

# Constructing Knowledge

## *Histories of Modern Sport*

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### Introduction

Modern sport is a socially constructed global phenomenon. International sporting federations register players, define the rules of play, stage events, and negotiate with each other, sponsors, broadcasters, and governments. States support ministries and ministers of sport. The media previews, broadcasts, and reviews matches and games 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Sporting teams represent local, regional, and national communities which build sporting infrastructures (and decorate them with sporting insignia, symbols, and flags) and host events to signify their identities. In this chapter I examine the ways historians construct knowledge about modern sport and its form, development, and meanings.

The chapter comprises two substantive parts. I begin with a set of basic questions about the emergence of modern sport, its causes, its motors of diffusion, and its cultural reception. These questions have not only failed to produce a consensus among historians, they have also fueled debates and controversies that raise fundamental questions about the “coherence” of history as a discipline (Thompson, 1995: 51; see also Jenkins, 1991: 15). Thus, in the second part of the chapter,

I critically examine the primary epistemologies (forms of knowledge) which have framed, and continue to frame, historical enquiries into modern sport. The philosopher of history Alun Munslow (1997) labels these epistemologies *reconstructionism* and *constructionism*. Although these two epistemologies privilege empiricism and proffer primary sources (e.g., official documents) as evidence of the past (which they insist can be recovered), reconstructionists conceptualize history as an objective discipline grounded in the interrogation of sources while constructionists embrace theory to frame their objectivity.<sup>1</sup> The lack of agreement among historians of sport, even among those working within the same epistemological framework, leads me to advocate an alternative deconstructionist-leaning epistemology which contextualizes knowledge about modern sport in the moment of its existence or its narration. Deconstructionist historians are less concerned with reconstructing sport or constructing theoretical interpretations of sport; their goal is to explicate the way historians construct facts, theories, and narratives and the ways they variously “frame,” “foreground,” “remember,” “obscure,” and “forget” the past (McDonald and Birrell, 1999: 292). I elaborate on deconstructionist epistemology in the second section with

reference to the interpretation of modern sporting practices and cultures.

### Questions (and Unstable Answers)

Since the late 1960s a set of common questions has framed scholarly inquiry into modern sport. When did modern sport begin? What conditions precipitated and predisposed modern sport? How did modern sport become a global phenomenon? How have different cultures received modern sport? In this section, I summarize the debates and disagreements ignited by the answers to these questions under three headings – origins and causes, diffusion, and reception – and I highlight the shifting, and unstable, meanings they impose on modern sport.

#### *Origins and causes*

Most reconstructionist historians date the emergence of modern sport as a distinct practice from the mid-Victorian era. They cite as evidence the formal constitution of a raft of English governing bodies such as the Football Association (1863), Amateur Swimming Association (1869), Bicyclists Union (1878), Metropolitan Rowing Association (1879), Amateur Athletic Union (1880), and Lawn Tennis Association (1888). Some reconstructionists, however, point to the formal constitution of several important governing bodies at least a century earlier, such as the Jockey Club, for horse racing, in 1750; the St Andrews' Society of Golfers, for golf, in 1754; and, for cricket, the Marylebone Cricket Club in 1787; and then, from the early Victorian period, the Grand Caledonian Curling Club in 1838 for curling (Tranter, 1998). Of course, dates marking the formal constitution of sports governing bodies paint only a partial picture and do not resolve the issue of when modern sport emerged as a distinct practice, much less its causes.

Highlighting the “interplay of change and continuity” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Richard Holt (1989: 12) attributes the idea of modern sport to mid-Victorian “folklorists” who, living “in the midst of an unprecedented upsurge of urban and industrial change,” tended to cast their world as modern and the pre-Victo-

rian era as traditional. Stefan Szymanski (2008: 4) gives rather more emphasis to continuities across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and dates modern sport from the early eighteenth century with the codification of cricket, golf, and horseracing in rural areas.

Supporters of a mid-Victorian birth point to quantitative and qualitative differences between mid-eighteenth- and late nineteenth-century sport. Although acknowledging eighteenth-century antecedents, Tranter (1998: 16), for example, insists “the sporting culture of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain was quite unlike anything that preceded it. Sport in its modern, organised, commercialised and extensive form, was truly an ‘invention’ of the Victorian and Edwardian age.” Steven Riess (2008) concurs. Referring to the American experience, he situates modern sport firmly in the nineteenth-century “process of city building” (p. 37). “Cities,” Riess argues, “were the primary sites of organized sports, and the location of players, spectators and sports clubs” (p. 37). According to Riess, “the growing city” was the site of countless voluntary organizations, including elite, middle-class, and working-class sports organizations and ethnic sports clubs that engendered a “sense of community and identity” among urbanites (p. 37).

If there is a consensus among reconstructionists that modern sport dates from the mid-Victorian era, Szymanski reminds us that the issue is unresolved. Deploying the concept of “public sphere” advanced by the German social theorist Jurgen Habermas, Szymanski (2008: 1), maintains that the essence of modern sport lies in the free social associations found in clubs which he traces to the eighteenth century and the “expansion of private associative activity [in] . . . the Anglo-Saxon world following the retreat of the state.” Early modern sporting practices, Szymanski elaborates, were largely “dictated by the rules governing associative activity, and different practices in different countries are a consequence of these different rules” (p. 3). In Britain and the United States the state granted individuals more independence and freedom to “create social networks and organizations outside the family” (p. 2).

The position adopted by Szymanski (2008) and the preceding comments by Riess (2008) reveal that debates over the birth date of modern

sport are difficult to separate from those which engage its causes and the transformation from premodern to modern forms.<sup>2</sup> Reconstructionists mostly attribute this transformation to the by-products of urbanization and industrialization, notably improved standards of living, communications and transport, reduced working hours, and technological innovations (e.g., Lucas and Smith, 1978; Vamplew, 1988). Reconstructionists typically avoid identifying the precise mechanisms of change, which requires engagement with theory and thus a constructionist epistemology. Constructionists largely draw from either modernization or Marxist theories.

Modernization theories of social change once wielded immense influence in the social sciences (Adelman, 1993; Stearns, 1980), but their application to modern sport largely failed to win converts. Allen Guttmann (1978) offers the most sophisticated theory of modernization and modern sport and the transformation of the latter from a form tied to religious customs and interwoven with agrarian rhythms to its contemporary version, which he characterizes as secular, democratic, bureaucratized, specialized, rationalized, quantified, and grounded in an obsession with records. Guttmann locates the basic mechanism of change in human desire and the quest for achievement and status which he proposes underpinned the scientific revolution. According to Guttmann, modern sport is a cultural expression of the scientific world. "The emergence of modern sports," Guttmann says, "represents . . . the slow development of an empirical, experimental, mathematical *Weltanschauung* [world-view]" (1978: 85). This "intellectual revolution . . . symbolized by the names of Isaac Newton and John Locke and institutionalized in the Royal Society," explains how a "relentlessly modern attitude . . . suddenly, even ruthlessly, challenged premodern forms of social organization and ideology" (p. 85).

Guttmann labels his theory of social change after the German sociologist Max Weber. But whereas dialectical interactions between the individual and society, the material and cultural, and the subjective and the objective underpin Weberian theory, Guttmann (1978) locates the origins of the "impulse to quantification" and the "desire to win, to excel, to be the best" in the scientific culture of seventeenth-

century England, about which he offers few details. Nor does he discuss the mechanisms by which this scientific *Weltanschauung* diffused around the globe. Rather, he attributes the mania for records to the *telos* of Western society and modern sport. Criticized for its functionalist assumptions and tenor (Booth, 2005), Guttmann's approach to change also assumes the homogenization of different societies, including their sports, which he implies follow a Western model (Maguire, 1999).

Marxist theories of social change focus on power and political struggles which, in the case of sport, revolve around the capacity to define legitimate sporting practices (Bourdieu, 1978: 826). Historical records reveal intense struggles in the nineteenth century over legitimate sport (John Hargreaves, 1986; Holt, 1989) as the middle classes set out to reform working-class sports. Reforms included restrictions on the times (e.g., Sundays) and places (e.g., public streets) available for sport, and prohibitions on certain forms, especially blood sports (e.g., cockfighting, dogfighting) and those involving gambling. Marxist interpretations identify the emergence of a new form of institutionalized sport in the late nineteenth century, one grounded in the "moral usefulness of games, middle-class respectability, and gentlemanly propriety" (Gruneau, 1988: 21). Critically, "none of this occurred in any evolutionary way, nor did it simply turn on the emergence of new forms of rationality"; the marginalization or incorporation of traditional sports occurred along with the sanctifying of amateur sport which was "part of a broader process of cultural conflict and social change" (Gruneau, 1988: 21).

Proposing motors for these struggles, early Marxist sociologists (e.g., Brohm 1978; Rigauer, 1981) emphasized class conflicts in capitalist social formations. In these theories sport functions as an ideological apparatus of the bourgeois to preserve and perpetuate capitalist structures. In the nineteenth century this meant glorifying skill-based hierarchies and undermining/restricting the development of working-class consciousness. Sport assisted both; in the case of the latter it acted as an "emotional safety valve for the release of aggressive feelings which might otherwise be turned on the real class oppressors" and "a false sense of escape"

(Gruneau, 1982: 23). Reminding us of the one-dimensional nature of these theories, Gruneau comments that they “reduce cultural formations to ‘passive reflections’ of reality rather than meaningful dramatizations” and “incorrectly assume” that the dominant classes “actually exercise complete control over sport” in ways that enable them to defend their class interests (p. 25).

Notwithstanding these limitations, Marxist theorizing enlightened a generation of scholars. Historian Eric Hobsbawm (1998: 193) described the insights as “charges of intellectual explosive, designed to blow up crucial parts of the fortification of traditional history.” According to Hobsbawm, the power of these insights, ironically, lay in their simplicity: “those of us who recall our first encounters with [Marxism] may still bear witness to the immense liberating force of such simple discoveries” (p. 194). Gruneau (1983: 36), too, admits that for all its overstatements, Marxism offers “powerful” and “penetrating” insights, especially into the ways sport helps reproduce the “repressive constraints” of capitalism.

Seeking to escape the reductionism and determinism of Marxism and include expressions of agency while accounting for the ongoing dominance of capitalist structures, left-leaning, constructionist sport historians turned to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony. Gramscian hegemony “refers to the . . . processes through which dominant social groups extend their influences . . . [by] continually refashioning their ways of life and institutionalized modes of practice and belief, in order to win consent for the system and structure of social relations which sustain their dominant position” (Gruneau, 1988: 29). Critically, Gruneau recognizes hegemony as an “ongoing process” as dominant groups confront an endless array of continually emerging practices that seek to redefine and reform social and cultural forms such as sport (p. 29). Thus, through the theoretical lens of hegemony, left-leaning historians, sometimes referred to as *neo-Marxists*, constructed modern sport as a set of practices which emerged “through compromises and struggles” and which were legitimized by the bourgeoisie in capitalist societies who incorporated them into the education system and the media and who reconstituted “the dominant

meanings of sport in a way that separated it from politically dangerous or economically disruptive practices” (Gruneau, 1988: 29–30).

Reconstructionist and constructionist historians concur that modern sport existed as a distinct form in the Anglo-Saxon world during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, although they continue to debate its precise birth date. Empirical evidence supports this position but it alone cannot provide definitive dates, which are inextricably intertwined with specific conceptualizations of modern sport. Nor can empirical evidence resolve ongoing debates over the causes of modern sport which reflect different theoretical conceptualizations of its form. Hegemony may be the most popular explanation among constructionists for the form taken by modern sport in the nineteenth century but it has critics among reconstructionists (e.g., Holt, 1989: 364) and constructionists (e.g., Booth, 2005; see also Donaldson, 1993) for whom the theory is simply too “neat.”

### *Diffusion*

Just as they debate the causes of modern sport, so historians dispute the motors which drove, and continue to drive, the diffusion of sport, that is, how individual sports developed and spread, and why some individuals/groups play some sports and not others.<sup>3</sup> Here I analyze the motors of diffusion advanced by four (largely overlapping) theories: modernization, imperialism, dependency, and Americanization.

**Modernization** If modernization failed to convince historians about the origins of modern sport, it proved even less persuasive as an explanation for the subsequent diffusion. Reconstructionists typically attribute diffusion to individual agents such as public schoolboys, diplomats, civil servants, military personnel, missionaries, merchants, migrants (e.g., Guttmann, 1993), while constructionists focus more on institutional/structural influences (e.g., bureaucracy, education, economics). In both cases, the process of diffusion often appears as a simple mapping exercise. Commenting on the formation of national soccer federations in Europe in the nineteenth century, Maarten Van Bottenburg (2001: 166) claims they broadly followed the “chronology of

modernization and relations between core countries and the periphery,” from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland to Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Albania (see also Clignet and Stark, 1974).

Advocates of modernization also commonly link diffusion to cultural homogenization in which local groups embrace modern organizational principles and transform the formal structural characteristics of traditional sports into modern forms. These scholars emphasize nominal historical continuity, even in traditional sports that have undergone modernization, such as in *buzkashi*,<sup>4</sup> judo, and sumo, where rituals and other characteristics survive from the past (Guttmann, 1991). Few reconstructionists or constructionists consider modernization a satisfactory explanation of diffusion. Whatever commitments to rational organizational principles modern sport expresses, these do not ameliorate economic and political tensions or conflicts and, not surprising, historians generally found imperialism a more persuasive explanation of diffusion.

**Imperialism** An imperial system refers to a set of political, economic, and cultural relations between dominant and subordinate nations. In its cultural form, imperialism describes the process by which agents of the dominant power variously attract and or coerce the ruling strata of the subordinate society into creating new social and cultural institutions that correspond to and promote imperialist values and structures (Houlihan, 1994; Guttmann, 1994). Cultural imperialism underpins much of the historical literature dealing with the diffusion of sport in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as British and American agents introduced cricket, rugby, soccer, track and field, volleyball, and basketball into their respective colonies. These sports supposedly provided colonists with a vehicle to preserve “cultural continuity and social respectability” and a yardstick by which they, and the colonized, measured their imperial identities (Stoddart, 1988: 238). Brian Stoddart’s description of cricket in Barbados before World War I captures the received wisdom of imperial sport and its “shared cultural values” (p. 237). The players came from the “elite, respectable section of the community” while the “lower orders,

who . . . had few opportunities to play,” cheered their exploits; the two “groups were part of a cultural authority system” based on “British heritage and its attendant ethical idealism through which cricket became as much moral metaphor as physical activity” (p. 237).

Critiques quickly emerged. Guttmann (1994: 174) declared that theories of cultural imperialism rest on the “facile assumption” that sport diffused in one direction only, from Europe and North America to colonies in the East and the South. Citing the diffusion of lacrosse from Canada to the United States, polo from India to Britain, and judo from Japan to Europe and the United States, Guttmann conceptualizes cultural imperialism as a “two-way” process between weaker and stronger states (1994: 173), although he concedes that “receptivity to ‘exotic’ sports has been limited to . . . more affluent and better educated” groups (p. 174). Guttmann also questions whether cultural imperialism is simply a mechanism of social control; he proposes a raft of “worthier motives” – “the desire to improve health, to encourage the fortitude, to diminish religious animosities” among indigenous populations – which he insists were more than just “colonialist camouflage” (p. 174). In Guttmann’s view, the key to understanding nineteenth-century cultural imperialism and the diffusion of sport lies in the concept of muscular Christianity and the “Christianizing” of indigenous populations (1994: 177; see also Gems, 2006).

Elaborating on his theory of cultural imperialism, Guttmann broaches the notion of hegemony which, he says, stresses the complexity of cultural interactions that are usually more than the “totally powerful” subjugating the “entirely powerless” (1994: 178): cultures can be “annihilated” but they can also be “resilient, adaptive, and transformative” (p. 185) and modern sports have helped “crystallize anti-colonial sentiments” (p. 181). Guttmann lists copious examples which support hegemonic conclusions. But ultimately he conflates the concept with ideology and undermines the central tenet of hegemony as a continuous process of political struggle when he insists that “those who adopt a sport are often the eager initiators of a transaction of which the ‘donors’ are scarcely aware” (p. 179). In the end, Guttmann’s version of imperialism disregards theoretical issues of power in favor of

functionalist-type assumptions about modern Western society.<sup>5</sup>

**Dependency** Power and control, of course, lie at the heart of Marxism, and among left-leaning constructionist historians imperialism captured "the economic and political relationship between advanced capitalist countries and backward countries" in a single world system (Bottomore, 1983: 223; see also Wallerstein, 1974). In the stream of Marxist imperialism known as dependency theory, "industrial metropolises dominate underdeveloped satellites" by expropriating their surpluses and consigning the latter to perpetual states of dependency and under-development (Bottomore, 1983: 498). Aspects of dependency theory appeared in several pieces of sport history in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the authors highlighting exploitative relationships between states (e.g., Arben, 1988; Jarvie, 1991; Stoddart, 1988). But the two fullest theoretical explications involved American domination of sport in neighboring states: baseball in the Dominican Republic (Klein, 1989) and professional sports in Canada (Kidd, 1982).

American major league baseball teams, says Alan Klein (1989: 95), have had a "deleterious structural effect on the autonomy and quality of baseball in the Dominican Republic" and constricted its development. Among the problems Klein identifies are discrepancies in pay between Dominican and American players, loss of local players, and baseball academies which "cannibalize" amateur leagues in the Republic. Klein likens the academies, which American major league teams introduced to the Republic in the early 1980s, to "colonial outposts" (1989: 103). They "operate more or less in the same capacity as a plantation: locating resources (talent) and refining them (training) for consumption abroad" (p. 103).

Bruce Kidd (1982) blames the subordination of major professional sports in Canada on American interests and the forces of dependency. Referring to hockey, Kidd argues that once city-based teams (e.g., Toronto Maple Leafs) become enmeshed in commercially sponsored competitions they no longer enunciate a sense of community identity. Such competitions, says Kidd, produce commodity markets for players who represent the highest bidder rather than their local

communities. By the end of World War II the American-based National Hockey League had, Kidd laments, reduced the Canadian Hockey Association to a "slave farm of hockey, controlling rules, revenues, style of play, player development, and even the national team" and it meant that "generations of Canadian boys grew up wearing (and never taking off) sweaters celebrating the cities of another country, while living in ignorance of their own" (Kidd, 1982: 291–292).

In a general critique of dependency theory, Colin Leys (1982) identifies numerous problems including a tendency to see capitalism as "an inexorable process of accumulation" rather than a set of contradictions and constant struggles (p. 307). Implicit in Leys' claim is that assumptions rather than historical evidence drive dependency theory. Elaborating on this point in a response to Klein (1989) which would equally apply to Kidd's (1982) analysis of the dependency in Canadian–American sporting relationships, Stoddart (1989) agrees that Dominican baseball might well be "run for the sole benefit" of American corporations (p. 128). But he maintains that the sociopolitical framework of dependency is considerably more complex and must take into account the place of games within the local economy. "We need to know more," Stoddart argues, about "indirect economic beneficiaries" (p. 128) such as officials, ticket sellers, vendors, souvenir sellers, and the media, and about the economic impact of those who return to the Republic after playing abroad. Moreover, we can never know whether those who left would have been economically successful had they stayed home.

While the concept of dependency has not been overly prominent in sports history, the idea raised interesting questions about capitalism and sport, and about America's imperial influence on sport in the second half of the twentieth century. Sport sociologists, more than historians, took up these questions. At least initially they subordinated questions about capitalism and the increasing commodification of sport to questions about American imperialism and America as the source of professional-entertainment sport. More than simply a form based on paid players, modern professional-entertainment sport is grounded in "management science, with executive directors and specialists in advertising, marketing and public relations," and corporate relationships that



include the media and which extend into “player development, equipment, facilities, coaching, dissemination of information, publicity, and administrative costs” (McKay and Miller, 1991: 87). Here I treat Americanization as a fourth motor of diffusion.

**Americanization** In the 1990s the American style of marketing and packaging sport attracted the attention of sport sociologists. Describing what they called the Americanization of Australian sport, Jim McKay and Toby Miller (1991: 89), for example, observed popular sports “opting for the showbiz format (e.g., cheerleaders, mascots, live bands, and spectacular displays before, during, and after events).” They also commented on American sport’s increasing penetration into the local market: “Australian networks televise the World Series, the Superbowl, the Kentucky Derby, and major events in American golf, tennis, automobile, and motorcycle racing. One of the five national networks televises a ‘game of the week’ from the [National Football League] and the [National Basketball Association], and professional wrestling matches from the USA are telecast on a regular basis” (p. 87). Such case studies led Peter Donnelly to conclude that American sport is now “the international benchmark for corporate sport” (1996: 246).

Donnelly (1996) believes Americanization has important explanatory power when applied to the diffusion of professional baseball and basketball, the rise and influence of Nike and the International Management Group, and the role of American television in the sport media complex. Notwithstanding their comments about the Americanization of Australian sport, McKay and Miller (1991) deem the concept limited. It tends, they argue, “to flatten out, to homogenize, and to deny the rich heterogeneity and conflict both within and among the supposed donors and legacies” (p. 92). Donnelly agrees. While acknowledging America’s influence on modern sport, he believes that any cultural impact must be conceptualized in “hegemonic terms” that affords recipients the power to interpret and resist (1996: 248). Donnelly concurs that Americanization at the corporate level has potential to create a “global sport monoculture” and “doom traditional sports to . . . extinction,” but he also believes this process can open “cultural space in which new sporting

activities may emerge and traditional sports may thrive” (p. 248; see also Andrews, 2009).

### *Reception*

Historians note that when modern sport diffused around the globe it “did not simply take root in virgin soil” (Bale, 1994: 8). For example, ball-games already existed in North Africa (e.g., *om el mahag*), India (e.g., *gulli danda*), Central America (e.g., *tlaxtli*), North America (e.g., *chueco* and *linao*), and Australia (e.g., *marn-grook*). Thus, the diffusion of modern sport raises questions about its reception by cultures that already have conceptualizations of physical movement. In general, theorists of modernization, structural Marxism, imperialism, dependency, and Americanization conceptualize reception in terms of adoption and acculturation and as a process of cultural homogenization in which modern sport emerges as the dominant way of playing, reconfiguring local physical cultures into a single global form. Such reconfiguration takes place either by marginalizing and destroying indigenous movement cultures (e.g., structural Marxism, dependency) or by winning the social acceptance of local elites (e.g., modernization, imperialism, Americanization). By contrast, theories grounded in hegemony refer to reception as a process of struggle leading to cultural heterogeneity.

However, the concept of reception requires clarification. Acceptance of sporting events (e.g., Olympic Games), specific sports (e.g., athletics, soccer), and rational organization (e.g., standardized rules, records, codes of conduct) appear almost universal. In this context, states and groups that claim to use sport as “a tool of cultural, and often explicitly political, resistance” in fact reinforce the idea of a homogeneous global sporting culture (Houlihan, 1994: 363). East Germany, Cuba, and the Soviet Union are classic examples as they claimed their victories in international sport as victories for socialism. But these victories stemmed from imitating the scientific, managerial, and organizational features of modern sport. Thus, claims of cultural difference in sport are often differences grounded in the symbols of identity and in particular national sporting identity rather than different practices (Houlihan, 1994). Here I examine the reception of modern sport and questions of cultural

identity through the debates among constructionist historians and sociologists under two headings: homogeneity and heterogeneity.

**Cultural homogeneity** Recording that 35 codes have national umbrella organizations in more than 100 countries, Van Bottenburg (2001: 8) writes that the level of "cohesion" in sport is such that one can legitimately speak of "a global sporting system." Numerous scholars advance the view that this system homogenized physical culture across the globe and reduced cultural variety. The champion of modernization, Allen Guttmann (1991), believes the concept implies that "the global transformation . . . in the last two centuries . . . has produced a more secular and a more rationalized [sporting] world, if not a more rational one" (p. 188). Jean-Marie Brohm, working at the other end of the theoretical spectrum, recognizes several universal cultural traits in global sport including the reproduction of bourgeois social relations based on "hierarchies, subservience, obedience," and the transmission of bourgeois myths around "individualism, social advancement, success [and] efficiency" (1978: 77). Cultural homogenization shines brightly among theorists of imperialism. Stoddart (1988: 249) cites a case in 1905 in which "a black spectator kissed the arm of an English bowling star" as an example of the "outright acceptance of cricket and its English cultural provenance" in the Caribbean. Scholars of Americanization emphasize the saturation of global markets by American sporting tastes, even to the extent that tribes in tropical jungles are now said to use satellite dishes and generators to watch US sport. Opponents of homogeneity, however, highlight the "socio-cultural complexity of local-global relations and the heterogeneity of cultural forms and practices" in modern sport (Giulianotti, 2005: 202).

**Cultural heterogeneity** Sociologists studying the reception of modern sport employ a range of concepts to explain cultural heterogeneity in modern sporting forms and practices. Terms such as *glocalization*, *creolization*, and *hybridization* reflect the dynamic nature of culture and cultural production, and convey the idea of new cultural forms emerging from cross-cultural contact. They "capture," says Richard Giulianotti (2005: 204–205), "the vitality of specific local cultures in

relation to globalization processes." Nowhere is this vitality better revealed than in the (sociological, historical, and anthropological) literature on national sporting identities (e.g., Bairner, 2001; Cronin and Mayall, 1998; MacClancy, 1996; Mangan, 1996; Mangan, 2001) which reveals "the values, prejudices, divisions and unifying symbols" (Guha, 2002: xiv) of individual societies. Here I offer three examples from sport history.

Tracing the history of cricket in India, Ramachandra Guha (2002: 5) claims expatriate Englishmen had "no intention of teaching the natives to play cricket"; they viewed the game as "a source of . . . comfort" and a means to "recreate memories of life in England." Played in colonial clubs, expatriate cricket was "self-consciously exclusive" (p. 8) and the Parsees, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs who took up the game did so on their own initiative as a way to assert their cultural identity rather than to express imperial loyalty. Since independence, cricket has become a symbol of Indian national identity. In 1971 the national team comprised Hindus and Muslims, a Parsee, and a Sikh; in 1983 a Christian replaced the Parsee (Guha, 2002: 348). At a time when the World Bank listed India at 150 in its ranking of nations based on Gross Domestic Product, Indian cricketers sustained national pride (p. 351). More recently Indian "cricket nationalism has become . . . intense and ferocious" (p. 352), even "ugly and destructive" (p. 405), and "chauvinism has triumphed over generosity" (p. 352).

South African rugby, according to Robert Archer and Antoine Bouillon (1982), highlights the values held by Afrikaner nationalists who appropriated the game from British colonists in the early twentieth century. Rugby carried the Afrikaner's "convictions, aspirations and dreams" (p. 73). "Attached to their Voortrekker past, proud of their civilizing mission in a savage land," Afrikaners "perceive themselves as elected and created by God to reign on earth"; they are highly "conscious of their vocation as warriors – not soldiers but freemen under arms – inspired by faith and an uncompromising moral ethic to defend the cause of their people and their God" (p. 73). During the apartheid era, rugby kindled nationalist tensions between Afrikaners and English-speaking South Africans, and even today, in



post-apartheid South Africa, it remains a source of nationalist hostility between black and white nationalists (Booth, 1998).

Greg Ryan argues that cricket survived an adverse climate, the tyrannies of geography and economics, and provincial rivalries and jealousies to become New Zealand's national game in the nineteenth century because its middle-class patrons subscribed to "a powerful Victorian ethos" that promoted "the game irrespective of cost" (2004: 236); gradually, however, rugby "superseded" cricket (p. 2). Ryan proposes that cricket and rugby reveal fundamental contradictions in New Zealand's national identity. Unlike Indian and Australian nationalists who seized cricket to assert their independence from England (Guha, 2002; Mandle, 1973), New Zealanders appropriated cricket to maintain "ties of affection and loyalty" (Ryan, 2004: 229) and used rugby to break those ties (p. 220).

Logic reinforces the idea that the structure of modern sport nurtures cultural heterogeneity (e.g., Rowe, 2003). The social relationships, dramatic qualities, and affective powers of modern sport may help erode social distinctions within groups (whether they coalesce around region, religion, class, caste, race or gender) but processes of exclusion, demarcation, differentiation, and distinction also disconnect groups from each other. Historians offer supporting evidence. Citing the early twentieth-century financier J.P. Morgan, Guttman (2004) captures the process of cultural disconnection in sport: advocating the exclusion of merchants from yachting circles at Newport, RI, Morgan told his peers, "you can do business with any one, but you can go sailing only with a gentleman" (p. 155). Such examples lead Guha (2002) to conclude that "those who believe the [batting] crease [is] so narrow as to allow white to become black or Untouchable become Brahmin . . . 'live in a fool's paradise'" (p. 318), and are grist to the mill among supporters of cultural heterogeneity in sport. Yet, for all the evidence in support of, and logic behind, sport as culturally heterogeneous, disagreements rage between those who emphasize cultural autonomy (such as the studies cited above) and those who privilege global forces (e.g., Neubauer, 2008; Roche, 2000). In the case of the latter, David Andrews and George Ritzer (2007: 30), for example, question the autonomy of the local in

the contemporary sporting landscape which they argue has undergone glocalization – "the interpenetration of the global and local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas" – and which they suggest is modified by the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, and different organizations.

The basic questions framing scholarly inquiry into modern sport since the late 1960s have yielded few definitive answers or stable meanings. Typically, the answers have produced new questions and ignited ongoing debate. For example, sociologist Ben Carrington has argued that traditional models of diffusion reduce the agent of social change to modern rationality. According to Carrington, such reductionism ignores the irrational tendencies – "gratuitous violence, unpredictability, emotional instability" – present in contemporary sport and which he believes require radically different analytical approaches (2010: 45). Notwithstanding the lack of accord, reconstructionist and constructionist historians of sport – and sociologists of sport with historical proclivities (henceforth historical sociologists) – remain committed to objective, factually based, and theoretically informed epistemologies which they (implicitly) believe will deliver the truth about modern sport. Despite their commitments to truth they also, ironically, subscribe to an epistemological skepticism which compels them to continually search for new interpretations, explanations, and meanings. In the following section, I investigate the epistemological assumptions of these scholars who have framed the production of much knowledge pertaining to modern sport. I argue that their epistemologies are limited, limiting, and politically constraining and I propose an alternative deconstructionist-leaning epistemology which questions the relationships between reality and its description and between subjects and objects, as well as the power of concepts, theories, and arguments to produce truth.

### **Epistemologies (and Floating Truths)**

Just as modern sport is socially constructed, so too is our knowledge about it and its forms, development, and meaning. Reconstructionist and constructionist historians of sport and historical

sociologists of sport use realist epistemologies to produce much of this knowledge. In this section I identify some fragile and deceptive epistemological assumptions which pertain to facts, theories, concepts, and narratives in these forms of history and sociology. As an alternative, I suggest an anti-essentialist, contextualized epistemology, the first shoots of which are appearing in sports history, notably in the reinterpretation of modern sporting practices and cultures.

### *Objective knowledge*

Reconstructionist and constructionist historians of sport and historical sociologists of sport rarely engage with epistemology and many seem unable, or unwilling, to confront the epistemological brittleness of their endeavors. Indeed, the majority approach their work as a distinct craft, with its own logic, protocols, and methodologies. In so doing they set up epistemological boundaries which create a “license to ignore” each other (McDonald and Birrell, 1999: 285) and grounds for intellectual skirmishes (e.g., Collins, 2005; Ingham and Donnelly, 1997; Malcolm, 2008; Rowe, McKay, and Lawrence, 1997; Vamplew, 2007). The latter works expose the epistemological fragility of much historical and sociological knowledge about modern sport and undermine the accompanying claims to objectivity, truthfulness, validity, and relevance.

Reconstructionist historians have long claimed a special relationship with the truth by virtue of their vigilance over the gathering and presentation of historical facts (Collins, 2005; Vamplew, 2007). Notwithstanding the prevalence of constructionist sport history (Hill, 1996; Struna, 2000), reconstructionists remain wary of theory which they believe “infuses predestined meaning” into the study of the past (Elton, 1991: 15). Thus, reconstructionists conceptualize history as a reconstruction of the past, grounded in facts derived from primary sources and represented as narrative. The only problem that reconstructionists acknowledge in this approach is the lack of facts, which they insist can be overcome by digging deeper into the archive or asking new questions. Holt (2009) implies that truths about modern sport will emerge as more historians examine the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and as they step beyond the national cultures in

which they are currently embedded to examine individual sports at the global level. Caroline Daley (2010), too, urges historians to look beyond the sporting nation and to examine the international circulation of ideas, people, and objects. But the real problem is epistemological not a paucity of evidence.

Historical narratives certainly contain references from the past, but a reference is not a representation: “historians impose narratives on events which they intend to resemble the past” (Phillips and Roper, 2006: 137). The issue, it must be stressed, does not concern the correspondence of simple statements extracted from traces of the past. The dates marking the formal constitution of international sports federations<sup>6</sup> usually survive in archives along with the names of inaugural presidents and committee members and their motives and interests. Assembled in a narrative these dates, names, and interests unquestionably offer factual statements corresponding with the past. However, a narrative representation is quite different from a factual statement: “representation is not reference; [representation] is *about* its subject. That history contains references does not authorise our access to the past’s meaning” (Munslow, 2006: 223).

International sports federations exist within multiple contexts (e.g., international relations, national politics, cultural and ideological values), and their founders bear idiosyncratic psychological dispositions. Both contextualizing and psychoanalyzing, which should be integral to histories of international sports federations, incorporate a myriad of assumptions and require judgments on the part of the historian that extend well beyond gathering evidence from primary sources. In practice, reconstructionist historians typically employ at a subconscious level a theory or a concept which directs the questions they ask, guides them to particular sources, organizes their evidence, and shapes their explanations, while constructionists are usually more explicit (Tosh, 2000: 134). Indeed, modernization, imperialism, hegemony, and muscular Christianity are good examples of theories and concepts embraced by historians writing about modern sport.

The origins of these theories and concepts are important because in the main reconstructionist and constructionist historians simply appropriate them from other disciplines, particularly sociol-

ogy, anthropology, and psychology (Hill, 1996). But the problem for historians dealing in this “second-hand trade,” as Alun Munslow (2006: 64) calls it, is the tendency to reify these theories and concepts.<sup>7</sup> Once committed to a theory or concept, few historians will admit that they are engaging a prefigured, constructed, and narrated – i.e., ideological/political – form of knowledge (Munslow, 2003: 176).

Likewise, it is pertinent to ask sociologists how they conceptualize history. The historical orientations of classical social theorists such as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber – each of whom viewed the past as the bedrock of the present; in Marx’s words, “the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (1977: 300) – alerted early sociologists of sport to the value of incorporating historical perspectives into their work. Engagements with C. Wright Mills’ (1959) notion of the sociological imagination – in which individuals shape and are shaped by society and “its historical push and shove” – reinforced this perspective, at least at the influential Massachusetts school of sports sociology (Ingham and Donnelly, 1997). “The sociological imagination,” Mills (1959: 6) espoused, “enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society.” According to Alan Ingham and Peter Donnelly (1997: 377), Mills’ perspective fostered an interest among sport sociologists in a stream of historical sociology informed by critical theory which, in epistemological terms, stood in “sharp contrast” to mainstream North American sport history that subscribed to the canons of empiricism. Indeed, historically inclined sport sociologists – notably Eric Dunning (Dunning and Sheard, 2005), John Hargreaves (1986), Jennifer Hargreaves (1994), and Richard Gruneau (1983) – “borrowed far more from sport historians (mainly, their data) than the other way around” (Ingham and Donnelly, 1997: 377). Of course, there is an irony in the situation where sociologists accept the facts and evidence offered by historians while rejecting their narratives: as noted above, historical explanations are typically framed by implicit theories that guide which facts historians gather and which ones they proffer as evidence.

Just as sport historians appropriate theories and concepts from other disciplines, so sociolo-

gists of sport retrieve them from mainstream sociology and classical social theory. How robust are these theories and concepts? Mills (1959) doubted whether the “grand theorizing” in mainstream North American sociology enhanced understanding or helped people to make sense of their experiences. Social historian Arthur Stinchcombe (1978) accused grand theorists of “reckless” theorizing by inventing their concepts at the “level of the large narrative” which he said typically “ignores” the facts in order to generate the concept (p. 16). According to Stinchcombe, the most “fruitful” concepts emerge from examinations of “analogies between historical instances.” At the heart of his notion of concept lies the “deep” analogy, a form based on three or more equivalent cases which, of course, demands careful attention to detail.

Lack of detail is a consistent lament among critics examining theories of modern sport. Barry Houlihan (1994) singles out Jean-Marie Brohm’s theory that sport reproduces the ideology of bourgeois social relations as one requiring more evidence. Similarly, Houlihan (1994: 360) rejects many of the conclusions relating to the reception of foreign sporting culture as little more than accumulations of eclectic anecdotes. The limited and limiting assumptions underpinning some theories and concepts constitute a second Achilles heel. Richard Gruneau (1988: 17) finds modernization theory bedeviled by assumptions that “direct attention toward certain research questions at the expense of others” and by its use of “hollow liberal clichés about the voluntary and consensual foundations of [Western society and] the extent of social progress.” Indeed, structural (i.e., economic, technological) or idealist (i.e., cultural) determinants underpin much of the literature on the origins and diffusion of sport while voluntarism and determinism are hallmarks of the studies into its reception (Gruneau, 1999).

Responding to these issues, Gruneau proposed what he called a “synthetic, multidimensional” approach which binds “history and theory, interpretive cultural analysis, and political economy” (1999: 114) and is sensitive to complexity.<sup>8</sup> Synthetic, multidimensional approaches undoubtedly eliminate much of the reductionism and determinism plaguing early research into modern sport, and better capture the complexity of this

phenomenon. Analyzing the reception of soccer in colonial India, James Mills and Paul Dimeo (2003) reveal the simultaneously oppositional and complicit tendencies in, and the complex nature of social relationships around, the game. As well as rejecting the search for cause and effect relationships, they dispose of polar positions that conceptualize soccer as a benign agent of socialization or a fully fledged site of resistance to colonial power and authority. Examining the victory of the Mohun Bagan club in the 1911 Indian Football Association Challenge Shield, Mills and Dimeo admit the team's success represented a "moment of nationalist triumph" and a "dramatic and public undoing" of colonial stereotypes about British athletic superiority and Indian effete-ness; but the celebrations also endorsed British mores enshrining demonstrations of physical prowess as the true markers of "strength and self-reliance," and the body as the proper "site for judging a people and its destiny" (2003: 119–121). Placing soccer in colonial India in a dynamic cultural system that forged contradictory and paradoxical identities enables Mills and Dimeo to escape the reductionism and determinism befalling much of the work on modern sport.

Jay Scherer, Mark Falcous, and Steven Jackson (2008) display heightened sensitivity to the dynamics of, and shifting power relations in, global capitalism, and especially the media sports cultural complex, a concept that aspires to capture the interrelationships between sporting organizations, the media, and transnational corporations, and to put those interrelationships in a broader cultural context. Scherer and his colleagues transcend many of the problems in the early work on the political economy of sport which, as I showed in the discussion on dependency theory, largely ignored internal relationships and contradictions. While sporting institutions may "financially depend" on transnational corporations, say Scherer and colleagues (2008: 65), this does not mean the media sports cultural complex constitutes a "seamless economic synergy and untrammelled affinity between interest groups" (p. 49). On the contrary, local "conditions, histories, traditions, sporting codes and power relations" ensure that the "processes of commodification and media-sport convergence" are never predetermined (p. 49). They illustrate this point in an

empirically rich case study of the media sports cultural complex in New Zealand in which they highlight the fragile and contingent relationships between three key agents: the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU), Adidas, and News Corporation. Notwithstanding the shared financial goals of these three agents, Scherer and colleagues maintain that the relationships are "situational, temporary, and dynamic according to the relative market worth of [the] entities at any moment" (p. 65). The market worth of NZRU, for example, is currently threatened by local supporters who resent the Union transforming *their* game into a commodity.

Scherer and colleagues (2008) conclude their analysis with a call for more "empirical studies" to "critically engage" the power brokers and representatives of the media sports cultural complex (p. 66). Such research, they contend, should strive to tease out the ongoing commodification of sport and its increasingly larger place in global capitalism. In many respects their call amounts to testing the concept of the media sports cultural complex. Although widely embraced (e.g., Wenner, 1998; Rowe, 1999; Gruneau, 1999), the media sports cultural complex is not a rigorous formulation in a Stinchcombean sense. David Rowe (1999) embraced the concept as a means to contextualize sport in the broader cultural terrain of late capitalism rather than as an instrument for comparing agents/events/institutions across time/space. In this volume (CHAPTER 3) he notes that the media sports cultural complex continues to "mutate" at a pace which problematizes the integrity of the concept. Similarly, Scherer and colleagues (2008) embrace the media sports cultural complex to locate one set of national power relations in a global context. Yet, notwithstanding the merits of their work as representative of the synthetic, multidimensional approach, which Gruneau (1999) abbreviates to "better histories and more inclusive theories," Scherer and colleagues (2008) and Mills and Dimeo (2003) still express faith in a realist epistemology which they believe captures authentic knowledge about modern sport. But the lack of consensus demonstrates it is an unfounded faith. Not surprisingly then scholars are increasingly challenging realist epistemologies with anti-essentialist, contextualized forms which are more alert to the constructed nature of knowledge.

### *Contextualized knowledge*

Grounded in the ideas of thinkers such as Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Clifford Geertz, Maurice Halbwachs, and Hayden White, and commonly labeled postmodernist, anti-essentialist and contextualized epistemologies have established a beachhead in sport history (e.g., Phillips, 2006) and indeed sport sociology (e.g., Rail, 1998). In sport history, for example, Steve Pope (2006) demonstrates the need for such epistemologies when dealing with elusive and indeterminate sources, and Douglas Brown (2003) engages affective sources.<sup>9</sup> John Bale (2004) argues that facts are often “beliefs” and that language is inordinately “complex,” “multifaceted,” and “slippery,” while Jeffrey Hill (2006) examines sport as “negotiated meaning.” Incorporating aspects of her personal working life into the broader context of rights for women, Patricia Vertinsky (Vertinsky and McKay, 2004) embraces the idea of reflexive contextualization. I have advocated reconceptualizing archives as sites of power rather than sites of knowledge (Booth, 2005), and Brett Hutchins (2002) deconstructs the function of myths which he links to structures of social power and vested interests. Gary Osmond and Murray Phillips (2004) and Jaime Schultz (2005) approach memory as a process of construction rather than one of retrieving facts and truth. Where reconstructionists ponder the reliability of memory, Osmond and Phillips ask questions about how people relate their memories of the past to the present. Dan Nathan (2003) disposes of reconstructionists and constructionists as disembodied observers in preference for historians as authors, while Synthia Sydnor (1998) has experimented with presenting history in new ways.

None of these historians view knowledge about modern sport as fixed; rather their knowledge is situational and contextualized in the moment of its existence/narration. Importantly, they do not view context as a pure analytical tool. In this regard they follow Frank Ankersmit (2005: 256) who likens contextualization to clouds that obstruct the airline passenger’s view of the ground and “prevent us from seeing the past itself or distort our view of it.” Instead of searching for the facts pertaining to origins, events, and/or agents, these historians explicate how reconstruc-

tionists and constructionists “frame,” “foreground,” “remember,” “obscure,” and “forget” the past (McDonald and Birrell, 1999: 292). Effectively, they “displace the notion of privileged access to ‘truth’” and relocate it in the text and in the “complex interrelationship” between the producer and the reader (McDonald and Birrell, 1999: 292).

Michael Oriard (1995) graphically illustrates the fluidity of truth and meaning in sporting “texts” and its highly contextualized nature in his conceptualization of American football as a cultural text grounded in multiple voices and perspectives. For example, Oriard offers a long list of interpretations available to spectators watching a violent collision between a receiver and defender:

Imagine our receiver as black, the defender white. Or one of them from Notre Dame, the other from Brigham Young; one from the Big Ten, the other from the Southeast Conference; one a candidate for a Rhodes Scholarship, the other a known drug-user or sex-offender; one a street kid from the inner city, the other the son of a wealthy cardiologist; one a well-known volunteer for the Special Olympics, the other an arrogant publicist of his own athletic brilliance. Certain teams have their own distinctive images: think of the Cowboys, the Bears, the Raiders, the 49ers in the National Football League; or, of Penn State, Miami, Oklahoma, Southern California among the colleges. And imagine the fans watching these players and teams not as a “mass” audience but as actual people: European-, African-, Hispanic-, and Asian-American; Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and nonbeliever; WASP and redneck; college graduate and high-school dropout; conservative and liberal; racist and humanitarian; male and female, rich and poor, urban and rural, sick and well; ones just fired from jobs and ones just promoted; ones just fallen in love and ones just separated from a spouse; some pissed off at the world and some blissfully content. (Oriard, 1995: 2–3)

As well as approaching knowledge of modern sport as open to multiple interpretations, contextualized epistemologies also view it as constructed and competing. Murray Phillips (2002) offers an apposite example in a comparative analysis of two narratives about the Australian surf lifesaving movement which, despite drawing



from the same archive, are remarkably different. Applying a model developed by Hayden White (1973) to interrogate the construction of narratives, Phillips (2002) unravels the highly technical and complex manner in which the two historian-authors filter their facts through different tropes (e.g., metonymic versus synecdochic), emplotments (e.g., romantic versus tragic), arguments (e.g., formist versus contextualist), and ideologies (e.g., liberal versus radical). In so doing Phillips lends powerful support to White's contention that historians prefigure and construct their narratives rather than discover them in their sources, as well as indicating the fallacies of foundational knowledge upon which scholars can agree and where the truth will emerge (Jenkins, 1999: 28).

An anti-foundationalism lies at the heart of these deconstructionist-leaning approaches. Anti-foundationalism teaches us that "questions of fact, truth, correctness, validity, and clarity can neither be posed nor answered in reference to some contextual, ahistorical, noninstitutional reality, or rule, or law or value" (Jenkins, 1999: 23). In anti-foundationalism, "these matters are intelligible and debatable only within the precincts of the contexts or situations or paradigms or communities that give them their local and changeable shape" (p. 23).

Three questions remain. What are the consequences of constructed knowledge for notions of truth? How should scholars respond to these consequences? How should scholars evaluate anti-essentialist knowledge? Mary McDonald and Susan Birrell (1999) believe constructed knowledge elevates truth to power relations and relocates truth in privileged versions of knowledge or narratives. According to them, privileged narratives are the ones with political import and the ones that constitute useful history. Against this scenario, they encourage scholars to respond by constructing narratives that highlight social conflicts and public debates – many of which abound in modern sport (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia) – with a view to both adding clarity and shaping the "outcome" (1999: 295). Lastly, McDonald and Birrell recommend that scholars measure the success of contextualized knowledge by its "moral, social and political significance, not simply by [its] empirical or explanatory correctness" (p. 295).

Contextualized epistemologies have exposed scholars to charges of relativism. But rather than

"implying licence" as critics charge, relativism introduces "ethical injunctions" (Jenkins, 1999; Jenkins, Morgan, and Munslow, 2007: 6). Ethics are not unique to contextualized knowledge; Scherer and colleagues (2008), for example, examine social access and fairness in their narrative of the sports media and the ways it invites consumers to interpret its functions. However, scholars working with objective epistemologies assume that facts identify and resolve ethical issues. Munslow (2006: 96) counters that facts do neither; nor do they spur political decision-making or action. On the contrary, observing that facts did not prevent genocide in Darfur and that neutrality did not work in Srebrenica,<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Ermarth (2007: 57) wonders whether there are any examples "where giving us the facts has guided choice." Scholars working with contextualized epistemologies acknowledge that the ethical and moral lessons they build into their narratives reflect their concerns and interests, and their context (i.e., their choices: see Jenkins, 1999: 52). In short, when we recognize that knowledge is a product inextricably intertwined with its social and cultural circumstances, logically and necessarily, attention should shift from questions of truth to questions about authors and their interests, ethics, and intentions.

## Conclusion

Modern sport is a global phenomenon whose significance lies not in its origins or development through time but in its meaning in the (never-ending and ever-changing) present. A key task confronting historians is to interrogate the different narratives about modern sport at the time of their production and ask what those narratives reveal about their authors (and the periods in which they write). To this end, the search is not for objective knowledge framed by infallible facts, concepts, and theories which can never capture reality, but for contextualized knowledge that appreciates its temporary and transitory state, and its ethical and political import. While such interrogations – which signal the shift from an epistemological paradigm based on objective knowledge to one based on contextualization – are in their infancy in sport history, their dispersal across the social sciences and humanities, combined with changes in science, technology,

and philosophy, suggest a “tectonic change” in assumptions and methodological processes (Ermarth, 2011: xiii). Many sport historians are oblivious to this change, others continue to defend empiricism, and a few even attempt to suppress intellectual experimentation. But while they continue to rely on apparently “natural” objectifying and rational approaches they will continue to deny not only the cultural functions

of their enterprise but also that history is merely a function of the present.

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## Notes

- 1 The overwhelming majority of sport historians work at the intersection of reconstructionism and constructionism, appropriating (and not infrequently misappropriating) sociological concepts rather than fully fledged theories to mediate their interpretations of primary sources (Booth, 2005).
- 2 There are surprisingly few definitions of these two forms of sport. Guttmann (1978) and Dunning and Sheard (2005) offer the most coherent and sophisticated definitions. I refer to Guttmann's (1978) definition in the following paragraph. Loy and Coakley (2006) define sport in a transhistorical sense as a contest-based ludic physical activity which is embodied, structured, goal-oriented, and competitive.
- 3 According to Van Bottenburg (2001), four of the seven sports with the most participants worldwide come from Britain (soccer, track and field, tennis, and table tennis), two from the United States (volleyball and basketball), and one from Germany (gymnastics). Somewhat surprisingly cricket does not feature in this list.
- 4 A traditional team sport in Central Asia played on horseback. Players use their arms to grab the carcass of a headless goat or calf, ride clear of their opponents, and then pitch the carcass either across a goal line or into a circle or vat.
- 5 Nor does Guttmann show any inclination to debate questions of power with his critics.
- 6 Sixteen international sports federations existed by 1914 (Van Bottenburg, 2001).
- 7 Scholars approach concepts from a wide variety of angles. Houlihan (1994: 372) draws attention to what he calls the “concept attention cycle” in which a concept is discovered and greeted with “euphoric enthusiasm.” This is followed by an awakening to “complexity” and the inevitable “cooling of enthusiasm” followed by its “quiet transfer . . . to the backburner.” Alexander (1995) examines the material conditions under which concepts emerge, while Fiss and Hirsch (2005) discuss the “framing of emerging concepts.”
- 8 Historical sociology also promised to address these concerns (e.g., Abrams, 1982). Figurational sociologists took up the cause of historical sociology with particular vigor in sports studies (e.g., Maguire, 1995) but the five-phased process of “sportization” (Maguire, 1999: 79) which figurationalists advance as an explanation for “the transformation of English pastimes into sports” and their “export” around the globe (p. 80; see also Malcolm, 2006) has won few converts among historians (e.g., Collins, 2005; Vamplew, 2007) or sociologists (e.g., Ingham and Donnelly, 1997; Hargreaves, 1992; Giulianotti, 2005). These sociologists are particularly critical of figurational sociology's failure to adequately theorize power, and charge its adherents with rarely connecting power to “a broader theory and critique of domination in social life, especially in respect to the changing organization of capitalism” (Gruneau, 1999: 121).
- 9 Sources which are “felt” at the level of the body and which are not easily transcribed into words (see, e.g., Papoulias and Callard, 2010).
- 10 During the Bosnian war the United Nations declared the town of Srebrenica a “safe area” and assigned its protection to a 400-strong contingent of Dutch peacekeepers. Despite the neutral status of this territory, units from the army of Republika Srpska invaded it and massacred more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims, mainly men and boys, in July 1995.

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