

Approaching Mt. Everest: On Intertextuality and the Past as Narrative

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INTERROGATING HOW WE DO OUR WORK as scholars and how we theorize our findings are ongoing processes in any field of study. At this particular historical moment within the fields that make up sport studies, debates over the diverse methodological and theoretical approaches that characterize our scholarship are particularly lively, and it might not be an overstatement to assert that sport history and sport sociology are at epistemological crossroads. Within sport history, earlier explorations of these issues by Tina Parratt, Jeff Hill, Murray Phillips, and others¹ invited historians to contemplate the potential analytical power that postmodern and interdisciplinary moves might bring to the field. More recently the publication of Murray Phillips' book *Deconstructing Sport History* (2005) and Douglas Booth's *The Field* (2005)² signaled a significant turn toward new ways to envision explorations of the past. The intense conversations that surfaced during many sessions at the 2006 North American Society for Sport History (NASSH) conference further energized these debates.

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Reflecting on the changes in sport history that Parratt, Hill, Phillips, Booth, and others document—and produce—has made me particularly mindful of the theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary turns my own work on Mt. Everest has taken. In this essay, I join these conversations, approaching them from a disciplinary home closer to sociology and informed by the interdisciplinary field of critical cultural studies, which is having an enormous impact on scholars who identify as sport sociologists. Although we may approach the past from different paths, I believe we have much to gain by stretching the boundaries of our disciplinary territories as we pose important questions about our scholarly practices. How do scholars, differently trained and located in different fields, approach the work we do? How can we overcome the disciplinary boundaries that interfere with the flow of our best ideas? What can we learn from each other?

My intention is not to undermine or replace current historiographic practices but to examine alternative ways to study the past that grow out of the epistemological, methodological, and theoretical challenges of postmodernism and poststructuralism. In following this trail, I take as my starting point the model of historical scholarship that Phillips and Booth³ identify as deconstructivist. Drawing on poststructuralist approaches, I argue for an expanded conceptualization of the place of narrative in our work by suggesting we pay more pronounced attention to textual analysis and, particularly, the power of intertextuality as a methodological strategy.

I do this by tracing an epistemological journey through particular theoretical traditions that inform the still emerging field of critical cultural studies and serve as a grounding for methodological practices that diverge from more mainstream approaches. In the process, I take a circuitous expository path: I introduce the Everest project as a study in textual analysis; provide a brief tour of the theoretical groundings for textual and intertextual analyses, with particular reference to poststructuralism and postmodernism; offer some examples of the ways these methodological strategies might be employed in the study of the past; and finally circle back to Everest to show how intertextuality, as a methodological strategy derived from textual analysis, can be invoked to provide added insights into the cultural meanings of Mt. Everest.

Mt. Everest as Text

I approached Everest originally not as an historian but following a route from sociology of sport through cultural studies. Taking Mt. Everest as an object of study meant acknowledging not just the necessity of trekking across several disciplinary boundaries—sociology, history, geography, anthropology, literary studies, for example—but making a strong commitment to discovering the insights that interdisciplinary approaches offer as well. My project is not a history of Everest exploration nor a celebration of the exploits of heroic men on the highest peak in the world but a critical analysis that reads the popular narratives of Everest in order to offer a critical analysis of the use of Everest as a cultural symbol throughout the past century.

To provide a critical analysis of the meanings that circulate around Mt Everest, I position Everest as a text and focus on the narratives and representations provided primarily by the popular press. Historical materials gathered for analysis included accounts in contemporary newspapers and magazines, mountaineering journals, expedition accounts

and films, climbers' biographies and autobiographies, photographs, some private correspondence, and public commentaries.⁴ Present-day sources include newspaper and magazine articles; websites; television coverage including news stories, features on television news magazine shows, documentaries, and made for television films; IMAX films; children's books; and first-hand observations of events in London and the U.S. that commemorated the 50th anniversary of the first successful summiting of Everest. I draw heavily on methods and theories derived from media studies, most appropriately poststructuralist theories of discourse, which plot the intricate relationships between meaning and power. A growing area of scholarship that critically examines the meanings of exploration and adventure provide a substantive context as well.⁵

My work on Everest examines the cultural meanings bestowed on Mt. Everest in both contemporary and retrospective accounts, with a focus on three particular Everest events: the early British expeditions of the 1920s when George Mallory and Andrew Irvine disappeared on their way to the summit; the first successful summiting in 1953 by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, and the tragic events of 1996 when eight climbers perished during a blizzard near the summit.⁶ Through each of these events I explore the ways that Everest has been appropriated to carry ideological messages that empower some views and values while dismissing or obscuring others. And I argue that Everest is an enduring international symbol whose mythic meanings of challenge, accomplishment, heroism, and adventure constitute a dominant and preferred reading of Mt. Everest that has been so thoroughly naturalized that it is rarely critically challenged.

Yet beneath the allure of adventure and achievement, the history of Mt. Everest is rife with privilege. One might see the summit as the clubhouse of one of the more exclusive clubs in the world. When one looks more closely at the profile of those whose exploits on Everest form the bulk of the Everest epic and, more to the point, the way these stories are presented, one sees stories of unabashed nationalism, unacknowledged class privilege, naturalized ethnic differences that helpfully provide a race of porters whose workload enables white climbers to reach the heights, and the highest male preserve on earth. Some of these tensions are readily apparent to anyone who thinks critically about them; others are more carefully hidden. For example, careful reading of the Everest stories reveals clear lines of ethnic, national, class, and gender privilege that are differentially mobilized in different time periods.

My interest in Everest as a topic of scholarly significance was initially motivated by the immense public interest in the events of 1996 when a sudden storm near the summit of Everest left eight climbers dead. This mountaineering tragedy drew an enormous amount of popular attention to Mt. Everest and mountaineering in general and reawakened within the general population an awareness of Everest that had been dormant since 1953, when Hillary and Tenzing first stood on the summit. At the time, the tragedy of 1996 was a contemporary event: appropriate terrain for a cultural studies scholar grounded in sociology. But, of course, the events of 1996 are not isolated events but are inescapably connected to the narratives of the past—to the 1953 triumph and the British climbs of the 1920s—and, as subsequent analysis has revealed, to future events as well—the discovery in 1999 of George Mallory's body and the events of 2003 that comprised the golden anniversary celebration of the first successful Everest summit. Clearly, the three stories

originally singled out for analysis⁷ are not discrete stories whose meanings are limited to the contemporary accounts that first attempted to make cultural sense of them. Rather the stories are joined in intertextual relationships in which the meanings of each are integrally connected to the others, so that one celebrates another, is undone by another, recuperates another.

A focus on intertextuality reveals the interrelationships and interdependencies of meaning making among texts. In the case of these Everest narratives, the analytical power of intertextuality enabled me to see that a motif of redemption operated in all the Everest stories I examined. Though differentially deployed in different narratives—prominently in the events of the 1920s and 1953, far more subtly in the narratives of 1996 and later—the theme of redemption is a key to unlocking the cultural meanings Everest comes to embody. As a methodological choice, intertextuality is grounded in a series of assumptions: that the past is never settled; that narratives constructed to capture that past are always partial, always owned, always vested with special interests; that narratives of one era bleed their meaning into the events of another; and that different eras make different uses of the stories of the past.⁸ In the sections that follow, I trace the intellectual heritage of this methodological conceptualization through the strands of theory that comprise the interdisciplinary project of cultural studies, with particular attention to the notions of textual, narrative, and discursive analysis.

Approaching Mt. Everest: The Route through Cultural Studies

In any scholarly venture, just as in any mountaineering expedition, one's successful arrival depends in large part on one's point of departure and one's route of approach. In this section I retrace the route I have followed through a variety of methodological and theoretical territories as I sought the most appropriate point of entry for understanding the cultural meanings and significance of Mt. Everest. Taken together, they comprise the interdisciplinary approaches that characterize critical cultural studies at this particular time.

Like many in the field of sport sociology, I have grown increasingly disenchanted with the methodological and theoretical choices that dominate the field of sociology. It often seems to me that cultural studies had to be invented because sociology has lost much of its sociological imagination—to invoke C. Wright Mills's⁹ famous phrase—and all of its critical edge. We approach our work as scholars from many different disciplinary routes; to this end, I believe that many of us are heading toward each other in very productive ways, and critical cultural studies might prove to be a felicitous meeting place.

Critical cultural studies is interdisciplinary by design. It is woven with theoretical threads from the critical edge of many disciplines: symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology from sociology; critical ethnography with its views on partial truths, blurred genres, and challenges to ethnographic authority from anthropology; semiotic analysis, leading to poststructuralism and deconstruction from literature; spatial relations theories from cultural geography; the deconstructivist and postmodern moments in history; and of course the critical core of already interdisciplinary enterprises central to cultural studies: feminisms, Marxism and materialist theories, critical race theory, and queer theory.

Interrogating Power in Critical Cultural Studies

The critical approach that underlies cultural studies requires interrogating the power relations that structure and constrain our everyday lived experiences at both material and symbolic levels. To engage such issues, we can explore the way power is always already structured along recognizable lines of distribution and display: gender, class, race/ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, religion, age, ability/disability. Perhaps it is not evident at first glance that Everest, for example, is tangled in so many lines of power, but narratives of Everest are implicated in a complex web of power relations. Four strands in particular are woven throughout the stories—nationality, class, ethnicity, and gender.

Nation and class are revealed in the unmistakable proprietary interests of upper-class British gentlemen in the British Everest enterprise. Acting in what they construe as the national interest, they manage instead to reproduce their own class interest through the exclusion of women, the subversion of the Sherpas, and the selection of climbers almost uniformly from the same upper middle-class public school and professional class as themselves.

Nationality and ethnicity are clearly enunciated as well in the treatment of the Sherpas. Clearly in the 1920s, still in 1953, and in more subtle ways in 1996, patterns of ethnic privilege follow predictable lines. The treatment of the Sherpas has improved vastly from the early days when they were considered “coolies” by the British, hired on as little more than beasts of burden, and either ignored or depersonalized in mountaineering accounts. Recognition of their climbing skills resulted in an evolution of their role and a refiguring of the term Sherpa. The name originally designated a particular ethnic group who lived in the Solu Khumbu region below Everest’s slopes. But as Sherpas joined the labor pool in Darjeeling, seeking employment on mountaineering expeditions, they distinguished themselves by their abilities at high altitude. Soon the term Sherpa was used to designate anyone with these abilities, and Sherpa shifted from an ethnic designation to an occupational category.¹⁰ By the 1996 climbs, Sherpas were recognized, by name, as equal climbing partners, but their top position is generally limited to Sirdar, or leader of the other climbing Sherpas on an expedition.

Women appear in Everest narratives more frequently now after virtual exclusion before the 1960s, but how they figure in the narratives is quite telling. Four women were on the fateful 1996 climb; all summited and one, Yasuko Namba, died in the storm, but it was Sandy Hill Pittman, inevitably described as “*socialite* Sandy Hill Pittman” who received most of the attention. Her climbing abilities were greatly maligned and her requirements—a satellite dish and espresso machine were carried up the mountain for her by porters—were read as examples of excessive and distasteful class privilege. Except for her gender, though, her profile is quite similar to that of Beck Weathers, the climber who miraculously raised himself from the dead and survived the storm. Both were wealthy climbing clients intent on completing the seven summits quest, and both were labeled as tourists in many accounts. The dramatic circumstances of his survival enables Weathers to transcend the disdain leveled at him as a rich Everest tourist. But reading the narratives of the climb reveals that much of the criticism aimed at Pittman is gender motivated—evidence perhaps that Weathers’ gender privilege has trumped the liabilities of class.

No aspect of cultural life is innocent of such power dynamics. Our explorations in search of them must be guided by theoretical sensibilities and sound methodological choices, and these decisions are always made within the context of particular moments. At the present time, that particular historical moment is referenced through debates about postmodernism, and theories of the postmodern are exerting enormous influence over scholarship across diverse disciplines and interdisciplinary fields. Though discomfiting to many, postmodernism and the related theoretical practices of poststructuralism require the careful attention of scholars, particularly those whose research projects focus on uncovering the depths of cultural meanings as they are produced, reproduced, and distributed among the subjects of history and the historians who try to capture those moments.

Poststructuralism and the Postmodern Condition

We live in a postmodern era within the conditions of life in a twenty-first-century post-industrial world marked by confusion and contradiction and by profound challenges to cherished beliefs that disrupt our ontological assumptions about truth, language, and the self. Who really wants to live in such a world where we are told that truth is not accessible, that reality not only eludes language but is constituted by it, and that our very selves are not our own—rather we are the subjects of discourse? Postmodernism is unsettling, but it has far too much to offer us as scholars to be dismissed without more careful scrutiny.

Part of our discomfort with this is the discomfort of paradigm shifts, but new paradigms rarely eradicate the paradigm they challenge. Instead a dialectical process results in dominant, emergent, and residual traditions. When postmodernism comes to town, it doesn't raze all the buildings and build something entirely new. It settles here and there, takes up residence in different neighborhoods where its new architecture rests, often uneasily, side by side with the buildings already there. We need not abandon our disciplinary homes entirely, but we should venture out from time to time to see what our neighbors are doing. Postmodernism encourages us to travel, to explore new ontological and epistemological positions and new approaches to theory and method. In this light, interdisciplinarity can be recognized as a particular response to understanding the postmodern condition in which the limits of rigid disciplinary boundaries are exposed and traversed.

The theoretical context for this methodological work is poststructuralism.¹¹ From my perspective, poststructuralism provides a more precise set of ontological and epistemological groundings than postmodernism. I recognize more available theory in poststructuralism than in postmodernism, evolving as it did from literary theories of structuralism and semiotics and already designed for a particular object of study: representations, narratives, texts. Poststructuralism theorizes meaning by providing "a theory of the relation between language, subjectivity, social organization, and power."¹² In so doing poststructuralism makes the important move of recognizing the semiotic relationship between the signifier and the signified as arbitrary; thus meaning does not inhere in the object itself but is the product of cultural work, and cultural work falls into the province of power relations. Most importantly, following Barthes, poststructuralism moves beyond structuralist conceptions of the text as the location of determined meaning to interrogate the production and consumption of those texts.¹³ As a result, poststructuralism is well

positioned to allow for critical analysis, that is, analysis that has as its central feature the interrogation of the complex of power relations that constitute social life.

The poststructuralist conceptualization of meaning and meaning production, though without this explicit focus on power, shares the assumptions of sociological theories of symbolic interactionism in which access to what Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann first called “the social construction of reality” is produced through interactions in which actors negotiate meanings.¹⁴ W.I. Thomas called this fundamental process “defining the situation.”¹⁵ The ontological position comes from Thomas—“If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences”—and Herbert Blumer provides the epistemological grounding. By arguing that “we act toward things according to the meanings they have for us,”¹⁶ Blumer legitimates a focus on actions as the point of entrée for understanding intention, motivation, and value.

The sociological tradition of Emile Durkheim adds further theoretical direction to this approach by focusing on the way that meanings, narratives, and texts work in cultural contexts to solidify community.¹⁷ From that perspective, narratives work as rituals, connecting us as cultural subjects to a larger community by encapsulating important cultural values within a mediating object: an event, a hero, a place; the lighting of the Olympic torch, the Super Bowl, the Black Power salute, Billie Jean King, Michael Jordan.¹⁸ In venerating the ritual object we celebrate, honor, and affirm the values it carries. Thus the narratives of Everest and the mountain they reference can be conceptualized as part of a ritual process through which community is forged. As we read heroic Everest tales of courage, suffering, deprivation, and perseverance we pay direct homage to Everest explorers and climbers. In so doing we also affirm the values they represent, both the exposed values that form the dominant messages of mountaineering literature—the nobility of heroism, bravery, and suffering—and the values hidden deeper within the narratives—the consolidation of class privilege, the exclusivity of gender, the naturalization of ethnic difference. To the extent that these stories bind the reader to Everest, the values it represents are reaffirmed and reproduced. And to the extent that the process works without our conscious knowledge or consent, the process does ideological work.

This move to ideology provides the crucial bridge back to cultural studies because it explicitly adds power into the theoretical equation. Poststructural analysis offers great potential for critical analysis because it acknowledges that the negotiation for meaning is always overlain with relations of power, that meanings are not negotiated so much as they are contested, and that because actors are located differentially within particular arrangements of power, some “contributions” to the negotiation are more equal than others. Meaning then is not the result of a fair fight but rather the articulation of vested interests masquerading as the common good. Methodological practices that provide us access to this process of meaning production, confirmation, and distribution offer new ways to understand the past.¹⁹

Text, Narrative, Discourse

These theoretical traditions provide firm grounding for methodological strategies that locate the interpretative process within the province of analytical positions variously referenced as textual analysis, narrative analysis, and discourses analysis. Teasing out the

differences among these important terms is a daunting task made all the more challenging because the terms have different meanings within different disciplinary context and in the hands of different scholars, a condition J. Hillis Miller has called “this swarming diversity of narrative theories.”²⁰ All three terms reference realms of linguistic power, and all share the same epistemological position: that language does not merely reflect reality but constitutes it.²¹

The distinctions among terms that make sense to me lie in the breadth of focus the terms reference: textual analysis begins with particular subjects constructed, often metaphorically, as texts; narrative analysis focuses on a middle range of linguistic practices that construct meanings around a trajectory of action; and discourse analysis takes the broadest scope and, following Michel Foucault,²² ties subjects to large scale power grids. But although I discuss them as if they are separate analytical enterprises, it is more likely that scholars working within this tradition deploy linguistic analysis at all three levels within a particular study. In practice as well as in theory, texts and narratives constitute and are constituted by discourses, and discourses furnish the broader context of power relations within which texts and narratives can be read.

Textual analysis is a linguistic analysis that indexes both a particular subject and a specific methodological practice. Thus textual analysis can be seen to be based on a double set of texts: the subject constructed metaphorically as a text (Mt. Everest, for example) so that it can be read using literary methods of analysis, and the textual sources that form the material for most historical analysis (newspaper articles on climbs, expedition accounts written by members of the climbing team, private correspondence, etc.). Thus textual analysis examines both the literal texts we are familiar with as historical evidence and texts more metaphorically and heuristically defined. Examples of this approach, sometimes called “reading,” are featured in several recent cultural studies anthologies²³ and in the pages of the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*.

The method of reading these texts critically entails identifying a particular incident or actor as a site for exploring the specific relations of power they articulate. Thus as Mary McDonald and I have argued elsewhere:

What were once regarded as individuals, celebrities, or even heroes [or events] become repositories for political narratives, and our task as cultural critics is not to search for the facts of their lives but to search for the ways in which those “facts” are constructed, framed, foregrounded, obscured, and forgotten. Such an analytical strategy displaces the notion of privileged access to “truth,” relocating it . . . in a complex interrelationship of the producer of the text and the reader of text rather than the text itself.²⁴

Thus textual analysis is a search for meanings—dominant, preferred, resistant—as they cohere around a particular subject of interest, and it is best seen as a means for accessing the dynamic, ongoing process of meaning making that positions that text within a relationship of production and consumption, always with reference to the particular historical and cultural sites in which it is located. Michael Oriard’s two fine books, *Reading Football* (1993) and *King Football* (2001), offer excellent examples of this process within sport history.²⁵

The term narrative implies a search for connection and unity and provides a greater sense of organization and completeness than a textual subject on its own. Narrative analy-

sis as I employ that term is a linguistic practice that examines texts—both material and metaphorical—within the framework of a temporal sequence of events made meaningful in part through that very sequence. Accounts structured around particular texts almost invariably take narrative form, and the relations of power revealed by the trajectory of the narrative can most productively be examined in terms of their participation in the larger discourses that reconstitute these relationships. Tina Parratt's analysis of the Haxey Hood furnishes an excellent example within sport history, where the text—the Haxey Hood—is located within narratives of place, community, and sacrifice, themselves contexted within discourses on gender, age, tradition, and nation.²⁶

Discourse analysis provides the broad critical context for understanding the cultural meanings and significances of particular texts within constituted relations of power. This is an analytical strategy Larry Grossberg calls “radical contextualization,” and Stuart Hall refers to as “articulation.”²⁷ Texts, they argue, must always be read with reference to their cultural and historical contexts. While these instructions may not need to be repeated to historians, too often they are news to those trained in more traditional sociological traditions or even some in cultural studies, as Graeme Turner reminds us.²⁸ Critical scholars must explore the resonances between their narratives and the discursive forces that constrain them. For example, in *The Eternally Wounded Woman* (1994), Patricia Vertinsky uses medical discourses as the framework for her study of women's bodies in the nineteenth century, and Susan Cahn employs the discourses of gender and sexuality as she explores women's sport involvement in *Coming on Strong* (1995).²⁹

These examples notwithstanding, while the forms of textual analysis described above have been increasingly popular within cultural studies, skepticism still abounds within sport history, if the debates during the 2006 NASSH meetings are any indication. Clearly, profound epistemological, methodological, and theoretical differences exist between this approach to studying the past and more familiar historical methods. Yet although the forms of textual analysis I advocate are most comfortably located within the theoretical paradigm shifts to postmodernism and poststructural analysis, some aspects of our work studying the past remain the same. Our methods for collecting evidence, for example, are much the same; the difference in our analytical approaches lies in the way we conceptualize and analyze what we have found.

Engaging in textual analysis does not mean totally abandoning more familiar methodologies of history or more familiar sites. A careful scholar still must spend weeks in the library of the Alpine Club in London, or in the Oriental and India Office reading room of the British Library, or among the newspaper files at the British Library's Colindale extension. We still must access rare, long unread books from interlibrary loan and hunker down with a pile of expedition books and mountaineering biographies and autobiographies. How can we *not* do this fundamental work? But when we finally surface from our dusty archives, we need to examine exactly what it is we have been collecting. What sort of evidence have we uncovered?

Textual, narrative, and discursive analyses are the central methodologies advocated by those who seek to interpret the meanings of the past by reconceptualizing as *representation* those accounts of the past that historians more traditionally see as sources or data. Of course, historical accounts are almost always treated as problematic, for historians generally

do not take the words of their subjects at face value. Skeptical about the possibility of accessing reality directly, I argue that texts (or “textual traces” as Parratt refers to them)³⁰ are the only materials we have to hand and thus must comprise the “data” upon which we generate explanations and conclusions. Because the texts themselves, not the events, comprise the subject of inquiry, gathering as many textual resources as possible is essential to this form of analysis. It is imperative to be exhaustive rather than selective in the gathering of material and to endeavor to collect and analyze every newspaper story, magazine and journal article, biography and autobiography of key players, and retrospective account that can be identified. To a large extent, the impact of particular events can be gauged by the number and breadth of sources that cover it and the duration of time the event remains on public display in the mainstream media.

Focusing on textuality takes this process one step further, by conceptualizing accounts as narratives and asking why particular narratives were constructed, whose interests were served by such a narrative, and what sort of cultural work the narrative was intended to accomplish. This reconceptualization of the purpose of narrative in history lies at the heart of the essays in Lynn Hunt’s *New Cultural History* (1989) and is further advanced in Judith Walkowitz’s stunning analysis of the force of “narratives of sexual danger” in the lives of women in late nineteenth-century London.³¹

Perhaps this approach can make us more comfortable if we acknowledge that we are not uncovering truth or excavating facts but uncovering *interests*: whose interests are served from the narrative being represented in this particular way? Who benefits? Whose interests are consolidated? This is a difficult task because vested interests are not helpfully self-evident, in fact are often carefully concealed, and, of course, not all such “interested” constructions are the result of willful or calculated actions. Thus we can treat our sources not as data but as narratives, and we can interrogate them as such. And we can assume that the narrative tells us as much about the narrator and his or her times as about the event itself.

This approach requires the scholar, as critical reader, to identify which events are highlighted, which characters are made central to the narrative, how they are characterized, why this particular detail, this nuance, this interpretation was chosen and which ones were unseen, neglected, subverted, or purposely forgot. We need to look for absences and offer careful conjectures about lost voices. For example, when one has an entire literature written about events that include both privileged white Westerners and natives who serve as their porters, a relationship anthropologist Sherry Ortner³² refers to as the Sherpa/Sahib relationship, and when that literature is almost entirely penned by the *sahibs*, one would be inexcusably negligent not to wonder about and search for accounts from these other voices—to ask the subaltern to speak, as Gayatri Spivak³³ might say. Or when another historically unprivileged group, for example, women, is largely absent from a particular site, one must wonder whether the almost exclusive maleness of the situation produces a different set of sensibilities, reflects particular values, produces partial narratives. One must wonder, what would a woman make of all this? It is intellectually irresponsible not to do so. By locating the narratives and the narrative absences within the discursive constraints that articulate or silence them we are in a better position to theorize about the cultural meanings and interests particular sites of power engender and mobilize.

Intertextuality as an Analytical Strategy

Intertextuality as an analytical strategy grows logically from the types of narrative and textual analyses developed by critical scholars working within and between the variety of disciplines and scholarly practices discussed above. It works well as an analytical strategy because it offers a further expansion of the contexts within which we can interpret the textual and narrative representations that form the subject and the sources of our work.

Intertextuality references the interrelationships and interdependencies of cultural meanings as they circulate between and are articulated within other texts. Derived from poststructuralist literary theories, intertextuality asserts that all texts are interconnected and any given text derives its meanings from the meanings that adhere to it from readers' previous encounters with other texts.³⁴ Keith Jenkins refers to this as "the utter contingency of all readings."³⁵ Referencing Robert Berkhofer, Doug Booth points out that historical research is itself grounded in intertextuality: "Historians inevitably begin their explorations into the past with the interpretations proffered by other practitioners; in this sense they address the past in terms of how it is defined by the discipline."³⁶ However the intertextualities I am most concerned with here refer to the correspondences among the texts themselves, those accounts we use to draw our own interpretations of the meaning of the events we are studying.

Acknowledging intertextuality as a significant aspect of cultural analysis means both endorsing the epistemological notion that we know things through our knowledge of other things—that all meanings are connected—and that locating our readings of particular texts within the context of the texts that help form their interpretative context is appropriate scholarly work. Applied to the context of historical research, taking intertextuality seriously as an analytical strategy does more than ensure that one establishes the particular historical context for a specific event: it connects apparently separate historical events to one another within a comprehensive theoretical framework.

The strategy requires a comparative process, exploring various versions of the same narrative as it is offered by different participants in that event or, even more provocatively, as the narrative travels across time. This method of comparison is not new to history: all careful scholars weigh the relative verisimilitude of accounts against one another. As with textual analysis more generally, however, where intertextual analysis departs from this standard historiographic practice is in its attempts to uncover authorial purpose and its conceptualization of the sort of evidence these sources are imagined to provide.

Dan Nathan provides an outstanding example of this process in *Saying It's So* (2003), his exploration of the Black Sox scandal.³⁷ Drawing on a variety of sources including newspaper accounts, interviews, biographies, novels, and plays as well as other historians' accounts, Nathan traces the shifts of meaning connected to the scandal. As he argues in his introduction, his purpose was not to uncover the most authentic account of the event but the conditions and intentions of its production: "the historical 'accuracy' or 'truth' of a narrative is less important to me than its construction, which inevitably reshapes, omits, distorts, conflates, and reorganizes the past."³⁸ Nathan's project was not conceived as a standard history. As he notes, "*Saying It's So* is less about baseball history than it is about cultural values and the way people make meaning."³⁹ He also observes, "This book uses

the Big Fix as a portal of sorts into these issues and considers what versions of the Black Sox scandal reveal about those who recreated them and the respective eras in which they were produced.”⁴⁰

Intertextuality as an analytical strategy entails more than making a critical comparison of texts and narratives differentially produced and distributed—although that is a necessary first step. The most profound contribution of intertextuality as a strategy of analysis is that it reveals that narratives and the events they attempt to capture are located in a sort of epistemological time warp. The past is never settled because meanings are never permanently fixed. Just as the events of the past, as we understand them, influence our thoughts and actions in the present, so also we read back to the past from the present to reinterpret earlier events in light of more recent occurrences. Leola Johnson and David Roediger demonstrate this process in their provocative analysis of the unsettled history of the text known as O.J. Simpson. Referencing public conceptions of Simpson before and after the murders of his wife Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman, they document the fragility and impermanence of the past.⁴¹ As Toni Morrison succinctly put it in the opening of her introduction to the volume in which this essay first appeared, “We have been deceived. We thought he loved us. Now we know that everything we saw was false.”⁴²

My research on Mt. Everest narratives uses several strategies of intertextual analysis: comparing different versions of the same story, charting the shifts of meaning of a particular story over time, and, most productively, exploring the way that one narrative affects the telling of other narratives—some past, some future—and how events work to undo the prevailing meanings of an earlier story. All these methods begin with an attempt to articulate the dominant narrative in place around Mt. Everest and the ways each story articulates with those meanings. More specifically, within each story, I search for discrepancies among accounts. How does Anatoli Boukreev’s account of the events of May of 1996, particularly his own actions during the storm, contradict Jon Krakauer’s?⁴³ What difference do these two versions of the story make? What kind of cultural work does each accomplish? Or with reference to shifts in meanings across time, how do Edmund Hillary’s references to Tenzing Norgay change from one autobiography to the next?⁴⁴ How do we account for the fact that Tenzing virtually disappears from the second of these narratives? And how do these accounts differ from the “autobiographies” Tenzing himself produced?⁴⁵ We now have first-hand accounts from seven of the members of the successful 1953 Everest climb;⁴⁶ do we have seven versions of the truth? How should we understand the correspondences and the divergencies among accounts? What would be achieved by finding correspondence among all the accounts? Finding the commonalities does not establish the truth but rather a collection of preferred and partial truths, or perhaps a strategy for memorializing—a communal sense of the important issues that require capturing for posterity, that might be venerated in the ritual process of narrative. The point of collecting and comparing them is not to establish collaborative truth—or history—but precisely to remind ourselves that narratives are particular, independent, interdependent, and intertextual.

More than self-interest is at stake in the way a particular author frames his or her narrative. As Durkheim and others would remind us, these narratives are as much cultural products as they are the products of individual hands. Indeed the poststructuralist procla-

mation of the death of the author requires us to look beyond the modernist fiction of individual ownership of our ideas and their expression and to interrogate acts of meaning production as cultural and discursive rather than personal. Resolving the discrepancies among accounts through intertextual strategies is not the primary aim: locating these discrepancies within the context of their production and consumption and within their specific historical contexts is.⁴⁷

Narratives of Redemption on Mt. Everest

Unpredictable as the events of a particular climb might be, mountaineering literature follows rather predictable plot lines that characterize the genre. Everest tales, like sport narratives, follow a familiar trajectory from anticipation (the preparation and trek to base camp), to challenge (establishing base camp and all the intermediary camps along the way), to climax (the final push to the summit), to denouement (back to base camp and home again). Taken together, they reproduce elements central to mountaineering literature: a cast of dedicated, adventurous, and capable climbers; the documentation of risk and hardship; and the particular struggle that results in some measure of triumph or tragedy. Thus each participates in the dominant and preferred narrative of bravery and perseverance in the face of hardship and challenge, and each asserts the importance of the struggle.

But it is the unpredictable elements of a climb that produce its particular drama. To take its place within the mountaineering canon, a mountaineering book must document something beyond the usual—the first ascent by a new route, a particularly harrowing escape or rescue, remarkable bravery or sacrifice, devastating hardship or tragedy. Thus within a context of familiar storylines, each Everest tale has its own particular dramatic trajectory: the mysterious disappearance of Mallory and Irvine in 1924, the triumph of Hillary and Tenzing in 1953, the sudden blizzard of 1996. But in addition to carrying the dominant narrative messages that inhere in all mountaineering texts and adding its own variation of these themes to the cumulative history of Everest, each Everest story participates in and reproduces larger cultural discourses.

A critical reading of Everest tales plumbs these deeper discursive currents. It would be disingenuous to imply that I was surprised to find that the Everest narratives I examined worked to produce and reproduce discourses on masculinity, class privilege, expansive nationalism, and ethnocentrism, for example, since a critical perspective predisposes me to look for such themes, indeed requires me to do so. These themes exist just below the surface of Everest tales, and it does not take a critical genius to uncover them. More interesting are the specific ways these discourses are activated in each particular text and, even more, how the texts are joined intertextually. Each derives a part of its meaning from the others, yet the texts also work against one another to produce unanticipated readings. For example, in my analysis of three Everest events, an intertextual approach revealed a theme of redemption that connects the three narratives in unanticipated ways, in the final analysis revealing the magnitude of importance Everest occupies as a cultural symbol.

My analyses of the British led expeditions of the 1920s and of the British success on Everest in 1953 paid careful attention to the theme of nationalism that dominated these expeditions, or, more accurately, the need for national redemption that played itself out in

these tales. Contemporary news accounts made it clear that Mallory in 1924 and Hillary and Tenzing in 1953 were widely understood as platforms for shoring up sagging British spirits after the failures at the North and South Poles and, indeed, the end of empire itself. In both cases, as I discuss below, the significance of the climbs to the restoration of damaged national prestige was quite clear.⁴⁸

But my Everest project included also the tragic events of 1996—events that pushed Everest into the public arena after over forty years of relative quiet. If redemption is such a pervasive theme in the Everest narratives that dominate public awareness of the mountain, how did it manifest itself in the narratives of 1996? A commitment to intertextual methods required me to place all three narratives within this larger discursive frame and to seek the commonalities and discontinuities among events that produce a fabric of understanding of Everest that transcends any particular Everest event and its retelling. As I describe below, I found redemption in the 1996 tales in a way that not only confirmed it as a salient theme but went even further to reaffirm the magnitude of symbolic power Everest wields, for the events of 1996 result in narratives that bemoan the misuse and degradation of Everest thereby constructing Everest itself as endangered and in need of redemption. To appreciate that pattern one must explore all three Everest stories together.

The British Everest expeditions of the 1920s carried enormous national significance. Although Everest was located in a desolate area which was never within bounds of the British Empire, no matter how vast, most Britons considered it a British peak, and being the first to summit it was seen as a point of national honor. After the national embarrassment suffered when British attempts to be the first to the North Pole and then the South Pole both failed, the latter a particularly poignant tragedy, attention shifted to Everest, now regarded as “the third pole,” and the burden of British prestige was shifted onto the shoulders of George Mallory. Mallory is a legend of mountaineering, widely considered the best climber of his generation. He was a romantic figure as well, handsome and charming, a graceful climber, a public school boy nicknamed “Galahad” by his friends, a man who read poetry in his tent on the high slopes of Everest. He was the perfect man to fulfill the cultural mission of The Mount Everest Committee, a group of upper middle-class men who felt they had a mandate to promote these climbs in the national interest. Thus George Mallory was positioned to redeem symbolically the glories of British conquest, which had been so symbolically lost by the tragic failure of Scott at the South Pole. But British pride took another blow when, on the third expedition, in 1924, Mallory and his climbing partner Andrew Irvine disappeared into a cloud while nearing the top of the mountain. When the cloud dissipated, the climbers were gone without a trace. Generations of climbers debated their fate and whether they had reached the summit before disappearing. Like Scott before him, Mallory became a romantic and tragic hero.⁴⁹

The central chapter in the Everest story is surely the first summiting of the peak in 1953, a moment that represents the crowning glory of Everest exploration. Edmund Hillary's photo of Tenzing Norgay on the summit captures an iconic moment in mountaineering and in sport. Recently named by both *Life* magazine and *Sports Illustrated* as one of the greatest achievements of the twentieth century,⁵⁰ the ascent of Everest stands as the standard for all the tales of courage and perseverance. This triumph was widely regarded as having recovered some measure of the prestige lost to Britain after the failures of

the 1920s climbs and the four unsuccessful climbs it mounted during the thirties, forties, and fifties. Adding to its nationalistic currency was the fact that the feat took place on the eve of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and was presented to her as a coronation gift. In this way Britons recently deprived of the last real vestiges of their once mighty empire imagined they might usher in a new Elizabethan era.⁵¹ To nationalize this accomplishment—to make Everest their own—the awkward fact that neither man who summited was British had to be managed: Hillary was a gawky New Zealander and Tenzing a citizen of Nepal or India, a distinction that itself created huge nationalistic controversy. Their “patriation” was accomplished through narrative intervention in two ways: by proclaiming both men to be citizens of the Commonwealth, an assertion quite difficult to sustain for Tenzing, and by elevating the importance of the contribution of John Hunt, a real Briton who served as the expedition leader.⁵²

Once “conquered,” Everest took on an almost transcendent quality. In the late twentieth century, expeditions no longer received the public attention those of the 1920s or 1953 did—featured as they were on the front pages of daily newspapers, for example—yet Everest retained, even solidified, its iconic status as the ultimate symbol of aspiration and achievement. It became a useful metaphor as well, often reduced to use in advertising to sell everything from watches to breath mints. But the events of 1996 pushed Everest back onto the front pages, this time with a storyline that endangered the meanings and values it had come to embody.

The events of 1996 are invariably labeled tragic. The dramatic center of the story is the sudden storm at the summit of the mountain that took the lives of eight climbers. The clear focus of all news accounts was the search for explanations, and most accounts focus on the combination of deadly circumstances: too many climbers, too little experience, bad decisions on the part of the leaders, and bad weather. The unexpected blizzard was the precipitating factor, but most also blamed the arrogance of expedition leaders Rob Hall and Scott Fischer who had made a business out of guiding relatively inexperienced climbers to the top of the world’s highest peak. Outrage was also directed at the climbers, usually dismissed as “tourists,” who were understood to have been chosen not for their climbing experience or ability but their ability to pay the \$65,000 fee.⁵³

But although the main theme of these accounts is the indictment of the commercialism of climbing, the theme of nationalism is also present. Popular accounts made sense of the 1996 tragedy by seeking to define who “belonged” on the mountain, generally concluding that only highly skilled and experienced elite climbers—a category that would look mostly white, Western, professional, and male—should be allowed to climb it. No one raised an argument that this sacred space should not be violated by any climber, no matter how many *puja* ceremonies are performed, or that the indigenous people should themselves be the ones to decide their mountain’s fate. Instead, in trying to determine who belonged on the mountain, the arguments constructed culturally situated rationales of restricted access that obscured nationalistic and imperialistic motives.⁵⁴

But even critically, the events of 1996 severely damaged the purity of the reputation of Everest as a symbol of achievement. While in earlier eras Everest was the site of struggles for national prestige and manly accomplishment, after 1996 the ability of the mountain to be sustained as a symbol of achievement was compromised. What did it mean to climb

Mt. Everest when one of its most well known climbers called the south route “the yellow brick road to the top”;⁵⁵ when wealthy clients were being short roped to the top, when computer hookups were common, when anyone with \$65,000 could be escorted to the top? The negative fallout after the events of 1996 was immense, and 1996 was not only a tragedy in terms of the loss of life but also a tragedy for the reputation of Everest. But, as intertextual analysis reminds us, history does not stand still. As it turned out, two later Everest events intervened in the narrative process, providing a new frame for understanding the meaning of these troublesome events.

In 1999, a team of climbers mounted an expedition to find the body of Andrew Irvine, rumored to have been sighted by climbers on the north face. Blessed by perfect conditions and against extremely long odds, they succeeded, but they found not Irvine but Mallory himself. Their discovery sparked considerable public interest and refreshed the legend of that storied climber—with excellent timing, given the events of 1996 that had cast a pall over the aura of Everest.⁵⁶ Eric Simonson, a member of the climbing team that found Mallory made explicit the connections between the two events:

I had become increasingly frustrated by the growing public misconception that Everest history essentially began in 1996 and consisted mostly of bad decisions and tragedies befalling inexperienced climbers. . . . I wanted the new class of mountaineering spectators to learn more of the Everest I know: a different and much richer mountain—a giant complete with a very long legacy of heroes, challenges, and mysteries. No single Everest story could better teach this than the great story of Mallory and Irvine.⁵⁷

The resurrection of George Mallory reminded the public of the romance of past Everest adventures and the purity of heroic adventure in general and went a long way to remove the unsavory reputation of commercialism on Everest that had threatened to replace it.

A second set of events that intervened to help restore the damaged reputation of Everest were the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the first successful summiting of Everest by Tenzing and Hillary. Among all Everest stories, this one, and the iconic image of Tenzing triumphant on the summit, is not just the dominant narrative of Everest but of all of mountaineering: it remains virtually impervious to detraction, controversy—and re-reading. The fiftieth anniversary of the first ascent occasioned celebrations across the globe: at a royal gala evening in London which featured all the remaining surviving team members and was attended, with great fanfare, by Queen Elizabeth II, herself an important player in the drama; at a month-long sport festival held in Nepal at which Sir Edmund Hillary was the guest of great honor; in the American Himalayan Foundation fundraiser in San Francisco, also attended by Sir Edmund.⁵⁸ By reminding us of that moment of supreme mountaineering glory, these celebrations also worked to help restore luster to Everest’s reputation.⁵⁹

The events of 1999 and 2003 should logically derive their salience from their connections to the climbs of the 1920s and 1953 respectively. Ironically however, the discovery of Mallory’s body is tied more meaningfully to the aftermath of the tragedy of 1996 than to the tragedy of 1924. And the events of 2003, organized ostensibly to celebrate the heroic triumph of 1953, actually achieve greater salience as they also work to restore respect to Everest after the tragic events of 1996. Recognizing the power of narratives to confirm or undo the narratives of the past—or the future—indicates that they achieve

their power and coherence through their intertextuality. That the meanings activated by the events of 1999 and 2003 resonate more with the events of 1996 than with the events they were intended to augment and elaborate is evidence of the power of intertextuality. Though differentially deployed in different narratives, the theme of redemption clearly emerged as a crucial element in the stories that circulate around Mt. Everest. When an event occurred that threatened to tarnish the image of Everest as the touchstone of aspiration, courage, and achievement, narratives of other events were mobilized to recuperate that image.

In this final drama of redemption, the magnitude of Everest's symbolic meaning is revealed. Everest as a signifier carries such cultural importance that disruptive events that threaten to disturb its dominant meaning generate strong counter narratives. In such times of narrative crisis, Everest is rescued by narrative means and intertextual strategies of analysis provide a means for considering this process.

Textuality, Intertextuality, and the Promise of Interdisciplinary Exchange

In this paper, as at the NASSH conference at which an earlier version was presented, I have attempted to establish some points of contact, some common ground among scholars interested in exploring aspects of our sporting past, whether we are located within the confines of sport studies, the sociology of sport, or sport history. Using my own research on Mt. Everest as a point of both departure and arrival, I have presented one approach to cultural studies of sport that I believe provides a promising entrée into understanding the meanings of events of the past: textual and intertextual analyses. Textual analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis are inter-related methodological strategies relatively new to the study of the past, yet I believe they offer exciting opportunities for discovering the ways that cultures produce their histories through the production and distribution of dominant and preferred narratives. These narratives are an appropriate focus for historians, not just as documents of what happened in the past but as documents of what people want us to remember about the past; as a way to focus on how the "facts" of the past are produced and mobilized. If one conceptualizes the events of the past as texts, a focus on intertextuality—on the interconnections among texts and narratives as they stretch from the past to the present and back again—provides a strategy for analysis that promises to reveal the complicated nature of the past and our knowledge of it.



¹Catriona M. Parratt, "About Turns: Reflecting on Sport History in the 1990s," *Sport History Review* 29 (1995): 4-17; Jeffrey Hill, "British Sports History: A Postmodern Future," *Journal of Sport History* 23 (1996): 1-19; Murray Phillips, "Deconstructing Sport History: The Postmodern Challenge," *Journal of Sport History* 28 (2001): 327-343.

²Murray Phillips, ed., *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sport History* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³Phillips, *Deconstructing Sport History*. The typology Booth provides in *The Field* follows Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁴Archives consulted were the Blakeney Collection in the British Library, London; the India and East India Room of the British Library, London; the British Library Newspaper Library at Colindale; and the Cuttings Collection scrapbooks in the Alpine Club library, London. Some materials from other archives

were accessed online, including the Everest Expeditions Collection in the Royal Geographical Society, London, and the Mallory Papers at Magdalene College Archives, Cambridge University. Although some of the materials accessed were private papers, letters, and other documents, my primary focus was on public accounts that achieved broad circulation.

⁵For critical analyses focused on Everest see Gordon Stewart, "The British Reaction to the Conquest of Everest," *Journal of Sport History* 7 (1980): 21-39; idem, "Tenzing's Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and Late Imperial Culture in Britain 1921-1953," *Past and Present* 149 (1995): 170-190; Peter Hansen, "Confetti of Empire: The Conquest of Everest in Nepal, India, Britain and New Zealand," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (2000): 307-332; and idem, "Coronation Everest: The Empire and Commonwealth in the 'Second Elizabethan Age,'" in *British Culture and the End of Empire*, ed. Stuart Ward (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 57-72. For mountaineering see Peter Donnelly, "The Invention of Tradition and the (Re)Invention of Mountaineering," in *Sport History and Social Theory*, ed. Kevin Wamsley (Dubuque, Iowa: Brown and Benchmark, 1995), 235-243; idem, "Playing with Gravity: Mountains and Mountaineering," in *Sites of Sport: Space, Place, Experience*, eds. Patricia Vertinsky and John Bale (New York: Routledge, 2004), 131-144; Reuben Ellis, *Vertical Margins: Mountaineering and the Landscapes of Neoimperialism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); Peter Bayers, *Imperial Ascent: Mountaineering, Masculinity, and Empire* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003); and Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit* (New York: Vintage, 2003). On exploration and adventure more generally see Lisa Bloom, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Beau Riffenburgh, *The Myth of the Explorer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁶Susan Birrell, "The Resurrection of George Mallory," presented at the annual meeting of the North American Society of Sport History, French Lick, Indiana, May 2002; idem, "The Empire's New Clothes: Everest 1953, 2003," presented at the annual meeting of the North American Society of Sport History, Columbus, Ohio, May 2003; idem, "Claiming Mt. Everest: Nationalism and Ideology at 29,000 Feet," Grayson Kirk Distinguished Lecture in International Studies, Miami University, Miami, Ohio, November 1999; idem, "Ego-Tourism at 29,000 Feet: Mt. Everest, May 1996," presented at the annual meeting of the North American Society for Sport History, Springfield, Massachusetts, May 1997.

⁷Of course, Everest's lore is not restricted to the three particular stories I have chosen to explicate. After all, over 2,200 people have summited (through 2004), any one of whom is likely to pen a very compelling story. Others might have chosen the first successful completion, in 1985, of the challenge now known as the Seven Summits, in which a climber summits the highest peak in each continent, usually culminating with Everest. Because these quests are usually accomplished with the support of a climbing guide, they are seen as manifestations of the commercialization of climbing, and many see the advent of the Seven Summits as the marker of an unfortunate shift in climbers' motivations and the culture of climbing. On the other extreme, Reinhold Messner's solo climb of Everest in 1980, accomplished without oxygen, is viewed by many as the most extraordinary mountaineering feat of all time. Significant as these moments are, I believe they do not approach the three featured in this analysis in terms of cultural currency.

⁸I am deeply indebted to Daniel Nathan for first making me aware of this approach to historical analysis. His book, Daniel Nathan, *Saying It's So: A Cultural History of the Black Sox Scandal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), is a compelling example of the salience of this method.

⁹C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

¹⁰For an excellent analysis of the role of Sherpas in the climbing culture of Mt. Everest see Sherry B. Ortner, *Life and Death on Mt Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹¹Useful guides to understanding poststructuralism and postmodernism include Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); Madan Sarap, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989); David Morley, "Postmodernism: The Rough Guide" in *Cultural Studies and Communications*, eds. James Curran,

David Morley, and Valerie Walkerdine (New York: St. Martins Press, 1996), 50-65; and Terry Eagleton, "Poststructuralism" in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, ed. Terry Eagleton (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 127-150.

¹²Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, 12.

¹³Eagleton, "Poststructuralism," 138.

¹⁴Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1966).

¹⁵W.I. Thomas, *The Unadjusted Girl* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1923).

¹⁶W.I. Thomas with Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), 571-572; Herbert Blumer, *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 2.

¹⁷Emile Durkheim is often categorized as a "social facts" rather than "social definitionist" theorist—see George Ritzer, "Sociology: A Multiple Paradigm Science," *American Sociologist* 10 (1975): 156-167—but in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1915) he clearly pioneered definitionist, that is, symbolic interactionist, principles. See Susan Birrell, "Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman," *Social Forces* 60 (1981): 354-376.

¹⁸Birrell, "Sport as Ritual."

¹⁹Though he does not explicitly mention poststructuralism in his provocative discussion on the methodological practices of history, Keith Jenkins makes a similar argument. See Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), particularly 17-18, 71.

²⁰J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 68.

²¹Many scholars reject the extreme version of this premise: that it therefore follows that nothing exists outside the text—a sort of discursive reductionism that Bryan Palmer has referred to as the "descent into discourse." Bryan Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). I believe the more productive position is to assert that since we cannot directly access the past (or truth or reality) we must privilege what we can access—the narratives used to construct that past. This position has pragmatic value as well as this essay attempts to demonstrate.

²²The classic statement is in Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). For discussions of applications within sport, see David Andrews, "Desperately Seeking Michel: Foucault's Genealogy, the Body, and Critical Sport Sociology," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 10 (1993): 148-167; and idem, "Posting-up: French Post-structuralism and the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Sporting Culture" in *Handbook of Sports Studies*, eds. Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2000), 106-137.

²³Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, also uses this metaphor in his discussion of sources and interpretations within history. For a more detailed discussion of this methodology and its application to sport studies, see Mary McDonald and Susan Birrell, "Reading Sport Critically: A Methodology for Interrogating Power," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 16 (1999): 283-300. Two anthologies comprised of work representative of this tradition are Susan Birrell and Mary McDonald, eds., *Reading Sport: Critical Essays on Power and Representation* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000); and David L. Andrews and Steven J. Jackson, eds., *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Other examples that examine a particular subject, often from various viewpoints, include Nick Trujillo, *The Meaning of Nolan Ryan* (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1994); Toni Morrison and Claudia Brodsky Lacour, eds., *Birth of a Nationhood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case* (New York: Pantheon, 1997); and David Andrews, ed., *Michael Jordan, Inc.: Corporate Sport, Media Culture, and Late Modern America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

²⁴McDonald and Birrell, eds., "Reading Sport Critically," 292.

²⁵Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport & Spectacle in*

the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

²⁶Patriona Parratt "Of Place and Men and Women: Gender and Topophilia in the 'Haxey Hood,'" *Journal of Sport History* 27 (2000): 229-245; idem, "Wasn't It Ironic? The Haxey Hood and the Great War," in *Deconstructing Sport History*, ed. Phillips, 131-146.

²⁷Stuart Hall, "The Problem with Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10 (1986) 28-44; Larry Grossberg, "Cultural Studies, Modern Logics, and Theories of Globalisation" in *Back to Reality? Social Experience and Cultural Studies*, ed. Angela McRobbie (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1997), 7-35. See also David Andrews' discussion in "Coming to Terms with Cultural Studies," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26 (2002): 110-117.

²⁸Graeme Turner, "Why Does Cultural Studies Want History?" *Australian Historical Studies* 118 (2002): 113-120.

²⁹Patricia Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors, and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

³⁰Parratt, "About Turns," 5.

³¹Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narrative Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³²Ortner, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest*.

³³Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 271-313.

³⁴As might be imagined, frustration with the elusiveness of the generative text on which intertextuality might be grounded raises the same criticisms leveled at the ontological privilege granted texts within poststructuralist theories of textuality. Critics see intertextuality as an endless cycle of references among texts with no grounding in a material reality.

³⁵Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, 66.

³⁶Booth, *The Field*, 186. The reference is to Robert Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). Keith Jenkins makes the same argument in *Re-Thinking History*.

³⁷Nathan, *Saying It's So*.

³⁸Nathan, *Saying It's So*, 7.

³⁹Nathan, *Saying It's So*, 2.

⁴⁰Nathan, *Saying It's So*, 6. While relatively rare in sport history, the method has been used to good advantage by other scholars who have applied it to studies of the shifting meanings of events such as Watergate (Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* [New York: Basic Books, 1992]), slave rebellions (Albert Stone, *The Return of Nat Turner: History, Literature, and Cultural Politics in Sixties America* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992]), the American Civil War (Jim Curran, *The Civil War in Popular Culture* [Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1995]), the Iran-Contra Hearings (Michael Lynch and David Bogan, *The Spectacle of History: Speech, Text, and Memory at the Iran-Contra Hearings* [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996]), and the sinking of the Titanic (Stephen Biel, *Down with the Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic Disaster* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1996]).

⁴¹Leola Johnson and David Roediger, "Hertz Don't It: Becoming Colorless and Staying Black in the Crossover of O.J. Simpson," in *Reading Sport*, eds. Birrell and McDonald, 40-73.

⁴²Toni Morrison, "Introduction: The Official Story: Dead Man Golfing," in *Birth of a Nationhood*, eds. Morrison and Brodsky Lacour, vii.

⁴³Anatoli Boukreev and G. Weston DeWalt, *The Climb: Tragic Ambitions on Everest* (New York: St. Martins, 1997); Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997).

⁴⁴Edmund Hillary, *High Adventure* (London: Stoddard and Houghton, 1955); Edmund Hillary, *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win* (Kent, U.K.: Coronet Books, 1975); Edmund Hillary, *View from the Summit: The Remarkable Memoir of the First Person to Conquer Everest* (New York: Pocket Books, 1999).

⁴⁵Tenzing Norgay and James Ramsey Ullman, *Tiger of the Snows: The Autobiography of Tenzing of Everest* (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1955); Tenzing Norgay, *After Everest* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1977). Tenzing's autobiographies raise important issues about the meaning of authorship as we are reminded of Spivak's rhetorical question: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Accounts of Sherpa life authored by Sherpas themselves are only beginning to appear. See Tashi Tenzing, *Tenzing Norgay and the Sherpas of Everest* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001); and Jamling Tenzing Norgay, *Touching My Father's Soul: A Sherpa's Journey to the Top of Everest* (New York: Harpers, 2001).

⁴⁶John Hunt, *The Conquest of Everest* (Garden City, N.Y.: International Collectors Library, 1953); Wilfred Noyce, *South Col: One Man's Adventure on the Ascent of Everest, 1953* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1954); Hillary, *High Adventure*; Tenzing and Ullman, *Tiger of the Snows*; Jan Morris, *Coronation Everest* (London: John Murray, 1958; reprint ed., London: Faber and Faber, 2003); George Band, *Everest: 50 Years on Top of the World* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, Ltd. 2003)—this is the "official history" co-sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society, the Mount Everest Foundation, and the Alpine Club; Michael Ward, *Everest: A Thousand Years of Exploration* (London: Ernest Press, 2003).

⁴⁷Those who work in more recent historical contexts are likely to have more accounts to work with; many historians do not have the luxury of trying to decide how and why different versions of the same events differ. Within Everest narratives, the conditions of production play a significant part in the variety of accounts available for reading. In the 1920s, control of the narrative was concentrated in a single author: the expedition leader was charged with providing regular dispatches to the *Times*, which had bought exclusive rights to the story. No other expedition member was allowed to pen his own account.

In 1953, again under exclusive contract, the *Times* assigned young reporter James Morris (now Jan Morris) to accompany the team to Everest. Although Morris and the *Times* had an exclusive contract, rival newspapers sent their own reporters to lurk around Katmandu trying to intercept Morris' stories for their own. (See Ralph Izzard, *An Innocent on Everest* [New York: E.P. Dutton, 1954]). Through clever codes and sheer physical exertion, Morris managed to maintain the scoop and deliver the exclusive story of the summit triumph to the *Times* for publication on Coronation Day itself. All other newspapers had to reprint the *Times* account. Morris' book *Coronation Everest* is an anomaly within mountaineering literature because its tension derives as much from the suspense of this journalistic intrigue as from the suspense of the climb itself. This exclusivity ended once the climbers were off the mountain, and six of the participants have now written their own accounts.

By 1996 exclusive authorship seemed a quaint idea. There were internet stations at base camp, satellite hook-ups carried up the mountain by Sherpas, and two professional journalists among the climbers. To date four climbers have written their own books about these events. Today, we have an embarrassment of narrative riches and a confusion of sources and messages, in terms of first-hand accounts and an overwhelming amount of material on the internet.

⁴⁸This point is clearly articulated in earlier scholarly analyses. See Stewart, "The British Reaction to the Conquest of Everest"; idem, "Tenzing's Two Wrist-Watches"; Hansen, "Confetti of Empire"; and idem, "Coronation Everest."

⁴⁹Birrell, "The Resurrection of George Mallory." Published tributes and the eulogies delivered in memorial services for Mallory touch on these themes; see David Robertson, *George Mallory* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968, 1999), 250-254. Mallory's life is documented in several other biographies: Showell Styles, *Mallory of Everest* (New York: Macmillan, 1967); Peter Gillman and Leni Gillman, *The Wildest Dream: The Biography of George Mallory* (Seattle, Wash.: Mountaineers, 2000); Dudley Green, *Because It's There: The Life of George Mallory* (Stroud, U.K.: Tempus, 2003). The official expedition accounts are Charles Bruce et al., *The Assault on Everest, 1922* (London: Edward Arnold, 1923) and Edward Norton et al., *The Fight for Everest, 1924* (London: Edward Arnold, 1925). For a near contemporary account of the national importance of the expeditions of the 1920s see Francis Younghusband, *The Epic of Mount Everest* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1926; reprint ed., London: Pan, 2000). Recent books about the discovery of Mallory's body in 1999 also provide characterizations of him, particularly David Breashears

and Audrey Salkeld, *The Last Climb: The Legendary Everest Expeditions of George Mallory* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, n.d.); Peter Firstbrook, *Lost on Everest: The Search for Mallory and Irvine* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1999); Jochen Hemmleb, Larry Johnson, and Eric Simonson, as told to William E. Nothdurft, *Ghosts of Everest: The Search for Mallory and Irvine* (Seattle, Wash.: Mountaineers, 1999); and Tom Holzel and Audrey Salkeld, *The Mystery of Mallory and Irvine*, rev. ed. (Seattle, Wash.: Mountaineers, 1996). In addition the contemporary newspaper articles contained in the Clippings Collection in the Alpine Club were extremely helpful in gauging the impact of the 1920s expedition across England.

⁵⁰“Still on Top of the World—Sir Edmund Hillary Reflects on Everest,” in *Life: The Greatest Adventures of All Time* (Des Moines, Iowa: Time Life Books, 2000), 84-104; Frank Deford, “Our Favorite Feats: Pioneer Miller Roger Bannister and Everest Conqueror Edmund Hillary Became, at Midcentury, the Last Great Heroes in an Era of Sea Change in Sport,” *Sports Illustrated*, 27 December 1999, pp. 102-124.

⁵¹Morris, *Coronation Everest*.

⁵²Birrell, “The Empire’s New Clothes: Everest 1953, 2003.” See also Stewart, “The British Reaction to the Conquest of Everest”; idem, “Tenzing’s Two Wrist-Watches”; Hansen, “Coronation Everest”; Ellis, *Vertical Margins*; and Bayers, *Imperial Ascent*.

⁵³Birrell, “Claiming Mt. Everest”; idem, “Ego-Tourism at 29,000 Feet.” See also Krakauer, *Into Thin Air*. Krakauer had been sent to Everest by *Outside* magazine specifically to do a story on guided expeditions. A sampling of the headlines of news stories and commentaries that appeared in newspapers and magazines is indicative of public opinion: “The Top of the World, No Place for Amateurs,” *US News & World Report*, 27 May 1996, pp. 10-11; Jennet Conant, “Snowblind Ambition,” *Vanity Fair*, August 1996, pp. 80-84, 143-147; “Everest Takes Worst Toll, Refusing to Be Stylish,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1996, sec. A, pp. 1, 3; “Mountain Climbing is Sublime; Is It Selfish, Too?” *New York Times*, 19 May 1996, sec. 4, p. 7; “Trapped on Everest: How the World’s Highest Mountain Became a Deadly Playground,” *Newsweek*, 27 May 1996, p. 8.

⁵⁴Birrell, “Claiming Mt. Everest”; idem, “Ego-Tourism at 29,000 Feet.”

⁵⁵This comment is attributed to Scott Fischer, a veteran climber and leader of the commercial guiding company Mountain Madness. He died on Everest during the blizzard of 1996. See Krakauer, *Into Thin Air*, 66.

⁵⁶Several books appeared almost immediately: Breashears and Salkeld, *The Last Climb*; Firstbrook, *Lost on Everest*; Hemmleb et al., *Ghosts of Everest*; and Anker and Roberts, *The Last Explorer*. Legendary climber Reinhold Messner offered his opinion of the connections between Mallory and modern climbing in *The Second Death of George Mallory: The Enigma and Spirit of Mount Everest* (New York: St. Martins, 2001).

⁵⁷Eric Simonson, quoted in Holzell and Salkeld, *The Mystery of Mallory and Irvine*, xiii.

⁵⁸Of course not all celebrations were so respectful: my favorite sign of the times was the U.S. television program, Global Extreme Mt. Everest 4-Runners of Adventure, a “Survivor”-type contest whose final stage was a televised climb of the northern face of Everest. The series was broadcast on the Outdoor Life Network, January of 2003 to June of 2003.

⁵⁹Birrell, “The Empire’s New Clothes: Everest 1953, 2003.”

Birreli, Susan. Approaching Mt. Everest: On Intertextuality and the Past as Narrative. 34(2007)1, 1-22. Blaisdell, Lowell D. Legends as an Expression of Baseball Memory.Â Blake Tyrell's The Smell of Sweat. Spignesi, Sinatra, and the Pittsburgh Steelers: Franco's Italian Army as an Expression of Ethnic Identity, 1972-1977. 30(2003)3, 347-371. 35(2008)3, 421-427.