human creation – indeed a creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history.”<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, Boyes and Mackenzie explain that “concepts of wilderness and mountains are contestable social constructs that reflect the ideologies, dominant discourses and values of western civilizations over time.”<sup>16</sup> They are subject to change that unfolds in diffuse processes of negotiation.<sup>17</sup> Roderick Nash's remark that “wilderness appreciation was an urban, not a frontier product,” underlines this notion of social determination.<sup>18</sup> Since nature is also a field where subjectivity is shaped in contestation with its forces, the work will pay attention to this relation in an excursus.

## 2.2. Mountaineering as sport

Although many researchers have approached the matter from recreational perspectives as opposed to perspectives of adventure tourism, these cannot, as Pomfret stresses, be neatly separated.<sup>19</sup> That is a valid statement for various approaches, however, because mountaineering happens at a point where different perspectives converge. Following McPherson, mountaineering can be approached with a sports framework, though with some reservations. He defines sport as “a structured, goal-oriented, competitive, contest-based, ludic physical activity.”<sup>20</sup> Mountaineering involves all these features, except competitiveness.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore it presents several other characteristics of sport, such as the formation of physical prowess, strategy, critical decision-making and training.<sup>22</sup>

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14 Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 35.

15 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 69.

16 Mike Boyes and Susan H. Mackenzie, “Concepts of the Wilderness Experience and Adventure Mountaineering Tourism,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Ghazali Musa, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr (New York: Routledge, 2015), 81.

17 Anke Ortlepp, “Nature – Culture – Leisure. Die Bedeutung von Natur in der amerikanischen Freizeitgestaltung,” in *Sehnsucht nach Natur: über den Drang nach draußen in der heutigen Freizeitkultur*. ed. Kirchoff, Thomas et al. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 186f.

18 Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), xvii.

19 Gill Pomfret, “Mountaineering adventure tourists: a conceptual framework for research,” *Tourism Management* 27 (2006): 114.

20 Barry D. McPherson, James E. Curtis and John W. Loy, *The social Significance of Sport. An introduction to the Sociology of Sport* (Champaign: Human Kinetics Books, 1989), 15.

21 Still, it can be competitive, or “contest-based,” to a limited extent, if we think of the rivalries between Whympers and Tyndall concerning the Matterhorn or Royal Robbins and Ed Cooper in Yosemite. Cf. Fleming, *Killing Dragons*, 232-235; Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 325-329.

22 James E.S. Higham, Anna Thompson-Carr and Ghazali Musa, “Mountaineering Tourism: Activity, People

Furthermore it is a subcultural and lifestyle sport because it is unstructured and unregulated or based only on informal rules.<sup>23</sup> There are, if any, only implicit binary settings of victory and loss, and no organized competitions, at least in mountaineering.<sup>24</sup> Things are different with climbing, involving crag-climbing, sport-climbing, and others, as compared to mountaineering, since the former is performed also in organized competitions and has only recently been recognized as an Olympic discipline, thus being more easily defined as a sport. Mountaineering has owned a character of sport already in its heydays in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Robinson recognizes, when with “the professionalization of science ... and the resulting decline of amateur science, athleticism would provide the dominant framework.”<sup>25</sup>

### 2.3. Mountaineering as risk-taking

A crucial factor in the activities of mountaineering and climbing is risk and its overcoming.<sup>26</sup> Therefore they are often considered forms of “recreational risk-taking” or “risk-taking sport.”<sup>27</sup> Already Horace Benedict de Saussure recognized, “it is this very dangers, this alteration of hope and fear ... which excite the huntsman, ... the gambler, the sailor and, even to a certain point, the naturalist among the Alps.”<sup>28</sup>

The role of risk is, however, hard to determine, due to the difficulty of semantic conceptualization. Göring, referring to sociologist Niklas Luhmann, proposed to grasp risk as a subjective factor, which cannot be objectified and barely be quantified, but which rather depends on individual estimation.<sup>29</sup> That means that an activity can be associated

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and Place,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Musa Ghazali, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr (London: Routledge, 2015), 9.

23 Peter Donnelly and Kevin Young, “The Construction and Confirmation of Identity in Sport Subcultures,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5, No. 3 (1988): 240, accessed June 28, 2017, DOI:10.1123/ssj.5.3.223.

Rex Thomson, “Physical activity through Sport and Leisure: Traditional versus Non-Competitive Activities,” *Journal of Physical Education New Zealand* 33, 4 (2000), 36f.

24 Higham, Thompson-Carr and Musa, *Mountaineering Tourism*, 8.

25 Robinson, “Early Alpine Club Culture,” 112; Cf. Unsworth, *Hold the Heights*, 54.

26 Alan Ewert and Stacy Taniguchi, “The Motivations and Satisfactions attendant to Mountaineering,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Musa Ghazali, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr (New York: Routledge, 2015), 160.

Henning Allmer, “No risk - no fun. Zur psychologischen Erklärung von Extrem- und Risikosport,” in “Erlebnissport - Erlebnis Sport,” ed. Henning Allmer and Norbert Schulz (Köln: Academia, 1995). Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 17-18.

27 Paul Beedie, “A History of Mountaineering Tourism,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Musa Ghazali, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr (London: Routledge, 2015), 46.

28 Macfarlane, *Mountains of the mind*, 71.

29 Arne Göring, “Auf der Suche nach Herausforderungen. Natur als risikosportliches Handlungsfeld,” in

with risk when the individual perceives a situation as risky. However, risk is not, according to Ewert, crucial insofar as it would be consistently stated as a motivation for performing adventure sports, but rather its control was mentioned as a motivation.<sup>30</sup> Risk is a prerequisite for the dimensions of both accomplishment and experience in mountain climbing.<sup>31</sup> Whereas in daily lives, risk and concrete dangers for life and health are either minimized or becoming more abstract by taking on the form of fear of material or social decline, this concrete risk is offered by nature.<sup>32</sup> Charles Houston already noticed the tendency towards ever-increasing risk. He stresses the need to distinguish risk from danger: An experienced climber “understand[s], enjoy[s] and seek[s] risk because it presents a difficulty to overcome and can be estimated and controlled. He equally abhors danger because it is beyond his control.”<sup>33</sup>

## 2.4. Mountaineering as tourism

Simultaneously, mountaineering is grasped by scholars under the category of tourism, and there is good reason to do so.<sup>34</sup> From the beginnings of mountaineering on, its exponents were tourists and mountaineering was a form of tourism. Mountaineering still usually happens in a touristic context, involving travel and practice within “the unique context of *place*” as a “space that is infused with meanings.”<sup>35</sup> Adventure tourism, as defined by the *Adventure Tourism Marketing Report* of 2010 comprises the following attributes: physical activity, interaction with nature and cultural learning or exchange.<sup>36</sup> German sociologist Hans Magnus Enzensberger noticed in his “Theory of Tourism”, that the beginning alpinism incorporated the romantic ideology of tourism in a specific pureness, aiming on “the

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*Sehnsucht nach Natur: über den Drang nach draußen in der heutigen Freizeitkultur*, ed. Thomas Kirchhoff, Vera Vicenzotti and Annette Voigt (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 167.

30 Ewert and Taniguchi, “The Motivations and Satisfactions attendant to Mountaineering,” 160. Pomfret, “Mountaineering Adventure Tourists,” 114f.

31 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, xiii. Cf. Beedie, “History of Mountaineering Tourism,” 47f.

32 Cf. Göring, “Auf der Suche,” 170; Karl-Heinrich Bette, *X-treme. Zur Soziologie des Abenteuer- und Risikosports* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004) Karl-Heinrich Bette, *X-treme. Zur Soziologie des Abenteuer- und Risikosports* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004), 15-19.

33 Charles Houston, “Stress-seekers in Everyday Life,” in *Why man takes chances. Studies in Stress-seeking*, ed. Samuel Z. Klausner (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1968), 51-52.

34 Cf. Beedie, “History of Mountaineering Tourism,” 41f., 47.

35 Higham, Thompson-Carr and Musa, “Mountaineering Tourism,” 9.

36 “Adventure tourism market report.” The Adventure Travel Trade Association and The George Washington University School of Business, 2010, accessed May 28, 2017, [http://cdn.adventuretravel.biz/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/adventure\\_travel\\_market082610.pdf](http://cdn.adventuretravel.biz/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/adventure_travel_market082610.pdf).

elemental, the pristine, the adventure.”<sup>37</sup> A further conceptualization was made by Stebbins for climbing as a form of *serious leisure*, that involves over-coming of negative aspects for overall rewarding results as well as the pursuit of leisure careers, lifestyles and identities creating a “central life interest.”<sup>38</sup> Mountaineering and climbing in general are primarily physical activities, possessing the sportive characteristics mentioned above and, thus, sport. But they occur at a linking point of sports, recreation and tourism. They overlap to an extent that makes them sometimes indistinguishable, whereas the actual activity is basically still a sport. An analysis of the subject has to be aware of this inter-relationship and multi-dimensionality.

## 2.5. Continental differences

It is highly interesting for this work to reconstruct, to what extent American climbing and mountaineering tradition has developed its own forms and styles and how far it distinguishes itself from European “original” climbing tradition. American climbers are well aware of their own traditions and styles such as trad-climbing, alpine-style, and the Yosemite history,<sup>39</sup> as was noted in *Climax* magazine. And they even seem to overstate them, not caring too much about European climbing and its emphasis on sports-climbing and competitive climbing, neither about the earlier establishment of higher standards. Trad-climbing ranges as the ultimate American climbing style, although alpine style has its place in the American climbing community, too.<sup>40</sup> Americans are to be found in the world elite not only of crag-climbing, but also in alpinism, which is probably due to their climbing in remote areas that trains for long and difficult climbs in the Himalayas. Selters notes, in comparison with mountaineering heritage in other parts of the world, “what's unique in our heritage is the context of wilderness. Mountaineering in North America started with ventures into wilderness. ... When wilderness seemed to be running out we acted to

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37 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Eine Theorie des Tourismus,” in *Einzelheiten I. Bewußtseins-Industrie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1962), 192; own translation.

38 Robert A. Stebbins, “Serious Leisure,” *Society* 38, no. 4 (2001): 55.

39 In trad-climbing, which is done on rock walls or crags, all gear for protection from fall is placed and removed by the climbers, whereas sport-climbing is practiced on routes that are protected with drilled bolts. Alpine-style means basically “light and fast” mountain climbing with a daypack and refers to shorter climbing excursions of a day or a weekend in the Alps and has been transferred to long and difficult climbs in high and remote mountains such as the Himalayas.

40 Andrew Bisharat, “USA, USA, USA!,” *Climax* 24, July 2015, 20f.

preserve it. In North America, mountains *mean* wilderness.” Americans seem to have gained a “reputation for heavier packs and lower technical standards.”<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, American alpinist Colin Haley simply speaks of a different approach. North American mountaineering was rather seen as a wilderness experience than a sports and is not as comfortably possible as in Europe.<sup>42</sup>

In turn, “to many European historians, North America's mountaineering heritage has merited little more than a few side notes that help fill the gaps between alpine and Himalayan breakthroughs.” This, according to Selters “neglects the breadth of world's mountaineering legacy” and overlooks that Europeans from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century have continuously come to America “when their own mountains began to seem too familiar.”<sup>43</sup>

## 2.6. The trend to climbing

Climbing flourishes in all its facets for some years now, and worldwide. *Climbing* magazine even speaks of an explosion.<sup>44</sup> Already for the first years of the new millenium, Macfarlane notes mountain-going to be the fastest growing leisure activity, with an estimated 10 million Americans doing it.<sup>45</sup> Not only are more people exercising adventure tourism in Europe and America (North and South), they have also increased their spendings for trips between 2009 and 2012. The international climbing market increased by an (estimated) yearly average of 65%.<sup>46</sup> Membership in the Alpine Club of Canada i.e. has constantly risen in the last six years.<sup>47</sup> In 2013 the German Alpine Club (DAV) broke the one million members landmark and Thomas Bucher of the DAV said, people were coming to them increasingly in times of crises.<sup>48</sup>

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41 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 327.

42 Flo Scheimpflug, “Colin Haley. Interview.” *Climax* 24, July 2015, 66-74.

43 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 327.

44 Chris Noble, “The Mentorship Gap: What Climbing Gyms Can't Teach You,” *Climbing*, May 7, 2014, accessed July 2, 2017 <https://www.climbing.com/people/the-mentorship-gap-what-climbing-gyms-cant-teach-you>.

45 Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 17.

46 “Adventure tourism market study.” The George Washington University School of Business and The Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2013, accessed May 28, 2017, <http://files.adventuretravel.biz/docs/research/adventure-tourism-market-study-2013-web.pdf>

47 According to its Annual Reports, found under “Annual General Meetings,” Alpine Club of Canada, accessed July 12, 2017, <http://www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/annual-reports>. However, membership numbers might not be an ideal indicator since club culture in America has never been as pronounced as in Europe.

48 Michael Wittershagen, “Trendsport Klettern. Ein Boom mit Nebenwirkungen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 16, 2009, accessed May 18, 2017, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/mehr->

A downright explosion also concerns indoor-climbing. Every year a number of new climbing gyms pops up and between 2005 and 2014 the number has doubled in the U.S.<sup>49</sup> In the U.S., more than a thousand people try climbing for the first time per day, as is estimated according to liability waivers. German magazine *klettern* already in 2010 spoke of a boom and also stressed its economic importance in creating safe jobs.<sup>50</sup> Mark Eisele, operator of the world's largest climbing gym in Munich prognosed in 2009, "an end of the boom is not foreseeable."<sup>51</sup> Although the boom is primarily linked to gym climbing, outdoor climbing's growth is catalysed by the former and expected to reach the limits of natural capacities,<sup>52</sup> because indoor climbers usually tend to make a step outdoors, too. Unsurprisingly, modern climbing "superstars" such as Alex Honnold or Sasha diGiulian started their careers in climbing gyms.<sup>53</sup> On both continents, thus, the sports is becoming an increasingly important part of culture.

## 2.7. Tourism and the culture industry

A study of the European Travel Insurance (Europäische Reiseversicherung), found that vacations are becoming more important as an escape from stress at work and a precaution against the burnout-syndrome.<sup>54</sup> Adventure tourism is "one of the newest and fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry."<sup>55</sup> Just as tourism in general, this reflects the social dynamics and the culture it is embedded in.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, the role of sport in tourism experience is increasing.<sup>57</sup>

Roots of tourism can already be found in antiquity, when it was practiced as "reinforcement

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sport/trendsport-klettern-ein-boom-mit-nebenwirkung-1881982.html.

49 Noble, "The mentorship gap."

50 Sarah Burmester, "Plastikboom: Immer mehr Kletterhallen," *klettern*, January 4, 2010, accessed June 8, 2017. <http://www.klettern.de/community/vertical-life/kletterhallen-boom.380272.5.htm>.

51 Wittershagen, "Trendsport Klettern."

52 Noble, "The mentorship gap."

53 Daniel Duane, "The rise of climbing," *New York Times*, July 25, 2015, accessed July 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/opinion/sunday/the-rise-of-climbing.html>.

54 "Mangelnde „Work-Life-Balance“ und Burnout-Syndrome: Urlaub als Flucht vor dem Arbeitsstress," Europäische Reiseversicherung, accessed May 19, 2017, [https://www.europaeische.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/2014-04-02\\_pa\\_1\\_erv\\_reisestudie\\_end\\_neues\\_layout.pdf](https://www.europaeische.at/fileadmin/user_upload/2014-04-02_pa_1_erv_reisestudie_end_neues_layout.pdf)

55 Ewert and Jamieson, "Current Status and Future Directions," 81.

56 Cf. Harald Michels, "Wenn einer eine Reise tut, dann kann er was erleben," in *Erlebnissport – Erlebnis Sport*, edited by Henning Allmer and Norbert Schulz (Köln: Academia, 1995), 46f.; Enzensberger, "Theorie des Tourismus," 189-199; Ziak, *Der Mensch und die Berge*, 6.

57 Michels, "Wenn einer eine Reise tut," 46.

of status” in ancient Greece, and Ulysses might even be considered the first tourist. The “birth” of tourism is often dated back to 1841, when Thomas Cook in a public address suggested an excursion for temperance movement.<sup>58</sup> While the formerly common Grand Tour of Britains or Americans was an educational activity of the well-to-do, the expansion of tourism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also represented a democratization of travel.<sup>59</sup> Mountain tourism, in turn, as an escape from mass-tourism was rapidly becoming a form of mass tourism itself in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup>

A central presupposition of tourism is the social construction of landscape which is, just as wilderness, subject to (social) change. As Macfarlane insightfully shows in *Mountains of the Mind*: “when we look at a landscape we do not see what is there, but largely what we think is there. We attribute qualities to a landscape that it does not intrinsically possess – savageness, for example, or bleakness – and we value it accordingly.”<sup>61</sup> That implies also a social construction of mountains, whose images tend to develop a life of their own in the minds of their admirers, being attached with meanings that are negotiated and “contested terrain,” as Cronon notes.<sup>62</sup> In turn, no social-constructivist stance is taken here that postulates that nature is *only* a construct. Rather, nature is both at a time: social, but on a material foundation. To put it with Macfarlane: “The mountains one gazes at, reads about, dreams of and desires are not the mountains one climbs. These are matters of hard, steep, sharp rock and freezing snow; of extreme cold... .” Very alike, German alpinist Robert Steiner wrote that, “mountains are beautiful, but simultaneously they are a pile of debris. They can be unfair, brutal and ugly ... you will only find as much humanity in the mountains as you put into them.”<sup>63</sup> That reminds us of how far imaginations can divert and deviate from reality, and how people can even be possessed by them, just as Mallory was by Everest.<sup>64</sup> The latter makes for a highly instructive example from its early exploration on: “I sometimes think of this expedition as a fraud from beginning to end, invented by the wild enthusiasm of one man... Certainly the reality must be strangely different from their

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58 Beedie, “History of Mountaineering Tourism,” 41f.

59 Cf. Enzensberger, “Theorie des Tourismus,” 189.

60 Paul Beedie, “A History of Mountaineering Tourism,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Musa Ghazali, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr (London: Routledge, 2015), 42f.

61 Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 18.

62 Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 51.

63 Robert Steiner, *Selig, wer in Träumen stirbt* (Köngen: Panico, 2011), 175.

64 Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 20.

dream.”<sup>65</sup> Peter Habeler who was the first to climb Everest without supplemental oxygen, simply said: “the mountain without humans is dead.”<sup>66</sup>

Mount Everest is particularly noteworthy, since in the last three decades, a special sort of tourism has established and institutionalized with proper and sometimes fatal consequences: climbing companies guide mostly under-experienced aspirants to the summit for large sums in all-inclusive-packages. As a result, an over-crowding of Everest first led to catastrophe in 1996, having 12 people killed, which was famously accounted for in Jon Krakauer's book “Into thin Air.”<sup>67</sup> Similar catastrophes happened again in 2012 and 2014.<sup>68</sup> In general, an on-going process of institutionalization of recreational risk-taking in the tourism sector evolved around the experience of “soft” adventures that introduce clients into recreational risk-taking activities.<sup>69</sup>

Part of the tourism industry is a climbing industry that includes mountain guiding, infrastructure, climbing gear production, as well as climbing movies and literature. That, in fact, can be subsumed under the term “culture industry,” as coined by Adorno to describe modern culture.<sup>70</sup> Applied here, it includes prominently productions of the culture industry such as media products, literature, movies and clothing. Alpinist publications have not only been traditionally a sphere where climbers discussed and shaped their sports and its ethics. They also served for discussing their “scientific” geographic observations, since the British climbing community and the British Alpine Club (BAC) evolved out of a scientific spirit, too, in an era of Victorian imperialistic drive for discovery, conquest, expansion. These were conflicting discourses, as Robbins notes.<sup>71</sup> Published media moreover represented the sphere, where climber's deeds could be recognized by the community and the public.<sup>72</sup> The BAC required members to write about their accomplishments or to

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65 Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 248.

66 *Land der Berge* 5 (2012), 10.

67 Jon Krakauer, *Into thin Air. A Personal Account of the Everest Disaster* (New York: Anchor, 1997).

68 Cf. Lukas Eberle, “The Story Behind another Deadly Year on Everest,” *SPIEGEL ONLINE*, October 5, 2012, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/mount-everest-records-deadliest-year-in-over-a-decade-a-859533.html>; Ellen Barry and Graham Bowley, “Deadliest Day: Sherpas Bear Everest’s Risks,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2014, accessed July 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/19/world/asia/fatal-avalanche-on-mount-everest.html>.

69 Alan Ewert and Lynn Jamieson, “Current status and Future Directions in the adventure tourism industry,” in *Managing tourist Health and Safety in the new Millenium*, ed. Jeff Wilks and Stephen J. Page (Oxford: Pergamon, 2003), 81. Cf. Michels, “Wenn einer eine Reise tut,” 46, 50f.

70 Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, *Einzelheiten I. Bewußtseins-Industrie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1962).

71 Robbins, “Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class”, 587-595.

72 Robinson, “Early Alpine Club Culture,” 105.

otherwise engage culturally: "Publication mattered,"<sup>73</sup> in a way that makes Robinson even speak of a dependency on print culture.<sup>74</sup> Publication still matters today, although the BAC was, as a community, in a way self-centered, that it is not any longer. In turn, however, literature also always serves to popularize mountain climbing.<sup>75</sup>

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73 Robinson, "Early Alpine Club Culture," 108.

74 Robinson, "Early Alpine Club Culture," 114.

75 Robinson, "Early Alpine Club Culture," 113.

### 3. Motivational research

Since this work aims at a social theory of climbing, it examines the history of climbing as well as previous research on mountaineering and combines it with theoretical works mostly by Frankfurt School theorists. Contrary to Anderl Heckmaier's remark that alpinism is a passion "residing deeply inside the soul that cannot be explained,"<sup>76</sup> a closer look at what motivations have been encountered in research about mountaineering or climbing, as well as some links to literature by climbers, would reveal almost the complete range of possible motivations.

A variety of efforts already have been spent on the question for motivations of climbers and alpinists, e.g. by Klausner in 1968,<sup>77</sup> Alan Ewert for the last decades,<sup>78</sup> as well as Allmer, Bette and Aufmuth in the German context from sociological and psychological perspectives.<sup>79</sup>

Motives interfere with each other and are subject to change within time but also subject to the skill and experience level of climbers.<sup>80</sup> The motivational complex for climbing involves challenge-, risk- and sensation-seeking.<sup>81</sup> Some of the more persistent motives that Ewert found, include exhilaration, self-image, catharsis or escape and sense of achievement.<sup>82</sup> Travel experiences, stress release and discovery of personal boundaries are further important.<sup>83</sup>

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76 Ulrich Aufmuth, *Lust am Aufstieg, Zur Psychologie des Bergsteigens* (Walzburg, GER: Drumlin, 1984), 106.

77 Samuel Z. Klausner *Why man takes chances. Studies in stress-seeking* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1968);

78 Alan Ewert et al., "Beyond 'because it's there'. Motivations for Pursuing Adventure Recreational Activities," *Journal of Leisure Research* 44, no. 1 (2013), 91-111.

79 Allmer  
*Karl-Heinrich Bette, X-treme. Zur Soziologie des Abenteuer- und Risikosports* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004); Aufmuth, *Die Lust am Aufsteig*, see above.

80 Ewert et al., "'Beyond 'because it's there;'" Ewert and Taniguchi, "Motivations and Satisfactions," 164.

81 It is, however, mostly not risk that is searched, but rather its overcoming. Pomfret, "Mountaineering Adventure Tourists," 117f.

82 Ewert and Taniguchi, "Motivations and Satisfactions," 167f.

83 Ewert and Taniguchi, "Motivations and Satisfactions," 156-158. Allmer, "No risk - no fun," 73-75f. One prominent example for the notion of extending personal limits is Reinhold Messner who calls himself a "Grenzgänger." Cf. *Reinhold Messner, Mein Weg. Bilanz eines Grenzgängers* (München: Frederking & Thaler, 2005); Ulrich Aufmuth, *Die Lust am Risiko. Gedanken über Extremformen der Bergleidenschaft* 1989, 126.

Identity construction is another crucial aspect.<sup>84</sup> Search for self, as Giddens calls it, and its narrative construction in the “reflexive project of the self,”<sup>85</sup> can be grasped as a varying expression of the process of subjectivation that will be analysed further down. These aspects also interfere with the accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital in climbing and mountaineering, as has been acknowledged i.e. by Beedie.<sup>86</sup>

The most useful work is presented by Bette who, with a sociological view, has offered a far-reaching account, presenting a plethora of motivations for risk-taking, without, however, following their origins. As has been recognized by different authors, the lack of risk in modern societies leads to an increase in risk-seeking activities.<sup>87</sup> Bette, e.g., emphasizes the complex of risk and fear, or anxiety, stating that “modernity not only produces a demand for security as well as minimizing risk. On the opposite it also produces a demand for risk, uncertainty and experience of fear.” But as will become clear, this is not sufficient. He plausibly argues, however, that fear in adventure and extreme sports evolves “context-specifically,” i.e. as fear from rockfall, avalanches, a sudden weather change or downfalls.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in modern societies the feeling of vitality was lost and modern risk-taking should thus be regarded as a “cultural technique of affirmation of life” (Lebensbejahung), of “nobilitating” life by seeking “proximity to death.”<sup>89</sup>

Equivalently, a need for body sensation and the “experience of evidence,” are mentioned.<sup>90</sup> Further, he sees the role of people in society as a passive one: as patients, clients, students, spectators, audience.<sup>91</sup> By adventure sports, however, feelings of powerlessness towards organizations, institutions, bureaucracy could be overcome.<sup>92</sup> The “risky mastery of natural variables” procures “feelings of feasibility, self-efficacy, vitality, that cannot arouse either in office work or in lawnmowing.”<sup>93</sup> He hints at a form of alienation, writing that the

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84 Pomfret, “Mountaineering adventure tourists,” 119; Lee Davidson, “Narrative Construction of Self through a commitment to mountaineering,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Musa Ghazali, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr (London: Routledge, 2015), 121-124.

85 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 185.

86 Beedie, “History of Mountaineering Tourism,” 49f.

87 Allmer, “No risk - no fun,” 82f.; Bette, *X-treme*, 15-21; Michael Apter, *Im Rausch der Gefahr. Warum immer mehr Menschen den Nervenkitzel suchen*, (München: Kösel, 1992), 245.

88 Bette, *X-treme*, 19; always own translations.

89 Bette, *X-treme*, 20.

90 Bette, *X-treme*, 75; 82f.

91 Bette, *X-treme*, 26.

92 Bette, *X-treme*, 23-29, 77-79.

93 Bette, *X-treme*, 43.

activities create “primary experiences” instead of merely mediated receptions of pictures.<sup>94</sup> Adventure and extreme sports can thus be grasped as means to attain self-control, self-assurance or agency, and thus, means of self-empowerment.<sup>95</sup>

These categories are often valid or at least useful. Partly, they reach into neurological dimensions, linking to sensation-seeking<sup>96</sup> or the widely known “flow” concept.<sup>97</sup> Neuropsychological, cognitive psychological or emotion-psychological approaches<sup>98</sup> that in one form or another address significant emotions such as excitement, anxiety, arousal, satisfaction, and the flow experience, as well as their neurological stimuli and states of excitation are not being dealt with here. Neither are any assumptions made about their applicability or connectivity to social theories.<sup>99</sup> Also anthropological assumptions are left aside which argue that, for example, “humans have an atavistic exploratory instinct”<sup>100</sup> or that the desire to conquest “resides deep in the human psyche” and “is not culturally specific”<sup>101</sup> or that humans generally have a basic desire for nature.<sup>102</sup> Without completely rejecting those approaches for making ontological assumptions about the essence of human being, it is argued here that climbing and mountaineering are clearly socially inspired and historically specific activities. They change over time and respond to social needs and constraints. The same is true for what will be considered as drives (instincts) further down. A major shortcoming of generalizing approaches like the present one, is that they cannot explain why some people feel a compelling need to climb and others do not. Filling this gap requires psycho-analytical approaches because they can take into account different psychological developments. Balint's approach which focuses on the feeling of 'thrill' is partly useful in this sense. It relies on object relations shaped by the outcome of mother-child-relationships.<sup>103</sup> Besides, psycho-analytic approaches have strong legitimacy

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94 Bette, *X-treme*, 77.

95 Allmer, “No risk - no fun,” 75.

96 Marvin Zuckerman, *Biological Bases of Sensation Seeking, Impulsivity and Anxiety* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1983).

97 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow. The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008).

98 Cf. Göring, “Auf der Suche,” 175f.

99 Göring, “Auf der Suche,” 176

100 Beedie, “History of Mountaineering Tourism,” 45.

101 Beedie, “History of Mountaineering Tourism,” 46.

102 Thomas Kirchhoff, Vera Vicenzotti, and Annette Voigt, *Sehnsucht nach Natur. Über den Drang nach draußen in der heutigen Freizeitkultur* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 12.

103 Allmer, “No risk - no fun,” 68f.

in trying to explain the compulsiveness of such activities.<sup>104</sup> Aufmuth regards paralyzes of the capacity to live emotions as causes that originate in childhood, for instance when exuberant feelings of guilt, of relinquishment and fear of punishment were experienced. Repressed problematical feelings such as grief, helplessness, anxieties, and longing for love can result in desires for a participation in risk-taking activities such as climbing.<sup>105</sup> Further, aggressions can be transformed into resolving discharge reactions.<sup>106</sup> However, since motivation-psychological approaches operate on a merely individual basis, their explanatory capacity is limited.

Contrary to the assumption that “‘pull factors’ (desirable characteristics of the destination) have a greater influence ... than do ‘push’ motivations (such as the need to escape from an urban environment),”<sup>107</sup> this work argues that push and pull factors cannot be neatly separated, but rather belong together, assuming that what pushes one person has its counterpart in what the person is pulled by. This refers also to the fact that tourism, especially in its more risk-involving forms, is inherently paradoxical, because, as Beedie states,

“the more sophisticated and safe life becomes the greater the desire of many people to experience thrills, excitement and otherness. In some respects, this desire is an antidote to the ennui of city life in an industrialized, efficient and heavily bureaucratized world that positions productivity and the accumulation of capital above all else. It is no surprise that escape from this ‘iron cage’ ... is a constant aspiration for many, and it is tourism that provides this potential temporal and spatial escape.”<sup>108</sup>

This paradox has been recognized by other scholars, too,<sup>109</sup> and will be taken up in the analytical part, where a social theory of tourism is linked with climbing.

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104 Gert Semler, *Die Lust an der Angst. Warum Menschen sich freiwillig extremen Risiken aussetzen* (München: Heyne, 1994), 126.

105 Aufmuth, *Lust am Aufstieg*, 123-127.

106 Aufmuth, *Lust am Aufstieg*, 179-181.

107 Alan A. Lew and Guosheng Han, “A world geography of mountain trekking,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*, ed. Musa Ghazali, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr (London: Routledge, 2015), 25.

108 Beedie, “History of Mountaineering Tourism,” 46.

109 Cf. Enzensberger, “A Theory of Tourism;” Cronon, “Troupe with wilderness,” 86f.

## 4. History

For understanding the role that climbing and mountaineering play in our societies, it is necessary to look at history, since sports always reflects the culture in which it occurs.<sup>110</sup> Karl Ziak, too, stresses that alpinism “is, just as philosophy and arts, inseparably connected to the entire culture of an epoch, which it simultaneously characterizes.”<sup>111</sup> But before, it is highly important to closely look on the history of the idea of wilderness (or nature) appreciation, because alpinism and adventurism exist in a functional relationship with it. Since nature attracts adventurers and alpinists it contributes to or extends the appeal of the looked-for areas and activities. Wilderness furthermore has a special role and function in the American imaginations that is different from that in Europe.

### 4.1. History of wilderness appreciation

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the view of mountains and of nature altogether was normally negative, people were downright appalled.<sup>112</sup> In North America, this relates to the vastness of the country and the history of its conquest along the frontier. This *wilderness condition* is a crucial part of American history<sup>113</sup> and “a basic ingredient of American culture.”<sup>114</sup>

Wilderness has in the beginning of civilization of the continent been a negative quality and was object of contempt and subordination.<sup>115</sup> “To be a wilderness then was to be ‘deserted,’ ‘savage,’ ‘desolate,’ ‘barren’—in short, a ‘waste’”<sup>116</sup>. Settlers were as hostile to wilderness as were alpine peasants towards their high mountainous environment.<sup>117</sup> In a process unfolding in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this negative image changed into a positive one.<sup>118</sup> Frontier life and wildlife were getting idealized as “freer, truer and more natural.”<sup>119</sup>

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110 McPherson, Curtis and Loy, *Social Significance of Sport*, 35f.

111 Ziak, *Der Mensch und die Berge*, 6.

112 Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 146.

113 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 76.

114 Nash, *Wilderness*, 43.

115 Nash, *Wilderness*, 23-43.

116 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 70.

117 Fleming, *Killing Dragons*, 8f.

118 Carolyn Merchant, “Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative,” in *Uncommon Ground*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1996), 132-170.

119 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 77.

A downright “frontier nostalgia,” as Cronon calls it, came up as a “peculiarly bourgeois form of antimodernism.”<sup>120</sup>

Although Europe almost owns no wilderness nowadays, the role of nature had a similar place in the emergence of alpinism as a special form of tourism, since the appreciation of nature is grounded on a turn in sciences with Enlightenment thinking that made nature the object of research. This appreciation is also based on the understanding of the universe as “at once vast, complex, and harmonious” and of nature as sacred and divine revelation.<sup>121</sup> That period also brings the association of nature with the idea of the sublime that was represented by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant.<sup>122</sup> The former, in his “Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful” of 1757, described the sublime as an emotional response to natural phenomena that is inspired also by terror, which “always produces delight when it does not press too close.”<sup>123</sup> The idea became favored by the romantic movement also as a response to rationalism.<sup>124</sup> Generally, the new adoration of nature in North America, too, can be seen as equivalent to what in Europe developed on the basis primarily of what Nash calls the “Romantic and Primitivistic Complex,” shaped by thinkers such as Lord Byron, Chateaubriand, and, probably most important, Rousseau and his pre-romantic adoration of nature in his novel “Julie, or the new Héloïse.”<sup>125</sup>

In America, the change in attitude began to manifest itself practically and was represented philosophically by the Transcendental movement and its protagonists Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The latter, who stood in a tradition of German Idealism and was probably the intellectual founder of Transcendentalism, was skeptical, if not resentful towards society. In his essay “Nature” where he outlined his philosophy, nature was set as an object for both scientific and spiritual research as well as infused with divine presence.<sup>126</sup>

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120 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 78.

121 Nash, *Wilderness*, 45.

122 Nash, *Wilderness*, 43-45; Cronon, “Troube with wilderness,” 73.

123 Edmund Burke, *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful: with an introductory discourse, concerning taste, and several other additions* (Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1779), 73; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 101-131.

124 Isserman, *Continental Divide*.

125 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *La nouvelle heloise: Julie, or the new Eloise*, trans. Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (Hanover-London: University Press of New England, 1992).

126 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” in *Essays* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1903), 161-188.

In the words of Lawrence Buell, Emerson “sacralized nature as man's mythic counterpart.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, in a lecture about “The American Scholar,” he recommended the study of nature, stating that “‘Know thyself,’ and the modern precept, ‘Study nature,’ become at last one maxim.”<sup>128</sup>

Inspired by Emerson's writings, Thoreau, an early anarchist and critic of technology, started his attempt to live in balance with nature in the Massachusetts forests at Walden Pond, that he famously described in his book *Walden*<sup>129</sup> which became American canon literature.<sup>130</sup> His desire for nature originated in both a rejection of the modern, industrializing society and the search for self, which will be taken up in the next chapter, and thus makes him an forerunner of the modern hobby adventurer. As wilderness became a sanctuary for escape already in the early 1800s,<sup>131</sup> romantic enthusiasm increased in the following decades.<sup>132</sup> Nash writes that “romanticism, including deism and the aesthetics of the wild, had cleared away enough of the old assumptions to permit a favorable attitude toward wilderness.”<sup>133</sup> Hence, the emerging middle class increasingly used their newly gained leisure time for the discovery of nature and recreation in nature, i.e. by mountaineering—“the noblest form of recreation,” as Coolidge called it.<sup>134</sup>

The first National Parks were getting established in the 1870s, but the movement to preserve wilderness “began to gain real momentum at precisely the time that laments about the passing frontier reached their peak.”<sup>135</sup> The first parks were established mainly for aesthetic and recreational, not ecological reasons, due to the enrichment of the wilderness idea with particular images (of the sublime and others) that prevailed in a particular historical period, as is also noticed by Cronon.<sup>136</sup>

Motivations and backgrounds of wilderness appreciation have expressed themselves in

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127 Lawrence Buell, “Thoreau and the natural environment,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Thoreau*, ed. Joel Myerson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 171.

128 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The American Scholar,” in *The selected writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: Random House, 1968), 45-63.

129 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden. A fully annotated Edition*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

130 Ortlepp, “Nature - Culture - Leisure,” 189.

131 Nash, *Wilderness*, 60.

132 Nash, *Wilderness*, 71.

133 Nash, *Wilderness*, 66.

134 Unsworth, *Hold the Heights*, 125.

135 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 77.

136 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 73, 86.

statements of conservationists in processes of fighting back attempts to restrict protected areas. John Muir stated: “thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as foundations of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.”<sup>137</sup> Ulysses S. Grant III said that “our industrial civilization is creating an ever greater need for the average man ... to reestablish contact with nature ... and to be diverted from the whirling wheels of machinery and chance.”<sup>138</sup>

With the turn in attitude, perceived wilderness areas, such as the Niagara Falls, Adirondacks, Yosemite or others, became objects of touristic interest, catalysed by the idea of the sublime as a transatlantic driving force that spurred the romantic movement.<sup>139</sup> Lyndon Johnson signed the Wilderness Act in 1964, establishing a National Wilderness Preservation System. For some, “the philosophies of Thoreau and Muir provided a justification for the wilderness system, particularly the idea that man's happiness and strength depend on blending periodic contact with the primitive into a civilized existence.” Nash further writes that “finally, some supported preservation ‘because of the central role which the wilderness, the frontier, has played in our history’ and the importance of maintaining a distinctive American national character.”<sup>140</sup> That suggests that preservation was enacted not *despite* but *because* of the frontier experience.

#### **4.2. History of mountaineering**

The history of mountaineering is widely analyzed, i.e. in Fergus Fleming's brilliant work on the *The Conquest of The Alps*. However, works on North American mountaineering history are rare, with Walt Unsworth's *Hold the Heights* as well as Andy Selters' and Chris Jones' works being the most prominent ones.<sup>141</sup>

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137 John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton Muffin, 1901), 1.

138 Quoted after Nash, *Wilderness*, 213.

139 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 72.

140 Nash, *Wilderness*, 225.

141 Fergus Fleming, *Killing Dragons. The Conquest of the Alps* (London: Granta Books, 2001); Walt Unsworth, *Hold the Heights. The Foundations of Mountaineering* (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1994); Chris Jones, *Climbing in North America* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1976); Andy Selters, *Ways to the Sky. A Historical Guide to North American Mountaineering* (Golden: AAC Press, 2011).

Already neolithic people have climbed mountains in North America and early Spanish colonialists probably reached the top of Popocatepetl. And just as in Europe, locals have reached summits before their “official” successors.<sup>142</sup> Native Americans have casually climbed prominent peaks in North America before whites had been there, which is partly proven by archeological evidence.<sup>143</sup>

Alpinism started in Europe out of curiosity and with a desire to enhance human knowledge about nature, overcoming the long-persisting fear and aversion towards high mountains. Before, existing knowledge about alps was based on economic necessities, held by crystal gatherers, livestock farmers and game hunters.<sup>144</sup> The local population was dominated by superstitions and fears. Summits were believed to inhabit dragons.<sup>145</sup>

The birthdate of alpinism is usually seen in the climb of Mont Blanc in 1786 by Jacques Balmat and Michel-Gabriel Paccard, after the scientist Benedict Horace de Saussure had announced a summit bid already 20 years before. It is exemplary for the entire development of alpinism that this climb was originally ignited by curiosity and scientific desire for exploration. Some authors, such as Macfarlane, Unsworth or Isserman have begun their histories in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>146</sup> Often, Petrarch's climb of Mont Ventoux in the year 1336 is mentioned as the first mountain-climb done without any necessity.<sup>147</sup> But the era when mountaineering evolved literally as a movement was doubtlessly the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Spurred by romanticism, the alps were becoming a refuge for a plagued wealthy citizenship, and slowly a shift took place from an exploratory character to one of adventure, holiday and leisure. The first noticeable climbs of North American peaks were realized in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, often induced by scientific, military or geographical necessities, such as survey missions, the search for passes such as the Athabasca pass,<sup>148</sup>

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142 Martin Krauß, *Der Träger war immer schon vorher da. Die Geschichte des Wanderns und Bergsteigens in den Alpen* (München: Carl Hanser, 2013).

143 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 34; Unsworth, *Hold the Heights*, 215.

144 Paul Beedie, “A history of mountaineering tourism,” in *Mountaineering Tourism*. ed. Musa Ghazali, James Higham and Anna Thompson-Carr, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 48. Cf. Fleming, *Killing Dragons*, 23;

145 Fleming, *Killing Dragons*, 8f.; Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 205.

146 Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 25; Unsworth, *Hold the Heights*, 19-46; Maurice Isserman, “Continental Divide: A History of American Mountaineering, New York: Norton, 2016, accessed June 11, 2017, <https://books.google.de/books?isbn=0393292525>.

147 Cf. Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 146; Ewert and Taniguchi, “Motivations and Satisfactions,” 161. For the original description see i.e. James Harvey Robinson, *Petrarch. The first modern scholar and Man of Letters* (New York, Putnam's Sons, 1909), 307-320.

148 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 18.

or railway construction.<sup>149</sup>

With the 1854 climb of the Bernese peak of Wetterhorn in 1854 and the founding of the British Alpine Club in 1857 began what is often called the “Golden Age” of mountaineering. Other European countries followed with the emergence of alpine clubs until the 1880s at the latest. Increasingly, athleticism and sportsmanship added to the character of mountaineering, and the first, though informal, competition arose about the Matterhorn. This led to the development not only of tools and methods, but of “ethics and aesthetics”, too.<sup>150</sup> After the following disaster when Whymper first-ascended the peak and four of his party fell to death, a public Controversy in Britain incited about the dangers of mountaineering.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, mountaineering did not come to a halt or even slow down. Whymper's *Scrambles amongst the Alps* and Stephen's *Playground of Europe* further popularized climbing.<sup>152</sup> In 1870 the first American climbed Mont Blanc and mountaineering further developed.<sup>153</sup> The Alps already “were getting crowded,” according to Edmund Coleman who migrated to British Columbia.<sup>154</sup> Mountaineering had in the 1850s and 1860s largely been established in Europe and although in the 1850s Northwestern U.S. summits (Mts. St. Helens, Hood, Adams, Rainier) were first-ascended and becoming even popular climbs for Pacific North Western citizens by the 1870s, North America was still lacking behind. Coleman explained this plausibly by material necessities: “The absorbing pursuit of money, the strangely practical character of the American mind, so averse to anything merely visionary, are quite sufficient to account for the absence of that *passion des montagnes* which is so often to be met with in older communities.”<sup>155</sup> Accordingly, Jones, along with Nash, stresses that everyday life at the time was a “continual challenge” and “accomplishment enough.”<sup>156</sup> Early mountaineers were aware of the reasons they climbed for and these persisted through time, famously expressed by Muir and his

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149 Cf. Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 8, 16f.; Unsworth, *Hold the Heights*, 202.

150 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 9.

151 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 9.

152 Unsworth, *Hold the Heights*, 90. Cf. Edward Whymper, *Scrambles amongst the Alps in the Years 1860-1869* (London: Nelson, 1900); Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe* (London: Putnam's Sons, 1909); Robinson, “Early Alpine Club Culture,” 113.

153 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 9.

154 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 11; Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 26.

155 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 27.

156 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 41.

contemporaries.<sup>157</sup> Goals were both accomplishment and experience, as Selters explains.<sup>158</sup> In this period that Jones calls the “pre-dawn era” of American mountaineering, it was still more common for well-to-do Americans to travel across the Atlantic or vacation in New England's mountains or the Adirondacks.<sup>159</sup> Intensive exploration and development followed, however, when Europeans turned to other mountain ranges after the Alps had become “conquered” and unclimbed peaks rare.<sup>160</sup>

Railway construction opened up the Canadian Rockies and Selkirks, where climbing life then centered around the “Glacier House” Hotel built by the Canadian Pacific Railway.<sup>161</sup> Despite increased accessibility of Canadian mountains, the Alps yet seemed more attractive with their “more numerous and widespread conveniences established, ... increasing the chances of success.”<sup>162</sup>

In the 1890s ambitious climbers began to challenge the Canadian Rockies<sup>163</sup> and “from about 1898 until World War I, they became one of the world's prime destinations for alpinism.”<sup>164</sup> Professional guiding became common. It led to an “import” of renowned Swiss Guides by the C.P.R., employed on subsistence basis, to promote British Columbia mountains as a travel destination comparable or even better than Switzerland, and endowed with C.P.R. run hotels.<sup>165</sup>

In technical regards, too, climbing further developed, since by the turn of the century ice axes (shorter Alpenstocks) were common and creepers (primitive crampons) were increasingly used.<sup>166</sup> Mount Assiniboine, called “North America's Matterhorn” because of its remarkably resembling form, was first climbed in 1901, incited by another C.P.R. publicity campaign for which Edward Whymper was even invited, thus spurring competitive spirits.<sup>167</sup> In the outgoing 19<sup>th</sup> century, most prominent peaks in the U.S. were climbed and becoming increasingly popular. The next logical step of development, however, was to turn further

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157 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 14.

158 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 15.

159 Cf. Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 9.

160 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 43.

161 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 44f.

162 Ewert and Taniguchi, “Motivations and Satisfactions,” 163.

163 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 45.

164 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 32.

165 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 50.

166 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 30f.

167 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 51f.; Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 33f.

north, towards Alaska.<sup>168</sup> In 1897 the Duke of Abruzzi climbed Mt. St. Elias in the first serious expedition to a major mountain including a multiple-days approach, after several under-experienced expeditions had departed for the mountain already beginning in 1886.<sup>169</sup> Denali was finally won in 1913 after several attempts in the previous years and a legendary scandal of famous explorer Frederick Cook unrightfully claiming the climb.<sup>170</sup> Thereafter, mountaineering in Alaska declined, since it was too remote and sponsors were not interested.<sup>171</sup> In 1925 the Glacier House hotel closed, after the glacier retreated out of sight and few climbers visited the Selkirk area for 30 years.<sup>172</sup>

The foundation of mountain clubs was largely concluded in the beginning 20<sup>th</sup> century: most important were the Appalachian Mountain Club (1873), Sierra Club (1892), Mazamas (1894), American Alpine Club (1902), Alpine Club of Canada (1906), Rocky Mountain Club (1896). Their goal, apart from bringing together the climbing community, was also to protect nature in the mountainside from destruction by touristical or industrial development.<sup>173</sup> The ACC was a result of dissatisfaction with American and British climbers “dominating” Canadian mountaineering. The foundation of the ACC can thus be understood as a partly nationalist endeavour.<sup>174</sup> Religious feelings also played a role: seven percent of early members were ministers. Herschel Parker shared religious associations, equating the mountainside with god.<sup>175</sup> In terms of gender, the ACC was unusually ahead of its time, because females made up about half of its members.

With the beginning 20<sup>th</sup> century the middle-class began streaming into the mountains due to “an echo of disillusionment and longing for nature” stirred by industrialization, alienation and the loss of frontier life hardships.<sup>176</sup> It is rather apparent that this influx, similar to Europe, stood in a mutual relationship with touristical development.

Climbing declined with World War I, however, and led to a stagnation due to a generational gap—many had fallen on the frontlines—and the old-fashionedness of Club's values.

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168 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 41, 59.

169 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 60f..

170 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 63-73; Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 41-49.

171 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 50.

172 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 37.

173 Cf. Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 37.

174 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 61.

175 Cf. Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 60. The club motto “Sic itur ad astra” (this way to the stars) accordingly bears some religious association.

176 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 53.

Generally, in post-war America, “mass marketing and vacation time expanded leisure interests, including ... competitive sports,” as Selters remarks. “The very concept of personal adventure also grew.” However, technical progress in climbing would “neither seek nor attract much social support,” the public became uninterested and the (Romantic) spirit got lost.<sup>177</sup>

A shift from exploratory climbing towards difficulty-oriented and more technical climbing based on the experience of adventure, took place after all prominent peaks were climbed in the 1920s.<sup>178</sup> Later that decade, pitons were introduced from Europe as a technical aid for climbing. Their rejection by British climbers led to the emergence of a piton “ethics” that allowed their use when they advanced good style and was brought to North America and influenced the development of technical climbing.<sup>179</sup> Rock-climbing also came to Colorado, which by its sheer abundance of peaks, played a major role for climbing development.<sup>180</sup>

The evolution of rock-climbing or crag-climbing began in the Dolomites, the Lake District, and the Labe-Sandstone mountains, but rapidly gripped Americans, too. Fritz Wiessner, a highly talented pioneer in Saxonian Labe-Sandstone climbing emigrated to the U.S. in 1929. Experienced in the Dolomites, too, he pushed climbing forward like no one before in North America.<sup>181</sup> Wiessner basically started free-climbing in the U.S. and established the New York Shawangunks as a climbing area.<sup>182</sup> He led an outstanding and legendary American expedition to K2 in 1939, almost reaching the summit. Wiessner had, according to Selters, “impressed, intimidated and in some cases disturbed the American climbing community.”<sup>183</sup> Most ambitious climbers came from the East, as Jones recognizes, since it first profited from industrialization, economical growth and social achievements such as extended education. Still, “it was customary for them to make the several-months-long European grand tour,” as Jones writes.

“Several ... devoted the majority of their climbing careers to the Alps. Although it may appear strange that these climbers traveled to Europe each year when there were

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177 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 80.

178 Cf. Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 85f.; Unsworth, *Hold the Heights*, 102.

179 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 88f.

180 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 105f.; Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 89f.; Unsworth, *Hold the Heights*, 219.

181 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 124; Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 157f.

182 Flo Scheimpflug, “The Gunks. Trad und Tradition,” *Climax* 24, July 2015, 77f.

183 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 125f.; Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 159.

mountains at home, it must be remembered that Europe had a cultural heritage singularly lacking in the boorish West... The Alps were simply more exciting than the Rocky Mountains. An additional factor was the alpine ambience: picturesque villages, rustic hotels, and colourful mountain guides.”<sup>184</sup>

Rock-climbing was carried out with greatest progress in New England.<sup>185</sup> The mystified North Faces of both Grand Teton and Matterhorn were climbed.<sup>186</sup> The 1920s and 1930s were also the time when rope usage was becoming a veritable technique, and when pitons became significantly used, but also subject to debate of style questions. Between wars, climbing flourished in Europe and big successes were made due to the widespread use of pitons, great influence of the alpine clubs, increased leisure time and unemployment, as well as the nationalist instrumentalization of alpinist endeavours.<sup>187</sup> In North America, however, climbing “came nowhere near the standard in Europe. Conditions made this inevitable.”<sup>188</sup> Climbing was accepted as a sport in Europe, and more people practiced it.<sup>189</sup> During the second World-War climbing came to a “virtual standstill” in North America, but climbing units were implemented in the Armed Forces and successfully employed in the fight against Germany, for instance in the Apennine offensive. Nylon ropes were successfully applied and became common in that period.<sup>190</sup> The war also led to a large amount of climbing equipment being available, crampons and rubber soles became increasingly used.<sup>191</sup>

The post-war era was marked by enthusiasm and adventurous ambitions with emblematic pioneer Fred Beckey having the most impressive record of climbs to date, uniting dedication and patience.<sup>192</sup> The post-war era also brought the dawning of professional rock-climbing in North America, and it was induced by technological advancements. John Salathé, immigrant Swiss iron-worker made breakthroughs in both climbing and

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184 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 111.

185 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 111f.

186 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 122.

187 Cf. Tait Keller, *Apostles of the Alps. Mountaineering and Nation Building in Germany and Austria, 1860-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of N.C. Press, 2016).

188 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 167f.

189 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 166f.

190 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 170-172.

191 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 137f.

192 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 138-141.

technology, after he began to forge stronger pitons fit for the hard Yosemite granite that helped him climb serious unclimbed Yosemite big-walls. He climbed Half Dome's southwest wall and along with Allen Steck was one of the great innovators of his time.<sup>193</sup> He pioneered and strongly influenced the coming generation of fully-fledged Yosemite big wall climbers in both technics and attitude,<sup>194</sup> such as Royal Robbins or Mark Powell, the first “climbing bum.”<sup>195</sup> This expansion of difficulties was made possible by improving technical abilities not only for protection, but for climbing with aid, too. Crag-climbing now spread across America and advanced in different areas, although relatively isolated from each other, like in Colorado, where Longs Peak and its east face were the place-to-go.<sup>196</sup> Further, the Shawangunks in New York became highly important for eastern U.S. and Canadian climbers, also in terms of advancing standards.<sup>197</sup>

However, Yosemite and its locals became the “non-plus-ultra” of American crag-climbing by 1960, when the self-sufficient isolation of the different climbing centers slowly began to crumble and rock-climbers to orientate towards the alpine.<sup>198</sup> Where pitons were dismissed as irregular aid, as in British or Canadian climbing communities, skills lacked behind compared to where pitons had been used, as in Yosemite or the rest of Europe. However, in the 1950s climbers were less reluctant to use them as direct climbing aid, whereas today forcing a route with aid is mostly rejected by climbers.<sup>199</sup> That already shows the interdependence with technical innovations.

At that time, long and demanding technical ridges and other alpine routes were getting accomplished. European immigrants advanced climbing in Canada,<sup>200</sup> and academic clubs pushed to more remote peaks which became easier to reach by the help of airplanes. Expedition style was applied on high northern peaks such as Logan, Augusta, and Denali.<sup>201</sup> Himalaya climbing, however, began slowly for Americans. The third K2 expedition failed and the first American expedition to climb an 8,000m peak succeeded on Hidden Peak only

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193 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 176-184; Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 143f.

194 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 260.

195 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 194.

196 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 208.

197 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 201-206.

198 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 213-215, 292.

199 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 221.

200 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 299.

201 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 239-246.

in 1958.<sup>202</sup>

The famous 1000m wall of El Capitan, by its sheer size and smoothness representing not only a technical but also a psychological barrier, had until then remained untouched but got climbed in a long-term project in 1958 by Warren Harding with immense material efforts. The technical tendency went towards minimizing pitons and fixed ropes. Free-climbing was the new objective but only achieved slowly by small, difficult steps, of which the next one was probably the ascent of the North America Wall in 1964 by Royal Robbins who became a legend of this era.<sup>203</sup> Jones regards El Cap's first-ascent as a downright revolution that put Americans at the forefront of the sport within the coming decade.<sup>204</sup>

It also brought a new type of climbers who rejected society and its values and practiced withdrawal by living solely for climbing as mostly poor, "four-months-a-year climbing bum."<sup>205</sup> The climbing bums were principal in Yosemite, but also the Tetons had them. No surprise either, this phenomenon was also pioneered in Europe, when in the interwar years the self-proclaimed "mountain vagabonds" ("Bergvagabunden") escaped their crisis-shaken homes and enjoyed mountain life, and particularly its great advantage of being comparatively cheap.<sup>206</sup> Jones writes about climbing bums:

"Instead of looking toward a college degree and a career, this new breed lived from year to year. They had a clear sense that they were 'different.' The Yosemite climbers created a gulf between themselves and the despised 'tourists.' It was easy to look down upon them ... At high school and in society at large the key factor was 'fitting in.'"<sup>207</sup>

One of those climbing bums was Yvon Chouinard, a French-Canadian from Maine, who grew his climbing hunger in the Tetons and like Salathé forged his own pitons. He went to Yosemite in 1959 to sophisticate technical climbing, and contributed strongly to its development. Supporting himself by selling gear, he later founded his own company *Patagonia*. Chouinard applied his approach to high and difficult alpine walls.

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202 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 248.

203 Cf. Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 260.

204 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 251.

205 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 260.

206 Krauß, *Der Träger war immer schon vorher da*, 110-115. An exciting autobiographical account of one Mountain Vagabond: Hans Ertl, *Bergvagabunden* (Frankfurt a.M.: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1954).

207 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 260f.

In that era and setting rock-climbing became both popular and professional. Then established grading systems had to be extended and Americans entered the world climbing elite.<sup>208</sup> The advance was threefold, comprising technology, ethics and style interdependently. Efficient, free and alpine-style climbs were the goal.<sup>209</sup> Climbing, wilderness journeys and dropping out became increasingly fashionable and common lifestyles entering mainstream culture.<sup>210</sup>

It was also in this period of social change that the awareness for environmental concerns increased and conservationists gained momentum, i.e. with the Wilderness Act of 1964, supported and lobbied for by many climbers. The first ethics of protection of rock from overuse were conceptualized, supported by new, non-invasive belaying devices, and taken up in the idea of climbing clean, advanced by Yvon Chouinard in 1972.<sup>211</sup>

Americans now climbed ahead of Europeans, that is, on big walls, since they perfected technique and gained confidence by their successes.<sup>212</sup> One of the American features was that style mattered much more, than in Europe, where fixed ropes, repeated attempts and “all-bolt extravaganzas” were common, contrary to the “self contained climbing party and the single, all-out push” typical of Yosemite.<sup>213</sup> Bolting had constantly been a controversially debated topic in the climbing community, and continues to be. Discussion arose again, when Warren Harding and Dean Caldwell climbed the incredibly hard Dawn Wall in a 27-day Odyssey in 1970, drilling 300 bolt holes. It ceded when new means of protection, so-called nuts, were getting common.

The 1960s also saw the first Americans on Mount Everest and its first traverse done by Americans, as well as aspirations for advancement of style in alpinism. Increasingly, deterring north faces were being headed for. Within that decade, the leading mountaineers again turned increasingly to the North since they “knew that the Tetons and the Cascades were not the ultimate experience.”<sup>214</sup> Technical mountaineering then really kicked off. Jones states that, “the intermixing of climbers, ideas and ambitions from across the continent, the acceptance of objective hazards as part of the challenge and the application of skills

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208 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 151, 225; Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 265-268.

209 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 225f.

210 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 352.

211 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 235.

212 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 341.

213 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 343.

214 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 295.

developed at rock climbing centers all contributed to the progress.”<sup>215</sup>

Alpine style more and more became a matter, certainly helped by the fact that in the 1960s and 1970s ice-climbing swapped over to the continent and Americans were at the “fore-front of this revolution,”<sup>216</sup> although already in the 1950s first attempts with front-point usage of crampons had been made.<sup>217</sup>

This, again, was much facilitated by improvements in equipment primarily made by Yvon Chouinard who experimented with shorter axes equipped with curved blades in the 60s, partly inspired by European climbers.<sup>218</sup> It brought entirely new possibilities for climbing and signified great advances in alpine climbing because of increased speed. Outstanding winter and north face ascents were made, i.e. on the epic Mt. Robson's Emperor Face.<sup>219</sup>

In 1971 a six-step scale of difficulty had been concluded by the international climbing union but to be extended eight years later, after the sixth grade had been considered the limit of possible.<sup>220</sup> Reinhold Messner's essay “The killing of the impossible” evoked discussion, since he criticizes the use of bolts for achieving “diretissimas” (direct lines) as routes previously considered impossible.<sup>221</sup> It foreshadowed the advance sports-climbing over mountaineering in the 80s also in the mountains, pushing degrees even higher, but waning in the late '90s with the “return” of mountaineering.<sup>222</sup>

A tendency towards the extreme came up: non-stop light-and-fast alpine-style ascents with as little as possible gear and supplies. Also, the first (implicit) speed-climbs were made. Mark Twight advanced the idea of “extreme alpinism” which also titled his book. He called for sponsorship like in Europe and stated that “American alpinists are the Jamaican bobsledders of world mountaineering.” He wanted to push towards what he thought would be the future of Alaskan and Canadian climbing: light and fast, in between storms.<sup>223</sup> In the new millenium, Americans were established at the forefront and Steve House who won the “Piolet d'Or”-the “mountaineering *Oscar*”-for his celebrated ascent of the 4.5km high Rupal

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215 Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 302.

216 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 190.

217 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 194.

218 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 196f.

219 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 200f.

220 Cf. Krauß, *Der Träger*, 189

221 Reinhold Messner, “The murder of the impossible,” *Mountain* 15, 1971, accessed June 11, 2017, <http://web.mit.edu/lin/Public/climbing/Messner.txt>.

222 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 280-285.

223 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 316.

Face of Nanga Parbat in 2005 together with Vince Anderson was considered the best alpinist worldwide.<sup>224</sup> Again in 2014, with Tommy Caldwell and Alex Honnold a now equally famous American duo received the award, thus highlighting Americans aspirations in worldwide elite climbing. Selters, regarding the social role of mountaineering, concludes:

“The modern era brings climbers and society into closer weave, the social context of mountaineering has changed. ... By the late 1990s, however, mountaineering had become a fairly accepted curiosity, partly because of hyper-publicized tragedies and discoveries on Mt. Everest. As the social value of mountaineering has risen... modern climbers often take it for granted that at least some part of the world is very interested in what they do. The outdoor equipment industry aids this process with ever-finer gear.”<sup>225</sup>

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224 Reinhold Messner, “Vorwort,” in Steve House, *Jenseits des Berges. Expeditionen eines Suchenden* (München: Malik, 2012), 10.

225 Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 280.

## 5. Social theory of climbing

### 5.1. Odysseus as role-model

In 1845, Transcendentalist nature-lover Henry David Thoreau noted in his journal:

“I am at least a remote descendant of that heroic race of men of whom there is tradition. I too sit here on the shore of my Ithaca, a fellow-wanderer and survivor of Ulysses.”<sup>226</sup>

In contemporary societies the narrative construction of self has become as indispensable as simultaneously burdening. When Giddens writes that “the sustaining of such a narrative directly affects, and in some degree helps construct, the body as well as the self,”<sup>227</sup> this is only a slightly different formulation of what I want to recur to as the process of subjectivization as Horkheimer and Adorno described it by their excursus to the *Odyssee* in their historico-philosophical work “Dialectic of Enlightenment.” In the same light appear Charles Houston's remark that “mountaineering is more a quest for self-fulfillment” than of conquering mountains<sup>228</sup> or Gaston Rebuffat who saw mountains as a “mirror of stone and ice”.<sup>229</sup>

Not by chance, Conrad Anker states that “perhaps today's modern adventurers are simply a new interpretation of this ancient story.”<sup>230</sup> References to Odysseus are abundant in alpinist and adventurist literature. Not surprisingly so, since Odysseus is not only a proto-type of an adventurer but, even more, by that quality he is also a proto-type of the modern subject. The formation of this subject in the *Odyssey* is traced back by Adorno and Horkheimer who, in their excursus analyzing Homer's epos, show the continuous entanglement of enlightenment with its origins in myth. Seemingly odd at the first glance, they explain that enlightenment, grasped as advancing thought and “traced back to the beginning of recorded history,” the “twofold character of enlightenment” emerges “more

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226 Henry David Thoreau, *Journals. Volume 2: 1842-1848*, ed. Robert Sattelmeyer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984), 156.

227 Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 185.

228 Houston, “Last blue Mountain,” 58.

229 Chris Noble, *Why we climb. The world's most inspiring climbers* (Guilford: Falcon, 2017), 6.

230 Noble, *Why we climb*, viii.

clearly as a basic motif of history."<sup>231</sup> The epic hero Odysseus, in the adventure of his journey from Troy to Ithaca, prototypically performs what Adorno and Horkheimer illuminate as a process of subjectivization which they show by analyzing different stages and occurrences during his travel. This subjectivization happens in a process of contestation with the forces of nature, where the subject character is shaped in an adventurous endeavour, by self-renunciation and alienation from nature.

Most instructive is the passage of the sirens, where he orders his men to enchain him to the pole of his ship and to fill their ears with wax. He knows he cannot resist the sirens' singing, so he subjects himself to immobility. He thus is able to circumvent and to cheat the irresistible temptation of the sirens which represent a force of nature. He outwits it and thereby dominates it, having developed a capacity of mind that points towards self-preservative reason: "the faculty by which the self survives adventures, throwing itself away in order to preserve itself, is cunning."<sup>232</sup> But he also dominates his desires, his internal nature, and this is a first example of what will later be analyzed on a psycho-analytical level.

Another illuminating stage of his journey is when he outwits the Cyclope by denying his name, a behavior which for the two authors is an act of self-denial that eventually helps saving him.<sup>233</sup>

Odysseus is indeed a real adventurer and this quality seems to be key: he follows temptations that deflect the self from "the path of its logic,"<sup>234</sup> ventures into the unknown, risks his life, and: persists. The self forms itself in the adventure and in the capacities that grow by being challenged, and "the knowledge which makes up his identity and enables him to survive has its substance in the experience of diversity, distraction, disintegration."<sup>235</sup> The whole process is described as dialectical, insofar as Odysseus "throws himself away, so to speak, in order to win himself; he achieves his estrangement from nature by abandoning himself to nature, trying his strength against it in all his adventures..."<sup>236</sup> To become subjects, humans cut off their nature, or what they perceive as

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231 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 36.

232 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 39.

233 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 50-53.

234 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 39.

235 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 38.

236 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 38.

such. By describing this process, the authors address a more general relation that continues to be a fundamental dilemma until today. Trying to break the force of nature will lead to even deeper entanglement into, or, subjugation under this force.<sup>237</sup>

Briefly turning back to Thoreau, the self-proclaimed Odysseus, who in a Transcendentalist tradition probably perceived the ancient Greeks as role models,<sup>238</sup> one can find that in his first-hand motivation of cognition of nature, the will to dominate nature might reveal itself. This domination was to some extent necessary for his own survival and to that extent he probably was entangled in the way of thinking as it had established. He wanted to (and had to) practice renouncement, self-denial. That is, Thoreau also had to subjugate his own nature. In *Walden* he noted: "Weather the danger and you are safe, for the rest of the way is down hill. With unrelaxed nerves, with morning vigor, sail by it, looking another way, tied to the mast like Ulysses."<sup>239</sup>

But in the mountains of "The Maine Woods" he encountered a more deterring, "deep and intricate wilderness"<sup>240</sup> and his recountings deviate from their otherwise "joyous sensuousness."<sup>241</sup> A notable process of reflection can be recognized, as was also found by Roderick Nash:

"On the mountain, Transcendental confidence in the symbolic significance of natural objects faltered. Wilderness seemed a more fitting environment for pagan idols than for God. 'What is this Titan that has possession of me?' ... 'Who are we? Where are we?' Identity itself had vanished. It was a rude awakening for a man who in another mood had wondered 'what shall we do with a man who is afraid of the woods, their solitude and darkness? What salvation is there for him?'"<sup>242</sup>

Remarkably, Nash even sees a loss of identity here, when Thoreau seems to be aware of his own shying-away of this greater and more fearsome nature. Thoreau, and through his eyes, Nash, seem to have discovered the dilemma of human relationship with nature and

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237 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 9.

238 Maurice S. Lee, *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature, 1830-1860*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 186.

239 Thoreau, *Walden*, 95.

240 Nash, *Wilderness*, 91.

241 Moldenhauer, "The Maine Woods," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thoreau*, ed. Joel Myerson, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 136.

242 Nash, *Wilderness*, 91.

possibly the anticipation of consequences.

## 5.2. The twofold character of mountaineering

For further analysis, a differentiation is necessary. Two dimensions make up the appeal of climbing: achievement, or accomplishment, and experience.<sup>243</sup> The first is at once a field of sublimation of drives as well as a means for accumulation of cultural and symbolic capital, since the conquest of mountains is a culturally acknowledged and valued accomplishment. Sublimation will be of detailed interest in the psycho-analytic part further down. The second dimension allows for climbing to stimulate feelings of freedom, for example from social constraints, and therefore the possibility to escape. This dimension works more individually, that is, without cultural recognition, whereas the first is based on a mental exchange with other humans or acknowledgement by society. Climbing accomplishments, as well as to a lesser extent, the experiences made, can be understood as symbolic or cultural capital, as two forms of capital according to Bourdieu, that are “particularly important in the field of cultural production.” Symbolic capital “refers to the degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*).” This obviously presupposes a process of exchange by conversation, publication or other means of communication, as is also the case for the form of cultural capital. This concept concerns “forms of cultural knowledge, competences or dispositions” but was defined by Bourdieu also as an “internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts.” They can (but don't necessarily do) serve the accumulation of economic capital and, “like economic capital, the other forms of capital are unequally distributed among social classes.”<sup>244</sup> Hence, the publication of climbing accomplishments and experiences can serve the economic exploitability as well as the social status of the individual, and, can thus be regarded as part of the motivation.

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243 Cf. Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, xiii.

244 Pierre Bourdieu. *The Field of Cultural Production: essays on art and literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 7.

### 5.3. Work and escape

A very different aspect is that activities such as climbing, similar to tourism, serve similar social and economic purposes. Here, the character of leisure time as a counter-part of labor comes into play. People need to recover from work and have to reproduce their workforce and thus, recreational activities underly the logic of capital. Accordingly, Adorno saw camping ideology as well as leisure in general as very widely determined by the logic of wage labor<sup>245</sup> in the same sense that he stated that “entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism.”<sup>246</sup>

That leads to aspects of mountain climbing that have since its beginning been key to it: the notion of freedom and the opportunities for escape and escapism. As was already noted, with growing industrialization and unfolding capitalism, people sensed a growing dissatisfaction and distress which drove them out of their normal lives and into the mountains, their attitude often being some form of “bourgeois anti-capitalism.”<sup>247</sup> British polymath John Ruskin, expressed these feelings of many contemporaries, who in a totally flat landscape, felt “a kind of sickness and pain.”<sup>248</sup>

From its beginning, mountaineering carried the promise of freedom. It was referenced extensively by climbers and poets, or, climbing poets. One of the first is Nikolaus Lenau with his Poem “An die Alpen” (“To the alps”)<sup>249</sup> or Friedrich Schiller's unsubtle phrase “Auf den Bergen ist Freiheit” (“Upon the mountains, there is freedom”)<sup>250</sup>. This freedom can be grasped with Enzensberger and his theory of tourism as a counterpart to a society in which people often feel restricted or even imprisoned.<sup>251</sup> And “one wanted to get out,” as Adorno said, “in both senses of the word.”<sup>252</sup>

Just as mountains, travelling itself can become a sanctuary, can bring salvation to

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245 Theodor W. Adorno, “Free time”, in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, transl. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia UP, 2005), 183.

246 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 109.

247 Robbins, “Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class,” 596.

248 Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 162.

249 “Alpen! Alpen! unvergeßlich seyde meinem Herzen ihr in allen Tagen; bergend vor der Welt ein herbes Leid, hab' ich es zu euch hinaufgetragen.” Nikolaus Lenau, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Band 1* (Leipzig: Insel, 1970), 345-346.

250 Friedrich Schiller, *Die Braut von Messina oder die feindlichen Brüder. Ein Trauerspiel mit Chören, in Sämtliche Werke. Bd. Maria Stuart. Die Jungfrau von Orleans.* (Stuttgart: Verlag der Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1838) 493.

251 Enzensberger, “Theorie des Tourismus,” 198f.

252 Adorno, “Free Time,” 170.

individuals seeking escape of everyday life. Enzensberger grasps the modern movement of tourism as a direct result of the democratic overturnings in an enlightened Europe: "The victory of the bourgeois revolution implanted in the individual a consciousness of freedom which had to break itself on the very society that emerged out of this revolution."<sup>253</sup> Tourism became one of the preferred means of diversion and distraction for modern Europeans getting tired and over-burdened by civilization and its accompanying distresses, and, with mountaineering representing its avantgarde, it could rely on the movement of romantic escapism and the images which it established. Tourism since was the "mirror image of the society of which it removes itself."<sup>254</sup>

#### **5.4. Dialectic of tourism**

It is here where mountaineering, like tourism, bears a paradox in itself, since the appeal of the wild and unexplored, or the object of conquest, is lost at the very same moment it gets conquered and dominated by a multitude of climbers or becomes an established touristic destination. The moment of adventure, to some extent, vanishes with every conquest, and the touristic target loses some of its appeal by reaching it.<sup>255</sup> Johnston and Edwards recognized this paradox, too:

"Mountaineers are caught in a trap of their own making. To feed their own compulsion to climb, mountaineers have initiated and participated in various endeavours that attract an ever-growing number of people to mountain regions. Climbing motivations have become increasingly complex, with economic concerns playing a more central role. This has led to a loss of meaning and value in the experience as mountaineers confront at each step of their travels the adverse impacts of their presence."

In their view, this problem affects hosting communities with ties to mountaineering (eco)tourism to the same extent, since their development is by their own nature very

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253 Enzensberger, "Eine Theorie des Tourismus," 189; own translation. Original quote: "Der Sieg der bürgerlichen Revolution pflanzte dem einzelnen ein Freiheitsbewußtsein ein, das sich an der Gesellschaft, die aus ihr hervorging, brechen musste."

254 Enzensberger, "Theorie des Tourismus," 199; own translation.

255 Cf. Beedie, "History of Mountaineering Tourism," 46; Cronon, "Trouble with Wilderness," 80f.

restricted.<sup>256</sup> Regarding these findings it can be concluded that alpinism has the same paradoxical consequences of what Enzensberger ironically judged as tourism:

“The new human right to distance oneself as far as possible from one's civilization took on the shape of the harmless vacation trip. Yet to this very day tourists insist on the value of the adventure, the elemental, the pristine. The destination has to be both: accessible and inaccessible, distant from civilization and yet comfortable.”<sup>257</sup>

### **5.5. Dialectic of wilderness**

This paradoxical character of the escapist appeal of tourism has its equivalent in the escapist tendency of environmentalism, as is recognized by Cronon, too. Wilderness, the “unfallen anti-thesis of an unnatural civilization” has become the basis and the great standard for the critique of modernity, the ideal of environmentalism with its “quasi-religious values.” An ideal, however, that can never be attained, because “wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural.” If nature is where no humans are, “then our very presence in nature represents its fall.”<sup>258</sup> Practically, people are drawn into wilderness by its perceived quality of the untouched, uninhabited, desolate. But as soon as people frequent those wilderness areas, they are not wild any longer. With other words, visitors must destroy what they actually appreciate so much, which is one of the principal dilemmas of National Parks and other protected areas. The wilderness enthusiasm, as Cronon writes, is a “fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living – urban folk for whom food comes from a supermarket or a restaurant instead of a field.”<sup>259</sup> Civilized humans appreciate the untouched quality of wilderness, although humans have always shaped their environment and lived in exchange with nature, an exchange that necessarily includes mutual influence and change. For Cronon, the wilderness ideal is a result of alienation from the actual land and thereby refers to what was of prime concern to Horkheimer and Adorno as a basic

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256 Barbara R. Johnston and Ted Edwards, “The commodification of mountaineering,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 21, No. 3 (1994): 474.

257 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “A Theory of Tourism,” *New German Critique* 68 (1996): 127, accessed July 8, 2017, DOI: 10.2307/3108667.

258 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 80f.

259 Cronon, “Trouble with wilderness,” 80.

problem of civilization from its beginning: the separation of the natural from the human. Cronon is aware of the problem that results: "To the extent that we celebrate wilderness as the measure with which we judge civilization, we reproduce the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles."<sup>260</sup> For a conclusion, Enzensberger's following statement requires no additional remarks: "Whatever name one assigns this goal, the dialectic of the process remains the same: once it is achieved, it is destroyed."<sup>261</sup>

## **5.6. Domination of nature**

In consequence, "nature, in being presented by society's control mechanism as the healing antithesis of society, is itself absorbed into that incurable society and sold off," as Horkheimer and Adorno remark.<sup>262</sup> The conceptual dualism, however, now has to be considered further. Philosopher William Leiss offered a highly instructive account of the history of the idea of "domination of nature."<sup>263</sup> Drawing largely on Critical Theory, he traces this history from antiquity on and documents philosophical milestones in the development of the human relationship with nature that made the latter become an object of domination.

Clearly, the role of man as master over nature already is based on the Judaeo-Christian religious framework and the separation it established between nature and spirit, breaking with the animistic imaginations of natural things as possessing spirits. The Biblical creation story proclaims "the derivative authority of man over the living creatures" on earth and thereby man is installed as Lord over the world by the supreme Lord, God.<sup>264</sup> This "collective vision" of mastery over nature which "has roots deep in the main cultural traditions of Western society" has established itself with lasting importance and, hence, still influenced Renaissance and utopian thinkers who set out for new paths concerning science and arts.<sup>265</sup> With Renaissance, natural objects and phenomena became more attractive for scientists as well as artists by ways of both rational analysis and irrational occupations, as

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260 Cronon, "Trouble with wilderness," 81.

261 Enzensberger, "Theory of Tourism," 126.

262 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 140.

263 William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1994).

264 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 30f.

265 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 34.

in mysticism.<sup>266</sup> The Christian conception amalgamated into Bacon's philosophy and his idea of progress, which Leiss deems crucial. The turn his philosophy made concerning new approaches of science were a point of departure for this shifting relationship. Bacon was, together with Descartes, pioneer of a "period of a concept of progress based on the conquest of nature."<sup>267</sup> He envisaged a religiously framed "qualitative expansion of the arts and sciences," and an improval, or, beginning of organization of science, and thereby, of institutions, too.<sup>268</sup> His philosophy "formulated the concept of human mastery over nature much more clearly" than had been done before, "wedded" it to "the predominant cultural force of that time"—Christianity—and made it "respectable."<sup>269</sup>

Descartes was a second "keystone" in this process of transforming philosophy that aimed on rendering "ourselves the masters and owners of nature."<sup>270</sup> Marx, too, for whom nature always was a central category,<sup>271</sup> in a footnote of the *Capital* said, "that Descartes, like Bacon, anticipated an alteration in the form of production, and the practical subjugation of nature by man, as a result of the altered methods of thought."<sup>272</sup> Thus, they must be understood in a whole bundle alongside the other central minds of science in his time, and as Carolyn Merchant concludes, "the Baconian-Cartesian-Newtonian project is premised on the power of technology to subdue and dominate nature."<sup>273</sup> Turning to ancient Greece, Bacon noticed that its arts "have an ambiguous or double use, and serve as well to produce as to prevent mischief and destruction," thus foreshadowing aspects of what Horkheimer and Adorno recognized as the dialectic of enlightenment.<sup>274</sup>

Gradually, "science and the mechanical arts (later technology) replaced 'nature' as the focal point of the expectations" and a "geometric spirit ... had suffused over the entire intellectual realm," turning the pursuit of science into what Leiss calls "a crusading

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266 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 36f.

267 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 15.

268 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 46-50.

269 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 48.

270 René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting one's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, 1637, accessed June 11, 2017, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1637.pdf>.

271 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 83; Cf. Alfred Schmidt, "Der Begriff der Natur in der Lehre von Marx" (Frankfurt a.M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1962).

272 Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production. London 1887*, in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, ed. Institut für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung (Berlin: Dietz, 1990), 340.

273 Merchant, "Reinventing Eden," 132; Cf. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 185ff.

274 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 4.

ideology.”<sup>275</sup> The primacy of quantitative measurement of natural phenomena, accordingly, replaced natural philosophy. With recourse to Franz Borckenau, Leiss writes that along with manufacturing interchangeably went a mechanistic world-view,<sup>276</sup> thus enabling a “productive interaction of science and industry.”<sup>277</sup>

This was a presupposition for the newly emerging technologies, and it was adequate for their application to the exploitation of man and nature, between which also exists an affinity.<sup>278</sup> Whereas with Saint-Simon and his disciples there were early socialists believing in the liberation of man through industrial production and increased exploitation of nature, mastery over nature and mastery over man were actually two sides of the same process. Marx, developing his critique of capitalism also in reaction to this naïve belief in technology, showed that the relationship between man and nature is dialectical. Being nature still, man must also transform and transcend nature, both internal and external.<sup>279</sup> Thus, it became obvious for the materialist thinkers Marx and Engels, that the human relationship to nature is key for man's understanding and reclaiming his own history, and it is in this tradition of thought that György Lukacs called nature a “social category.”<sup>280</sup>

It was not a long way to go from the fruitful interdependence of industrialization and science towards the ideology of positivism, which, concerning nature, could be summed up with Heisenberg: “human attitude toward nature changed from a contemplative one to the pragmatic one ... one rather asked what one could do with it.”<sup>281</sup> The remarks about this development of modern thinking in relation to nature are also caught in a phrase in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: “Thought arose in the course of liberation from terrible nature, which is finally subjugated utterly.”<sup>282</sup>

It is remarkable in this context of scientific pursuit that, as Robbins remarks, it was likely that scientists took up the sport of mountaineering and that the British climbing community and the BAC evolved out of a scientific spirit or what he calls “scientism.”<sup>283</sup> That also concerns its pattern of institutionalization being “equally well adapted to the competition

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275 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 76, 78.

276 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 92-93.

277 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 86.

278 Cf. Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 13f.

279 Marx, *Capital*, 154-159; Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 83.

280 György Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, 16.

281 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 86.

282 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 82.

283 Robbins, “Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class,” 583-588.

over the discovery and publication of new climbs” as well as of new scientific phenomena.<sup>284</sup> Not only did a large portion of climbers grasp themselves as scientists, their publications also shared a characteristic and nowadays strange fusion of narrative genres, mixing adventurous and scientific text.<sup>285</sup>

It must not be forgotten, however, that in this context of domination of nature, which is evidently to be grasped as one of enlightenment thinking and industrialization, and in America specifically the wilderness condition, the conception of nature and wilderness as positive or even as a sanctuary from the former evolved, partly as a response, representing two sides of the problematic relation between nature and culture.

### **5.7. Libidinal economy of society**

Arnold Gehlen said the human as a “constitutionally ‘risked’ being” has to “escape his nature, but into a nature, whose laws he governs the lesser, the higher they are pushed by the human.”<sup>286</sup> Turning himself as a force of nature against nature, as Horkheimer and Adorno recognized, he renounces his own nature, and this dilemma, in a way, escalates in capitalism.

“At the moment when human beings cut themselves off from the consciousness of themselves as nature, all the purposes for which they keep themselves alive—social progress, the heightening of material and intellectual forces, indeed, consciousness itself—become void, and the enthronement of the means as the end, which in late capitalism is taking on the character of overt madness, is already detectable in the earliest history of subjectivity.”<sup>287</sup>

This cutting-off of human's own nature now must, as Adorno and Horkheimer have implicitly done, also be grasped by psycho-analysis as a process that takes place in the libidinal economy of both individuals and societies.<sup>288</sup> From a psychological standpoint,

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284 Robbins, “Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class,” 587.

285 Robbins, “Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class,” 587f.

286 Arnold Gehlen, “Ein anthropologisches Modell,” (1968) in *Gesamtausgabe, Bd. 4. Philosophische Anthropologie und Handlungslehre*, ed. Karl Siegbert Rehberg (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1983), 215.

287 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 42f.

288 Cf. Peter Wehling, “Dynamic Constellations of the Individual, Society and Nature,” in *Sociological Theory and the Environment. Classical Foundations, Contemporary Insights*, ed. Riley E. Dunlap et al. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 148.

Aufmuth stresses the alpinist's need to discipline oneself<sup>289</sup> and in Allmer as well, the fight against oneself follows the struggle against nature.<sup>290</sup> Roderick Nash, too, hinted at the relationship between the psychological necessities of civilization and the desire to escape into nature. Quoting New York writer Robert Marshall and "his contention that some men had a 'psychological urge'", Nash said that "these individuals deplored the 'horrible banality' and 'drabness' of civilized existence; their very sanity depended on periodically renouncing society and pushing into the blank spaces on the map."<sup>291</sup>

Sigmund Freud in his *Civilization and its Discontents* described civilization as necessarily going along with the repression of drives, in order to be able to deal with what Freud called scarcity.<sup>292</sup> If people were uninhibitedly following the pleasure principle they could not live together peacefully. In order to civilize and establish a peaceful social life, or, "to limit man's aggressive drives and hold down their manifestations,"<sup>293</sup> a regimen of laws, institutions and morals has to be established that is internalized by people. Since this does not allow for drives to be satisfied immediately, they have to be inhibited in their intentions and distracted from their targets,<sup>294</sup> according to philosopher Herbert Marcuse who highlighted the critical contents of Freud's work.<sup>295</sup> Particularly, sexual drives had to undergo a transition not only with regard to their time, that is, their satisfaction has to be post-poned to a possible moment, but also in their substance (*transsubstantiation*). This dynamic is referred to by Freud with the terms of *pleasure principle* and *reality principle*, last of which "safeguards" and "modifies" the former, in order to subjugate the "destructive force of instinctual gratification."<sup>296</sup>

His theory led Freud to the rather astonishing contention, "that much of the blame for our misery lies with what we call our civilization, and that we should be far happier if we were to abandon it." But he himself recognized this to be paradoxical, since "all the means we use in our attempts to protect ourselves against the threat of suffering belong to this very

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289 Aufmuth, *Lust am Aufstieg*, 127f.

290 Allmer, "No risk - no fun," 74f.

291 Nash, *Wilderness*, 202f.

292 Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, in *Sigmund Freud. Studienausgabe*, Vol. I., ed. Alexander Mitscherlich, James Strachey, Angela Richards (Frankfurt a.M.: S. Fischer, 1997), 308.

293 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2004), 61.

294 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 11.

295 Dahmer, *Libido und Gesellschaft*, 24.

296 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 13.

civilization.”<sup>297</sup>

In a very generalizing manner, it can be said that this process of distraction of drives from their original targets partly is directed to culturally legitimized goals such as works of arts or generally to recognition of culturally valuable achievements, which is called by Freud sublimation.<sup>298</sup> As has become clear in the remarks on the history of mountaineering, a mountain (climb) represents such a culturally legitimized goal and climbing represents a sort of substitute goal for repressed drives.

Marcuse, sharpening Freud's meta-psychological cultural criticism towards a critique of society, calls this theory a rationalization of drival renunciation, which simultaneously contains potential to break that very rationalization.<sup>299</sup> He starts with Freud's assumption that civilization subordinates the social as well as biological existence of humans while simultaneously being the prerequisite of its progress which means a “repressive modification (sublimation) of happiness.”<sup>300</sup> Marcuse regards drives, however, as historically specific, as subject to change and criticizes Freud for mistaking their historically given character for their nature.<sup>301</sup>

More specific concepts are necessary because Freud's concepts do not allow for differentiation between biological and socio-historical aspects or dimensions of instincts. Marcuse thus uses the term *surplus-repression* for “the restrictions necessitated by social domination” and *performance principle* for “the prevailing historical form of the reality principle.”<sup>302</sup> The latter term gives credit to the fact that the way in which needs were satisfied and scarcity was distributed has always accorded to the historically actual rationality of domination. The reality principle “materializes in a system of institutions,” it is determined by this specific rationality, and thus determines how instinctual repression becomes manifest.<sup>303</sup>

The performance principle is “that of an acquisitive and antagonistic society in the process of constant expansion.”<sup>304</sup> This society which is “stratified according to the competitive

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297 Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 30.

298 Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 44.

299 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 5f., 16.

300 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 11, 18.

301 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 116.

302 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 35.

303 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 15, 36.

304 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 45.

economic performances of its members,” also includes control over alienated labor as the specific form of labor—as “work for an apparatus which they do not control.”<sup>305</sup> Under its rule, “libido is diverted for socially useful performances” and the human body is adjusted to labor.<sup>306</sup> Bodily labor, however, has become less important in the last several decades, thus increasing the need to use the body perceptibly.<sup>307</sup> Little satisfaction is left apart from sex,<sup>308</sup> and libidinal life is concentrated on sexuality, or, to be more specific, on “the establishment of genital supremacy” which is reduced to procreation.<sup>309</sup> “The temporal reduction of the libido,” Marcuse concludes, is “supplemented by its spatial reduction.”<sup>310</sup> Work is a central sphere where by sublimation, libidinal impulses are to be satisfied.<sup>311</sup> That also means that labor is stripped of its fulfilling qualities, labor time turns into “painful time.”<sup>312</sup> Marcuse stresses that social oppression and domination of nature increased while simultaneously means to decrease them were multiplied.<sup>313</sup>

This suggests that by the establishment of capitalist societies in Europe, the need to distract drives and their fulfillment by achieving socially sanctioned and legitimized goals constantly increased. Whereas there are sufficient ways of controlling work activities, especially control over labor time, alienation and regulation also spread into the sphere of leisure time, which is not even forced upon by social institutions. Adorno and Marcuse attested immense mechanisms of control by the entertainment or culture industry,<sup>314</sup> by which “the individual is not to be left alone.”<sup>315</sup> In turn, the individual even strives for the seductive offers of the culture industry and its advertisement, as Adorno said: the masses want what “is being imposed on them once again.”<sup>316</sup>

Now Enzensberger, along with Marcuse, was also very critical of those desires and their origins, since he, just as Macfarlane, regarded them as constructed: “Tourism is the industry whose production is identical to its advertisement: its consumers are at the same

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305 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 44.

306 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 45.

307 Aufmuth, *Lust am Aufstieg*, 19-24. Bette, *X-treme*, 73-75.

308 Aufmuth, *Lust am Aufstieg*, 21.

309 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 48, 40f.

310 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 48.

311 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 85.

312 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 45f.

313 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 86-89.

314 Adorno, “Free Time,” 174.

315 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 48.

316 Adorno. “Free time,” 170.

time its employees.”<sup>317</sup> Whatever reproduction they create or bring home or send into the world—photo, video, oral narration or text production—it serves the mental reconstruction of the imagined world anew. What is also reproduced and re-nurtured, is the desire for those images. The notion, however, that “we have to rediscover the Odysseus in us again and again,”<sup>318</sup> expressed by legendary Italian alpinist Walter Bonatti, who repeatedly referred to the epic figure, gives some idea of the compelling internal force that presses for reiteration.

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317 Enzensberger, “Theorie des Tourismus,” 203; own translation.

318 Ueli Steck, SPEED. *Die drei großen Nordwände der Alpen in Rekordzeit* (München: Malik, 2010), 234.

## 6. Conclusion

It should be understandable now how important climbing has become worldwide and how, particularly in the U.S., it became most relevant as a counter-culture, based on non-conformism and opposition to the mainstream, that, as many other subcultures was accepted and integrated, now being part of mainstream American culture. It was shown that this is due to the character of the activity of climbing, appearing as a possibility to break out of quotidian life or society. However, it only appears to be an offer for outbreak, but still works under the logic of exploitation, commodification, reification and, on different levels, of alienation. Its appearance as a form of escape is contradictory, but nevertheless tempting for many people. In that regard, climbing—as other outdoor sports, too—serves the functionality of the society. What was said is certainly valid for European societies, too, although developments were historically different.

Given the increasing importance of climbing and its capacity to forge individual and collective identities combined with its relatively harmless, peaceful and balanced character, we can be happy that people prefer to go climbing and do not seek remedies for their damaged lives in collectives such as the nation, in harmful ideologies such as racism or the thrill of going to war. Aufmuth, too, stressed that mountaineering was sometimes a means for the reduction of aggression as is often confirmed by the imagery of war in mountaineering literature.<sup>319</sup> “Many men would cease to desire war if they had opportunities to risk their lives in Alpine climbing,” as Bob Marshall said.<sup>320</sup>

Still, in climbing we can implicitly observe how individuals are damaged and in what ways communities might be harmful to individual lives, by looking at how much individuals need an activity like climbing to find remedy, resolve and resort. This work thus makes a point for understanding human desire for freedom, for authenticity or original, archetypical life, for balance and tranquility, for a feeling of vitality and originality, for self-empowerment, expressed in climbing, as a practical critique of society, and simultaneously as one of its means of functionality. These desires are indicative of dissatisfaction with the societal status and with its felt inadequacy, or at least can express some discontent. But this feeling

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<sup>319</sup> Aufmuth, “Lust am Aufstieg,” 176f.

<sup>320</sup> Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 112.

itself is accompanied by a misperception: “by imagining that our true home is in the wilderness, we forgive ourselves the homes we actually inhabit,” as Cronon put it. He regards the wilderness cult and the longing for nature as a “siren song of escape”, and “false hope of escape from history.”<sup>321</sup> In turn, it has to be recognized that “scarcely anyone at all escapes,” as Oscar Wilde foreshadowed, and Cronon, with his remarks, certainly aimed on this simple truth.<sup>322</sup> The mentioned dilemma has its deep and intricate core in the misconception of human nature and is interwoven with self-preservative reason. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the authors argue that “the human being's mastery of itself, on which the self is founded, practically always involves the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained.”<sup>323</sup> Self-preservative reason, or, as Horkheimer also calls it, subjective or instrumental reason, and in its most advanced stage: positivism, defines man and his goals, “seeks mastery over things,” does not consider what extra-human things may be in and for themselves” and does not ask for rationality of ends, “but only how means may be fashioned to achieve whatever ends.”<sup>324</sup> This form of reason is a tool whose character simultaneously animates and reflects science and technology in their endless enterprise of dominating nature that subsequently has become self-destructive. Nature, in turn, as “a collection of bodies in eternally lawful motion” has its social reflection in “the idea of a set of natural laws of economic behavior.”<sup>325</sup>

Believing we are separate from nature, writes Cronon, “is likely to reinforce environmentally irresponsible behavior.”<sup>326</sup> However, his concluding remarks about “the trouble with wilderness”, suggest that this seems to require only an act of will for a reconciliation of humans with nature. He ignores the social formation that *necessarily* makes people conceive of their relationship to nature the way they do.<sup>327</sup> A reconciliation between man and society, or, epistemologically speaking: general and particular, as well as of man and nature, is also promoted by Engels, stating that under socialism men will become for the first time “true masters of nature because and insofar as they become masters of their own

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321 Cronon, “Trouble with wilderness,” 80f.

322 Oscar Wilde, *The soul of man under socialism* (Leipzig: Valde, 2009), 1.

323 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 43.

324 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 149. Cf. Wehling, “Dynamic Constellations,” 148.

325 Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 150.

326 Cronon, “Trouble with wilderness,” 87.

327 Cronon, “Trouble with wilderness,” 88.

process of socialization.”<sup>328</sup> Thus, the necessity of “remembrance of nature in the subject” unfolds, but in a very specific form: *Eingedenken*.<sup>329</sup> It aims at humans becoming aware of their history as nature, and reclaiming their own history, free from social compulsions, i.e. those to climb mountains, but free to do so for their pleasure. However, pleasure should ideally be inherent to work, too, when it is not alienated. It involves what Marcuse called the extension of libidinal relations on work that, in turn, requires a rational reorganization of the industrial and technological apparatus and of the “highly specialized division of labor.”<sup>330</sup> That would go together with a form of non-repressive sublimation: “sexuality is neither deflected from nor blocked in its objective; rather, in attaining its objective, it transcends it to others, searching for fuller gratification.”<sup>331</sup> This can be achieved when “the organism exists not as an instrument of alienated labor but as a subject of self-realization,” if work simultaneously brings “satisfaction of an individual need.”<sup>332</sup>

This clearly very utopian idea is certainly not as vital as other utopias. But in fact, Alpinism, for those who passionately practice it, has some utopian quality. Mountains are their sanctuaries, places where they find ransom, at least temporarily. As a twofold, contradictory activity which includes being a practical critique, alpinism yet remains a form of utopia as “salvation that has no continuation.”<sup>333</sup>

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328 Friedrich Engels, *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft (Anti-Dühring)*, in *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, Vol. I/27, ed. Institut für Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), 446.

329 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 53. Cf. Gunzelin Schmidt-Noerr, *Das Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt. Zur Dialektik von Vernunft und Natur in der Kritischen Theorie Adornos, Horkheimers und Marcuses* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990).

330 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 216f.

331 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 211.

332 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 210.

333 Aufmuth, *Lust am Aufstieg*, 123, own translation of “Erlösung, die keine Dauer hat.”

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