

REMNANTS OF THE PAST, HISTORY AND THE PRESENT¹

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Facts saturate history. Historians of sport know only too well that English cricketer William Gilbert Grace scored 54,211 first-class runs, that American Gertrude Ederle swam the English Channel in 14 hours 30 minutes on 6 August 1926 and that Englishman Roger Bannister ran the first sub-four-minute mile on 6 May 1954. Facts are the truths that historians recover from what Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob (1994, p. 259) call “the detritus of past living”. However, the great paradox of historical facts is that they are typically trivial and banal and rarely contribute to understanding the past. Reducing the life of one of England’s best-known Victorians to a set of factual cricket scores, for example, leaves an absurdly shallow picture of Grace as the founding father of modern cricket, a notorious shamateur and wily entrepreneur. Moreover, whatever factual content historians take from these three descriptions of Grace will depend upon their willingness to accept a metaphor (‘father’) and complex concepts (‘modern’, ‘shamateur’, ‘entrepreneur’) reinforced by ideologically-loaded adjectives (‘notorious’ and ‘wily’). It is hardly surprising then that philosophers of history point to the slender relationship between the raw facts of the past and understanding the past. The latter is an act of interpreting fragments from the past and not infrequently these support several points of view (Berkhofer, 1995). Of course, notions of history as an interpretive practice rather than a craft of recovering facts raises the question addressed here: how do historians interpret historical materials, those remnants of past human activity?

This question has particular significance at a time when historians are increasingly thinking about historical materials and evidence in radically new ways that are fundamentally changing the nature of history as an academic discipline. In the light of these changes, the first part of the article sketches three different sets of epistemological assumptions that operate in contemporary history; the second applies these assumptions to a more detailed analysis of four pieces of historical material. Reflecting on the analysis in part two, the conclusion discusses the complex relations between the present and the past.

THREE MODELS OF HISTORY

In *Deconstructing History*, Alun Munslow (1997) identifies three basic models of historical inquiry: reconstructionism, constructionism, and deconstructionism. Table 1 schematically represents the objectives and epistemological assumptions of each model. As the Table illustrates, different objectives drive each model. Reconstructionists set out to discover *the* past as it actually was (box 1), constructionists are more interested in interpretive generalisations and broad trends (box 2) and deconstructionists delve into selected aspects of *a* past (box 3).

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Table 1. Models of History

	Reconstructionism	Constructionism	Deconstructionism
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovers <i>the</i> (unique) past as it actually was <p style="text-align: right;">1.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interprets how, why, patterns and trends <p style="text-align: right;">2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovers <i>a</i> (fragmented and partial) past <p style="text-align: right;">3.</p>
Epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based • Impose limits on interpretations • Acknowledge that distance ensures detachment <p style="text-align: right;">4.</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privilege empiricism • Accept historical evidence as proof that the past can be recovered • View the past as fixed • See the past as yielding knowledge about the development of the present • Regard the present as an unproblematic platform from which historians look back into the past • Assume that traditional forms of representation are transparent & preserve the objectivity of observation <p style="text-align: right;">5.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins analysis with linguistic / discursive characterisation of the historical account • Holds the past as a slave to the present <p style="text-align: right;">6.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft-like discipline based on interrogation of sources • Facts precede interpretation • Limits on interpretation imposed by institutional & professional conventions • Iterative activity <p style="text-align: right;">7.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical discipline • <i>a priori</i> knowledge precedes facts • Limits on interpretation imposed by theory <p style="text-align: right;">8.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft-like discipline based on contextualisation of historical knowledge • Historical knowledge always relative • Limits on interpretation imposed by epistemology <p style="text-align: right;">9.</p>

Principal sources: Berkhofer (1995), Gottschalk (1969), Hamilton et al. (2002), Munslow (1997)

Reconstructionists and constructionists share common epistemological assumptions (box 5). Both privilege empirical methods, both accept historical evidence as proof that they can recover the past, and both insist that their presentations are transparent and objective. Nonetheless, different epistemological assumptions also divide reconstructionists and constructionists (boxes 7 & 8). The key difference between the two models is the extent to which they engage *a priori* knowledge, particularly concepts and theories.

Reconstructionists oppose theory in the belief that it predetermines explanations and that it tailors evidence. Among conservative reconstructionists, real historical phenomena are unique configurations and one-off events; history consists of the “stories ... of individual lives, or happenings, all seemingly unrepeatable” (Postan, 1971, p. 62). Constructionists deem theory integral to historical research. They maintain that historians who desire to be more than antiquarians must be trained in theory. Constructionists concede that historians require an intimate and technical knowledge of their sources but they relegate these skills to the margins (Sombart, 1929).

Constructionists hold theory fundamental to history for three reasons. First, the range and volume of evidence bearing on many historical problems is so large that historians cannot avoid selection, and theories provide frameworks for selecting evidence. Second, theory brings to the fore relationships between human experiences and thus enriches history. Third, identifying historical patterns invariably involves some form of abstract thinking and connections to theoretical explanations and interpretations. Responding to charges that theory predetermines history, constructionists counter with the claim that theory enhances understanding and that no one can “approach their evidence innocent of all presupposition” (Munslow, 1997, p. 40).

Deconstructionism finds a small, but nonetheless steadily growing, expression in history. As per boxes 6 and 9, deconstructionists are highly sceptical of the claims to truth made by objective empirical history. They view history as artificial narratives, devoid of moral or intellectual certainty (Munslow, 1997).

How these epistemological assumptions play out in practice is the subject of the remainder of this article. It examines how each model deals with different forms of historical materials that constitute the basis of all historical interpretation.

Dealing with Evidence

All historians interpret historical materials and they typically present their interpretations as validated evidence. Nonetheless, wide disparities exist in the way historians approach historical materials. Table 2 provides a schematic representation of both the general approaches and disparities between different models.

Box 1 shows that reconstructionists, constructionists and deconstructionists agree that validated historical materials, or sources, are the building blocks of historical knowledge, that historians must understand the origins and context of each source and that historians must be able to explain how the source is relevant to the historical question at hand (Marwick, 2001). That, however, is the extent of agreement. Reconstructionists treat historical materials as concrete artifacts which under interrogation will reveal the truth (box 2). Constructionists frame the gathering and interrogation of historical materials within theory which they believe is the primary means by which historians reveal reality (box 3). Deconstructionists conceptualise historical materials as traces and examine them for their subjective, partial, fragmented and open-ended contents (box 4). The remainder of this section

applies these assumptions to four types of historical material: official documents, oral testimony, films and photographs.¹

Table 2. General Epistemological Assumptions of Historical Materials

Reconstructionism	Constructionism	Deconstructionism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validated sources are the building blocks of historical knowledge • Practitioners must understand the origins and context of each source • Practitioners must explain how the source is relevant to the question at hand <p style="text-align: right;">1.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical materials are concrete artifacts • Interrogation reveals truths <p style="text-align: right;">2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theory drives gathering and interrogation of historical material • Theory reveals reality <p style="text-align: right;">3.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical materials are traces • Traces are examined for their subjective, partial, fragmented and open-ended contents • Employs new theories – semiology, psychoanalysis, structuralism – to assist interpretation <p style="text-align: right;">4.</p>

Official Documents

The term official refers to the records of states, governments, corporations, and formally constituted organisations. Their records include legislation and by-laws, internal memoranda, correspondence sent to other organisations and individuals, statements of policy, reports and minutes of meetings. Evidence from official documents is widely used in all branches of history.

Table 3 sets out the epistemological assumptions of the three models as they apply to the analysis of official documents and archives, the principal sites housing official documents. Reconstructionists regard official documents as especially reliable material (box 1) and, subject to basic tests of verification and corroboration, they intuitively assume a direct correspondence between official documents and the past (e.g., Holt, 1989; Huggins, 2000; O'Hara, 1988; Struna, 1996). Likewise, constructionists have little difficulty accepting official documents as reliable historical materials although theories frame their gathering and the precise means of interrogation (box 2) (e.g., Maguire, 1995).

Deconstructionists are less concerned about the reliability and accuracy of official documents. They seek to understand their authority to define social problems (which in sport include the abuse, discrimination and marginalisation of women, gambling, violence and so forth). To this end, deconstructionists ask questions about the way representations of particular problems serve specific political interests; they are especially interested in the way certain voices are silenced and excluded (Ashforth, 1990; Philips, 1992; White, 2000).

These differences are most pronounced in the respective ways that reconstructionists and deconstructionists approach archives. Reconstructionists see archives as sites of knowledge; deconstructionists conceive them as sites of power.

Table 3. Epistemological Assumptions of Official Documents (and Archives)

Historical Material	Epistemological Assumptions		
	Reconstructionism	Constructionism	Deconstructionism
<i>Official Documents</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official documents yield knowledge about the past <p style="text-align: right;">1.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official documents contextualised within theory to reveal reality <p style="text-align: right;">2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official documents serve political interests <p style="text-align: right;">3.</p>
<i>Archives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Archives: sites for the retrieval of knowledge <p style="text-align: right;">4.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Archives: non-theorised <p style="text-align: right;">5.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Archives: sites for the production of knowledge <p style="text-align: right;">6.</p>

Reconstructionists studying sport have made extensive use of archives. Ron Smith (2001), for example, scoured some 50 university archives in researching his history of radio and television in college sport, and Tony Mangan (1981) visited the archives of leading English public schools for his history of the cult of athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Archives are indeed indispensable repositories of primary materials and evidence for historians but they are not simple 'stores of transparent sources' from which practitioners freely "recover total images" (Ballantyne, 2003, p. 102).² Historians of sport know only too well that governments and associations manipulate, conceal, hide and destroy information (e.g., Watterson, 2002). In the former East Germany, the Ministry for State Security classified all documents pertaining to the state's controlled hormonal doping of athletes program. Only select people could access the documents that included doctoral theses, scientific reports from research institutes and sports associations, and protocol books that gave the times and dosages of androgenic-anabolic steroids administered to more than 10,000 athletes over nearly four decades. When the East German regime collapsed in 1989, sports officials destroyed many compromising documents and other sensitive materials 'disappeared' from official libraries (Franke & Berendonk, 1997).

Yet, such examples have not dented reconstructionist confidence in the archive which remains a "beacon of light, a place...of and for sight", a site where the initiated cry out "once I was blind, but now I see" (Harris, 2002a, p. 75). Sports historians Robert Barney (1995), Ron Smith (2002) and Stephen Wenn (1995) actively promote this view. Reconstructionists privilege stories about the discovery of documents and evidence over those that relate to their disappearance and concealment. Werner Franke and Brigitte Berendonk (1997) describe their retrieval of files containing tens of thousands of pages documenting the German Democratic

Republic's secret hormonal doping program, recounting instances of documents surviving official purges and of Manfred Höppner, the deputy director and chief physician of East Germany's Sports Medical Service and doping system, selling incriminating documents to the weekly magazine *Stern* (see also Ungerleider, 2001).³ Such narratives engender a firm belief among reconstructionists that persistence leads to the truth. But this belief typically comes at the expense of ignoring the circumstances under which archives are assembled and materials excised and excluded.

It is precisely these issues that prompt deconstructionist scepticism in the archive. "We often forget", writes Achille Mbembe (2002, pp. 19-20),

that not all documents are destined to be archives. In any given cultural system, only some documents fulfil the criteria of 'archivability'. Archives are the product of a process which converts a certain number of documents into items judged to be worthy of preserving and keeping in a public place, where they can be consulted according to well-established procedures and regulations. The archive...is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others. (See also Burton, 2003)

Among deconstructionists, then, archives are "processes of preservation and exclusion" and places where states, corporations and organisations produce knowledge for their own interests as distinct from sites for the retrieval of knowledge (Hamilton, Harris & Reid, 2002, p. 9; Ballantyne, 2003; Harris, 2002b; Stoler, 2002).⁴

Deconstructionists, it needs stressing, do not advocate abandoning archival searches and they agree that questions about the trustworthiness, authenticity and reliability of documents remain pressing. But they urge a more cautious engagement with archived materials. As well as alerting historians to the ways in which archival documents change over time, the "turn to the social and political conditions that produced those documents has altered the sense of what trust and reliability might signal and politically entail" (Stoler, 2002, p. 85; Hamilton, Harris & Reid, 2002).⁵

Much deconstructionist analysis of archives is couched in terms of social memory and imagination. Verne Harris (2002a) defines the archive as a trilectic of remembering, forgetting and imagining. Just as 'every act of memory is also an act of forgetting' (Derrida, 2002, p. 54), so imagining "dances between remembering and forgetting" (Harris, 2002a, p. 75). The deconstructionist tenet that 'there is no remembering that cannot become forgetting', calls into question the saliency of the documents recovered by Franke and Berendonk (1997; Ungerleider, 2001) pertaining to East Germany's secret hormonal doping program. It is highly improbable that these documents will constitute an archival foundation for drug-free sport – a memory reminding future generations of the athletes such as George Sievers and Ralph Reichenbach who died from hormonal doping and a warning to aspiring sportspeople of the severe side-effects that include liver tumours, liver cancer, disrupted menstrual cycles, enlarged genitalia in young females and genitalia atrophy in boys, "irregular heart rhythms" and "hazardous imbalances of serum-cholesterol levels" (Ungerleider, 2001, p. 46). The signs of forgetting are everywhere. The International Olympic Committee, for example, studiously avoids advertising former president Juan Antonio Samaranch's close friendship with Manfred Ewald. As the secretary of state for sport in East Germany, Ewald was the ultimate

mastermind of the doping programme; at the same time as suspicions raged about East Germany's sporting miracles, Samaranch awarded Ewald an Olympic Order (Ungerleider, 2001).

Oral Testimony

The recording and analysis of oral accounts of the past is an invaluable and compelling research method. Jennifer Hargreaves' (2001, p. 1) interviews with marginalised women who struggled against "particularly harsh forms of discrimination" to partake in sport reveal the unique abilities of oral histories to question informants and evoke recollections and understandings of individuals and groups largely hidden from documentary sources. But reconstructionists initially opposed attempts to extract evidence from oral communication because they said it distorted and corrupted accounts of the past. Among the litany of problems they identified were the "orientations, biases and manipulations" of interviewees and interviewers and the peculiar relationships between them, lack of "clear chronological organization", "accretions over time [and] selective adaptations" and the "vagaries and deficiencies of memory" (Hamilton, 2002, p. 212; Burton, 2003; Vansina, 1985; White, 2000). Jules Tygiel (cited in Pope, 1996, pp. 69-70) identifies one such example of manipulation in Ken Burns's monumental documentary *Baseball*:

Buck O'Neil, Negro League veteran and former manager of the Kansas City Monarchs,...described an incident which took place when [Jackie] Robinson played for that team. The Negro League club pulled its bus into a Southern gas station, where they hoped to fill the tanks and purchase food. When the station owner refused to serve the individual players, Robinson allegedly announced that they would purchase their gas elsewhere, whereafter the owner, fearful of losing a sale, capitulated. 'We learned a valuable lesson from Robinson, O'Neal indicated.'⁶

According to Tygiel,

the gas station incident is a wonderful tale, repeated in many variations by former Monarchs to demonstrate Robinson's fiery temperament, his refusal to accept discrimination, and his awareness of the chinks in Jim Crow's armor. O'Neil's testimony assumes the authority of an eyewitness. Yet, O'Neil was in the Army in 1945 and he never played with or managed Robinson on the Monarchs. (cited in Pope, 1996, p. 70)

Despite these problems oral testimony gradually gained more acceptance among reconstructionists, especially among those working with illiterate groups for whom oral communication offers one of their few access points to the past.

Reconstructionists thus set out to make oral methodology as "rigorous and equal to any documentary historiography" (White, 2000, p. 39). Early guidebooks peppered oral practitioners with commonsense advice: prepare, adopt 'a neutral and objective presence', listen carefully, refrain from interrupting, allow for pauses and silences, ask open-ended questions, avoid jargon, probing and leading questions, minimise the presence of the tape recorder (see box 1, Table 4).

But the formalisation of commonsense advice quickly encountered problems. How, precisely, does an interviewer balance the need for a neutral presence with the recommendation that they establish good rapport with interviewees? Or, how

do interviewers reconcile open-ended questioning with opposing advice to control the “focus and flow of the interview?” (Thomson, 1998, pp. 581-2; De Hart, 1993; Thompson, 2000; Vansina, 1985). Nonetheless, reconstructionists convinced themselves that they had worked through these issues and declared their ability to unlock even the dimmest memory and to verify their facts (e.g., Haigh, 2001).

Table 4. Epistemological Assumptions of Oral Testimony (and Memory)

Historical Material	Epistemological Assumptions		
	Reconstructionism	Constructionism	Deconstructionism
<i>Oral Testimony</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral evidence produced through structured interviews • Detachment from subjects essential <p style="text-align: right;">1.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral testimony contextualised within theory to reveal reality <p style="text-align: right;">2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral evidence produced in negotiated dialogue • Involvement with informants a virtue <p style="text-align: right;">3.</p>
<i>Memory</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory variously an obstacle to, or a databank of, the past • Memory and forgetting: distinct conditions • Truth and falsity: absolute values <p style="text-align: right;">4.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory contextualised within theory to reveal reality <p style="text-align: right;">5.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory a creative construction produced in dialogue • Memory and forgetting: one and the same • Truth and falsity: obsolete concepts <p style="text-align: right;">6.</p>

While reconconstructionists seek to extract objective truths from oral sources, deconstructionists locate oral testimonies in “particular cultural practices” that have their own ‘social, psychological, and cultural biases, perceptions and codes’ (De Hart, 1993, p. 590 & p. 592). Deconstructionists are especially sensitive to the communication patterns, practices and contexts of those particular subcultures. And, whereas reconstructionists advise detachment between interviewers and interviewees, deconstructionists consider some degree of subjective involvement in the lives of informants a virtue (see box 3). It is especially helpful, says Jane De Hart (1993), in shaping the questions asked.

It is in the area of memory that the different tenets pertaining to oral testimony become most apparent in reconstructionism and deconstructionism (see boxes 4 & 6). Reconstructionists promote the idea that interviewees simply retrieve their memories in response to the right questions posed in the right circumstances. Deconstructionists refer to dialogues between interviewers and interviewees that involve considerably “more than the retrieval of memory” (De Hart, 1993, p. 590).

Among deconstructionists, memory is not a simple act of retrieving facts and information, it is a process of 'creative construction' that incorporates passion, humanity and trope (De Hart, 1993; Murphy, 1986, p. 165; Thomson, 1998).

Deconstructionists do not necessarily dismiss memory because of its apparent unreliability. Irrespective of whether Buck O'Neil was with Jackie Robinson during the incident at the Southern gas station in 1945, his account informs us of how African-Americans understand their collective situation. O'Neil's story points to the refusal of African-Americans to accept discrimination and their awareness of the pragmatic limitations of white power. Thus, among deconstructionists, the apparent reliability of memory is less important than "how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them" (Thomson, 1998, p. 586).

These issues figure prominently in Phil Vasili's (1998) biography of Arthur Wharton. In addition to being the first black professional soccer player in England, Wharton, whose football career spanned from 1885-1902, also held the first world record for the 100 yards from 1886-1923. But Wharton's name is omitted from key football texts of his era (e.g., the 1900 and 1901 editions of *Football Who's Who, Football and How to Play*, published in 1904, the *Book of Football* published in 1906) and subsequent histories (e.g., Maurice Golesworthy's *Encyclopaedia of Association Football* published in 1973). This leads Vasili to ask why the British public erased Wharton from its memory. Vasili answers this question by comparing the social contexts of Wharton's achievements with the African-American runner Jesse Owens who won four gold medals at the 1936 olympics in Berlin and who remains fixed in the American memory. (Associated Press named Owens its Athlete of the Half-Century in 1950 and in 1976 he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.)

According to Vasili, social memory has a political context and, just as olympic officials prefer to forget Samaranch's support for Ewald, so it was easier for the public in imperial Britain to forget the athletic achievements of an African whose sporting records contradicted prevailing ideas about white superiority and black inferiority. Owens' olympic successes, in contradistinction, "flowed with the prevailing current of international politics" (1998, p. 194). An economic and imperial power, Germany threatened the leading capitalist nations who sought to capitalise on what they recognised as Nazi vulnerability to "practical refutations" of its racist ideology (1998, p. 194). Owens' achievements on the track "publicly denied the nostrums of Nazism", embarrassed the Germans and "provided immense propaganda material to the opponents of fascism" (1998, p. 194). As Vasili concludes, Owens' medals "symbolise[d] not so much a victory for ethnic equality — for this could have dangerous repercussions in house and yard — but rather a defeat for a particular variety of racialism as constructed, implemented and propagandised by the Nazis" (1998, p. 195).

Vasili highlights the deconstructionist preference for understanding the broad context from which stories emerge rather than trying to establish the truth of every single story. Deconstructionists accept that informants will say 'different things at different times'. In one interview in 1962, Helen Liston described her heavyweight boxer son Charles ('Sonny') as a "good, obedient boy" who as a child "never gave me any trouble"; in another interview the following year she referred to Sonny as having been "a rough boy" who liked the "rough side of life" (Tosches, 2000, pp. 27-28). These different accounts are not necessarily due to confusion on Liston's part or a faulty memory but more likely emanate from her own complex and disrupted life and experiences. As Luise White explains, "people do not give testimony that fits

neatly into chronological or cosmological accounts...they talk about different things in personal terms; they talk about what happened to them and about what they did about it, but they also use themselves as a context in which to talk about other things as well" (2000, p. 39). The reconstructionist idea that a person "would not change [their] mind or words, serves historians not the speaker's own complicated interests" (2000, p. 40). In the case of the latter these will undoubtedly include taking into account those with whom they are talking.

Thus deconstructionists view oral testimonies as no different to other forms of evidence. They are equally relational and fragmented, bound by assumptions, embedded with intent, in need of interpretation and revealing of the limitations in representations of historical reality (De Hart, 1993; Hamilton, 2002; White, 2000). Rather than framing their thoughts around notions of truth as in "the most accurate kind of information", when people speak they construct stories "that carry the values and meanings that most forcibly get their points across" (White, 2000, p. 30). In this sense, oral evidence is "produced in contentious dialogue", that is, in a process of negotiation and renegotiation that renders absolute notions of truth and falsity obsolete. Hence, rather than embracing reconstructionist advice to avoid leading questions, deconstructionists propose "leading informants and arguing with them" (White, 2000, p. 32). Only by conducting interviews in such a manner will the historian learn what the informant believes is important enough to defend. The reconstructionist drive to distinguish between true and false stories is, in many instances, not only irrelevant but "eclipses all the intricate ways in which people use social truths to talk about the past" (White, 2000, p. 42; Burton, 2003).

Visual Evidence: Film and Photographs

Table 5 compares the different epistemological assumptions that underpin film and photographs as historical materials. Reconstructionism finds little of evidential quality in film (box 1). Among reconstructionists, production, and especially the unavoidable intrusion of the film-maker into the production process, relegates film firmly into the realm of fiction: "pictures are worth a thousand words", says Larry Gerlach, "but not if you want to explain history" (cited in Pope, 1996, p. 77). Reconstructionists acknowledge the power of film to connect viewers with events and people (box 1). Ken Burns's documentary *Baseball*, says Gerlach, "accomplished what legions of baseball historians have failed to do — impart to millions an appreciation for and understanding of baseball as the national pastime and the ways in which sport is an integral part of American history" (cited in Pope, 1996, p. 77). But ultimately reconstructionists find an incompatibility between the crafts of history and film-making. Gerlach maintains that the "vast majority of the visual inaccuracies" in Burns's *Baseball* are deliberate, the manifestations of poetic or artistic license (cited in Pope, 1996, p. 73).

Deconstructionists, by contrast, essentially see film, like history, as a genre of fiction (box 3). Deconstructionists are less concerned with factual veracity than with the lessons films teach. Dan Nathan (2000) captures the deconstructionist position in his comments on *The Hurricane*, a story of boxer Rubin Carter's 19-year wrongful imprisonment for a triple homicide. While noting the 'manipulative qualities' of the film, Nathan nonetheless concludes that it conveys important lessons about racism in America.

Here, however, my focus is on the way constructionists employ theory as the link between evidence and reality. This is represented in box 2 and further illustrated in an analysis of a surf video, *Runman 69*.⁷ Released in 1989, *Runman 69* primarily

shows non-professional surfers riding dangerous conditions at less well-known surf breaks in and around Los Angeles. *Runman 69* is one in a series that constitutes a genre of underground surf films. The images, signs and messages in this genre are radically different from those conveyed by mainstream surf-industry videos.

Table 5. Epistemological Assumptions of Photographs and Films

Historical Material	Epistemological Assumptions		
	Reconstructionism	Constructionism	Deconstructionism
<i>Films</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary films and historical practice generally incompatible • Films: powerful mediums for transporting viewers to events <p style="text-align: right;">1.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Films: contextualised within theory to reveal reality <p style="text-align: right;">2.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary films and historical practice both fictional creations <p style="text-align: right;">3.</p>
<i>Photos</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photographs: represent <i>prima facie</i> evidence • Reception resides in <i>non-theorised</i> context and circumstances of the image which limit alternative interpretations <p style="text-align: right;">4.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photographs: contextualised within theory to reveal reality • Reception resides in <i>theorised</i> context and circumstances of the image which limit alternative interpretations <p style="text-align: right;">5.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photographs: ambiguous texts passed through many mediating filters • New theories—semiology, structuralism, psycho-analysis—assist interpretation • Different interpretations are normal <p style="text-align: right;">6.</p>

Evidence of this difference emerges from comparative viewings with scores of surf videos and press releases heralding the videos. One press release accompanying *Runmental* promised a “below the radar assault on the unsuspecting...homogenized globally cloned surf species” (Runman, 2003, para.1). We probably cannot “resurrect the sold-out soul of surfing”, this particular press release continues, “but at the very least we will fucking molten lava roast it”. Further evidence of *Runman* as a different genre comes from the reaction of mainstream surf culture. Where magazines did publish reviews, comments were typically brief and condemnatory. *Surfer Magazine* said of *Runman 69*: “There’s enough mean, debauched and evil stuff in [the video] to make [us] a little leery about giving it a good review” (Runman, no date, para. 3). *The Surfer’s Journal* likened *Runmental* to “a clown at a rodeo, a bad joke at a wedding, or

a loud fart at a funeral”: “This is the Anti-surf flick”, the review concluded (Runman, no date b, para. 3).

But if *Runman 69* is part of a different genre, how, precisely, does it differ? Cultural insiders will immediately recognise three key differences. Firstly, *Runman 69* celebrates the counterculture soul-surfing riding style of the 1970s, a style characterised by the appearance of effortless on the wave. Secondly, the video scorns the new hyperkinetic style that accompanied the codification of professional surfing in which riders try to fit as many manoeuvres as possible into a single wave. The third difference emerges in the way the surfers in *Runman 69* distribute prestige, what William Goode (1978) calls a prime force in human society and what Alain de Botton (2004, p. 3) labels “one of the finest earthly goods”.

Most explanations of how individuals earn prestige conceptualise the concept within a rational, utilitarian framework where prestige is a reward that is accumulated for the purposes of reproducing and conserving human life (Bataille, 1932). But as Georges Bataille (1932) reminds us, utilitarian frameworks conceal and distort a fundamental reality. Prestige, he says, is often conferred not by acts of accumulation but through “unproductive expenditures: luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, [and] perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality) – activities which...have no end beyond themselves” (1932, p. 118). Bataille argues that rather than being part of an economy of accumulation, prestige is actually part of an economy of loss where the yardstick is not how much one accumulates, but how much one is prepared to lose. The surfers in *Runman 69* illustrate Bataille’s economy of loss in their willingness to incur serious injury in their quest for prestige.

Arguably such forms of ‘expenditure’ operate in all sports. However, mainstream sports manage this expenditure and co-opt it into schemes of utility. For example, untempered excesses and pleasures – violence, gambling, abuse of women – that are obvious in body-contact sports like football, boxing and ice-hockey are typically concealed behind official rules, referees, elaborate scoring systems and, of course, media and educational institutions that discursively recover social utility in sport. The media and educational institutions simultaneously blast all excesses and insist that sports teach leadership and discipline that participants carry over into competitive, accumulation-based careers (e.g., Ryan, 2004). Far from playing this game the producers of *Runman 69* encourage followers to “take a crap in someone’s pool” and “ask your boss if you can take his 13-year-old-daughter away for the weekend” (Runman, 2003). In this context it is hardly surprising that the video received poor reviews.

Thus constructionists, like reconstructionists, interpret films within the prevailing cultural and political contexts, within the circumstances in which the film was produced or commissioned, and within the context of its physical location. However, constructionists also theorise different elements (e.g., the distribution of prestige in *Runman 69*). Such theorising frames constructionist interpretations and their views of reality; among constructionists, alternative interpretations derive from misunderstandings, poor contextualisation or, most probably, inappropriate theorisation (e.g., utilitarian concepts of prestige).

Deconstructionists, by contrast, argue that different interpretations are normal (Burke, 2001). This latter point emerges in the following examination of photographs as historical material. Yet, as we shall see, despite their embrace of different interpretations, deconstructionists also tend to frame these differences within theory.

Boxes 4, 5 and 6 of Table 5 sum up the respective epistemological assumptions of reconstructionist, constructionist and deconstructionist approaches to

photographs as historical material. As per box 4, conservative reconstructionists hold photographs as *prima facie* evidence. Reconstructionists argue that a photograph is 'a direct and true rendering of reality as it existed at the moment the camera shutter operated'. Reconstructionists define photographs as "timeless document[s] that, after minimum identification, need no further context, social background or ideological framework to be understood and creatively redeployed" (Hayes, Silvester & Hartmann, 2002, p. 118; Burke, 2001; Ritchie, 2003; Whimpress, 2003). Indeed in most monographs, photographs appear as visual facts.

Ironically, the ease with which photographs translate visual interpretations of cultural patterns, social behaviours and incidents into concrete facts means that they actually require more careful corroboration and contextualisation (Hayes, Silvester & Hartmann, 2002). Cheryl Cole (2000) offers an example with two photographs of olympic 100 meters champion Ewa Klobukowska. The first, from *Time* magazine, shows a masculine-looking Klobukowska crossing a finishing line. Publication of the photograph coincided with news that Klobukowska had just failed a sex test at a European Cup event in 1967 and *Time* "quite clearly" wanted to cast doubt on her gender (Cole, 2000, p. 130). The second photograph appeared 20 years later in an article by Alison Turnbull published in *New Scientist*. Turnbull painted Klobukowska as a victim of sex testing; the photograph shows the athlete in a victory pose that accentuates her femininity.

Corroboration and contextualisation are often implicitly, and occasionally explicitly, theoretical. Cole's analysis, for example, fits firmly within a feminist framework and a theoretical perspective that views gender as socially constructed (box 5).

As mentioned above and shown in box 6, deconstructionists are highly sensitive to the ways that different individuals or groups view or receive the same images. In this sense, deconstructionists see photographs as "ambiguous texts rather than accurate records of 'the truth'" (Bale, 1998, pp. 235-236). Deconstructionists talk about photographs passing through mediating filters. These filters include the subjectivity of the photographer, protocols accompanying occasions at which photographs are shot, how different subjects present themselves to cameras, variations in the technical means of producing prints, the public or private circuits into which photographs are inserted, and the ultimate fates of photographs – framed family portrait, book illustration, file in an archive (box 6) (Hayes, Silvester & Hartmann, 2002).

John Bale (1998) highlights this aspect of deconstructionism in his brilliant analysis of photographic depictions of high jumping among Rwandan Tutsi in the early twentieth century. Among the photographs that Bale deconstructed is one showing the Duke of Mecklenburg and his adjunct standing between two high jump uprights with a Tutsi jumper passing over their heads to clear, according to the Duke, a height of 2.50 metres. The "preferred meaning" of the photographer, says Bale, is unknown and the actual image can be read in a number of ways: as "a means of authenticating the expedition" (i.e., to demonstrate to the reader that the writer was actually there), as a "personal memento of the African visit", or as a record of Tutsi achievement in a western sport.

Bale reads the photograph to connote European power. At first glance Bale's interpretation seems skewed: the Tutsi jumper – the apparent subject – sails smoothly over the heads of the "overdressed Duke...and his militarily uniformed adjunct", and the low position of the camera outlines the athlete "against the sky" thus "heightening the dramatic effects of the jump". Yet, as Bale observes, the high jumper does not assume an unequivocal "visual primacy" over the two Germans. On

the contrary, “the Europeans command the center even if they are not the subject of the photograph” and their centrality combined with “upright posture and military uniform” symbolise “power and control – the condition of European hegemony over Africa” (Bale, 1998, pp. 237-244).

Bale’s deconstruction is a perfect example of an innovative and creative use of historical material. While the Mecklenburg photograph yields scant evidence of Tutsi high jumping per se, it offers precious testimony into a cultural encounter between colonisers and colonised. Of course, such ingenuity requires that historians learn more advanced techniques for reading images than the commonsensical methods of interrogation and corroboration advocated by reconstructionists. Many of these techniques immerse historians in theory – in Bale’s case semiology, structuralism and psychoanalysis (e.g., box 6).

While theory is the staple of constructionism it is also integral to deconstructionist interpretation. Herein lies a key point of this article. While deconstructionists stress that the producers can neither fix the meanings of their materials that may become historical fragments nor determine their reception among subsequent generations, this does not mean that any interpretation is as good as another. Theory separates strong interpretation from weak interpretation in deconstructionism.

CONCLUSION

History is increasingly moving away from the craft of recovering facts towards the practice of interpreting remnants from the past. As this article has demonstrated, the act of interpretation demands careful reasoning that incorporates sophisticated contextualisation and theorisation. Notwithstanding the problems associated with defining and operationalising contextualisation (e.g., Berkhofer, 1995; Walsh, 1974; White, 1973), it has clearly been integral to interpreting each of the historical fragments examined in this article. No interpretation of the protocol books listing the times and dosages of androgenic-anabolic steroids administered to East German athletes would be complete without the context of that state’s place in twentieth century Europe and the deep wounds of the Second World War; no interpretation of Jack O’Neil’s testimony would be complete without the context of racial segregation in America; no interpretation of *Runman 69* would be complete without the context of the anti-competition, utopian counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s; and no interpretation of the photograph depicting the Tutsi jumping over the Duke of Mecklenburg would be complete without the context of colonialism. And, notwithstanding the problems associated with defining and operationalising theory (e.g., Denzin, 1989; Stinchcombe, 1978), no interpretation of *Runman 69* or the Mecklenburg photograph would be complete without a theory of prestige and semiology respectively.

Reflecting on the interpretation of historical materials also reveals a fundamental shift in the objectives of history away from the recovery of the past for the past’s sake to an approach in which historical practitioners are much more attuned to the complex relationships between the present and the past. Once the dominant approach, the recovery of facts to write seamless descriptive narratives such as *The Sporting Scots of Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Redmond, 1982) or *Aussie Gold: The Story of Australia at the Olympics* (Howell & Howell, 1988) is rapidly receding into the background. In its place are histories that are less concerned with facts and details and more interested in the ways that people and events are “represented and remembered” and what those representations and memories “say

about [sporting] culture and the process of making meaning" (Nathan, 2003, p. 220; see also Bale & Cronin, 2003; Bloom, 2000; McGimpsey, 2000; Oriard, 1995, 2001; Phillips, 2004). Not only are these issues typically more substantial but they also reinforce the present-centred nature of history, that is, rather than fixing the past as absolute, historians continually re-examine the past in response to contemporary issues and concerns. Herein lies the real relevance of history as a means of understanding how people make sense of themselves and their worlds.

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NOTES

1. These categories do not encapsulate the sum total of historical sources; they simply represent a sample of the more common types of materials upon which sport historians draw. The categories derive from Marwick (1981, 2001). Moreover, historians rarely rely on just one type of material for evidence which, rather than answering or clarifying historical questions, typically raises fresh issues. In other words, historians generally believe that the vaster the array of primary material, the more dependable the historical knowledge (White, 2000; Malcolmson, 1973).
2. The status of the archive in contemporary history is the subject of intense debate. Critics argue that in their original constructions they excluded the voices of subordinate groups and classes. Even today primary sources housed within recognised repositories will draw less attention than those outside (Burton, 2003).
3. A promising teenage athlete in East Germany, Berendonk defected to West Germany in 1958. She represented West Germany at the 1972 olympics and later married Franke, a molecular-biologist. In 2000, German courts convicted Höppner and Manfred Ewald (discussed later) of intentionally harming athletes.
4. As well as being sites of excision, archives are also sites of excess in the sense that they can allow for unlimited and imaginative readings (Nuttall, 2002).
5. Jacques Derrida (1996) has been particularly influential in shaping historical analysis of the archive. Harris (2002a, p. 65) provides a useful summary of Derrida's principal assertions: "1) the event, the origin, the *arkhé*, in its uniqueness, is irrecoverable, unfindable. The possibility of the archiving trace, this simple *possibility*, can only divide the uniqueness; 2) The archiving trace, the archive, is not simply a recording, a reflection, an image of the event. It shapes the event. "The archivization produces as much as it records the event"; 3) The object does not speak for itself. In interrogating and interpreting the object, the archive, scholars inscribe their own interpretation into it. The interpretation has no meta-textual authority. There is no meta-archive. There is no closing of the archive. "It opens out of the future"; 4) Scholars are not, can never be, exterior to their objects. They are marked before they interrogate the markings, and this pre-impression shapes their interrogation". Interestingly, Derrida (1996) provides little actual analysis of the archive as a repository of

information; his work is more about psychoanalysis and the political and social misuses of power (Steedman, 2001).

6. See Ward and Burns (1994) for a transcript of the interview.
7. This section draws on Booth and Fisher (2004) and Fisher (2004).

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