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Holly Thorpe

Snowboarding Bodies in Theory and Practice

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Snowboarding Bodies in Theory and Practice

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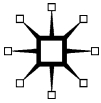

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For Catherine Kells (1978–2007)

An inspirational woman, board-sport enthusiast, and dearly missed friend

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1
Introducing a Sociology of Snowboarding Bodies

February 17, 2010. Standing atop of the super-pipe wearing baggy denim pants, a plaid-style jacket, long disheveled auburn hair, and a stars-and-stripes-patterned bandana around his neck, 23-year-old snowboarder Shaun White prepares for his second and final Olympic run. The announcer has declared it a victory lap. I stand in the bleachers at the base of the half-pipe, absorbing the energy of the crowd, anxiously awaiting action. A camera boom sweeps across our heads. Flags wave wildly. The babble of the commentators is interspersed with blasts of music. The dancing, stomping, cheering bodies around me blur. On the big screen, I catch Shaun readjusting his goggles and readying his legs. I quickly double-check the zoom on my camera, my right index finger itching in anticipation. Effortlessly, Shaun jumps his snowboard into position and begins to slide toward the pipe, quickly gaining speed and momentum. I inhale the cold night air with a sense of urgency, and hear others gasp around me; as if collectively holding our breath, there is a moment of silence. Pumping down into the half-pipe, Shaun slices across the transition and up the icy wall, and then launches into flight. As he soars more than 20 feet through the Vancouver skyscape and performs a dizzying array of highly technical maneuvers, including the infamous 'double McTwist' – a 1260 degree rotation with two flips – the crowd explodes. Furiously snapping photos and scribbling notes, I recognize this as a significant moment in snowboarding's short, but vibrant, history.

Snowboarding – the act of standing sideways on a board and sliding down a snow-covered slope – has gone from a marginal activity for a few diehard participants to an Olympic sport with mass appeal in the past four decades. Developing in a historically unique conjuncture of transnational mass communications and corporate sponsors, entertainment industries, and an increasingly affluent young population, snowboarding has spread around the world at a phenomenal rate and far faster than many established sports and physical cultures. Since its emergence in North America in the late 1960s and 1970s, snowboarding has become a highly visible feature of popular culture. Images, narratives, and representations

associated with snowboarding as a cultural form are often rich, evocative and wide-reaching. Snowboarders appear on the covers of *Rolling Stone*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *FHM*, and feature in advertisements for a plethora of corporate sponsors such as Nike, Mountain Dew, Red Bull, Hewlett-Packard, and American Express; they feature in blockbuster movies, and have their own video games and reality television shows. The broader cultural significance of snowboarding was particularly evident during the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver (Canada) with a snowboarder officially launching the opening ceremony by performing a spectacular jump through the Olympic rings. Media sources identified Shaun White as the most popular athlete at the games (Ebner, 2009), and NBC coverage of the men's snowboard half-pipe final drew over 30 million viewers in the United States alone (Dillman, 2010).

The mainstream exposure of snowboarding has had a significant influence on cultural demographics. Snowboarding attracts participants from around the world, and from different social classes and age groups, as well as females and minority groups. Between 1988 and 2003 snowboarding experienced a 385 percent increase in participation, and during the early 2000s, snowboarding was one of America's fastest growing sports ('Fastest growing', 2005; 'Select snow', 2004). Although snowboarding demographics are changing, privileged white youth continue to constitute a dominant force at the core of the culture. In America, for example, more than 75 percent of snowboarders are 24 or younger (NGSA, 2005a) and only approximately 11 percent are members of racial or ethnic minority groups (NGSA, 2001). Reliable international statistics are rare, yet some recent estimates suggest that there are nearly 70 million snowboarders worldwide (Wark, 2009). Contemporary participants range from novices and weekend warriors, to lifestyle sport migrants, to professional athletes. Snowboarders demonstrate various levels of physical prowess and cultural commitment, and engage in an array of styles (e.g., alpine, freestyle, big mountain, jibbing, and snow-skating) in various snow-covered spaces (e.g., on and off piste at ski resorts, half-pipes, terrain parks, backcountry, indoor ski slopes, and urban environments). Styles of participation and competition are constantly evolving, with boarders creating new and ever more technical maneuvers, and snowboarding companies and ski resorts going to greater lengths to cater to the diverse demands of this highly fragmented, yet lucrative, physical culture.

I have three primary objectives in this book. First, I provide an in-depth analysis of the global phenomenon of snowboarding culture. Drawing upon an extensive collection of artifacts and sources, each chapter offers fresh insights into the snowboarding culture, including the sport, lifestyle, industry, media, and gender relations, in both historical and contemporary contexts. Second, I offer a multidimensional analysis of the physical cultural body via the case of snowboarding. To facilitate understandings of

boarding bodies as historical, material, mediated, cultural, symbolic, interacting, gendered, moving, traveling, sensual, affective, and political, I draw upon, and extend, various critical sociological approaches and theoretical perspectives – cultural memory studies, Marxist political economy, post-Fordism, Foucauldian theorizing, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of embodiment, feminism, sociology of mobilities, and nonrepresentational theory. In so doing, I hope to contribute to contemporary debates surrounding the body and embodiment in sociology. It is also through this empirically grounded, theoretical examination of snowboarding culture that I address the third aim of this book, to bring social theory 'to life' for wider audiences. By making social theories and concepts more accessible via the case of snowboarding, I hope this book empowers readers to use social theory more confidently and reflexively to understand, analyze, and perhaps change, the social world around them.

Sociology, physical cultural studies, and the snowboarding body

Since the mid-1980s, the body has become a major domain for sociological inquiry and it remains 'one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences' (Shilling, 2005, p. 6). As Turner (2008), one of the preeminent body theorists, explains:

> Sociological theory can be said to be organized around a number of perennial contrasts – agency and structure, the individual and society, nature and culture, mind and body. ... The importance of the sociology of the body is that it lies at the axis of these theoretical tensions and it is thus a necessary component of any genuine sociology. The difficulty of providing a coherent account of what we mean by 'the body' is an effect of these theoretical problems. (p. 209)

The analysis of the body and embodiment has produced 'an intellectual battlefield' over which 'the respective claims of post-structuralism and postmodernism, phenomenology, feminism, sociobiology, sociology and cultural studies have fought' (Shilling, 2005, p. 6; see also Csordas, 1994; Davis, 1997; Featherstone et al., 1991; Shilling, 2007; Turner, 2008; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). Increasingly, scholars have drawn upon an array of theoretical and methodological perspectives to shed new light on various aspects of the body. Yet, as Williams and Bendelow (1998) suggest, this has led to some conceptual ambiguity and disciplinary fragmentation:

> Recent years have witnessed a veritable explosion of interest in the body within social theory ... [But] the more the body is studied and written

> about the more elusive it becomes: a fleshy organic entity and a natural symbol of society; the primordial basis of our being-in-the-world and the discursive product of disciplinary technologies of power/knowledge; an ongoing structure of lived experience and the foundational basis of rational consciousness; the well-spring of human emotionality and the site of numerous 'cyborg' couplings; a physical vehicle for personhood and identity and the basis from which social institutions, organizations and structures are forged. The body, in short, is all these things and much more. At best this has served to capture the multifaceted nature of the body in society. At worst it has led to a fragmentation of perspectives and a dispersal of approaches which, for the most part, talk *past* rather than *to* each other. (pp. 1–2)

Despite numerous theoretically sophisticated and empirically nuanced analyses of particular dimensions of the body and embodiment, contemporary sociological studies have yet to provide a theoretical approach that satisfactorily explains the various dimensions of the body. Rather, in each of these studies particular aspects of embodiment are foregrounded while others 'fade into the background' (Shilling, 2005, p. 6). Arguably, many of the criticisms leveled at mainstream sociological research on the body also apply to studies of sporting bodies.

The sociology of sport – a field of critical inquiry dedicated to the empirical and theoretical analysis of sport and human movement cultures – 'came of age' during the mid-1960s and 1970s (Coakley & Dunning, 2000). It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, that the physically active body (re)gained the attention of sociology of sport researchers (Gruneau, 1991; Hargreaves, 1987; Harvey & Sparkes, 1991; Loy, 1991; Loy et al., 1993; Theberge, 1991). The body and embodiment increasingly became the 'empirical core' of the field (Andrews, 2008, p. 52), such that today, sociology of sport boasts an array of theoretically and empirically insightful research on various aspects of the moving body in local, national, global, and virtual contexts. Since the late 1990s, however, a number of scholars have expressed concern that the overspecialization and fragmentation of the parent field of kinesiology is limiting understandings of the 'body in motion' (Duncan, 2007, p. 56; see also Andrews, 2008; Booth, 2009; Hargreaves & Vertinsky, 2007; Ingham, 1997; Woodward, 2009). Arguably, Physical Cultural Studies (PCS) – 'an emergent intellectual project with an interdisciplinary and multidimensional commitment toward critical and theoretically informed engagement with various expressions of the physical' (Silk & Andrews, 2010) – has the potential to reinvigorate and reconceptualize understandings of the physically active body.

The term 'Physical Cultural Studies' (PCS) was initially coined in the late 1990s (Ingham, 1997), but has recently (re)gained momentum among

scholars seeking more multidimensional understandings of the politics and practices of active embodiment in all its myriad forms (such as sport, dance, exercise, fitness, health, and leisure). While the PCS agenda continues to evolve, Andrews (2008) offers a preliminary definition:

> Physical cultural studies is ... a synthesis of empirical, theoretical and methodological influences (drawn from, among other sources, the sociology and history of sport and physical activity, the sociology of the body, and cultural studies) that are focused on the critical analysis of active bodies and specifically the manner in which they become organized, represented, and experienced in relation to the operations of social power. (p. 45)

The emerging field of PCS advocates 'a multi-method approach toward engaging the empirical (including ethnography and autoethnography, participant observation, discourse and media analysis, and contextual analysis)', and advances 'an equally fluid theoretical vocabulary, utilizing concepts and theories from a variety of disciplines (including cultural studies, economics, history, media studies, philosophy, sociology, and urban studies) in engaging and interpreting the particular aspect of physical culture under scrutiny' (Andrews, 2008, p. 55). In the remainder of this chapter I explain the PCS-inspired interdisciplinary methodological and theoretical approaches I employ to help capture the multifaceted nature of the snowboarding body. I then offer a brief overview of the book.

Understanding physical cultural bodies: some methodological and theoretical considerations

Contemporary physical cultures are complicated and multidimensional phenomena interwoven with numerous political, cultural, social, and economic events and processes. Understanding and explaining such complexities can make for challenging social research. Sociological investigations seeking to construct nuanced social explanations of the body in contemporary physical cultures must embrace theoretical and conceptual reflexivity, and methodological and analytical dynamicism and openness. Here I outline the multi-methodological and multi-theoretical approach I employ in this study of snowboarding bodies. Of course, there is a plethora of ways in which socially meaningful and insightful analyses of contemporary physical cultures may transpire. The following is by no means a prescriptive account of how to research physical cultures. However, I hope that the insights gleaned from my embodied research experiences prove useful for others embarking on their own projects on sport and physical cultures in global and/or local contexts.

Researching physical cultural bodies: a multimethodological approach

My understanding of the complexities of snowboarding bodies derives from multiple modes of data generation, a type of methodology used extensively by Bourdieu and which he describes as 'discursive montage' of '*all sources*' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 66, emphasis added). Bourdieu (1992) adds that this is 'the only possible attitude toward theoretical tradition' (p. 252). Similarly, Grossberg (2001) recommends using 'any and every kind of empirical method, whatever seems useful to the particular project' in order to 'gather more and better information, descriptions, resources', and improve one's interpretations (cited in Wright, 2001, p. 145). Throughout this project I seized all types of data, evidence, sources, and artifacts to shed light on my inquiry into snowboarding bodies. According to Mills (1959), sociologists do not study projects, rather they become tuned, or sensitive, to themes that 'they see and hear everywhere in [their] experience' (p. 211). As I became increasingly sensitive to the themes of the snowboarding body, I gathered evidence from personal observations and experiences, magazines, websites, newspapers, interviews and personal communications, videos, Internet chat rooms, promotional material, television programs, press releases, public documents, reports from snowboarding's administrative bodies, and promotional material from sporting organizations and from associated industries.[1] I will now briefly discuss some of the practical, ethical, and reflexive considerations for employing such methods in contemporary physical cultures.

Snowboarding bodies in global and local contexts: doing transnational ethnography

In light of fundamental transformations of space, place, and time, anthropologists and sociologists are increasingly calling into question traditionally defined ethnography – as an 'intensively-focused-upon single site of ethnographic observation and participation' (Marcus, 1995, p. 96). They urge scholars to embrace more broadly based research strategies, what some variously refer to as 'globalizing methods' (Stoller, 1997), 'mobile ethnography' (Fincham et al., 2010; Marcus, 1995), multisite 'transnational fieldwork' (Knowles, 1999), and 'global ethnography' (Burawoy et al., 2000). Arguably, transnational ethnography provides us with new tools to study the flows of physical cultural commodities, images, discourses, power and populations across local, regional, national, and international fields (Canniford, 2005; Nayak & Kehily, 2008). Thus, with the goal of further examining the values, practices, and interactions of snowboarding bodies in local snowboarding cultures, as well as regional, national, and global flows of people, objects, value systems, information, and images within and across these places, I conducted 15 'ethnographic visits' – ranging from one week to

one month – in an array of snowboarding communities and ski resorts in Canada (Whistler), France (Chamonix, Tignes), Italy (the Dolomites), New Zealand (Methven, Ohakune, Queenstown, Wanaka), Switzerland (Saas Fee, Zermatt), and the United States (Mt Hood, Oregon; Salt Lake City, Utah; Telluride, Colorado) between 2004 and 2010. The prolonged nature of this project allowed me to observe cultural change, as well as providing time for reflection on the data gathered and my conceptual interpretations.

Attempting to understand how snowboarders experience their bodies in (and across) local snowboarding fields, I made observations on and off the snow (including lift lines, chairlifts, resort lodges, snowboard competitions, prize-giving events, video premiers, bars, cafes, local hangouts, snowboard shops, bus shelters, train stations, and airports). During this fieldwork, I observed, listened, engaged in analysis, and made mental notes, switching from snowboarder to researcher depending on the requirements of the situation. Of course, the covert nature of some aspects of these participant-observation phases raises many ethical issues. As Sands (2008) explains, 'when or if the ethnographer reveals his/her role as a fieldworker and informs those being observed of the intent of the ethnographer is a matter of ethical concern' (p. 369). While all participants have the right to know when their behavior is being observed for research purposes, in some situations it was not feasible (or, indeed, safe) to declare my researcher identity or ask for informed consent from *all* participants (e.g., observations from the chairlift of unidentifiable snowboarders and skiers interacting in the terrain park below, or at a Big Air snowboarding event with thousands of young, intoxicated spectators). Rather, I negotiated my way through the various social situations differently depending on the dynamics of the interaction and my role in the relationships. In so doing, I regularly engaged in 'situated ethics', that is, I made ethical decisions regarding the overt and covert nature of my research based on the dynamics and complexities of the particular social, cultural and/or physical environment (Simons & Usher, 2000; Wheaton, 2002).

In light of the recent sensual turn in the social sciences and humanities, scholars have begun to question the bias toward the visual in ethnography. They are increasingly calling for greater attention to the 'multi-sensoriality of the ethnographic process' (Pink, 2010, p. 1). Terms used to describe this shift in ethnographic research and representation include an 'anthropology of the senses' (Howes, 2003), 'sensuous scholarship' (Stoller, 1997), 'sensuous geography' (Rodaway, 1994), and 'sensory ethnography' (Pink, 2010). For Pink, the process of sensory ethnography can help us account for 'multisensoriality' in both the 'lives of people who participate in our research' and 'our craft' (Ibid., p. 1). During my transnational fieldwork I observed and jotted notes in various social and snow-covered environments, and I was also a participant. Thus my fieldwork was a form of 'sensual research' that offered new opportunities for experiencing, observing, and sharing

the bodily and social pleasures, as well as the pains and frustrations inherent in snowboarding (Evers, 2006, p. 239). During phases of participant-observation I further adopted a 'sensory ethnographic' sensitivity by paying particular attention to the unique sights, as well as the sounds, smells, tastes, and touch, of various spaces and places. To facilitate more vivid recall of the multisensual aspects of the research experience upon returning 'home' from the field, I also employed an array of creative strategies using my notebook, camera and Dictaphone (Azzarito, 2010). For example, while conducting fieldwork at some snowboarding events and competitions (such as an urban rail-jam in downtown Queenstown, a Big Air event in Whistler, and a slopestyle event at the European X-Games in Tignes) I used my dictaphone to capture some of the multilayered sounds (e.g., commentators, music, snowmobiles, helicopters, crowd), thus freeing me to focus on other social and sensual dimensions of the occasion. Indeed, listening to these recordings, while viewing my photos and annotating my field notes, evoked more multidimensional memories of these socially, physically and sensually loaded phases of fieldwork.

Each of the locations I visited for this project posed different opportunities *and* challenges, such as language, localism, cultural access, accommodation, preexisting contacts in the field, and funding. According to Stoller (1997), the key to doing research in complex transnational spaces is 'suppleness of imagination' (p. 91). Thus I attempted to respond and adapt flexibly to the unique conditions of each field, and to remain open to a wide variety of relationships and interactions as they arose in various locations (e.g., on chairlifts, in snowboard shops, on buses). Particular ethnographic methods became more important when conducting research in some spaces and places than in others. For example, language barriers in France, Italy, and Switzerland made the communicative and auditory aspects of fieldwork more difficult. While conducting fieldwork in social spaces such as lift lines and resort cafes in these locations, my observations became much more important – I paid more attention to the signs and symbols, posturing and interactions of snowboarding bodies, as well as the tones and inflections of voices. In this way, it was typically the 'circumstance that defined the method rather than the method defining the circumstance' (Amit, 2000, p. 11).

I developed my transnational and sensual ethnographic methods in dialogue with 60 participants (32 female and 28 male) from an array of countries, including Australia, Canada, England, France, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, and the United States.[2] Participants ranged from 18 to 56 years of age, and included novice snowboarders, weekend warriors, committed/core boarders, professional snowboarders, an Olympic snowboarder, an Olympic judge, snowboarding journalists, photographers, film-makers, magazine editors, snowboard company owners, snowboard shop employees and owners, snowboard instructors and coaches, and event organizers and

judges. The snowball method of sampling proved effective with many participants helping me gain access to other key informants by offering names, contact details (e.g., email addresses, phone numbers), and even vouching for my authenticity as 'a researcher who actually snowboards' (Field notes, November 2005). During the interviews, I asked participants to reflect on their beliefs about various aspects of the snowboarding culture and encouraged them to express their attitudes, ideas, and perceptions about, and memories of different aspects of the snowboarding body (such as gender, media, performance, competition, travel, pleasure, risk, injury, consumption, and lifestyle). Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 4 hours in length, depending on the willingness of participants. To accommodate the nomadic existence of many snowboarders, I also distributed follow-up interviews by email to 35 participants living or traveling abroad. The majority of respondents wrote freely and in colloquial tones, their degree of comfort with this medium perhaps reflecting the time spent on the Internet emailing and chatting in their everyday lives.

In conjunction with my multisited transnational fieldwork and interviews, I also gathered evidence from cultural sources, such as magazines, films, newspapers, television, and websites,[3] to help deepen my understanding of cultural complexities of the global–local nexus in snowboarding. Instead of focusing solely on the detailed structuring of individual texts, I examined the evolving patterns of discourse traceable across the various forms of snowboarding media. Integrating this analysis with participant-observations and interviews further enabled me to examine the ways particular discursive constructions of the snowboarding body were created, reinforced, amplified, and negotiated within the culture. In other words, I analyzed both the content of the texts and 'the everyday life of media representations, their contexts of production and circulation, and the practices and discourses of reception that envelop them' (Spitulnik, 1993, cited in Frohlick, 2005, p. 177). As I did so, the study of documentary and visual sources enabled me to refine and develop the analytical themes that simultaneously emerged during the phases of transnational fieldwork and interviews, as well as to produce new areas of inquiry. Furthermore, combining the empirical evidence with secondary sources (especially scholarly research relating to the kindred activities of surfing, skateboarding, and windsurfing) also helped me to construct the social and cultural contexts of the snowboarding body. Secondary sources included theoretical and empirical literature covering the body and embodiment, social and cultural change, sport and leisure, and youth cultures.

The reflexive researching body

Research is a process that occurs through the medium of a person: 'the researcher is always and inevitably present in the research' (Stanley & Wise, 1993, cited in Wheaton, 2002, p. 246; see also Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

This was certainly true in this project. Prior to commencing this study of snowboarding bodies, I had already spent approximately 600 days snowboarding on more than 30 mountains in New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. Between 1999 and 2004, I held many roles in the snowboarding culture (novice, weekend warrior, and lifestyle sport migrant) and industry (semiprofessional athlete, snowboard instructor, terrain park employee, and journalist). Thus, upon embarking on this project, I could have been considered a cultural insider. My physical abilities and knowledge about snowboarding gave me access to the culture and a head start in recognizing the significant issues and sensitizing themes and concepts, and in discerning relevant sources. However, this 'insider knowledge' also carried potential pitfalls. Perhaps one of the hardest tasks during the early phases of this research was negotiating the path that allowed me to understand and acknowledge the participants' worldviews and their subjectivities, while also gaining the 'critical distance' necessary to contextualize those views and actions (Wheaton, 2002, p. 262). This involved not only 'demystifying the familiar' but also 'analyzing respondents' views' (Ibid.) and engaging with them from a number of different theoretical perspectives. Moreover, as my research progressed I spent less time on the mountains and more time reflecting in my study, which helped me acquire greater analytical distance. The length of this project and the dynamic nature of the snowboarding culture also meant that, as my research progressed, I became further removed in terms of age and generation (as exemplified by clothing style and language) from the majority of core participants, who are mostly in their late teens and early twenties. In a way that I had not anticipated, my personal experiences of a progressive physical, social, and psychological 'distancing' from the core of the snowboarding culture, prompted me to further reflect on issues relating to cultural access and participant rapport while conducting research in the field, as well as individual participants' embodied experiences of movement into, within, and out of, the snowboarding culture.

Acknowledging that the 'theorist is also embodied', and reflexively exploring some of the bodily tensions that can occur within the field, can 'open up' new areas of inquiry, as well as 'possibilities for exploring new ways of doing theory – ways which use embodiment as a theoretical resource' (Davis, 1997, p. 14; see also Thomas & Ahmed, 2004). During the early phases of my research, my insider knowledge and cultural identity undoubtedly influenced my ability to develop rapport with participants during interviews and participant-observation. For example, while in the United States completing fieldwork, I bought a cap from a snowboard store in Portland, Oregon. Admittedly, I liked its style and color, and was naive about the fact that this was one of the most 'authentic' core brands within the local snowboarding scene at the time. Core snowboarders are masters of reading bodies and their symbols, and wearing this cap seemed to give me instant cultural credibility among some local core snowboarders and facilitate my rapport with

interviewees. During my participant-observation phase in Whistler, Canada, I experienced the flipside of this scenario. Due to unforeseen circumstances, I was forced to rent an outdated snowboard. Interestingly, the tone of chair-lift conversations changed when core snowboarders observed this board, as it was a clear sign of outsider status and hindered my rapport with some snowboarders (interestingly, noncore participants rarely noticed). While this was somewhat frustrating, it provided me with a fresh perspective on the cultural intricacies and social hierarchies, and the effect these can have on those outside the snowboarding culture. These examples illustrate the capricious nature of some of my interactions with participants. While I made attempts to manage my impressions (e.g., by wearing snowboard-specific clothing, employing snowboarding argot, and sharing snowboarding experiences), I could not control the interpretations that others drew from my performances. In this sense, as Shilling (2003) notes, I was 'caught in a web of communication irrespective of individual intentions' (p. 85). The key point here is that throughout my fieldwork, I self-consciously reflected on my constantly shifting positions as an (increasingly less) active snowboarder and a young, white, heterosexual, middle-class, female researcher and academic from New Zealand, and on how these roles influenced my relationships in the field, as well as the theoretical and empirical development of the study. While the focus of this book is the corporeal experiences of 'other' snowboarders, it is important to acknowledge that my own embodied snowboarding experiences – as a participant and researcher – influenced every phase of this study, from conducting participant-observations and interviews, to theorizing, to representing my research.

As Knowles (1999) explains, 'fieldwork offers the transnational researcher the prospect of reconnection with a former life or the prospect of escape; it sustains the possibility of an alternate sense of belonging and self, deftly busied in conceptions of work and intellectual enterprise' (p. 60). While I certainly enjoyed moments of escapism, nostalgia, adrenalin, and joy during my fieldwork, the practice of global ethnography should not be romanticized. Transnational ethnography has the potential to be 'humiliating, belittling, at times dull, boring and downright exhausting' (Silk, 2005, p. 75), as well as dangerous. When conducting global (and local) fieldwork the researcher – particularly the female researcher – should be prepared for an array of potentially high-risk or threatening situations in which instantaneous decisions may need to be made (e.g., witnessing violent, sexist and/or criminal behaviors, or hiking out of bounds from a ski resort despite avalanche warnings). In such situations, researchers need to protect both the right of their participants to anonymity and their own safety. When confronted with situations requiring an almost immediate ethical response, the researcher should draw upon all of his/her senses to interpret the dynamics and complexities of the particular social, cultural and physical environment.

In sum, my study drew upon all types of data, evidence, sources, and artifacts to illuminate the theoretical inquiry into snowboarding bodies that follows. 'Even the humblest material artifact is', as Eliot (1947) explains, 'an emissary of the culture out of which it comes' (cited in Vamplew, 1998, p. 268). Using cultural sources, such as magazines, films, and websites, in conjunction with transnational multisited fieldwork and interviews, certainly helped deepen my understanding of snowboarding's cultural complexities and the multidimensional snowboarding body. But even the richest caches of primary source materials 'will speak only when they are properly questioned' (Bloch, 1952, cited in Hardy, 1999, p. 91). Similarly, Bourdieu et al. (1991) remind us, no matter how sophisticated one's 'techniques of observation and proof', unless they are accompanied by a 'redoubling of theoretical vigilance', they will only 'lead us to see better and better fewer and fewer things' (p. 88). In this case of the snowboarding body, the range and diversity of theories structured my evidence, and in so doing helped me to see better and better more and more things.

Explaining physical cultural bodies: using social theory

Theory is the heart and soul of sociology and central to the discipline's contribution to 'the development of self-knowledge and the guidance of human society' (Waters, 2000, p. 1). Similarly, Wilson (1983) says that 'good sociological research without theory is unthinkable' (p. xi), while Hall (1996) believes that theory can better 'help us understand our culture' (p. 30). Thus social theory is a 'tool' (Mouzelis, 1995, p. 3), a 'heuristic device' (Blaikie, 2000, p. 141) and a 'framework for interpretation' (Tosh, 2000, p. 134) which sets out questions, directs practitioners to particular sources, organizes evidence and shapes explanation, and thereby gives 'impetus to an inquiry and influences its outcomes' (Munslow, 1997, p. 46). Theory helps scholars understand and critique society, and point to new directions and perhaps reform. In this book, broadly following in the sociological tradition, I employ social theory to understand the multidimensional snowboarding body.

A wide range of opinions exists as to the prime concerns of social theory. Some argue for a microanalysis of behaviors and interaction in specific contexts; some advocate macro approaches that examine structures and processes. Others strive to reconcile micro and macro analyses. Some see the multiplicity of approaches as problematic (Turner, 1991), or the source of endless disputes and conflicts (Cuff et al., 1990). Others find virtue in diversity. Among the latter, Merton (1981) said that diverse theoretical orientations help the field deal with 'diverse kinds of, and aspects of, sociological and social problems' (p. 1), and Wallace and Wolf (1991) believe that 'different perspectives offer different and often complementary insights' (cited in Waters, 2000, p. 345). According to Shilling (2005), while no theoretical approach has proved adequate to explain all dimensions of the body

and embodiment, diverse theoretical and methodological approaches can 'heighten our sensitivity to various aspects of the body's multiple dimensional relationship with society' (p. 71). With Shilling, I believe there is merit in strategically juxtaposing a selection of conceptual perspectives from commensurate paradigms in order to construct a better and more multi-dimensional representation of the social, cultural, political, gendered, practiced, lived, and interacting body.

In this book I employ an array of theories from compatible paradigms to help explain various dimensions of the snowboarding body, including cultural memory studies, Marxist political economy, post-Fordism, Foucauldian theorizing, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of embodiment, feminism, sociology of mobilities, and nonrepresentational theory. Of course, the social sciences and humanities are host to a wide variety of theories and theoretical perspectives, and I had to make judgments about which theories to include. My selection of these theories was informed by both my existing cultural knowledge of snowboarding, and my theoretical knowledge. I selected the theories that I believed would shed light on various aspects of the snowboarding body and help me capture some of the complexities of the global phenomenon of snowboarding. The chosen concepts were those that remain flexible enough for appropriation and application to this contemporary phenomenon. This approach is in the spirit of the PCS agenda, where the aim is not 'finding the "right theory"' or 'demonstrating one's theoretical acumen', but finding 'whatever theoretical positions' will best facilitate the task of 'understanding what is going on' (Wright, 2001, cited in Andrews, 2008, p. 57). I do not pretend to provide an exhaustive account of each theory. It would be impossible to analyze all the strengths and shortcomings of each theory in detail in the space available. Moreover, such an analysis would not contribute to my goal of providing a more nuanced explanation of the practices and politics of the physical cultural snowboarding body. Instead I have cast my net widely, and I focus on selected critical concepts from a range of sociocultural theoretical perspectives. The chapters which follow extend existing knowledge of the body in physical culture by painting a fuller, more complete picture of snowboarding bodies than could have been achieved by focusing on one theory, but this does not mean that I have sealed all the gaps.

The various theoretical approaches adopted in this book offer different perspectives on, and often complementary insights into, the body in contemporary popular physical culture. Yet no single theory could adequately explain all aspects of the multidimensional body. Furthermore, because all 'theories are created by individuals in their search for meaning' in response to concrete material conditions (Alexander, 1995, pp. 79–80), some theories prove more suitable for explaining some aspects of the physical cultural body at the current historical moment than others. But, as Slack (1996) explains, 'successful theorizing is not measured by the exact theoretical fit

but by the ability to work with our always inadequate theories to help us move understanding "a little further down the road" ' (p. 112). Thus, in this book I 'work with' theory to enhance understanding of physically active bodies in global snowboarding culture.

Theoretical conversations with snowboarding bodies

Balancing theory and empirical research is a prime goal of sociology, yet its practice is 'all too rare' (Waters, 2000, p. 4). Not only do critical social theories often appear as a 'clash or confrontation of ideas', they rarely involve 'a productive interchange [of] empirical evidence' (Layder, 2004, p. 118). Concerned that many intellectual projects have lost their analytical dynamism and openness, and remain bent on 'illustrating the applicability of *their* framework' (Baert, 2004, p. 362, emphasis added), philosopher Richard Rorty (1980) pleads for a critical approach that challenges 'accepted taxonomies and lenses rather than merely reiterating them' (cited in Ford & Brown, 2006, p. 146). Baert, like Rorty, is concerned by the contemporary trend that measures theory-inspired research by the 'extent to which a theory ... neatly ... fits the data ... and to which the various components of the theory ... weave easily into the myriad of empirical experiences' (Baert, 2004, p. 367). Instead, he proposes that the success of such research should be measured by its ability to 'see things differently' (Ibid.). This is one of the goals of this project. Rather than employing one theoretical perspective to frame the phenomenon of the snowboarding body, I attempt to make multiple theoretical ideas 'live' through 'empirical discussions' (Alexander, 2003, pp. 7–8) with the culture.

Throughout this project, I 'move[d] back and forth between theorizing and researching, between interpretations and explanations, between cultural logics and pragmatics' (Alexander, 2003, p. 6). In other words, at the centre of this project I placed dialogue between theoretical knowledge and cultural knowledge, which was gained from previous and current cultural participation and combined with multiple modes of data generation. In sum, the empirical evidence gathered through a transnational multimethodological approach was refined and developed in conversation with the theoretical concepts. While each of the theoretical chapters which follow is informed by my 'discursive montage' of *all* the sources (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 66), each of the theories I have adopted in this project asks different questions of the evidence. Thus, each chapter approaches and analyzes the same (and different) sources in different ways, according to the sociological questions being asked. Nonetheless, throughout my research, I continually sought 'negative instances or contradictory cases' from *all* the sources in order to avoid including only those elements of the snowboarding culture that would substantiate my analyses (Mason, 2002, p. 124).

In some cases, I also extend and synthesize theoretical perspectives to help make sense of nuanced (or contradictory) evidence, and to make a

further contribution to theoretical conversations surrounding the body and embodiment. Theoretical synthesis arguably provides a fruitful strategy for analyzing multidimensional social and physical cultural phenomena.[4] As Giulianotti (2005) writes, 'the research object of sociologists – human societies – can be better explained through working relationships with other disciplines rather than insisting upon the hypocritical, asocial conceit of splendid isolation' (p. 211). In recent years there has been a significant abatement of hostility and a fundamental shift towards synthesis in the humanities, even while fundamental disagreements remain: 'The borrowing and intertwining of once rival traditions is readily apparent in recent empirical work. It is also the new agenda for a wide range of robust and ambitious efforts in sociological theory' (Alexander, 1991, p. 152). As will become apparent in some chapters of this book, I found theoretical syntheses between feminism and the work of Pierre Bourdieu particularly insightful for understanding issues relating to gender, the body and embodiment, power, culture, agency, and reflexivity in snowboarding culture.

The politics of embodied theorizing

Davis (1997) believes that much theorizing about the body has been cerebral, esoteric, and ultimately, disembodied, and as such ironically 'distances us from individuals' everyday embodied experiences' (p. 14). Similarly, Williams and Bendelow (1998) argue that it is only through a shift from theorizing *about* bodies 'in a largely disembodied, typically male way (e.g., a sociology of the body, which objectifies and subjectifies the body from outside, so to speak), to a new mode of social theorizing *from* lived bodies' (p. 3), that a 'truly embodied sociology [will] have any real hope of putting minds back into bodies, bodies back into society and society back into the body' (p. 3). Thus, by grounding theoretical discussions of the body in the global phenomenon of snowboarding, I offer an account of 'the body in everyday life as well as in social theory' (Davis, 1997, p. 13).

Adopting an embodied theoretical approach that engages theoretical concepts in dialogue with numerous examples and evidence from an array of sources from the snowboarding culture, I also hope to make social theory more accessible. While the various social theories adopted in this study have much to offer in terms of providing frameworks for a range of descriptions and explanations of the body in the contemporary social world, they are often largely inaccessible, in their current form, to the majority of those outside academe. Social theories are too often presented as highly abstract and disembodied, such that many students and new researchers experience social theory as intimidating, overwhelming, and tedious. A central aim of this book is to show that much pleasure can be gained from using social theory to reflexively interpret the social conditions of our existence and inform our involvement in related practical and political issues.

This text seeks to make social theory more accessible, yet it does not claim to offer an introduction to, or an overview of, modern sociological theory; a number of excellent resources already achieve this (Elliott, 2008; Layder, 2006; Turner, 1996; Waters, 2000). While the theoretical discussions offered in the chapters which follow briefly introduce theoretical schemas and key concepts, the focus is on illustrating their applicability through the example of snowboarding culture. Moreover, some chapters build upon, extend, and synthesize theoretical perspectives to further reveal some of the corporeal complexities in contemporary physical culture. In other words, I am less concerned with outlining the 'rules' for using social theory or achieving theoretical closure, and more interested in exploring the possibilities of engaging in more reflexive, dynamic, and creative embodied theorizing.

I hope that my resulting theoretical and practical 'adventures' in the field of physical cultural studies highlight the rich potential of social theory for producing new knowledge and understanding of physically active bodies in global and local contexts, and inspire others to embark on their own theoretical journeys with confidence and a sense of excitement. Like Foucault (1974), I hope readers find in this book 'a kind of toolbox' which they can 'rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area' (p. 523). Importantly, a political impetus also underpins this project. It is hoped that some readers – particularly those less familiar with social theory – will be inspired to use these 'tools' to identify and analyze – and perhaps seek to intervene in – the 'operation and experience of power and power relations' in the social world around them (Andrews, 2008, p. 58), and particularly in those sporting and physical cultures that have captured their 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959), as snowboarding did mine.

Snowboarding bodies in theory and practice: an overview

The remainder of this book consists of nine chapters. Each chapter draws upon one (or two) principal theoretical approaches to examine a different dimension of the snowboarding body, offering fresh insights into the snowboarding culture, and identifying some of the strengths and limitations of the selected theoretical perspective(s) for explaining physical cultural bodies. While each chapter is based on a solid understanding of the extensive theoretical and empirical literature from various disciplines that examines the particular aspect of the body under investigation (e.g., mediated physical cultural bodies, or masculinity), it is beyond the scope of this book to review all of this work. Just as I made decisions about which methodological and theoretical approaches to use based on an understanding of the strengths and limitations of various possibilities, in each chapter I employ only those studies that most facilitate my analysis of the particular dimension of the snowboarding body under discussion.

Chapter 2 offers a brief history of the development of snowboarding culture. This is followed by a critical discussion of the cultural politics involved in the construction and reproduction of this historical narrative. In the process, it examines how some snowboarding bodies are remembered while others are forgotten, and reveals that the production of the snowboarding cultural memory is an implicitly political process complicated by various sociocultural-economic factors. Building upon this interdisciplinary analysis of cultural memory construction, Chapter 3 draws upon traditional Marxist and post-Fordist perspectives to illustrate how the snowboarding body has become a malleable marker of commercial value subject to the fragmentation of the snowboarding market and the vagaries of fashion. Various case studies illustrate the processes of production and consumption of snowboarding bodies by the owners and employees of companies such as Burton Snowboards, professional athletes, and various groups of cultural consumers (i.e., the female niche market).

Further exploring the complex relationship between the snowboarding culture and economy, Chapter 4 explains how the highly fragmented snowboarding media produce multiple representations of snowboarding bodies and, in so doing, support new niche markets necessary for ongoing economic growth. The chapter begins with a description of snowboarders' engagement with various forms of mass, niche, and micro media. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's concepts of power, power/knowledge and discourse, I then examine some of the multiple discursive constructions of snowboarding bodies in various forms of mass and niche media, focusing on representations of female snowboarding bodies. In the latter part of this chapter I engage with Foucault's concept of 'technologies of self' to examine how women (and men) make sense of the multiple and contradictory mediated discourses of femininity and sexuality in the snowboarding media.

Chapter 5 draws on the work of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu to explain how distinctions among snowboarders, expressed as differences in embodied tastes and styles, and uses of cultural products and commodities, are practiced, performed, and regulated, on the mountain and in various other social spaces. More specifically, this chapter explains embodied dress and language practices, as well as displays of cultural commitment, physical prowess and risk-taking, as contributing to the social construction and classification of group identities (e.g., skiers, snowboarders, poseurs, professionals, freestyle riders) within the alpine snow field.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I draw upon recent feminist engagements with some of Bourdieu's key concepts to offer fresh insights into the gendered snowboarding body. Chapter 6 begins with an introduction to recent feminist critiques of, and conversations with, Bourdieu's conceptual schema, and then proceeds to examine female snowboarders' embodied experiences of physical and social agency, reflexivity and constraint within the male-dominated snowboarding field. In Chapter 7, I extend this discussion to argue that a

gendered (re)reading of Bourdieu's conceptual schema also has the potential to shed new light on men and masculine identities in sport and physical culture. Here I offer a description of some of the practices and performances of different masculinities identifiable across the global snowboarding field, and the power relations between and within these groups. In both chapters, I consider the potential of the gender-habitus-field complex for explaining how some female and male snowboarders come to critically reflect upon problematic aspects of the hypermasculine snowboarding culture.

Chapter 8 explores the discourse of transnationalism within the snowboarding culture with a discussion of the corporeal mobilities and migration of snowboarders. Engaging with some of Urry's (2000) suggestions for a 'sociology of mobilities', I begin by offering a description of the various travel patterns of snowboarders (e.g., snow-sport tourists, professional athletes, and core participants). In the latter part of this chapter I draw upon recent work by human geographers, and Pierre Bourdieu's key concepts of field, capital and habitus, to enhance our understanding of privileged youth's lifestyle sport migration experiences. I conclude with a brief discussion of the local mobilities and interactions of snowboarding bodies within three transnational mountain resort destinations.

Located at the intersection between the recent sensual, affective and spatial turns in the social sciences and humanities, Chapter 9 examines the lived experiences of participants within various physical spaces and social places, focusing particularly on three distinct geographies – snowboard terrain parks, the backcountry, and the après-snow culture. Each section begins with a description of the interactions and experiences within these places, and concludes with a brief autoethnographic tale of the sensual and affective experiences in these unique geographies. Here I point to some of the possibilities of alternative ways of reflexively engaging with theory and representing the sensual and affective dimensions of the lived physical cultural body.

The final chapter consists of two main parts. In the first, I draw on two theoretical approaches – nonrepresentational theory and third-wave feminism – to reveal some of the creative and embodied approaches employed by contemporary youth to produce new forms of passionate and affective politics in local and global contexts. Lastly, I offer some concluding comments about the opportunities and challenges of theorizing the body and researching physical cultures into the twenty-first century, as well as possibilities for disseminating potentially empowering forms of knowledge to wider audiences.

In sum, this project is an intellectual and personal statement on both contemporary snowboarding culture *and* social theory. It is the result of my ongoing critical reflections on snowboarding culture *and* the usefulness of modern social theory for explaining the myriad ways the active body is 'culturally regulated, practiced, and materialized' (Andrews, 2008, p. 53).

Drawing inspiration from the burgeoning field of Physical Cultural Studies, I adopt an interdisciplinary, multimethodological, and 'fluid' theoretical approach to help make sense of the complex and highly nuanced snowboarding culture and the multidimensional snowboarding body. Engaging multiple theoretical concepts in conversation with my empirical evidence, gathered over seven years from local, national, transnational, and virtual snowboarding sites, I seek to 'identify and analyze how dominant power structures become expressed in, and through, [the] socially and historically contingent embodied experiences, meanings, and subjectivities' of snowboarders (Ibid.). It is hoped that, through recognizing and understanding the various forms of power operating within contemporary physical cultures, such as snowboarding, we can begin to imagine more effective strategies for intervening, disrupting, and challenging power inequalities in local, national, and global contexts.

2
Remembering the Snowboarding Body

> There is a growing interest in the history of snowboarding because our sport is finally at a point where we can look back and speculate. Now I feel there is actually a history. Ten years ago it seemed silly to think of snowboarding in any historical sense, as it was still so young. Now there is some depth, people have stories … There is a lot of interest for me personally in the history of snowboarding because these were the years that shaped my life. (Steve, personal communication, June 2009)

> The history of snowboarding definitely seems to be getting more important to me as I get older. Possibly it could be more about me trying to maintain a connection to the sport … or a longing for the good old days … When I read stories or watch footage from earlier periods it provides that nostalgic feeling. I remember making my first pair of pants … sawing off parts of my bindings … cutting the toes out of my boot liners. … The young kids today have no idea, and I don't think many of them really care, but I do. This is *our* history, and I feel like I was part of something special. (Nathan, personal communication, June 2009)

Dating the birth of snowboarding is impossible. People have been standing on sleds and trying to slide on snow for hundreds of years; recent 'discoveries' include a board dating back to the 1920s and a 1939 film of a man riding a snowboard-type sled sideways down a small hill in Chicago. Snowboarding as we understand the activity today, however, emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s in North America with a new piece of equipment that appealed to the hedonistic desires of a new generation of youth. In this chapter I offer a brief history of the development of snowboarding culture. This is followed by a critical discussion of the cultural politics involved in the construction and reproduction of this historical narrative, which examines how some snowboarding bodies are remembered while others are forgotten, and reveals the production of the snowboarding cultural memory as an implicitly political