The proliferation of Olympic meanings: interpretation of Olympic texts

Tracy Ann Delphia

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Tracy Ann Delphia entitled “The proliferation of Olympic meanings: interpretation of Olympic texts.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

William J. Morgan, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Joan Paul, Joy DeSensi, Christine Holmlund

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
To the Graduate Council:

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William J. Morgan, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Jay W. DeLancey

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Associate Vice Chancellor and Dean of The Graduate School
THE PROLIFERATION OF OLYMPIC MEANINGS:
INTERPRETATION OF OLYMPIC TEXTS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Tracy A. Delphia
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There are many elements of the doctoral program that must be undertaken alone. But success, certainly my success, is built upon a foundation of support and encouragement from professors, family, and friends. I was fortunate to have the support of so many fine faculty members at the University of Tennessee who were willing to give generously of their time and expertise. Dr. Bill Morgan agreed to serve as my major professor and without his fine scholarship and guidance, I do not believe I could have completed this dissertation. Drs. Joan Paul and Joy DeSensi have been supportive of my academic progress since my arrival in Knoxville and their feedback and insights during the preparation of the dissertation were invaluable. Dr. Christine Holmlund’s expertise and graciously expressed critiques in the area of communication studies considerably strengthened several section of this study.

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Perhaps most importantly, because they have been there from the beginning and will always be there to lend their encouragement, are the members of my family. I may never fully understand all my motivations for pursuing this new career, but I do know that I would not have had the strength to finish without the underlying foundation of support and love they provided.
ABSTRACT

This study uses textual analysis to suggest new ways to approach Olympic interpretations. An oft-heard lament is that the Olympics today are beset by problems which endanger their future; for example, professionalism, commercialism, and politicization. Despite these concerns, worldwide television viewership is greater than three billion persons, a testimonial to the continued popularity of the Games. A difficulty for Olympic scholars is how to reconcile this popularity with increasing concern for the ability of the Olympics to impact lives positively.

The role of authors, readers (including audience, spectator, viewer, and fan), genre, information theory, and intertextuality are examined to explore how Olympic meanings are produced. Following an introductory chapter, Chapter II explores the role of the author, and in the case of the Olympics, the role of Pierre de Coubertin, generally recognized as the founder of the modern Olympics. I draw on the work of Michel Foucault to explore Coubertin's continuing influence on the Games, suggesting that he functions as an unmarked author, in the sense of Foucault's founding authors.

Chapter III considers the positions of spectator, viewer, and fan, and the role of the audience in generating Olympic interpretations. Evidence from an internet newsgroup--rec.sport.olympics--is used to suggest that fans of the Olympics are active participants in the production of meaning. They often resist pre-packaged meanings that broadcasters or advertisers seek to foist upon the Games.
The role of genre, and particularly John MacAloon's highly regarded typology of genres for the Olympics Games, is examined in Chapter IV. I suggest that MacAloon's genres of game, ritual, festival, and spectacle are useful in considerations of Olympic interpretations—from particular perspectives. In other words, different interpretive communities may utilize different genres to help shape interpretation. I argue against the possibility for a universal genre structure for the Olympics.

Umberto Eco's adaptation of information theory is the focus of Chapter V. The balance between meaning and information, which interact in inverse proportion to each other, helps explain how textual interpretations can proliferate, yet still be deficient in meaningful meaning. I use the examples of professionalism and commercialism to suggest that we are being saturated with Olympic texts which renders us insensitive to the unique impact that they might have on our lives.

Intertextuality is the focus of Chapter VI and I utilize John Fiske's suggestion that intertextuality functions along horizontal and vertical axes to further the discussion of how Olympic meanings proliferate. Acceptance of an intertextual approach to the process of interpretation means recognizing that neither readers nor texts control the process of interpretation, but that interpretation takes place in the shifting intersections between them.

Olympic texts, I conclude, are endangered (at least in the United States) not because their popularity is fading, but because they have become so popular that Olympic texts saturate our culture. The meanings of Olympic texts are
rapidly being reduced to the mundane as advertisers and sponsors (whom I hold as the major culprits) co-opt Olympic texts for economic purposes.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. PIERRE DE COUBERTIN: THE ROLE OF THE AUTHOR IN OLYMPIC INTERPRETATIONS</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Evolution of the Author in Literary Criticism</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Criticism</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roland Barthes and &quot;The Death of the Author&quot;</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foucault Returns the Author to the Text</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre de Coubertin: Author of the Modern Olympics</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to the New Critics: Yes, the Olympic Text Does Have an Author</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responding to Roland Barthes: Ridding Olympic Interpretations of Author-Gods</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitching an Interpretive Ride with Foucault: Authors do Contribute to Meaning</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. SPECTATORS, TELEVISION VIEWERS, AND OTHER READERS OF OLYMPIC TEXTS</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Concept of the Reader in Literary Criticism</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader-Response Criticism</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley Fish: From Affective Stylistics to Interpretive Communities</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfgang Iser: The Importance of Gaps in Textual Interpretation</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience, Viewers, Spectators and Fans</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Audience</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectators, Viewers, and Fans</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectators, Viewers, and Fans of Olympic Texts</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telling It Like It Is: What Fans Thought of the Nagano Opening Ceremonies</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CATEGORIZING OLYMPIC TEXTS: THE ROLE OF GENRE IN OLYMPIC INTERPRETATIONS</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A 2,000 Year History: Genre Theory in Literary Criticism</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications and Genre: Cinema and Film</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Olympics and Genre.</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. OLYMPIC TEXTS AND THE PROLIFERATION OF MEANING.</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction.</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umberto Eco and Interpretation.</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Versus Closed Texts</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Awful Din of Olympic Texts.</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scope of Olympic Texts.</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Limits to Interpretation: Saturation and Keeping</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Texts Open</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialism.</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. OLYMPIC TEXT INTERPRETATION: INTERTEXTUALITY</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction.</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships Among Texts: Intertextuality.</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextuality versus Contextuality</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical and Horizontal Intertextuality</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Texts, Intertextuality, and the Author.</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Texts, Intertextuality, and Readers</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Texts, Intertextuality, and Genre</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES CITED</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

Introduction

On June 26, 1996, I joined an excited crowd along the route of the Olympic torch relay leading into Knoxville, Tennessee. Spirits were high and I was there to see an acquaintance carry the torch. I remember not only the joyous look on his face as he set off for his leg of the relay, but the excited cheers of the onlookers. A friend and I rushed to our car and raced to the park in Knoxville where the torch would soon arrive for a city-wide celebration. Thousands were in attendance and while waiting for the torch bearer to appear, I spoke with strangers about our mutual excitement at sharing this experience.

A collective cheer arose from the crowd when the torch arrived and the cauldron was lit. Then, a member of the Atlanta Organizing Committee spoke, delivering a rather well-rehearsed and somewhat stilted speech about the meaning of the Olympics and world peace. His speech was followed with a presentation by a representative from the Knoxville mayor's office that was heavily weighted with nationalistic and religious cliches. It was clear that the mood of the audience was broken by the overtly politicized messages imparted by the speakers. We did not need to be told the meaning of the torch; we each interpreted the torch in our own ways. Common threads of awe or reverence, hope for some kind of unity among the people of the world and our corner of it--these are poor descriptions for the joy that permeated the crowd--and the spell was shattered when the speakers attempted to provide a pre-packaged interpretation for us.
The modern Olympics that we celebrate today were begun on a continuing basis in the late 19th century. However, the nineteenth century Olympic metanarrative of international peace and understanding promoted through the medium of sport and sportsmanship is presently endangered. They have been co-opted for interpretation by, among others, politicians, industry, and mass media. Writers and commentators, noting the loss or diffusion of original meaning, have predicted the demise of the Olympics in the twenty-first century.

The Olympics have the potential to further understanding between peoples, but they must be open to local, folk interpretations, rather than to imposed interpretations; for example, commercializing the Games to meet a company's economic goals. This requires a greater understanding of what the Olympics can mean and what they do mean—and how it is that those meanings are created. In writing of the Olympics, Margaret Carlisle Duncan suggests that no interpretation forecloses the value of other interpretations.¹ In fact, it is through a study of several diverse interpretations that we can gain broader understandings of the Olympics and other texts.

The purpose of this study then, is to offer one interpretation of how Olympic meanings are produced using textual analysis. We usually think of 'texts' as printed materials—books, to be precise. But the concept of text has been expanded by social critics to include any cultural production that is given meaning by audiences (or spectators, viewers, or readers). Texts are thus the

sites at which meaning is negotiated by readers. To discuss the Olympics as a collection of texts is to explore the process of interpretation from a particular vantage point; one that recognizes that 'the Olympics' are not one text, but a collection of related texts. The strongest theoretical debt for the expansion of textual analysis beyond literary criticism is owed to semioticians who have employed the text analogy as a productive method for applying some of the rigor of literary textual analysis to other aspects of popular culture, such as the Olympics. When cultural critics write about these social texts they use language and concepts from literary criticism and communication studies so that terms such as 'author' and reader,' which we intuitively apply to the act of reading a book, have more expansive interpretive possibilities.

Traditional strategies of textual interpretation focus on the author or the reader as the source of meaning. Genre is a third site, more commonly considered by scholars of mass communications. While each of these strategies is capable of providing insights into how textual meaning is produced, they are all limited by their focus upon one site as the sole source of meaning. The Olympics are a social text that continues to evolve and I believe strategies of textual analysis that consider the more historicized, contingent nature of the Olympics will more accurately reveal the complex nature of the production of meaning in the Games. Toward that end, I will evaluate the merits of Umberto Eco's notion of open texts and his use of information theory which, when applied to Olympic texts, suggests that the possibilities for meaningful Olympic interpretations are compromised when the media and advertisers (among others)
contribute to a state of Olympic saturation. The concept of intertextuality, which describes the relationships among texts and readers, is employed to suggest the dynamic ways in which texts and readers interact to form a constantly shifting matrix that shapes interpretation.

The complexity of Olympic texts—and the treatment of social texts in general—confound efforts to fix precisely textual boundaries. Olympic texts include the sport contests themselves, broadcasts of the contests and festivities, movies and videotapes that mention the Olympics, academic research on the Olympics, magazine articles, television interviews, and advertising that targets the Olympics. In my analysis, I will draw on examples from two recent Olympic celebrations—the 1996 Summer Games in Atlanta and the 1998 Winter Games in Nagano, Japan, focusing on television and internet texts.

The Olympics were first broadcast in 1936, but on an extremely limited basis. Athletes in the Olympic Village had a room in which to view the broadcasts, and there were a few locations scattered around Berlin where citizens could watch the telecasts. Widescale broadcasts began in the 1960s with the advent of satellite technology. Today, worldwide audiences in the billions watch the Olympics on television. Because television is the medium through which most people experience the Olympics, I have chosen to focus much of my discussion on the role that television viewing and television broadcasts play in the interpretive process.

The explosion of the internet in the last ten years offers yet another medium through which the Olympics can be experienced. I will utilize examples
from one internet discussion group devoted to the Olympics to consider the interpretations that readers (and more specifically, television viewers) make of Olympics broadcasts and how their interpretations often challenge the meanings that advertisers or broadcasters attempt to impose.

When textual meaning is determined by the author of the text, the critic must consider the author's intentions and all subsequent critiques must chime with meanings that the author wished to convey. In the case of the Olympics, scholars generally treat Pierre de Coubertin as the author and his intentions are often given great weight in considering whether meanings generated today are valid or not. Because the Olympics are historical texts that continue to grow and change, it would be a mistake to regard Coubertin as their sole author. Athletes, officials, media personnel, International Olympic Committee (IOC) presidents, organizing committees, sports federations, citizens of host cities, terrorists: all contribute to the on-going production of Olympic texts and, therefore, can be considered to play an authorial role. When the concept of 'author' becomes this diffuse it no longer has the critical power to account adequately for the variability in the production of meanings. I will argue, however, that Coubertin's presence as an unmarked author--one whose name is often unknown--mirrors Michel Foucault's notion of the founding author. This means that current interpretations are often measured against Coubertinian ideals, and in this sense Pierre de Coubertin's ideological stamp continues to guide Olympic interpretations.

Readers--variously referred to as spectators, viewers, or readers--are consumers of texts. There are roughly two main critical approaches in
considering the relationship between readers and texts. One suggests that the source of meaning is in the text, which is then passively 'consumed' by the reader. The other says that meanings are produced by readers during their interactions with texts. Both of these approaches assume that 'readers' and 'texts' are clearly distinguishable from each other.

I will explore the reader-response tradition of literary criticism first, introducing the concepts of Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser. Fish suggests that interpretation is guided by values held in common by interpretive communities. Iser suggests that different interpretations result when readers discover 'gaps' in texts. Reader-response theory emphasizes that readers take active roles in interpretation instead of 'consuming' prepackaged interpretations.

I will consider concepts developed by researchers in film and television studies because they are more applicable to Olympic textual interpretation. This shift implicates other kinds of textual 'readers,' namely, spectators, viewers, and fans. In this regard, I will rely on Judith Mayne's work in cinema studies to account for spectators and John Fiske's work in television studies to analyze the reading strategies of viewers. Henry Jenkins's study of fans--viewers who actively engage with texts and appropriate them for the generation of other texts will be used to examine electronic texts. I will also consider the responses of posters to the newsgroup rec.sport.olympics and their engagement with the televised broadcast of the opening ceremonies for the Nagano Winter Olympics. The internet appears to be a resource largely untapped by the sport studies
community, and the information found there can provide valuable takes on readers’ interpretations of the Olympics.

Genres are categories into which texts are grouped. John MacAlloon has suggested that the Olympics are actually a compilation of four 'nested' genres, what he calls a "ramified performance" type. Each increasingly complex genre is superimposed over the previous. MacAlloon begins with the genre of game, and proceeds through ritual, festival, and spectacle. While MacAlloon’s explanation accounts for much of the complexity of meaning production in the Olympic text, he nevertheless privileges the interpretations of particular agents, notably athletes and live spectators. I will suggest that meaningful interpretations are possible outside the confines of event venues or the city limits of the host city and that MacAlloon’s version of genre analysis, widely accepted by sports scholars, too narrowly limits the range of meanings considered acceptable.

I will employ some of the concepts of Umberto Eco to ussgtest that the proliferation of meanings dilutes the impact of the Olympic text and the possibilities for meaningful meanings. Eco suggests two areas of textual analysis that are productive avenues for exploring how Olympic meanings are multiplying. First, Eco suggests that texts can be either 'open' or 'closed.' According to Eco, open texts allow for a variety of possible 'correct' interpretations, whereas closed texts allow for only one correct interpretation. Moreover, readers of open texts are active participants in the construction of meaning, but in closed texts, readers just 'consume' the proffered interpretation.
Information theory assesses differences between 'meaning' and 'information' and argues that the two operate in inverse proportion to one another. The capacity of a message to convey information is contingent on openness in the sense of possibilities for multiple, open-ended interpretations. But this information will not mean anything unless there is some structure to it, some limitations to all the possible avenues we might pursue in generating information. I use the examples of professionalism in the Olympics and advertisers' appropriation of Olympic texts (commercialism) to suggest that some Olympic texts are being overcome by mere information, rather than lending themselves to meaningful interpretation.

The concept of intertextuality (under the name "transposition") was first suggested by Julia Kristeva. The name "transposition" was suggested by Kristeva to convey the notion of signs being transposed from one text to another. In this scheme, intertextuality describes the linkages between texts; intertextual references that allow the reader of one text to experience meanings that might be shared by different texts.

Tony Bennett takes Kristeva's version of intertextuality to task arguing that her theory still holds the text 'itself' to be an unchanging cultural artifact subject to a reader's interpretive activities. By contrast, Bennett's version takes into consideration the shifting nature of texts and readers. The effect of intertextuality is to remove agency from both texts and readers. In order to excavate a meaning, then, it is not possible to look to either the text or reader. Instead, the creation of meaning occurs at the intersections among readers and texts.
I will employ John Fiske’s argument that intertextuality functions along two axes: horizontal and vertical. Primary texts, such as Olympic sports events or other activities at the venue, interact together along what Fiske describes as the horizontal axis. These interactions are complemented by the engagement of primary texts with secondary texts (such as television broadcasts and newspaper reports) and tertiary texts (texts authored by various readers, such as the newsgroup posters, in response to secondary texts). These other interactions take place along what Fiske calls the vertical axis of intertextuality. The proliferation of Olympic meanings can be seen to function along both these axes.

As it becomes more apparent that the Olympic texts are being interpreted in ways not always advocated by the International Olympic Committee, some scholars have suggested that the goal of the Olympic family (IOC members, national Olympic committees, sport federations, sponsors) should be to ‘recapture’ past Olympic meanings, to restore the Olympics to their past--untainted by politicization, commercialism, or professionalism. This past is a myth, of course, and so cannot be reclaimed because it never existed in the first place. Advertisers and broadcasters tap into the mythic stories that surround the Olympics to enhance the images of products. In order for the Olympics to continue as a worthwhile part of people’s lives, therefore, the Games must be open to meaningful interpretation; that is, interpretations that enhance and enrich lived lives. The International Olympic Committee can slow the trivialization of meaning by reconsidering how sponsorship and broadcast contracts are
constructed. In other words, the IOC can attempt to stem the extent to which secondary and tertiary texts are trivialized.

There is a paradox in the attention being paid to how Olympic texts are being interpreted, and the proliferation of those interpretations. Individuals concerned about the Olympics note a general loss of meaning and yet, worldwide, interest in the Olympics continues to grow as evidenced by increasing television viewership. One explanation offered for this conundrum is that increased viewership does not mean that the Olympics are being interpreted meaningfully. Rather, they are being consumed 'passively' by readers who accepted the commercialized versions portrayed by the media. My study suggests that this is not the case. Evidence from tertiary texts like rec.sport.olympics supports an alternative idea: readers, viewers, and spectators of the Olympics are aware that Olympic texts are being trivialized by, for example, commercialism and professionalism. Scholars concerned about the future of the Olympics should look first to tertiary texts before sounding a death knell for the Games in the twenty-first century. It is only through a fuller understanding of the actual interpretations in circulation among interpretive communities that we can begin to envision ways in which to ensure a future for the Olympics.
CHAPTER II

Pierre de Coubertin: The Role of the Author in Olympic Interpretations

Introduction

Pierre de Coubertin is often—in both popular and academic fora—accepted without question as the founder of the modern Olympics. The generally unreflective acknowledgement of Coubertin's status as "founder" tends to conceal the role of others’ efforts in resuscitating the Olympic Games of 1896, just as the designation "modern Olympics," applied to the series of festivals begun in 1896 obscures earlier modern-era Olympic-style celebrations. John MacAlloon's impeccably researched biography of Coubertin—This Great Symbol—proves to be something of a contradiction in this regard. MacAlloon carefully outlines the various events and people who influenced Coubertin so that even a casual reader of the book clearly understands that Coubertin's version of the Olympics was not an original creation, but rather a cobbling together of ideas borrowed from others. Yet, even though the reader is assured by MacAlloon that Coubertin was not responsible for "dreaming up the idea of the revived Olympic Games, but for being the one to make the dream reality," the very existence of a whole book devoted to the life and influences of Coubertin reinforces, at least for some people, a perception of him as the founder of the Games.

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2 MacAlloon, This Great Symbol, 153.
In textual terms, Coubertin's role as founder of the Olympic Games corresponds to that of an 'author' of a literary text. Therefore, a consideration of the Olympics as a social text suggests that an examination of the author--Coubertin--is important to determine his role in generating Olympic meanings.

The intentions of the author--what the author meant when he created his text--comprise one means for traditionally interpreting texts. Coubertin's intentions for the Olympics are often given great weight, particularly by sport scholars, in discussions about Olympic meanings. How much authority to assign Coubertin in determining the meaning of the Olympics is an issue discussed in this section.

In this chapter I will first give a broad overview of how the author is defined and treated in literary criticism. Then, I will discuss how and why Coubertin should be considered the author of the Olympic social text, primarily utilizing criteria set forth by Michel Foucault in his response to Roland Barthes' claim for "The Death of the Author." I will also explore the implications of accepting Coubertin as author and suggest that to do so uncritically imposes a needless limitation on the interpretive potential of the Olympic text.

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3 Unless stated otherwise, 'modern Olympic Games' will, as a statement of convention, refer to the Games begun in 1896.

The Evolution of the Author in Literary Criticism

It is not my intention to provide a detailed analysis of literary critics' treatment of the author. Rather, I will touch on several threads of this on-going discussion in literary circles that are relevant to an analysis of the Olympics as a social text. Therefore, I will first consider the author's role from the perspective of the New Critics who were responsible for severing the connection between text and context (including the author). Next, I will examine Roland Barthes' early semiological/structuralist viewpoint which challenged not just the role, but the existence of the author, followed by Michel Foucault's post-structuralist/New Historicist response which reassigned the author a role in textual interpretation.

New Criticism

The critical tradition now known as 'New Criticism' began to enjoy widespread popularity in the 1920s and peaked in the '30s and '40s. Although the dominance that this critical tradition held was challenged by other critical approaches in the 1950s and 1960s, and New Criticism's popularity has continued to wane, there are vestigial traces left of it which continue to influence textual criticism today.

New Criticism emphasized "the intrinsic qualities of a work over the biographical and historical context." The author, and his (occasionally her) role

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influences or intentions were not to be taken into account. In fact, the general historical context which may have influenced either the author, or a reader of the text, was said to be unimportant. For the New Critics, the text was everything.

The meaning of a poem or literary work for the New Critics was to be discovered through the activity of close reading in which "the complex interrelations and ambiguities of the form and content of the work are subtly analyzed." Close reading, properly executed and attentive to the internal form and content of a poem or literary work was considered an objective activity. Because meaning was but a product of the structure of a poem or work, two equally qualified literary critics should be able to explicate similarly the same meaning of a text. In reality, this process of 'discovery' took place most often in classrooms under the careful tutelage of a professor who taught the 'correct' meaning of a particular work of literature. As these "second and third generation" students of New Criticism entered their own teaching careers, their unwavering adherence to the objective tenets of New Criticism reduced "the movement to a carefully refined dogmatic method." In fact, close reading, which was innovative when introduced by New Critics, has become a "naturalized" technique still important to the general process of criticism today. This process

7Childers and Hentzi, The Columbia Dictionary, 206.
8Leitch, American Literary Criticism, 31.
9Leitch, American Literary Criticism, 25.
of close reading, then, keeps the focus on the text itself without resorting to a consideration of extrinsic factors; the author being one such extrinsic factor.

The position of the author—as extrinsic to textual meaning and the real work of criticism—was formalized by Wimsatt and Beardsley in their essay "The Intentional Fallacy." Wimsatt and Beardsley suggest that some critics have confused the poem itself with its origins. When critical attention is focused on the author rather than the text, the result is biography and a brand of criticism tainted by relativism. The point for Wimsatt and Beardsley is that the "judgment of poems is different from the art of producing them" and the task for literary critics is to realize that "there is criticism of poetry and there is author psychology." That author is not, however, extinguished by Wimsatt and Beardsley, even though New Critics deem the role of the author unimportant to the process of textual interpretation. The author still exists, but as a factor extrinsic to the text. They note that different meanings of poetry result when the author is considered; it is just that a consideration of the external influence of the author, from their vantage point, does not constitute a valid explication by a literary critic. It was the later work of Roland Barthes that questioned the existence of a subject position known as 'author.'

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11 Leitch, American Literary Criticism, 26.


13 Wimsatt and Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," 338.
Roland Barthes and "The Death of the Author"

Roland Barthes' 1968 essay "The Death of the Author" claimed not that the author was extrinsic to the process of textual interpretation, but rather, that there was no original author to consider.

We know now that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but of a multidimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture."\(^\text{14}\)

The notion of an "Author-God" or a "single theological meaning" conveys Barthes' fear that the role of the author is to foreclose the process of interpretation.

The role of literature for Barthes "is to put "meaning" into the world but not "a meaning."\(^\text{15}\) Barthes rejects New Criticism's claim that each text has but one meaning and instead envisions texts as polysemic. Barthes suggests that critics are not perusing literature to discover a meaning embedded in the form and content, but rather, the process of criticism itself is one of interpretation--of

\(^{14}\)Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 57; Stephen Heath's translation reads a bit differently: "We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture." Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Image--Music--Text, Stephen Heath ed. and trans., (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 146.

creating meaning(s). Barthes' polysemic text signals the birth of the intertext,\textsuperscript{16} the ongoing exchange and generation of meanings among a web of texts, which I will examine in a Chapter VI.

The author is replaced by the "scriptor," the act of creation with the process of writing. While an author "is supposed to \textit{feed} the book, i.e., he lives before it, thinks, suffers, [and] lives for it," the scriptor "is \textit{born at the same time} as his text."\textsuperscript{17} The scriptor's job is not original creation, but to "mix writings derived from the archive of culture."\textsuperscript{18}

Once a text is written, the task of deriving meaning from it falls to the \textit{reader}. No longer is the meaning ensconced within the text itself, waiting for explication by a (new) critic. Instead,

...the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any of them being lost, all the citations out of which a writing is made...the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that \textit{someone} who holds collected into one and the same field all of the traces from which writing is constituted."\textsuperscript{19}

Meaning has now shifted from text to reader, and without recourse to authorial intention. However, Barthes has resorted to the creation of an ahistorical, decontextualized reader; a reader who has no history, no biography, no psychology. It is this concept of a reader scrubbed clean of context and history

\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{17}Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 57.
\item\textsuperscript{18}Leitch, \textit{Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism}, 28.
\item\textsuperscript{19}Barthes, "Death of the Author," 59.
\end{enumerate}
that Foucault will challenge. In addition, he will restore the author to the mélange of factors that contribute to textual meaning.

**Foucault Returns the Author to the Text**

"What is an Author" was Michel Foucault's response to Barthes' sounding of the demise of the author. Both Barthes and Foucault were critical of source studies that looked to the author as the focus of textual critical analysis, but Foucault felt that Barthes had gone too far in calling for an end to authorship. For Foucault, the concept of authorship is still necessary as "a means to institutional and ideological analyses of discourse--not reverent biographical reconstruction of either the lives of literary geniuses or the stable meanings of poetic texts."\(^{20}\)

Barthes reduced authors to scriptors—writers. Foucault, however, distinguishes between authors, who contribute to the cohesion of "unrelated discursive practices into a coherent cultural realm,"\(^{21}\) and writers, whose words do not contribute to a cultural discourse. For example, "an anonymous text posted on a wall probably has a writer—but not an author."\(^{22}\) Foucault was not interested so much in the intention of the author, as the function that authorship has to provide cohesive power to a discourse or text:

\(^{20}\)”Leitch, *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism*, 30.


\(^{22}\)”Foucault, "What is an Author?", 108."
...an author's name is not simply an element in a discourse...it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition, it establishes a relationship among the texts.23

Texts are no longer static entities, contextually set adrift, but are linked to each other through the author. Texts can be categorized, and considered to have related meanings based upon authorship. The author's name also functions to help define the boundaries of a text, to mark "off the edges of a text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being."24

Foucault outlines four traits of the author function:

...(1) the author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses; (2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way at all times and in all types of civilization; (3) it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations; (4) it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, several subject-positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals.25

Foucault's first authorial function addresses the issue of accountability, or authorial responsibility. Authors' names were attached to texts and authors were given certain rights of ownership by the 18th century. However, in addition to any possible benefits of ownership, such as control of publication, came certain responsibilities. Authors were now legally held accountable for what they had written and could be punished for "transgression[s] attached to the act of

23Foucault, "What is an Author?," 107.

24Foucault, "What is an Author?," 107.

25Foucault, "What is an Author?," 113.
writing."\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, the first function of authorship protects the author's rights, but even more, holds the author accountable for perceived violations of states' rights. Using judicial systems, states can control authored texts and discourse.

The function of the author has changed over time, which is what Foucault describes in his second point. Today, we think of "authors" as the creators of, for the most part, literary texts. But, Foucault notes that up to about the 17th century, texts that we would today consider "literary" did not require the association of authors' names to be considered worthwhile reading. The thought of walking into a bookstore filled with anonymously written books is nearly inconceivable today, but would not have been the case for people several hundred years ago. However, even though literary texts could be accepted anonymously, scientific texts required an author; someone had to be held accountable--responsible--for the radical claims being made in scientific texts. This perception of accountability and authorship reversed in the 17th and 18th centuries and for science "the inventor’s name served only to christen a theorem, proposition, particular effect, property, group of elements, or pathological syndrome" yet "literary discourses came to be accepted only with the author function."\textsuperscript{27} This feature of change is strongly related to the first feature; authors' names are linked to texts where accountability is important. Science is no longer

\begin{itemize}
\item[26]Foucault, "What is an Author?", 108.
\item[27]Foucault, "What is an Author?", 109.
\end{itemize}
a dangerous unknown capable of disrupting a social status quo,\textsuperscript{28} whereas the creation of other kinds of texts do have the capacity to disrupt society and authors must be held responsible for their words (for example, Salman Rushdie's \textit{Satanic Verses}).

The realization--or actualization--of an author develops over time. This is Foucault's third point in outlining how an author functions in the production of meaning. Foucault suggests that the traits and characteristics we assign to authors are actually a reflection of the psychological prerequisites we have in order to generate meaning from a text or discourse:

\begin{quote}
...these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Of course, because social expectations and needs for the interpretation of a text can vary over time, so will our perception of who the author is (what is important to know about the author) and how that knowledge impacts on a reading of a text. Therefore, while the \textit{name} of an author on a literary text, say William Shakespeare, holds constant over time, our understanding of Shakespeare changes over time and shapes our interpretation of a text authored by

\textsuperscript{28} However, I suspect that with recent recombinant DNA and genetic research advances, that another shift is due. Perhaps the change this time will point more towards \textit{moral} accountability than the judicial accountability that Foucault has outlined.

\textsuperscript{29} Foucault, "What is an Author?," 110.
Shakespeare. Similarly, an author of a social text—which we will discover Pierre de Coubertin to be—changes over time.

Finally, Foucault suggests that the author functions in a variety of subject positions. The author is not a person separable from an authored text, but is positioned both within and outside the text. This "plurality of self" is conveyed by the text through the use of "personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place, and verb conjugation." The use of 'I' indicates an "individual without an equivalent who, in a determined place and time, completed a certain task"—in other words, an 'I' who authored the book in the traditional sense in which we think of authors. 'I' can also be filled by any reader who accepts the content and examples contained within a text.

In addition to setting out how authors function, Foucault also describes a particular kind of author characteristic of the 19th century—founding authors. Founding authors are not just the authors of their own work, but create "the

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30 Foucault, "What is an Author?" 112.

31 Foucault, "What is an Author?" 112.

32 I find this time delimitation somewhat puzzling. Although I accept the concept of "founding authors," to suggest that they are characteristic only of the 19th century is, I believe, a case of historical nearsightedness and perhaps even false modesty. In the case of historical nearsightedness, it seems reasonable to suppose that some time needs to pass before we can assess the intellectual impact of mid- to late-20th century authors. As to false modesty, only time will tell whether the current intellectual fascination with Foucault's own work is a passing fad, or the initial stage of recognition of another founding author.
possibilities and the rules for [the] formation of other texts." Marx and Freud are cited by Foucault as exemplars of this author type because their work has inspired and guided other authored-texts. All of these other texts comprise a discourse that may not necessarily agree with the claims of, say, Marx. Marx's texts, however, are held in consideration by these other authors and the use of Marx's ideas in the creation of additional texts adds to the on-going discourse around Marxism.

Foucault has retained a concept of an author that participates in, but does not control the production of meaning. Vincent Leitch, whose work bridges the practices of literary theory to cultural criticism, develops his own conception of the author and is skeptical of Foucault's historical author, suggesting that "to maintain the author as a historical figure is not to guarantee much in particular." Leitch's project is to outline an author who connects the private and public spheres expressing personal values and convictions not just as an individual, but as a representative for others sharing those views. This author operates as "the agency, conscious and unconscious, for certain interests, values, and groups, which may well exhibit internal contradictions, [and] the "author" opens local discourse to cultural analysis and critique attentive to institutional factors and ideological matters." Foucault was not, however, unaware of the ideological

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33 Foucault, "What is an Author?," 114.
34 Leitch, Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism, 31.
35 Leitch, Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism, 38.
implications of authorship, pointing out that "the author is ... the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning."\(^{36}\)

In my opinion, Leitch's conception of the author is not so much a different author from the one Foucault suggests, as a different interpretation of the author Foucault suggests. Leitch's normally clear writing fails him when he describes the author:

...a pluralized private-public figure (or figures), is a relay in regimes of reason, connecting individual discourse with the social text and constituting a specific sociohistorical locus for the archival intertext. As the agency, conscious and unconscious, for certain interests, values, and groups, which may well exhibit internal contradictions, the "author" opens local discourse to cultural analysis and critique attentive to institutional factors and ideological matters.\(^{37}\)

Leitch is concerned that Foucault failed to incorporate authors into an intertextual realm, ensconcing them within one text or discourse without recognizing the interactive effects between texts. However, I think that is only a crime of semantic omission on Foucault's part.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{36}\)Foucault, "What is an Author?," 119.

\(^{37}\)Leitch, *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism*, 38.

\(^{38}\)And in fact, even though Julia Kristeva coined the term 'intertextuality' in 1969, (for a concept that was understood, but not yet named and directly addressed), it was not widely used until the 1980s. Michel Foucault died in 1984, and more importantly, "What is an Author?" was originally published in 1969. Had the circumstances of history been different, I feel that the word 'intertextuality' would have been featured in "What is an Author?;" as it reads now (or at least, in *my* interpretation of it) Foucault adequately addresses issues of intertextuality.
I will now consider a particular author--Pierre de Coubertin--and how his treatment as author of the modern Olympics guides some interpretations of the meaning of the Olympics.

Pierre de Coubertin: Author of the Modern Olympics

There are two claims that I want to advance in this section. The first is that Pierre de Coubertin is an author with respect to the Olympic Games. I say 'an author' rather than 'the author' because his well-publicized role as founding father,\textsuperscript{39} reviver,\textsuperscript{40} creator,\textsuperscript{41} the patron saint,\textsuperscript{42} promoter and organizer\textsuperscript{43} and, most commonly, founder\textsuperscript{44} does not preclude the existence of other authors who

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{39}Caroline Searle and Bryn Vaile, eds., \textit{The Official Olympic Games Companion} (London: Brassey's Sports, 1998), 2, 36.


\textsuperscript{41}Râman Czula, "Pierre de Coubertin and Modern Olympism," \textit{Quest} 24 (Summer 1975): 10.

\textsuperscript{42}Râman Czula, "Pierre de Coubertin and Modern Olympism," 10.


continue to add to evolving social texts like the Olympics.

The Olympics are not a static text, like a book which exists as a singular artifact open to various interpretations. As a social text, the Olympics are dynamic: the text is constantly being added to and subjected to continuous interpretation and re-interpretation. To facilitate discussion, I propose consideration of a primary Olympic text: most importantly the actual Olympic events themselves sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and National Organizing Committees (NOCs), as well as the institutional activities of members of the IOC and NOCs which bear directly upon the production and continuation of the winter and summer celebrations. Therefore, Juan Antonio Samaranch, in his capacity as IOC president, or any athlete in an Olympic event, can also be considered an author because they are contributing to the Olympic text. Pierre de Coubertin’s high visibility among scholars and Olympics enthusiasts and his unique role in the formative years of the modern Olympics, however, warrants a special focus on his authorial role.

The second claim is a spin-off of the first: just because Coubertin is accepted in the role of author does not mean that our interpretations of the Olympics should be limited to Coubertin’s legacy. With respect to this point, I will suggest that Coubertin’s authorial role might best be considered in a league with Foucault’s ‘founding author,’ an especially appealing term in this instance since I am arguing for the term ‘author’ and Coubertin is already best known as the ‘founder’ of the modern Olympics.
Responding to the New Critics: Yes, the Olympic Text Does Have an Author

The new critical disavowal of authorial intention takes on a new twist when it is social texts rather than literary texts that are in question. The Olympics cannot be stripped down to the 'text itself' in the same way that literary artifacts might be stripped of their authors. There are agents within the Olympic text—for example, athletes—who are also authors of the text; a point that will be discussed more when I reconsider Foucault's delineation of authorial functions. For now, it is enough to reiterate an earlier point: athletes' performances are simultaneously adding to the text and, at the moment of performance--of creation--are themselves acting as authors.

Coubertin's role has been treated differently though. Espoused as the founder, Coubertin has, at times, been revered for his role in resurrecting the ancient Greek Olympics. A tendency to credit Coubertin as an original creator has often suffused institutional and academic treatments of the Olympics: the meanings of Olympic events being measured against early claims or aspirations that Coubertin had for the Games. This tendency to depend on the source or psychology of the author--resorting to the author as the compass for a proper interpretation--is the kind of interpretation the New Critics were resisting.

In its most everyday sense, an author is

...someone who starts up a game, or invents a machine, or asserts political freedom, or thinks up a formula, or writes a book. Depending on the activity and the application, the term can connote initiative, autonomy, inventiveness, creativity, authority, or originality.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{45}\)Pease, "Author," 105.
In order to be an author then, a person does not have to be a creator of original material.

This is an important point in Coubertin's case because most scholars now agree that Coubertin was a driving force in the implementation of the modern Olympic sport festivals that started in 1896. However, few of the individual ideas that contributed to the actualization of the Olympic festival were thoughts original to Coubertin, nor was he solely responsible for the realization of the modern Olympics. In fact, even the title "founder of the [modern] Olympics" was applied earlier to Evangelis Zappas who directed the Olympic revival efforts in Greece beginning in 1859.

Early modern Olympic scholarship tended to valorize the role of Coubertin in shaping the Games. These Olympic historians were preserving and repeating Coubertin's own claim following the 1896 Olympics that he had been "sole author of the entire project." Revisionist histories and scholarship are now commonly questioning Coubertin's role as 'creator' or 'inventor' of the modern Olympics. Richard Mandell, writing in 1972, captured the demythologizing efforts of more critical work on Coubertin and the modern Games' origins: "The Olympic movement has...manufactured a splendid Coubertin out of a man who was

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46 See, for example, John MacAlloon's biography, *This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the Modern Olympic Games*, for an extensive treatment of the influences on Coubertin's revival of the Games.


indeed fascinating to investigate but who does not merit his growing reputation as genius, prophet, and saint." Mandell's reaction is a strong counterpoint to—or rather an acknowledgement of—a situation where the International Olympic Committee members are said to, even today, "worship the Baron as a godlike infallible figure whose words are interpreted and followed as gospel."

John MacAloon's biography of the Baron, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is paradoxical in this regard. Coubertin's status as founder, and celebrationist interpretations of Coubertin's role as the originator of modern Olympic festivals are called into question, but at the same time, MacAloon focuses intensely on Coubertin—his life, family heritage, influences, strengths, and foibles—and thereby contributes to the myth of Coubertin's status. The lesson I would suggest we take from the New Critics is that we should resist interpretive schema that rely too heavily and uncritically on author psychology.

Responding to Roland Barthes: Ridding Olympic Interpretations of Author-Gods

Olympic scholarship has already, for the most part, moved past a deification of Coubertin in his authorial role. When Barthes eliminated the 'Author-God' as an interpretive determinant, he cleared the way for readers of texts to accept interpretive responsibility. But, as I noted earlier, one effect of Barthes' efforts was to decontextualize the text; sever it from its historical rootedness. Shifting the job of interpretation wholly to the reader while

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disavowing historical context does not work in the case of the Olympics because the Games are an unfolding social text that is dependent on history and context for meaning.

The Olympics are strongly rooted in tradition. In fact, the modern Olympics were founded on an understanding, however imperfect, of the ancient Greek tradition. Other 'modern' Olympics were sporadically re-enacted in the 19th century prior to Coubertin's efforts. While I think it is possible to interpret the Olympics synchronically, I also feel such efforts would result in an impoverished interpretation, for historical context and a sense of nostalgia are integral to the generation of meaning in the Olympics.

The torch relay, for example, which links the modern Olympic Games to the ancient Greek celebration, invokes an image of Greek athletes and a popularized perception that hostilities ceased during the ancient Games' celebration.\textsuperscript{51} The arrival of the torch during the opening ceremonies signals not only that the Games are about to begin, but for some, an aura of international friendship (an irony of the modern Olympics is that the Olympic torch--perceived as a symbol signalling peace--has its origins in the 1936 Berlin Games, in the heart of the aggressively militaristic (and evil) Nazi regime). Often, the men and women who carry the Olympic torch into the stadium or light the cauldron, are

\textsuperscript{51}Juan Antonio Samaranch, for example, says during his speech opening the Centennial Olympics in Atlanta on July 19, 1996 that "peace has finally been established in Bosnia" and calls for "all parties involved in armed conflicts to observe the Olympic truce and lay down their arms so that dialogue may be restored as a prelude to peace."
selected because of their ability to invoke strong ties with past Olympics. Muhammad Ali's appearance at the Centennial Olympics in Atlanta was one such poignant reminder.

The role of tradition can easily be found in any Olympic athletic contest. Athletes' performances are measured against those of other athletes in other Olympics; hence, they may strive for Olympic records which are distinct from world records. Or, athletes may seek (or be interpreted as seeking) to perform well in an event that no other athlete from their country has performed in (or performed well in) before. The success of an athletic performance, or an Olympiad, is rarely measured against itself, but against what has preceded it. The Olympics as we know them would not exist stripped of their historical context.

Michael Real, in characterising the Olympics as a postmodern phenomenon, suggests that

One important consequence of understanding the transition in the Olympic Games to postmodern [sic] is a realization that the Olympic Games do not operate independently of the global cultural environment surrounding them. One cannot, for example, exhort the Olympic movement to return to its idealistic ideological origins in classical Western modernism when the conditions and consensus for that no longer exist.\(^{52}\)

Whether you agree with the notion of a postmodern Olympics or not, the point is well taken that context and the march of history are integral to the evolution of

the Olympic text. That is why, whether you want to focus on interpretation through a reader's or an author's lens, context must be kept in mind.

However, we must be vigilant that particular historical narratives do not become interpretive straight-jackets. Historical events are not objective events; history can be invented, recovered, and remembered in a variety of ways. Hence, I am suggesting that authors--Coubertin is the most obvious example here, but also other authors of the Olympic text--must be considered when we seek meanings in the Olympics. But, as critical, reflective readers of the Olympic text, we should avoid deifying any authorial intention, or decontextualizing the text.

**Hitching an Interpretive Ride with Foucault: Authors do Contribute to Meaning**

Michel Foucault's description of authors and authorial functions is helpful in positioning Coubertin in a meaningful relationship to the Olympic text. Foucault realized that authors do have a role to play in the generation of textual meanings. Furthermore, that role is contextually maintained.

Authors are a necessary corollary for the job of criticism. Foucault suggests that any critique of ideology of a text or discourse must ultimately look to the subject of the author for at least partial enlightenment about the meaning of a text. This accounts for the fascination that Coubertin has for scholars. Even though the Olympics are not an original creation of Coubertin's, he was responsible for organizing and implementing the collection of practices that have

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become the Olympics we know today. Therefore, even though we should be cautious about becoming overly reliant upon a 'Coubertinian' search for meaning, some attention to Coubertin's ideals can contribute to our understanding of the modern Olympics.

The prudence of continuing to keep at least one eye focused on Coubertin when we think about how Olympic interpretations are generated is suggested by Râmán Czula's comment that "although history has depicted him [Coubertin] as a romantic idealist, and much of his writing manifests this nature, he was an autocratic tyrant when implementing his doctrine of Olympism." Other successors to the IOC presidency have demonstrated a similar need for control, most notably Avery Brundage who "continued the modernis[t] ideals of amateurism and the celebration of the human body and elite physical culture as the foundations of modern Olympism." Brundage's recalcitrance on the nature of amateurism can only be understood through a consideration of Coubertin's ideological hopes for the Olympics. Similarly, current president Juan Antonio Samaranch's support for open (pro-am) competition has been regarded by those who still cleave to Coubertinian ideals as antithetic to the concept of Olympism. It seems clear that discussion about the success (or failure) of an IOC president's leadership is apt to be conducted with Coubertin's ideals as the relevant background.

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Coubertin's role--as founder--is clearly known to scholars of the Olympics and members of the Olympic family (IOC and NOC members, sports federations, etc.). But what about his role as author outside these institutional boundaries? I think he still does play a role. Many of Coubertin's ideals--for example, the desirability of amateur competition and the Olympics as a site for international peace and understanding--are important parts of the public consciousness about what the Olympics should mean, and what we expect them to mean; but more and more Coubertin's name fails to be associated with the idealistic concepts that he introduced into the Olympics. Coubertin thus sometimes functions as an unmarked author, an author whose ideological contributions have permeated the text he helped script, but whose personal identity is not always known. Recent popular publications on the Olympics bear out this claim. For example, Bud Greenspan's lush photographic portrayal of the 100 Greatest Moments in Olympic History\textsuperscript{55} never mentions Coubertin's role as founder. Coubertin is mentioned as having helped introduce the Olympic flag, the Olympic Motto, the Olympic Creed, and the Olympic Oath,\textsuperscript{57} but a reader who is not already familiar with Coubertin's role must surely be wondering (if they have bothered to read this far) who this creative Baron was. Coubertin's name is slipped in just once in the official program for the 1996 centennial Olympics, in a soliloquy called "A Prayer

\textsuperscript{55}Bud Greenspan, 100 Greatest Moments in Olympic History (Los Angeles: General Publishing Group, 1995).

\textsuperscript{57}Greenspan, 100 Greatest Moments in Olympic History, 223.
Before the Feast." Purchasers of the Barcelona program were no more enlightened. It seems odd to me that in a centennial celebration, the man whose words and deeds continue to inspire so many at the institutional level, was so noticeably absent from the popular presentation. In fact, Samaranch said in his message included in the Atlanta program:

> The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece, the birthplace of Olympism, in 1896. Looking back over the century, one is impressed by the increased interest and importance of sport in modern society, both as the basis of a healthy lifestyle and as a means to promote the Olympic ideal. The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.

Coubertin has been relegated to obscurity, but his ideological contribution to the Olympics clearly live on in this statement.

Similarly, an International Olympic Committee sanctioned publication, The Official Olympic Games Companion, which is a viewing guide for the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics, includes no biographical statement linking Coubertin with the founding of the modern Olympics. Coubertin’s name is mentioned a few times, but it is in the context of discussions on drug use in sport or the

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organization of the International Olympic Committee. So, like the event programs, Coubertin's Olympic ideology is present, but it has been severed of its linkage to Coubertin's name.

Let me briefly reiterate Foucault's four functions of the author and relate them to Olympic authorship before I move on to suggest that Pierre de Coubertin is a founding author, but not entirely in the sense that Foucault set out. Those four functions are as follows:

1. The author is the owner of the text, and is thus accountable/responsible for it;
2. Authorial function changes over time;
3. Realization/actualization of author's role develops over time;
4. Author functions in a variety of subject positions.

Pierre de Coubertin meets all four of these criteria. He actually usurped the title 'founder of the Olympics' from Zappas, but once he had it, he also had to accept the responsibility of being author. That meant, during the lean, early years, that he also bore some of the burden for the failure of the Olympics. However, it was also because of Coubertin's personal charisma and "unusual individual initiative"\(^{62}\) that the Games survived and grew in influence.

The second and third functions greatly overlap in the case of Coubertin: his role as author has changed dramatically over time. Initially, he was contested as the founder (in opposition with the modern Greek founder, Zappas), but Coubertin's identification with the Games and his unflinching support ensured the survival of the modern Olympics. As the Olympics entered

\(^{62}\)MacAlloon, *This Great Symbol*, xii.
a larger public consciousness, he enjoyed a glorified status, partly as a result of his own (sometimes exaggerated) writings documenting his contribution. Scholars and enthusiasts adopted this celebrationist approach which also permeates the institutional levels of the International Olympic Committee. However, many of the ideas initially embedded in the Olympics, from amateurism to the participation of women, became recognizably archaic and despite the efforts of some to hold the Olympics in a steady state, the Games began their accelerated adaptation to the 20th century (as the 21st century drew near). As some of the ideas most closely associated with Coubertinian ideology fell to the wayside, the association of his name with the Olympics has become less important. Coubertin's name was no longer necessary to ensure the survival of the Olympic celebrations. Pierre de Coubertin now seems little more than an historical curiosity outside the institutional and academic hallways. The fourth function--the occupation by the author of a variety of subject positions--is especially true for a social text. I have already noted that athletes and others both write portions of the text and read the text. Coubertin was engaged in an ongoing process of reading (watching, attending, reading about, etc.) the Olympics as well as continuing to add to the text via his institutional participation and his writing.

Founding authors have produced something more than a single text, or a collection of texts. They have produced "the possibilities and the rules for [the] formation of other texts" and they have done so by creating "a possibility for something other than their discourse, yet something belonging to what they
founded.¹⁶² I am suggesting that Pierre de Coubertin is such a founding author. The assemblage of ideas and practices that Coubertin stamped his name upon may not have been original creations, but he gathered them together under the umbrella of the 'modern Olympics.' The ideology of Olympism that he founded survives today, but it continues to evolve. 'Olympic-type celebrations' are commonplace and the IOC is hard-pressed to control the proliferation of Olympic nomenclature. What makes Coubertin different from Foucault's archetypal founding authors Marx and Freud, is that Coubertin's role, as I have already suggested, now sometimes functions in an unmarked status. By that, I mean that ideological discourse about the Olympic text can take place using Coubertinian ideology as a reference point, but without the need (or perhaps sometimes even the knowledge of) Coubertin as the author responsible for promulgating those ideas.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the role of authors in textual interpretation and suggested that Pierre de Coubertin is author of the Olympic text. Coubertin enjoys a special status as the founding author, although he is not the only author contributing to Olympic texts. Authors are not the sole source by which textual meaning is determined, as the New Critics feared and Barthes rejected, but they do have a role. In the case of the Olympics, Coubertin's continuing role, whether

¹⁶²Foucault, "What is an Author?" 114.
marked or unmarked, is to help control the "proliferation of meaning." Too powerful a reliance on this role, however, unduly constrains the production of meaning. In a social text, with multiple authors, the ideological position of a founding author can serve as a point toward which we orient meanings; but because the Olympics continue to expand diachronically, both the ideology and the role of the founding author as a figurehead for that ideology must change to meet societal needs and expectations. Authors are not the only locus for the production of meaning in social texts, so I now turn to a consideration of readers.

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64 Foucault, "What is an Author?", 119.
CHAPTER III

Spectators, Television Viewers, and other Readers of Olympic Texts

Introduction

Readers are the interpreters of texts. The readers of social texts are somewhat more difficult to categorize than readers of literary texts, however, because social texts are more variable than written texts. 'Readers,' beyond the scope of literary readers, are people who occupy a range of interpretive positions: people who are reading printed material (traditional, literary criticism-styled 'readers'), television viewers, spectators at live sporting events, and the newest readers on the block, internet surfers.

A discussion of reading practices for the Olympics should consider the contributions of several disciplinary fields: textual analysis from literary criticism, audience research from mass communications, and television studies. Cultural studies work has drawn on a variety of disciplines to develop discussions of reading practices in relation to popular culture. However, the rather uneven blending of these professional vocabularies can create confusion in how the terms 'reader,' 'spectator,' 'viewer,' and 'audience' are used. Therefore, in the course of my discussions I will clarify my use of these terms and how they apply to the interpretation of Olympic texts.

The previous chapter drew most strongly from literary criticism. In this chapter, I will begin to shift the focus to the work of media scholars since the Olympics are experienced by most people via television. I begin, however, by
addressing the contributions of literary criticism and the importance of active readers in their interpretations of the Olympics. Roland Barthes' work on texts and readers, as discussed in the previous chapter, helped signal the role that autonomous readers could play in textual interpretation. In this chapter, I will discuss the contributions of reader-response theory using the work of Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser, whose work focuses on the role of readers in the production of meaning rather than meanings inscribed in texts. Stanley Fish attempts to forestall critiques of reader-oriented theory as unredeemably relativistic by suggesting that readers are members of communities which share particular kinds of reading practices, and Wolfgang Iser suggests that readers fill in 'gaps' in texts and create their own meanings.

The work of Len Ang, John Fiske, and Henry Jenkins is used to address issues raised by researchers of television audiences. Fiske distinguishes between the featureless, generic 'audience' used to rationalize advertising decisions by the mass media, and specific audiences imbued with the characteristics of class, race, gender, etc. Ang and Fiske draw distinctions between the positions of spectators and viewers; specifically of television programs. Jenkins' work on fans and fan culture helps connect the work of audience research with the work of sport scholars on spectators and fans.

The last major section in this chapter will consider the role of readers--particularly viewers and fans--as these positions apply to interpretations of the Olympics. I will suggest that all readers of these social texts are active participants in the generation of meaning. In particular, evidence from the
internet newsgroup rec.sport.olympics suggests that not only are viewers active meaning makers, but that their engagement with televised versions of the Olympics resists pre-packaged meanings that mass media and advertisers seek to foist upon the Games. The interpretive activities of readers of Olympic texts, however, are influenced by a multitude of factors (including, for example, the effects of a founding author such as Pierre de Coubertin). Therefore, while I explore the role of readers, viewers, and spectators in this chapter in the generation of Olympics meanings, I am also suggesting that the 'reader' is but one piece of the whole puzzle that contributes to textual interpretations of the Olympics. Also, sport scholars should be aware that their readings are shaped by membership and values of particular interpretive communities and should not be considered as definitive interpretations of the Olympics.

**The Concept of the Reader in Literary Criticism**

**Reader-Response Criticism**

'Reader-response' is actually a catch-all term which refers to critical approaches that are attentive to "the ways in which texts are received, either by individual readers or readers belonging to specific categories, such as class, gender, ethnicity, etc." Reader-response criticism was most popular from the late 1960s through the 1980s and its adherents "argued against the text-centered criticism of formalism, advocating instead a reader-oriented approach."

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² Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the 30s to the 80s*, 212.
Reader-response theorists generally agree that "readers bring a great deal of extratextual material to their reading of texts, and the outcome of the reading experience is powerfully affected by this material." Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser were among the first reader-response theorists and their work, especially that of Fish, has been embraced by social and cultural critics. Fish's notion of interpretive communities and Iser's recognition of textual 'gaps' are important concepts not only for literary critics, but for a consideration of Olympic texts.

Stanley Fish: From Affective Stylistics to Interpretive Communities

Stanley Fish called his early work on reader-response 'affective stylistics.' This was a response to Wimsatt and Beardsley's New Critical work on the 'affective fallacy,' which suggested that some theorists failed to differentiate between readers and texts. Fish focused on the experience of reading which he described in the following way:

...the execution involves an analysis of the developing responses of the reader in relation to the words as they succeed one another in time ... A reader's response to the fifth word in a line or sentence is to a large extent the product of his responses to words one, two, three, and four."  

This approach took into account "provisional interpretations" that were made, and possibly rejected or altered, during the course of a sequential reading of a literary text. This resulted in meaning being continually deferred as "the

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3M. Keith Booker, A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism, 51.


5Booker, A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism, 42, 44.
reader's expectation of meaning is [thus] continuously adjusted: the meaning is the total movement of reading."^5 Meaning was thus not just the end-product of the process of reading a book, but encompassed all the thoughts and interpretations made while reading.

Fish focused on the production of meaning as the result of sequential reading--"the basis of the method is a consideration of the temporal flow of the reading experience, and it is assumed that the reader responds in terms of that flow and not to the whole utterance."^7 Jonathan Culler, questioning whether reading actually took place in such a systematic way, suggested Fish's description unrealistically portrayed the activity of reading.^8 Most damning were claims by Fish's critics that Fish was not describing the activities of his informed readers, but instead, his own personal reading practices.^9 Indeed, Fish's informed reader was rather stringently defined:

The informed reader is someone who (1) is a competent speaker of the language out of which the text is built up; (2) is in full possession of "the semantic knowledge that a mature...listener brings to his task of comprehension." This includes the knowledge (that is, the experience, both as a producer and comprehend) of lexical sets, collocation


^7Fish, "Literature in the Reader," 74.


^9Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker, A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, 60.
probabilities, idioms, professional and other dialects, etc.; (3) has literary competence.¹⁰

In addition, critics noted that Fish's approach retained a role for "authorial intention and the role of the text in provoking the reader's responses"¹¹ because the structure of the text remained an important component of the interpretation process.

Fish took to heart the critiques of his affective stylistics and his concept of the role of readers radically changed as he moved toward a more intersubjective conception of the process of reading with less reliance on textual stability. In 1980 Fish published Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities,¹² which solidified his conversion to anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism.¹³ In it, he admitted that his affective stylistics approach "was much more dependent on new critical principles than I was willing to admit."¹⁴ The 'new' Fish suggested that readers were members of interpretive communities; groups of readers who shared interpretive strategies based on shared understandings of social practices. This new, critical approach to readers also

¹⁰Fish, "Literature in the Reader," 86-87.

¹¹Booker, A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism, 43.

¹²Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).


¹⁴Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in this Class?, 7.
entailed a revision of Fish's earlier views on texts: now both texts and readers "are to a large extent the product of interpretive communities."\textsuperscript{15} The concept of interpretive communities thus eliminated Fish's previous conceptualization of the relationship between texts and readers; readers' interpretative strategies are shaped not by the text itself, but according to the interpretive strategies held in common by an interpretive community. The change from affective stylistics to interpretive communities also signaled Fish's own shift in focus from literary criticism to cultural criticism. Readers in this larger context are interpreters of cultural situations (be they sports events, movies, television, politics, or other cultural events or artifacts) and members of interpretive communities share conceptions of what is good and right relative to those contexts. Fish suggests that the boundaries of interpretive communities are cordoned off from each other when he writes that "persons embedded within different discursive systems will not be able to hear the other's reasons as reasons, but only as errors or delusions."\textsuperscript{16} This implies that communication cannot take place between interpretive communities. It would also suggest that the meanings different interpretive communities hold are not available to a member of another interpretive community; that the discursive boundaries of interpretive communities are impermeable.

\textsuperscript{15}Booker, \textit{A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and Criticism}, 50.

\textsuperscript{16}Stanley Fish, \textit{There's No Such Thing as Free Speech...And It's a Good Thing, Too} (New York: Oxford, 1994), 136.
The Fishian concept of interpretive communities claims that communication between groups becomes unmediable when different groups hold competing interpretations. There is a measurable degree of futility inherent in this thought. It is one thing to suggest that people should hold fast to, and be willing to fight for, their own interpretations when we are speaking in the abstract. To suggest, however, that we should pursue our own interests, with an awareness that they are disinterests of other interpretive communities, is to remain oblivious to real world applications. If we cannot cleave to at least a semi-permeability in the discourses between interpretive communities, then we are, it seems, doomed to strife as each interpretive community seeks to further its own agenda. What Fish overlooks, or fails to address, is the power of persuasion in addressing common interests. And it is a commitment to those common interests that can encourage the members of each interpretive community to engage in dialogue and maintain semi-permeable, rather than impermeable boundaries enclosing the community.

Wolfgang Iser: The Importance of Gaps in Textual Interpretation

German Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory, like the affective stylistics of Stanley Fish, is unwilling to cut the reader completely loose from the text. Meanings are to be found not solely in the interpretations engendered by readers, but as a result of the interaction between reader and text. Iser empowers readers by positing textual 'gaps' which the reader can utilize to formulate their own interpretations of the text.
Iser describes the gaps in literary texts as openings where readers can use their imagination and as devices through which readers create meaning from texts:

...it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in the gaps left by the text itself. These gaps ... may be filled in different ways. For this reason, one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way... 17

The danger here is a slide into complete relativism if each interpretation is different. But applying Fish's conception of interpretive communities would, I believe, allow for the reader to be guided by a collective expectation that imposes some limitations on what is an acceptable interpretation of a textual gap.

For Iser then, the limits of interpretation are largely to be found in the text, and for Fish, the limits are within the reader—the social factors guiding the reader's membership within an interpretive community. Iser's textual gaps will become more important when I consider Umberto Eco's conception of open and closed texts in a later chapter. I want to note at this point, however, that it is gaps in Olympic texts that provide interpretive room for change and adaptation to a variety of social conditions. But if the gaps allowed only for idiosyncratic interpretations of individuals, they would lack the power to transform or mold the

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Olympics. It is through Fish's interpretive communities that consensus about what some aspect of the Olympics means can be reached. In other words, the members of interpretive communities must be similarly reading texts--similarly filling in the gaps in the text--according to shared social values and thus, arriving at shared meanings.

**Audiences, Viewers, Spectators and Fans**

Readers of non-literary texts are variously referred to as 'audiences,' 'fans,' 'readers,' 'spectators' and 'viewers' and these terms are often used interchangeably by audience researchers or other critics. However, some researchers note specific definitions for each term. Therefore, I want to clarify how these terms have been used by audience researchers and how I use them to describe interpreters of the Olympic text. Ien Ang, John Fiske, and Henry Jenkins are among the mass media scholars whose audience research scholarship focuses on television audiences, spectators, and fans lending itself well to a consideration of the Olympics.

**The Role of the Audience**

Literary criticism usually focuses on individual readers, or more specifically, the response of a theoretical 'ideal' or 'implied' or 'informed' reader to a text. So literary critics, even reader-response critics, rarely consider readers as a conglomerate. As mentioned, Stanley Fish's notion of interpretive communities is a notable exception. Audience researchers, on the other hand, are often more concerned with a group of spectators or readers, rather than individuals; the *audience* becomes the focus.
In his book *Television Culture*, John Fiske distinguishes between 'audience' and 'audiences.' An 'audience' is a "homogeneous mass of people who are all essentially identical, who receive the same messages, meanings, and ideologies from the same programs [texts] and who are essentially passive." An audience is a fictional entity essentially created for the purposes of advertising in the mass media. The members of an audience are "extremely depersonalized" and are stripped of social position, gender, age, race, and any other distinguishing characteristic. This faceless audience, unencumbered by social reality, is an invention of the institution of television and mass media--audience researchers and advertisers--according to Len Ang. The 'audience' does not exist, except in "the sense that it is only in and through the description conjured within the discourses produced by researchers that certain profiles of audiences take shape - profiles that do not exist outside or beyond those descriptions but are created by them." Graeme Turner notes that "we do not live our lives as members of audiences, at least not exclusively so." An


'audience,' then, is an invention of the mass media, not a representation of an actual social entity.

A more accurate conception is audiences. This pluralization, according to Fiske, has the advantage of recognizing that "we are not a homogeneous society, but that our social system is crisscrossed by axes of class, gender, race, age, nationality, region, politics and so on."\(^{23}\)

Audiences are often described as either 'passive' or 'active.' While Fiske considers any conception of audience to be relatively passive in comparison to a more detailed, ethnographic study of specific viewers or readers,\(^{24}\) other authors empower audiences in their ability to resist or negotiate messages contained within texts. Ang suggests that the distinction of passive versus active audiences arose in response to the gloomy criticism of the Frankfurt School, which addressed the "increasing commercialization and commodification of the cultural and media industries."\(^{25}\) Audience researchers responded by suggesting that the masses are not passive victims of the culture industry and that, in the case of television, "audiences are 'active' in their pursuit of pleasure from watching TV" and that "popular television is a site of cultural democracy rather than cultural oppression."\(^{26}\) Henry Jenkins suggests that audiences cannot be so neatly

\(^{23}\)Fiske, *Television Culture*, 17.

\(^{24}\)Fiske, *Television Culture*, 17.

\(^{25}\)Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 9.

\(^{26}\)Ang, *Living Room Wars*, 9.
classified as either passive or active. His work on fan culture, while it "does not prove that all audiences are active; [it] does, however, prove that not all audiences are passive."\textsuperscript{27} Audiences that passively acquiesce in their reception of media messages, tend to accept interpretations provided by the media. Other audiences may be more assertive in the process of interpretation; they may resist, question, or reshape messages conveyed by the media, generating their own meaning instead of parroting the one proffered them.

Spectators, Viewers, and Fans

Two different disciplinary traditions are represented by the interpretive positions of 'spectator' and 'viewer.' Spectators are situated within the tradition of film studies and 'viewers' within television studies. Judith Mayne's book \textit{Cinema and Spectatorship} details the history of cinema spectatorship which is "marked by an interest in theory, and specifically in the intersections among Marxism, semiotics, feminism, and psychoanalysis, with the latter usually serving the predominant role, particularly since the mid-1970s."\textsuperscript{28} A strictly psychoanalytic definition of spectatorship in film studies posits an ahistorical person traversed by drives and desires, male, and unmarked by race or class.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27}Henry Jenkins, \textit{Textual Poachers, Television Fans and Participatory Culture} (New York: Routledge, 1992), 287.

\textsuperscript{28}Judith Mayne, \textit{Cinema and Spectatorship} (New York: Routledge, 1993), 32.

\textsuperscript{29}Mayne, \textit{Cinema and Spectatorship}, 36-38.
In contrast, a viewer is a "real person."\textsuperscript{30} For Mayne, spectatorship "refers not just to the acts of watching and listening, and not just to identification with human figures projected on the screen, but rather to the various values with which film viewing is invested."\textsuperscript{31}

John Fiske recognizes the position of viewer as "compounded of both the social relations/experience of the viewer (class, gender, etc.) and of the material, usually domestic situation (which is also a product of his/her social relations within which television is watched)."\textsuperscript{32} Fiske then attempts to distinguish between the interpreters of television texts as 'viewers' and those of film as 'spectators' which elides the finer distinction noted by Mayne. In short, viewers are real people, as noted by Mayne, while spectators remain ahistoricized subjects.

Within television studies, the terms 'spectator' and 'viewer' are often used interchangeably. Len Ang teases apart spectators from audiences using the psychoanalytic model from film studies, but without addressing any difference between spectators and viewers or spectators and readers: "spectatorship [is] conceived as a set of subject positions constructed in and through texts, and ...social audiences [are] understood as the empirical social subjects actually engaged in watching television, filmgoing, reading novels and magazines, and so

\textsuperscript{30}Mayne, \textit{Cinema and Spectatorship}, 36.

\textsuperscript{31}Mayne, \textit{Cinema and Spectatorship}, 31.

\textsuperscript{32}Fiske, \textit{Television Culture}, 17.
In this case, we see spectatorship as a hypothesized position that the text-ostensibly, a fixed text—is aimed at. Spectators become members of the audience, and Ang's comments might also be extended to suggest that viewers are the situated members of audiences.

Fiske suggests that viewing "is specific to television" while "reading" is common to all texts. This tends to separate spectators from viewers based on whether one is watching movies or television. While this distinction glosses the historical legacy of spectatorship—especially in film studies—it does have an advantage for a discussion of Olympic texts. Current research by sport scholars—who also are the most prolific theorists of the Olympics—focusing on spectators refers in most cases to people who are actually in attendance at a sport contest. In order to more smoothly integrate this study with existing research with sport scholarship, I will use the terms 'reader,' 'spectator,' and 'viewer,' to refer to the location or 'type' of textual interpreter. 'Readers' will refer in a very general sense to the interpreter of any text. I will use the term 'spectator' to refer to readers who are actually present at the Olympics (or other sport-type event), and the term 'viewer' will be used to describe readers who are watching a text unfold on television.

'Fans' are spectators or viewers who are very active readers of texts. Jenkins suggests that fans do more that watch media texts—they appropriate the

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33 Ang, Living Room Wars, 112.
34 Fiske, Television Culture, 17.
texts and use them to shape their own texts and meanings. Jenkins' work focuses on organized fan activities, such as Star Trek conventions, and Jenkins is careful to note that his observations may not apply to other types of fans, such as sport fans. He writes that

Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it. ... Fans often display a close attention to the particularity of television narratives that puts academic critics to shame. Within the realm of popular culture, fans are the true experts; they constitute a competing educational elite, albeit one without official recognition or social power.

I will explore in the final section of this chapter how contributors to the newsgroup rec.sport.olympics constitute a fan culture that meets Jenkins' description.

Spectators, Viewers, and Fans of Olympic Texts

The purpose of this section is to first consider how sport scholars consider the role of spectators in the interpretation of sport texts. I will utilize the work of several scholars who regularly explore the nature of spectatorship: Margaret Carlisle Duncan, Walter Gantz, Allen Guttmann, Michael Real, and Lawrence Wenner. Stanley Fish's concept of interpretive communities and Wolfgang Iser's notion of textual gaps will be utilized to suggest ways in which sport scholars might expand the idea of what it means to be a reader of Olympic texts. The

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35 Jenkins, Textual Poachers, 279.

36 Jenkins, Textual Poachers, 287.
work of communications' scholars on the difference between an audience and audiences should also be of concern to Olympic scholars sensitive to the varieties of interpretation possible in Olympic texts. Finally, I want to suggest that an unexplored area of Olympic readership and interpretation exists; one that is unique in its ability to highlight for the sports studies' community how other interpretive communities are receiving the Olympics today--the internet. I will use examples from the newsgroup rec.sport.olympics to show how some actual readers of the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics made sense of the opening ceremonies as telecast by their respective national networks.

Allen Guttmann’s book *Sports Spectators* surveys sports spectatorship from Greek and Roman sport to modern sport. Guttmann describes a sports spectator as "anyone who views a sport event, either in situ or through visual media such as film or television." However, not all spectators are fans. Fans, according to Guttman, have an emotional commitment to a sport. This chimes with the work of Henry Jenkins, whose research on fans suggests that not all viewers or spectators are fans. A classic, and clichéd, sport example might be the sports 'widow' who may choose to sit with her husband while he watches television. She may be reading or engaged in some other activity at the same time, and she is probably not as interested in the finer points of the game or player statistics as her husband. In contrast, her husband may have looked

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forward to the televised game all day, planned his evening around viewing it, and have read earlier information in the newspaper about the teams to be fully informed for the game. In essence then, both husband and wife are viewers, but only the husband is a fan. Spectators who attend the Olympics may find themselves in a similar situation. Organizers for the Atlanta Olympics instituted a ticket lottery that went into effect approximately one year prior to the events. Ticket purchasers might thus receive venue tickets for events that were their second or third choice for that day and time. Someone who requested tickets for a gymnastics event that receives water polo tickets instead may choose to go ahead and attend, but while they might have been an informed, enthusiastic fan of gymnastics, they are a spectator at the water polo game.

Gantz and Wenner, in a study of television audience responses to sport, agree that there is a distinction between a spectator (or viewer, or reader in this sense) and a fan. They note that "the differences between spectator and fan may be more pronounced and important at home, where far more of the exposure to sports takes place." This is interesting because Gantz and Wenner recognize that both viewers (at home) and spectators (at a venue) have the potential for complex readings of sport. However, most sports scholars are quick to adopt the idea of 'mediated spectatorship,' an idea introduced by Guttmann. 'Mediation' in this sense, has to do with how a sport is interpreted by the media (newspaper, radio, television, etc.) and presented to the reader

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(viewer, spectator, fan) and suggests that viewers have experiences inferior to spectators. Duncan and Brummett note that

Actual experience in a game is not mediated; the athlete is immediately involved in the sport itself. But spectators [viewers] are always separate from the actual game. The sport is observed, it is presented to the spectator, through some structure or context which affects the nature of the spectating.40

Real and Mechikoff also suggest that "media technology and commercial advertising serve as constraints that shape aspects of the mythic experience of the Olympics, the World Cup, and other major spectator sports events."41

I think a problematic assumption in discussions of sports mediation is that spectators [viewers] are assumed to passively accept the interpretations offered by broadcasters and advertisers. Real and Mechikoff, for example, suggest that

The commercialization of sport through advertiser and sponsor financing ensure that the fan’s viewing experience itself will be commercialized, with players and products inseparably associated. The sports themselves are presented as commodities, and the fan becomes not merely a spectator but a consumer feeding on this heavily promoted and virtually omnipresent diet of mass-mediated sports.42

This claim could imply that viewers are incapable of separating the players from the products, and that viewers passively accept what is offered by the-


broadcaster. Guttmann also suggests that "American spectators acquiesce supinely in the advertisers' interruptions of the game." 43 Both claims tend to lump viewers of sport into a homogenized audience that glosses the active role that viewers, just like spectators, can take in interpreting sport events.

The mediation of sport should not be taken as a foreclosure on the ability of viewers to generate their own meanings from what is presented on their television. Although it is possible, as Guttman suggests, that viewers can be passive receivers of a pre-packaged, pre-interpreted text, they can also participate in the re-interpretation of what they see. The responses of posters to the newsgroup rec.sport.olympics vividly demonstrate that not all readers passively accept the interpretations broadcast to them on their television sets. They seek the interpretations of other fans of the Olympics who also watched televised coverage of the Olympics. A good example of this was their response to the opening ceremonies. None of the posters was able to attend the ceremony live, therefore all saw a mediated version of what actually took place. Posts from this newsgroup provide a unique window into what, and how, meanings are generated by readers of the Olympic text. No researcher-posed questions moderated the dialogue, or guided the discussion with a list of topics of interest to the researcher; all the information and discussion was generated by the fans themselves.

43 Guttmann, Sports Spectators, 142.
Telling It Like It Is: What Fans Thought of the Nagano Opening Ceremonies

In the United States, the 1998 Winter Olympics from Nagano, Japan, were broadcast by CBS from Friday, February 6th through Sunday, February 22nd. The opening ceremonies were shown the first night of coverage from 8 to 11:00 p.m.

The internet newsgroup rec.sport.olympics is open to any computer user around the world who has access to the internet (and a newsgroup reader). Discussion on this newsgroup is generally light between Olympic celebrations, but several hundred messages were posted daily during the Nagano Olympics addressing a variety of subjects of interest to the fans. Most posters were American and Canadian citizens, with occasional posts from people in other countries. Almost without exception, posts were in English; other discussion groups or websites host dialogues in other languages or geared to a particular nationality or sport. One poster, Jason, is a Canadian citizen who has been living and teaching in Japan for three years, and who went to college in the United States. Jason's comments often served as a catalyst for the group's discussion based on his (self-proclaimed) ability to articulate opinions from three different national perspectives.

Posters to this newsgroup meet the accepted definitions for fans: they have strong emotional commitments to the Olympics, are generally quite knowledgeable, and many rearranged their personal lives around broadcasts. While the posters can be generally grouped as 'fans,' it would be a mistake to assume that they all interpret the Olympics, or issues raised, in the same way.
Thus, I do not consider these fans as the members of a single interpretive community. For example, American fans split into two distinctive camps over whether the flagbearer for the U.S. contingent should dip the flag to the head of a foreign state. While nationality played a role in defining the positions that readers might take on issues (such as whether Ross Rebegliatti should have been disqualified)\(^4\), there were clearly cross-national alliances in opinion and many posters sought overtly to distinguish themselves from national stereotypes.

In the twenty-four hours following the telecast of the opening ceremonies, rec.sport.olympics was bombarded with commentary from mostly disgruntled (to say the least) viewers. Most viewers in America watched the broadcast on CBS, viewers in Canada watched CBC, and viewers in Japan watched NHK. Some American and Canadian viewers near the U.S./Canadian border were able to view broadcasts from both countries. CBC and NHK are public broadcast networks, while CBS is privately owned.

'DenverMan' started a long-running thread titled "CBS Opening Ceremony Coverage Confirms World View of Americans":\(^5\)

\(^4\)Ross Rebegliatti is a Canadian snow-boarder who won a gold medal. However, his post-event drug test results indicated the presence of marijuana. He tested at 17.9 nanograms and the acceptable level—which was supposed to allow for the possibility of passive smoking—was 15.0 nanograms. The IOC board voted three to two to disqualify Rebegliatti and he was stripped of his medal. The Canadian Olympic Committee appealed on behalf of Rebegliatti who stanchly maintained that he had not smoked marijuana, but had been present at a party several weeks earlier where others had smoked. After an appeal hearing, Rebegliatti's medal was reinstated.

\(^5\)I have corrected spelling, typographic, and punctuation errors in the postings for greater clarity.
I want to thank CBS for reinforcing the world's view of Americans as uncultured, knuckle-dragging, beer dribbling, burrito belching neanderthals. ... CBS outdid all of the disasters that paraded as Olympics coverage of the past when it decided to talk over Beethoven/Schuller's "Ode to Joy," cutting out for both commercials and an interview. Just to let the rest of the world know, some of us realized the cultural importance and the symbolic significance of this piece of music...\(^6\)

All Americans posting commentary on the opening ceremonies registered some level of disappointment or disgust with CBS's coverage. In a few cases, they recognized a need for commercials, but their critique was with the number and manner in which commercials disrupted the flow of the opening ceremony. In no instance, did an American passively accept the coverage that was dished out by CBS.

I waited four years to see the 1998 Winter Olympics and what do I get? A mouthy newscaster full of inane, neverending [sic], obstructive drivel that was supposed to pass for commentary and so many commercials and interruptions that there was no--I repeat NO--coherent coverage whatsoever of the opening ceremonies. ... CBS, if you can't do any better than this, don't waste the energy or my time. You obviously have no concept of the meaning of the Olympic Games, and could care less. You proved your only intent is to kiss as much corporate butt as possible, and screw national pride, honor, international comaraderie, and a beautiful, solemn, joyous occasion we all would have loved to take part in. You better believe you just lost this viewer.\(^7\)

One fan even noted that CBS had, in the weeks preceding Olympic coverage, helped create an expectation among viewers of what was to be covered in the


Opening Ceremony, specifically conductor Kenji Ozawa's orchestration of the Ode to Joy across five continents:

They [CBS] built this event up to be the virtual second coming, frankly. They essentially decided not to show it once the music started. This was something fully controlled by CBS. If this is how they are beginning their coverage, we are doomed to the most trivial tripe imaginable. If this is how this coverage will go, and how every succeeding television network will program the Olympics in the future, they may as well not do it and spare us the exercise in eating mental pablum.48

Karen consoled another American fan who lamented to the group that he had missed the Opening Ceremony coverage:

Eric, you didn't miss anything anyway. CBS didn't show the opening ceremonies. They just spent 3 hours kissing America's corporate fanny. I have never seen such an incompetent, disappointing span of "coverage" in my life. Between the idiot "newscaster" with his constant blathering and unending commercials, we probably got all of about 10 miserably disjointed minutes of the ceremonies anyway. I recommend watching water drip slowly from your bathroom faucet for the next week. It'll be better than anything CBS has to offer.49

Clearly these fans were not pleased with the coverage they received.

Earlier, I stated that I do not think that the posters to this newsgroup constitute a single interpretive community. However, they do share an important commonality: they are fans of the Olympics. Their knowledge of Olympic history provides them with a common basis through which their interpretations are framed. In other words, they may not always interpret events that they do see on


their televisions in the same way because those events are framed through social values. Nationalism was the most obvious perspective that affected interpretation. But dialogue was possible between variant groups because of a shared knowledge of the Olympics. It is this shared knowledge that opens the door for members of the different interpretive communities to attempt to persuade others over to their viewpoint. The Olympics then is not a universal standard, with a standard set of interpretations (despite the International Olympic Committee's attempts to institute an official understanding of the Olympics). Rather, the Olympics constitute a set of historical occurrences closely followed by many people throughout the world. How those events are interpreted, and their meanings engendered, is determined by the differing social values of the readers of this text. Because of a shared interest in the historical practice of the Olympics, however, members of these different interpretive communities can understand one another's interpretations and recognize their import.

Readers continue to find texts interesting because gaps in texts allow for flexibility in the interpretive process. Generally speaking, we can identify a textual gap anytime we have a difference in how some textual element is to be interpreted. In the case of the opening ceremony in Nagano, then, we know that something called the opening ceremony occurred at a certain time and place, and that specific events, such as a Parade of Nations, or the performance of the "Ode to Joy" took place. Readers should then ideally be able to generate their own interpretations of those events. A major problem in the broadcast of the opening ceremonies, however, was that viewers had difficulty discovering
interpretive gaps because there were so many (commercial) breaks in the text. In other words, the broadcast networks did not offer enough coverage of the actual Olympic text to afford viewers the opportunity to fully interpret the text itself. The breaks that were often dealt with by newsgroup posters were gaps generated by the media, and as such were not available for interpretation. Traditional accounts of sports spectatorship, especially mediated spectatorship (or viewership) might suggest at this point that viewers are forced into accepting the interpretation and information offered by the media. The advantage to looking at the newsgroup posts is that we can easily see that in fact fans do not passively accept this state of affairs. But before they can engage in a discussion about the kind of textual gaps that Iser postulated, they must first fill in the gaps of what actually took place. The internet is an immediate resource for information; not only the newsgroup I discuss here, but websites of the International Olympic Committee, the Nagano Organizing Committee, and various websites of Olympic sponsors or websites managed by other fans, as well as other discussion groups. Fans attempt, then, to circumvent the mediated coverage of a national network by accessing other sources in order to determine what the text of the opening ceremony actually was, and then to engage in a

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50 I realize that a three-hour block of coverage which includes video of the opening ceremonies, plus commercials and commentary, constitutes one kind of text. I am suggesting that the text these fans were most interested in, however, was the ceremony itself. NHK and CBC, as public broadcasters, conveyed more video of the ceremonies themselves than did CBS, a commercial network.
discussion of it. Spectators do not have to engage in this intermediary step before interpreting the text.

Dissatisfaction with media coverage is not a new phenomenon for the fans of rec.sport.olympics. A week before the Nagano Olympics began, Ed tempered his excitement at the approaching festivities with some resignation over the expected flawed coverage, and discussion of the coverage, that was about to flood the newsgroup:

As you know, the Olympics start in less than a week. For those of you who, like me, have been avid fans of the Games for many decades (since 1972, in my case), you know to expect two weeks of excitement, surprises, upsets, winning favorites, despair, glee, and just a great time. As a ten-year veteran of the newsgroups I can tell you that there's another thing to expect. This newsgroup will become inundated by flames of CBS's television coverage. ... I'm sure CBS, like NBC two years ago, will be too focused on American athletes--although the winter games are typically better in this respect because America doesn't have as many top winter sports athletes! I'm sure the commentators will say stupid things from time to time. I'm sure there will [be] a fair amount of "fluff," which, understandably, people on this newsgroup can't stand. But I still love the games. The typically bad coverage is only a minor annoyance to me, although it apparently drives others crazy.51

The anger and frustration that Americans felt at CBS's coverage was perhaps exacerbated by the comparative satisfaction of Canadian viewers with CBC's coverage:

CBC Canada had the entire ceremonies live and did not interrupt either the parade of nations or the Ode to Joy. The announcers remained quiet during the impressive and riveting Ode to Joy worldwide broadcast. Sad

51Ed (ed.suranyi@etak.com), 2 February 1998
but true--CBS and most of the world does not expect Mr. Average American to enjoy anything but violence and flag waving (their own).

Jason wrote a lengthy post reviewing the Japanese coverage by NHK. Some of the scenes he described were ones that American viewers had not been privy to via the CBS coverage. For example,

The children as flags was a great idea and having them walk in with each country, in the hand of a sumotori was a great visual image. I especially liked the child who came in with Portugal; the one who decided to try and push the sumotori he was with.

Several Americans wistfully remarked on having missed out on this portion (and others) of the ceremony, such as Charles who said "I wish I could have seen Portugal come in (CBS didn't show the entire parade of nations). I liked the snow children and the sumotori too."

As I previously stated, the discussion by the fans on rec.sport.olympics does not support the contention that viewers passively accept what networks broadcast. The internet is making available to some viewers a resource for

\footnote{Mike (701064@mail.ican.net), 9 February 1998 posting to rec.sport.olympics, on-line, available from Deja News, http://www.dejanews.com.}

\footnote{Jason (nospam@go.away), 7 February 1998 posting to rec.sport.olympics, on-line, available from Deja News, http://www.dejanews.com.}

\footnote{Charles (buchanan@traveller.com), 7 February 1998 posting to rec.sport.olympics, on-line, available from Deja News, http://www.dejanews.com.}

\footnote{Obviously, access to the internet requires a computer, modem, and gateway access. All cost money and I am not unaware that a certain socio-economic bias inherently exists in an examination of information gained from internet resources. However, I still feel that the information to be discovered via this resource offers new insights into how some readers interpret the Olympic text.}
comparing notes on the kinds of information and coverage offered around the world; viewers can and do find out what they are missing out on. And contrary to any claims by sports scholars that viewers passively acquiesce to rampant commercialism and mediated telecasts, these readers do in fact resist the telecast versions meted out to them. Strategies of resistance mentioned by the fans include taping the coverage so that commercials can be fastforwarded over, writing or contacting CBS to complain about poor coverage, writing and contacting advertisers whose commercials were a disruption to Olympics coverage, boycotting the products and services of advertisers, and finally, boycotting CBS and not watching coverage of the Olympics. Those who said they were going to boycott CBS sometimes appealed to Canadian fans for taped copies of CBC’s coverage, or indicated that they would follow the Olympics on various World Wide Web sites.

Eastman and Riggs outlined five components of fan experience for televised sports: membership, participation, connection, reassurance, and influence.

Exhibiting knowledge about a sporting event—in their own and coviewers’ perceptions—plays a central part in defining who is and is not a fan, who has group membership and who does not... sports viewers also adopted rituals to help them relate to the game or sports event itself, to participate in the externals of the game at home or in a bar, to take part without attending in person. Some rituals also establish and make public to other viewers one’s connection to the game. But at a deeper level of interpretation, it appears that while fans normally seek out the closest matches, the most suspenseful games, at the same time many seek to relieve the tension arising from the suspense, to reassure themselves, ...
and equally, idiosyncratic rituals seem to be ways of influencing a game's result in the minds of some fans.  

The characteristics of membership and connection were most apparent in the *rec.sport.olympic* fans. While participation in the newsgroup is open to anyone, several regular posters clearly dominated the conversation and were often deferred to for their knowledge of particular topic areas. For example, some posters had worked as volunteers at several Olympics and offered insights into behind-the-scenes activities, one poster had worked for the International Broadcast Company which coordinates national broadcast feeds, and another poster had unique knowledge of figure skating and its judging intrigues. All posters shared an emotional commitment that qualified them as fans, and this was enough to generally qualify them as members of the group. The special knowledge that some of the posters had—generally gained through direct participation in Olympic activities—earned them special recognition from other group members. These group 'leaders' were often deferred to when questions arose about technical points in particular and the technical information was then used to refashion posters' interpretations of the events they were watching.

Regular posters maintained a connection with other Olympics fans through their participation in the dialogue on *rec.sport.olympics*. Not only were these readers able to reinforce their own commitment and interest in the Games, but they were able to circumvent the restrictions of the broadcasts beamed into

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their homes through discussions with people in other countries. The Olympic
text that CBS broadcast to American viewers was vehemently criticized in many
cases for its blatant nationalism and generally poor coverage of sports events.
The textual breaks that CBS chose to insert—from omitting large chunks of the
opening ceremonies (like video of most countries in the parade of nations), to the
glossing of whole sports (e.g., curling)—were not quietly accepted by these fans.
Through the internet—rec.sport.olympics was but one available newsgroup and
there were a plethora of websites with current, accurate coverage and results—
fans were able to fill in the gaps and compare national broadcasts with other
information. Thus, these fans were capable of shaping their own text of the
Olympics using a variety of resources.

Internet access offered unique forms for meeting other criteria outlined by
Eastman and Riggs. The characteristic of fan participation was clearly met by
the posters when they read and responded to discussions generated on
rec.sport.olympics. Reassurance was often sought from other members of the
newsgroup as posters sought to validate their interpretations or to fill in gaps in
the television coverage. Members of the newsgroup used other internet
resources to learn more about what was happening in Nagano and this
information was shared with the group. Eastman and Riggs, for example,
specifically mention reassurance as necessary for dealing with the tension
created by the unknown outcome of a sport contest. Internet readers could
easily access the 1998 Olympics home page to learn the immediate outcome of
any event. The role of ritual to influence event outcomes was less clear on the
internet interactions.

Duncan and Brummett suggested in 1993 that four characteristics of
media logic shape the meanings of televised sports: narrative, intimacy,
commodification, and rigid time segmentation. Narrative refers to the ability of
television to tell a story "replete with standardized, stock characters, caricatures
who remain true to type"\(^5^7\) such as villians and heros. CBS used athlete
vignettes to tell stories and inform viewers who the potential heros might be.
CBS tried to capitalize on recent interest in figure skating and cut away during
the Ode to Joy for a pre-taped interview with Michelle Kwan to find out why she
was not at the opening ceremonies. For fans, even those, who enjoyed figure-
skating, CBS's obvious attempt to prefigure a hero met with cold disdain
because the interview interrupted the opening ceremony which contributed more
to the meaning of the Olympics:

I would like to express my extreme disappointment with CBS for the
coverage of the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics. During the
"Ode to Joy" sequence, with some of the most beautiful dancing and
costumes, they chose to cut away for a huge block of commercials. We
waited patiently to return. On returning, after about 20 seconds they cut
away again to show a clip about an athlete who couldn't be at the opening
ceremonies with her telling how she felt about missing them. How do they
think WE felt about missing them!!...when they kept cutting away from the
most spectacular worldwide music/dance even we had ever seen (more
precisely, TRIED to see).\(^5^8\)

\(^5^7\)Duncan and Brummett, "The Mediation of Spectator Sport," 220.

\(^5^8\)Mike (berrow@earthlink.net), 7 February 1998 posting to rec.sport.olympics,
The relatively small size of the television screen, the tendency of broadcasters to focus on individuals rather than large groups, and the use of close-up shots and interviews to make the viewer feel that they know athletes are ways in which television creates intimacy. The booming computer industry and increased access to the internet has created another medium arguably more immediate than television. When viewers watch the opening ceremonies on their home television, they may be active in their viewing and interpretation, but their interpretations are based on what they themselves have seen and heard (whether in the broadcast, conversations with family and others, read, etc.). Readers of the newsgroup rec.sport.olympics share a different kind of intimacy with other fans as they exchange opinions. Randy, who signed himself as "Thoroughly Disgusted" in his post about the opening ceremonies, complained about the coverage and exclaimed "Thank God for computers and the i-net!" The internet offered even more immediate interaction with athletes: computer users with access to the worldwide web had the opportunity to write to any athlete at the Nagano Olympics on the official website.

Commodification describes the extent to which commercials are interwoven with the other programming content of television. Duncan and Brummett suggest that "commercials blur the distinction between sport and advertisement, thus creating a link between sports and commodities in the

The viewers who post to rec.sport.olympics certainly challenge any claim that people watching television are unable to distinguish between commercials and other broadcast content. For example, Dennis agreed with another poster that CBS’s decision to broadcast ‘fluff’ and commercials at the expense of the entirety of the opening ceremonies was possibly representative of many Americans’ viewing preferences:

Given the level of trash on U.S. broadcast channels at any time of the day or evening, you are probably correct. But it does not mean I have to like it or even tolerate it.61

However, tolerating commercials as described by Dennis is not the same thing as accepting them in the manner suggested by Duncan and Brummett; it would be a mistake to think that all readers of the Olympic text are incapable of ascertaining commercial (or commercialized) telecast content.

Finally, time segmentation rigidly structures television content, dividing commercials from sports action. Viewers become accustomed to the media logic of television which develops and resolves narratives in short chunks of time.62 In the broadcast of the opening ceremonies, however, (and all other CBS 1998 Olympic broadcasts, in my opinion), it was complete fragmentation, rather than segmentation, which was aired. During the opening ceremonies, CBS ‘covered’ the rituals in very short time segments—sometimes only one or two minutes—

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60 Duncan and Brummett, “The Mediation of Spectator Sport,” 223.


sandwiched between longer blocks of commercials. Roy commented on Jason's review of NHK's coverage of the Ode to Joy, noting that "CBS showed so little of it that I couldn't really decide whether I liked it."\(^{63}\) Innured to the role of commercials in American broadcasting, many of the viewers that posted to the newsgroup still registered surprise and dismay at the quantity (which some admitted might be a necessity of commercial television) and the placement (felt to be poor decision-making on the part of CBS personnel) of commercials during the opening ceremonies.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I have explored the role of readers in the production of meaning in Olympic texts. I have focused on one group of readers from the newsgroup *rec.sport.olympics* to suggest that readers of the Olympics can be active participants in the generation of meaning, interacting with and manipulating a text to arrive at personal meanings. Readers interpret texts as members of interpretive communities and they discover gaps in the text and use those gaps as entry points for creating their own meanings. In the case of the opening ceremonies, viewers with access to the internet were able to interact with other viewers and fans not only to discuss meanings in the text, but discover gaps created in the process of mediation as networks chose which aspects of the ceremony to broadcast.

As previously noted, audience researchers like John Fiske have

distinguished between the homogeneous 'audience' hypothesized by advertisers, and the reality of multiple audiences (interpretive communities) with different interpretive strategies. Sports scholars should also recognize that spectators (or viewers or fans) of sports events cannot be homogenized. Using the examples from the newsgroup, that I have shown not only that readers can be very active participants in the process of generating meaning, but that they do so in ways that contradict some of the generalizations present in the literature about the behavior of sports fans.

Just as authors are not the sole locus for the production of meaning in social texts, neither are readers capable of interpretation separate from the effects of other factors. For example, rec.sport.olympics readers turned to various sources to help shape a fuller knowledge of the text of the opening ceremonies, and to refine their interpretations of that text. Readers must interact with texts in order to produce meanings; they cannot produce meanings independent of the text, and I have successfully shown that readers do not merely consume meanings dictated by a text. Olympic readers--spectators, fans, viewers, etc.--are active participants in the process of shaping meaning. Sports scholars should be aware that their membership in a particular kind of interpretive community (or communities) leads them to interpretations valued by their community. Fans of the Olympics, such as those posting to the newsgroup, have interpretations that may differ. The value of the internet for scholars interested in the Olympics today is the opportunity to gain richer perspectives on the various kinds of interpretations that different communities share. What do
the Olympics mean to readers? That depends on the reader’s membership in an interpretive community, the reader’s own personal experiences, and the kinds of textual information to which the reader has access. In the later chapter on intertextuality I will explore how these interact to help produce meanings of the Olympics. Next, however, I will explore the last of the traditional modes of textual analysis and focus on the role that genre has in the interpretation of the Olympic text.
CHAPTER IV

Categorizing Olympic Texts: The Role of Genre in Olympic Interpretations

Introduction

Genre is, quite simply, a lumping together of like texts into categories. Literary texts have been categorized since the time of Aristotle and communication scholars of the 20th century adapted literary genre theory to discussions of the cinema and television. Sport scholars have used broad categories like 'games,' 'sport,' or 'ritual' to describe sport activities in genre-like ways. In 1984, John MacAloon published an essay in which he clearly outlined a genre schematic for the Games. MacAloon characterized the Olympic Games as a ramified performance type; one in which four increasingly complex genres are superimposed upon each other. The core genre is 'game' which is then successively interpolated with 'ritual,' 'festival,' and 'spectacle.' The importance of MacAloon's theory is its ability to account for multiple levels of meaning experienced by for Olympic participants, viewers, and spectators.

My first task in this chapter is to outline the treatment of genre in literary criticism and communication studies. This overview will highlight two genre-related issues that are of concern to genre theorists: (1) whether genres are universal, unchanging structures or whether they are culturally defined, and (2) the relationship between genre structure and the meanings derived from any

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sample text within a genre. These two issues have been discussed in writings on literary texts as well as cinematic and television texts.

In the second section of the chapter I will offer an analysis of MacAloon’s theory of the Olympics as a composite of four different genres. I will use ideas from genre criticism in literary criticism, communication studies, and concepts like authorship and interpretive communities to suggest that MacAloon’s theory is representative of Western interpretive strategies, rather than the fuller range of interpretive strategies held by interpretive communities. In addition, genre typologies should be eyed warily lest they become self-fulfilling categorizations.

A 2,000 Year History: Genre Theory in Literary Criticism

The idea of genre, or classifying texts by type, is credited to Aristotle’s writings in the Poetics. In that work, he suggested five genres: epic, tragedy, comedy, lyric, and satire. These categories were resurrected from the classical Greek authors during the Renaissance with the addition of two new genres, the novel and the short story. Writers understood that their texts must fit the form of one genre or another. Readers and spectators (of plays) had expectations for the text of any particular genre, and these expectations in turn reinforced the need for writers to observe genre protocol in order to garner an audience for their

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work. For example, "Athenian citizens going to see a play by Sophocles knew in advance that the story would be acted out by a small group of actors, that they would be seeing and hearing a chorus as part of the production, and that a certain kind of music would accompany the chorus."^5

The rigidity of genre classifications contributed to their disfavor as a mode of literary critique after the eighteenth century. The use of genre purely to classify texts resulted in a codified genre structure that focused on the similarities between texts,® rather than the characteristics that make texts unique. Recent genre critiques are moving beyond a consideration of textual taxonomy, which characterized genre theory throughout the eighteenth century. The first question I raised in the introduction was whether genres can be characterized as universal, unchanging structures; the answer seems to be no, for critics today recognize that genres are not rigid categories, but are, in fact, open to change. The individual qualities of texts should not be sacrificed too easily to classification systems that can, in any event, be based on features that are arbitrary. It is always possible, according to Tzvetan Todorov to "discover a

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property common to two texts, and thus to put them together in a class." The point is that we should not be too quick to classify texts, and that we should be especially attentive to the features we select to base those classifications upon.

Genre criticism has enjoyed a resurgence precisely because the givenness of genre classification has been opened to question. Jean-Marie Schaeffer likens the concept of literary genre to magic because in

...magic thought the word creates the thing. That is exactly what has happened with the notion of "literary genre"; the very fact of using the term has led us to think we ought to find a corresponding entity which would be added to the texts and would be the cause of their relationship.

For Schaeffer then, it is only the names of genres that change over time because genres are not present in the texts themselves, but are discursive names applied by readers or critics to texts to describe perceived similarities among texts. However, because discursive practices are defined by social values, changes in how genres are perceived is related to cultural characteristics. Genre is not extrinsic to texts therefore, but is a product of the discursive practices of the culture interpreting the text. This leads to the second issue I am considering: the relationship between genre structure and the


9Schaeffer, "Literary Genres and Textual Genericity," 179.

meanings derived from any example text within a genre.

The role of genre in shaping interpretation is to be found in the interlocking expectations between authors and readers. Authors compose texts keeping in mind specific generic components, and readers consume texts in the context of generic expectations. As Wellek and Warren note, "the genre represents...a sum of aesthetic devices at hand, available to the writer and already intelligible to the reader"[^11] [emphasis mine]. This does not mean that individual texts within a genre are exactly interchangeable, even though generic conventions are adhered to. Each text can contribute something unique to the genre; stretching, building upon, or confounding established conventions. This element of surprise contributes to the fluidity and development of generic classifications.

Nevertheless, the conventions that circumscribe genres do become institutionalized. The creative latitude within a genre can be stretched only so far before readers, disappointed in a text's inability to measure up to its generic claims, will set a book aside. Todorov writes that "in a given society, the recurrence of certain discursive properties is institutionalized, and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by that [generic] codification."[^12] These institutions are, then, responsible for generating "horizons

of expectations" for readers and "models of writing" for authors. Readers’
expectations and authors’ generic models are linked to cultural factors,
particularly ideology. Todorov makes this case most clearly:

Like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of
the society to which they belong...a society chooses and codifies the acts
that correspond most closely to its ideology; that is why the existence of
certain genres in one society, their absence in another, are revelatory of
that ideology...

However, if genre is a cultural institution, embedded in, and understood by
individuals immersed in those particular cultural values, then there is a problem
in suggesting any universal kind of genre structure overlaying the Olympics. In
other words, if we think of genres as endemic products of particular cultures,
then we need to imagine culturally-defined genre structures for the Olympics.
The Olympics, however, also exhibit trans-cultural appeal. How then is it
possible to argue for a culturally-based genre structure when the Olympic text
also gives the appearance of universal appeal? Fish’s interpretive communities

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13 Todorov, Genres in Discourse, 18.

14 Childers and Hentzi identify four distinct ways in which ideology is currently
used in social criticism. In one of those senses, ideology is "the combination of
all forms of social consciousness, such as law, philosophy, ethics, art, etc." and I
believe this is the way in which Todorov used the term. Poststructuralists
consider ideology "as the system of representations, or stories, that define the
possibilities of existence for all individuals." This is the sense in which I apply the
notion of ideology. I do not consider these two definitions exclusive to each
other. The two other definitions noted by Childers and Hentzi—ideology as either
a range of political ideas, or ideology as a form of misrepresentations of social
reality—are not indicative of the way I am using the term. See Childers and
Hentzi, Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism, pages
149-151.

15 Todorov, Genres in Discourse, 19.
afford one way out of this dilemma. The semi-permeable borders of interpretive communities that I discussed in the previous chapter make it possible for readers of the Olympic text to share interpretations. In other words, interpretations between communities overlap and facilitate inter-group understandings. Olympic texts thus appear to be uniformly interpreted because we are often attentive to the similarities in interpretation, rather than the differences.

In sum, literary genres are systems of classification open to change. Their interpretive potential is a result of their institutionalization which creates particular generic expectations that must be met and recognized by both authors and readers. In addition, genre is embedded within cultural values, and for Olympic texts, this means that interpretation is structured by local cultural forms. Dialogue among different interpretive communities, however, helps link local communities in their understanding of Olympic texts.

**Communications and Genre: Cinema and Film**

Genre theory in the cinema and television is not weighted with the accretions of two millenia's worth of thinking on the codification of generic forms. Literary genre theory, however, has served as a guide for the development of genre criticism in communications so that issues pertinent to the written text still influence the assessment of genre in the cinema and television. In the previous section I addressed two issues: (1) whether genres are unchanging classificatory systems, and (2) the relationship between genre structure and the meanings readers obtain from an example of a generic text. These concerns apply also to non-literary textual types. The long tradition of generic classification for literary
texts seems to make generic classifications more 'stable' within that realm. I think that mass media texts, which can more quickly reflect social change, provide the opportunities for more varied interpretations in the reading formations developed between reader and text. Television's generic forms are especially relevant for a discussion of the Olympics, which attracts a worldwide television audience in the billions.

Stephen Neale traces the origin of cinematic genre theory to the late 1960s and early 1970s. Like their literary counterparts, cinematic genre theorists focus on similarities between films, rather than individual features of films. Generally recognized as patterns, forms, or structures which "transcend individual films," genre more specifically refers to "conventions, iconography, plots, themes, and characters." Genre is also heralded not only because it makes it possible to look at the relationships between films, but because it shows how films are representative of, and situated within cultures. John Fiske's definition of genre as it pertains to television immediately recognizes the role that genre plays in the production of meaning: "genre is a cultural practice that attempts to structure some order into the wide range of texts and meanings that

16 Stephen Neale, Genre (Hertford: Centurion Print Ltd., 1980), 1, 5.

17 Neale, Genre, 10.


circulate in our culture for the convenience of both producers and audiences."\textsuperscript{20}

Thus, while there are obvious similarities between film and television versus literary texts, movies and TV shows more readily acknowledge their tie to cultural generic forms; due in large part to the economic fallout when a purported generic type fails to live up to its audience's expectations.\textsuperscript{21}

I want to address first the possibility that cinema and television have universal genre types. Again, the answer appears to be no. Critics in both arenas readily acknowledge that genre in these media respond to cultural change. \textit{How} genres change is a mildly disputed topic. The word "evolve" (and its derivatives) is sometimes used to describe generic change, but Tag Gallagher argues against the notion of genre \textit{evolution}, suggesting that to describe genres as 'evolving' is to imply a linear development--in a Darwinian sense of slow accretive changes--of a generic form.\textsuperscript{22} Gallagher instead opts for generic change that takes place in response to its contextual placement within society. Genres then, might exist in a steady state for relatively long periods of time, then change quickly and often in response to cultural changes. Fiske suggests for television that "genres rise and fall in popularity as popular taste shifts with social and historical changes."\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20}John Fiske, \textit{Television Culture}, 109.

\textsuperscript{21}Neale, \textit{Genre}, 54.

Genre is perceived not as a rigid set of characteristics, but as a set of
customs or style that serve as a set of "structural elements...that are
shared between producers and audiences." Within that shared structure there
is room for each movie or television show to display its unique characteristics. In
fact, it is the juxtaposition of the familiar and new aspects of each text within a
gene, it is argued, which interests the viewer. Genre provides the structure of
familiarity within which viewers are prepared to interpret meanings, and new plot
twists, character developments, etc. hold the viewer's interest and help to stretch
the genre.

Fiske describes television as a "highly "generic" medium" in which
producers, programmers, viewers and advertisers are dependent upon generic
forms living up to their expectations. If some aspect of the movie or television
text plays too strongly against generic type, the show is "unlikely to be
successful." This is an important point in the case of the Olympics. Scholars
may recognize the interplay between different generic types in the Olympics
(e.g., MacAlloon's ramified performance type), but if television producers, or

23Fiske, Television Culture, 112.
24Fiske, Television Culture, 110.
26Fiske, Television Culture, 110.
28Fiske, Television Culture, 109.
television viewers, are expecting one genre and another is presented, the program will likely fail. This does not mean that new genres cannot emerge. New genres, however, cannot be displayed to audiences that are expecting the presentation of another genre. In the case of Olympic broadcasts, when viewers see commercials that create the expectation of a sport broadcast and the network then broadcasts three hours that contain, in actuality, very little sport competition, viewers are going to be disappointed. If the disappointment or frustration is widespread enough, viewers tune out. This leads to lower network ratings which also have an economic impact; sponsors and advertisers, who have been guaranteed a certain size viewing audience (share), must be compensated in other ways by the networks. Viewers may more readily engage in texts that push the envelope of generic categories as long as they are not led, through network advertisements and promotions, to expect a program strongly embedded within a particular generic type.

Media scholars, like literary critics, recognize that genres represent cultural values, and that it is through those values that the meanings of a genre are facilitated. Fiske suggests that genres “form the network of industrial, ideological, and institutional conventions that are common to both producer and audiences out of which arise both the producer’s program and the audience’s readings.” This means that genres are used by readers as a guide to

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Fiske, *Television Culture*, 111.
interpretation. For example, a curious television viewer may turn to *TV Guide* for a listing of programs. The viewer may a movie by genre--drama, comedy, or romance--based on their expectations of certain elements that would appear in any movie located in one of these genres. Similarly, a football fan, tuning in at a time when no football games are being broadcast, may select another program in the genre 'sport' with the expectation of viewing certain elements of competition. Neale suggests that "the existence of genres means that the spectator [or viewer], precisely, will always know that everything will be 'made right in the end,' that everything will cohere, that any threat or danger in the narrative process itself will always be contained."

Viewers can bring to their viewing experience a range of interpretive strategies, but the generic structure will help contain, and limit, which meanings are appropriate within a genre.

The producers of television programs (or movies, or radio shows) prepare and select programming based on genre structure to attract a certain kind of audience. Advertisers, in turn, are interested in the relationship between genre and audience as a tool for selling their products. Neale notes the interrelationship between these elements:

> The problem for the industry is that it needs, as far as possible, to guarantee meaning and pleasure (pleasurable forms of meaning) in order to attract and to maintain an audience sizeable enough to produce a return on its capital. If it is in any way to do this, it has to institutionalize a

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set of expectations which it will be able, within the limits of its economic and ideological practices, to fulfill.\textsuperscript{34}

Just because commercial entities--like broadcast networks and advertisers--are interested in capitalizing on the effects of genre does not suggest that meanings are imposed. Fiske notes that "there is considerable space for the negotiation of meaning" and that viewers may draw on their memories of previous episodes, other programs, and even "extra-generic" meanings.\textsuperscript{35} A prime Olympic example here is how sport contests between rival countries are imbued with nationalistic meanings external to the actual sport contest, such as field hockey contests between Pakistan and India, or hockey contests between the United States and Russia (or, historically, the Soviet Union).

Not only are producers unable to fully control which meanings are produced by a generic text, but they are challenged to offer new elements in addition to fully expected genre elements. Each text "has in some way to be different, unique, in order to guarantee regimes of pleasure and meaning."\textsuperscript{36} These novel elements, in addition to holding the viewers' interest, also help reshape and redefine genres.\textsuperscript{37} Non-literary texts then, like literary texts, must successfully co-mingle familiar generic elements with unfamiliar elements which may, or may not, ultimately be institutionalized in a revised version of the genre.

\textsuperscript{34}Neale, \textit{Genre}, 54.

\textsuperscript{35}Fiske, \textit{Television Culture}, 84.

\textsuperscript{36}Neale, \textit{Genre}, 52.

\textsuperscript{37}Neale, \textit{Genre}, 54.
Sport contests are particularly successful at balancing the familiar structural generic elements with new textual components guaranteed to hold a viewer or spectator’s interest. The basic element of competition—the expectation of a winner in a contest—coupled with the formal rules of the game provides the familiar structure of this genre. The reader’s attention is held because the outcome, and the elements of how that particular game is played are the novel aspects that interest the viewer.

Because genre elements reflect cultural values, it would be a mistake to suppose that any one genre will generate the same kinds of meanings across a range of cultures. Tudor notes of the cinema, for example, that "unless there is a world consensus on the subject ... there is no basis for assuming that a western will be conceived in the same way in every culture." But must the culture that produces a genre remain the only culture able to interpret texts of that genre in particular ways? I do not think so. Genres—especially, perhaps, because they are representative of social values—can be linked with genres of other cultures through the activities of interpretive communities. These linkages help generate the same kinds of reader expectations in the new culture as in the old culture. While interpretive possibilities of the two cultures probably will not

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38Tudor, "Genre," 7.

39I am trying to resist invoking a conception of 'condition,' as in: people in the new culture are *conditioned*, through repeated exposure, to interpret the genre in the same way as members of the originating culture experience, and interpret, examples of that genre. The negative connotations of 'condition' in this regard smack of George Orwell’s *1984*. My intention, rather, is to suggest that through exposure to elements of other cultures, people begin to appreciate and
be identical--because extra-generic factors that influence interpretation like local politics, will remain a part of the interpretive quotient--it does seem reasonable to me to expect some area where mutual interpretation may develop as the range of possibilities overlaps. Buscombe suggests that repeated exposure to generic elements leads audiences "to recognize certain formal elements as charged with an accretion of meaning"\textsuperscript{40} [emphasis mine]. The worldwide availability of the Olympics on television creates an environment for people of diverse cultures to see and hear the Games; and develop a set of generic expectations that may, in some instances, transcend national and cultural ideology.

Media scholars, then, make a much more forceful claim for the ability of genres to change than do literary critics. In addition, the immediacy of television (in particular) and film highlights the role of meaning in the relationship between genre structure and how readers interpret texts; meaning is grounded in local cultural values. I want to turn now specifically to the Olympics and the role genre plays in helping to shape readers' interpretations of the Games.

**The Olympics and Genre**

Genre is a relatively unexplored aspect of the Olympics and sport in general. According to media studies' scholars and representatives of the media (for example, programmers for television, editors for newspapers, book understand a wider variety of cultural perspectives. Genre, with formal structural elements that may, through increased familiarity, foster inter-cultural communication, be one vehicle for promoting shared interpretations.

\textsuperscript{40}Buscombe, "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema," 21.
publishers), "sport" is a genre, in the same sense as documentaries, soap operas or romance, comedies, dramas, and so on. The work of John J. MacAloon has opened the door to a more sophisticated consideration of genre in sport, and particularly for the Olympics. Rather than accept the Olympics as an undifferentiated example of "sport," MacAloon has developed an interlocking genre typology for the Olympics which provides insights into how interpretations are framed. MacAloon's theory has much to offer as explanation for the structuring of interpretation of the Olympic Games. But because his focus is on performance and performance genres, MacAloon's theory tends to privilege the interpretations of participants and spectators over viewers or other readers (say, those listening to radio or reading the newspaper). MacAloon's typology also seems oriented from a Western perspective so that the genre types he recognizes may not encompass all the possible genres used by various cultures to structure the Olympic Games for interpretation. I will explore these issues and suggest that shared understandings of the Olympics by different cultures are facilitated by, but not controlled by, genre. Sport scholars, in particular, should be wary of developing genre typologies that become prescriptive instead of allowing genres to emerge from the understandings of interpretive communities.

"Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies" outlines four genres--spectacle, festival, ritual, and game--that MacAloon suggests comprise a ramified Olympic performance type. Other performance types may also exist, but MacAloon thinks that these four are "semantically and
functionally the most significant. He suggests that spectacle and game were original performance types of the Olympics and that festival and ritual developed later, in conjunction with a growing Olympic tradition.

MacAloon leads off with a discussion of spectacle, a genre he feels is poorly understood. Spectacles "give primacy to visual sensory and symbolic codes," possess a certain size and grandeur, and are "a dynamic form, demanding movement, action change, and exchange" between performers and spectators. The Olympics are, according to MacAloon, "spectacle par excellence" and this feast for the eyes is available only to spectators and performers; television cannot capture it. Spectacles contrast sharply with festivals in mood--festivals are always joyous whereas spectacles always contain the potential for more ominous moods (e.g., our suspicions, realized or not, that an Olympic event might be marred by terrorist activity.)

MacAloon points out the tension between cacophonous, unruly spectacles and the joyful celebration of festival and notes the Olympic movement's repudiation of the term "spectacle" in favor of "festival." Spectacle is also 'emically' defined by performers and observers. For MacAloon, this means that outsiders--and he includes

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43MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle," 243-244.
ethnographers here—often have difficulty recognizing or describing spectacles. Spectacles are the most dynamic of the genres and demand "movement, action, change, and exchange on the part of the human actors who are center stage, and the spectators [who] must be excited in turn." A true understanding and recognition of spectacle, then, depends upon one’s participation or first-hand attendance according to MacAloon. In the case of the Olympics, athletes, officials, spectators and others who are physically present at an Olympic celebration are the only ones who can truly appreciate the spectacular generic qualities of the Games.

Festivals, in addition to their celebratory mood, are also, according to MacAloon, notable for being fixed in time. MacAloon pointed out at the time he wrote his essay, that "the Games are bound to a calendar occurring once, and only once every four years." This characteristic helped to separate festivals from the more diffuse genre of spectacle. The discrete parceling of Olympiads has now gone by the wayside as the Winter Games are now intercalated with the Summer Games. For Olympic fans (and capitalist sponsors) that means that any calendrical year is either (1) an Olympic year (Summer or Winter) or (2) a pre-post-Olympic year (for example, 1997 was a pre-Nagano, post-Atlanta year). In the next chapter I will use Umberto Eco’s adaptation of information theory to

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discuss how Olympic saturation is decreasing the value and potential for the
Olympics to positively affect lives (produce meaningful meanings). For now, it is
eight to say that the current biennial staging of the Olympics, with its ever
more frenzied commercialism, de-emphasizes the genre of festival and pushes
the Olympics more forcefully toward spectacle.

One facet of festival has acquired a new dimension in the electronic age.
MacAlloon notes that "the roles of actors and spectators are less
distinguishable" in festival than spectacle. In the Olympic festival, both
spectators and athletes are participants; both contribute to the production of the
festival atmosphere. Technology in the late 1990s, however, has expanded the
ways in which people can participate in the Olympics. During the Nagano
Olympics, a variety of readers (television viewers, newspaper readers, etc.--even
spectators) could send e-mail to any of the athletes participating. Athletes in
turn, could write back. This exchange between athletes and fans contributes to
the festival-like atmosphere and the act of electronic communication allows the
fan to act—to contribute—in the formation of the Olympic text.

Ritual is more complicated and it is MacAlloon's explication of ritual that
underlies much of his Olympic work. Ritual functions in two ways: it "invokes
and involves religious or sacred forces...and ritual action effects social transitions
or spiritual transformations; it does not merely mark or accompany them."

Coubertin used ceremonies to intentionally suffuse the Olympics with ritual, and it has been the evolution and accumulation of ritual practices that have contributed to the symbolic importance of the Games.

Many of the familiar ceremonies which mark the Olympics are rites of passage which ritualize the Games. The opening ceremonies, in particular, is a series of rituals which help to position the Games as something separate from 'ordinary,' everyday life. This suspension from everyday events is most strongly felt by spectators, athletes, and other participants who experience the ritual in its entirety. The genre of ritual is thus mostly applicable, without being exclusive to, people who experience the primary Olympic text. The role of religion was profound for the opening ceremonies in Nagano where Samurai performed traditional Japanese rituals which marked out and protected the Olympic stadium as a sacred location before the athletes entered the area. American viewers of the 1998 Winter Olympics were witness to the start of the ceremonies at Zenkoji Temple, and also knew that CBS was broadcasting from a location within the sacred grounds of the shrine. The role of Buddhist priests and Samurai in shaping the ritual flavor of the 1998 Games stands in sharp contrast to the opening ceremonies of Atlanta in 1996, which seem notable more for a procession of pickup trucks than the contributions of Southern gospel singers.

It is also ritual that is responsible for the ethos of universal humanism that permeates the Olympics. Olympic rituals actually focus on three social identities:
the individual, nationality, and humankind which MacAloon credits to Coubertin.\textsuperscript{52} The idea of a universal humanity is juxtaposed in Olympic ritual with a recognition of the individual—for example award ceremonies which celebrate the achievements of particular athletes. The parade of nations during opening ceremonies portrays the 'humanness' of all the athletes while opting for a focus on nationality; yet during the closing ceremonies athletes from all countries enter as a group so that the final message is one of unity, rather than difference.

In a 1982 address to the Olympic Academy, MacAloon suggests that it was the "genius of Pierre de Coubertin and of the others who created the Modern Olympics...to focus on those three social identities that, in the modern world, come the closest to being universal."\textsuperscript{53} Allen Guttmann also recognizes the importance of these three sources: "most spectators seem to need the opportunity to identify with someone who represents them."\textsuperscript{54} Some spectators identify with particular individuals, while others identify with the nationality of athletes; and still others with the human dimension of sports in which spectators "seem to be cosmopolitan enough genuinely to admire an athlete whose color, creed, or ethnic identity is different from their own."\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52}MacAloon, "Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle," 252-253.


\textsuperscript{55}Guttmann, \textit{The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games}, 171.
Games form the core, or innermost genre, for MacAloon's nested typology. Games exist first as formal structures that "involve fixed and public rules, predetermined roles, defined goals, and built-in criteria for evaluating the quality of the performance." The structure of games—and the contests within the Olympics—provides a framework within which the competitive action unfolds. MacAloon also suggests that games are intrinsically paradoxical, characterized as fun and entertainment, while players (and fans I might add) also engage in games with an attitude of intent seriousness.

Having delineated the four genres, MacAloon then arranges them into a series of concentric rectangles—the rectangles represent 'frames' adapted from the work of Gregory Bateson and Erving Goffman. This frame analysis recognizes that each genre has unique characteristics, but that in the case of the Olympics, it takes the interactions of the various genres to result in the ramified performance type that MacAloon says characterizes the Olympic Games:

...the Olympic Games form a single performance system. The genres are intimately and complexly interconnected on all levels: historically, ideologically, structurally, and performatively. Thus we are forced to recognize that the Olympic Games represent a special kind of cultural performance, a ramified performance type....

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So, to raise the first of the genre questions addressed in previous sections: are
the Olympic genres as described by MacAloon--the ramified performance type of
game, ritual, festival, and spectacle--universal and static, or open to change?

MacAloon seems to tread very carefully here. He is claiming a "single
performance system," however, he is also cautious and notes at various points
in his discussion that (1) the genres of game, ritual, festival, and spectacle do not
comprise all of the available genres to be found in the Olympics, and (2) frame
analysis allows for interpretation to be 'customized' by "sociocultural context."®

MacAloon contrasts American and Korean interpretations of the torch ceremony
in "The Ethnographic Imperative" concluding that "terms like state, people,
hierarchy, democracy, and hegemony are Western concepts that have no
precise Korean equivalents. To leave them uninterrogated is to substitute a
Western understanding of Korean political culture for a Korean understanding of
itself."® It seems surprising then that MacAloon would attempt to shoe-horn all
Olympic interpretations into one set of genres. His ramified performance type
not only recognizes the four genres of spectacle, festival, ritual, and game, but
nests them in a configuration that prefigures the importance of each genre.
'Game' for example is at the core of the typology, while spectacle, the outermost
frame, encompasses all of the performance types.


°°John J. MacAloon, "The Ethnographic Imperative in Comparative Olympic
To hold up these genres as representative of the four most important genres to be discovered in the Olympics, and to outline how they interact with each other seems to be suggesting a universal structure within which the Olympics are enacted. MacAloon has often exhorted sports scholars to join the semiological revolution; one which would discover a systematic system within which the production of meaning is structured. The problem for the Olympic genres is whether this typology is indeed a universal or whether it represents a particular viewpoint. I would suggest that while these genres may exist for many cultures, the relationships between them, their relative importance, and even possibly their existence, are all indicative of a particular Western conceptual standpoint.

The difficulty here is the balance struck between utilizing genre as a descriptive categorization versus a prescriptive categorization. Does MacAloon’s performance typology describe genres of the Olympics, or does it prescribe genres into which Olympic activities are neatly catalogued? MacAloon’s argument makes it tempting to utilize his genres prescriptively, rather than letting genres emerge from readers’ interpretations. I would argue that there is no universal genre structure for the Olympics, but rather a series of overlapping genres that make possible shared interpretations or at least glimpses of how others interpret the codes of the Olympics. This overlapping of genres lends a certain semi-permeability to interpretive communities, which allows the members of one community to access the meanings of other communities and to consider more possible interpretations of the sports that are the object of their attention.
MacAloon's performance typology seems to assume that readers of the Olympic text rely upon only one medium (watching an event in person or watching it on television or listening to it on the radio or reading about it in a newspaper) for garnering information about the Olympics. MacAloon likens the ramified performance type to a set of Chinese boxes: "The set of boxes may be initially presented disassembled, with one or several of its members missing. The recipient may happily toy with the boxes at hand without ever suspecting that the set is incomplete." MacAloon then suggests that this has been the experience for television viewers who are presented with programming that covers games and ritual only. However, some viewers may access other sources of information which expand their interpretive capacities. For example, MacAloon's television viewer does not suspect that she is missing out on some aspects of the Olympics. Yet, today's television viewer (if she possesses or has access to internet technology and the inclination to tap into it) can compare notes with other viewers, not only in her own country, but around the world. Contrary to MacAloon's conception of television viewers, some of them in 1998 (as well as other Olympic years) knew exactly what they were missing.

Television viewers, as I discussed earlier, tune in with certain generic expectations. If those expectations are not met, then viewers tune out or change the channel. With some of the lowest ratings in Olympic history, that was exactly CBS's fate for their coverage of the Nagano Olympics. They failed to meet

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audience expectations for the genre (whatever the genre, and those expectations, were). For example, viewers were rather well primed by CBS in the weeks leading up to the Olympics to enjoy famed conductor Kenji Ozawa leading choruses on five continents in "Ode to Joy." During the broadcast however, audience expectations were ignored by the network when, after just four minutes of coverage (and barely glimpses of the chorus and nothing of what was taking place in the stadium), CBS chose instead to run a pre-recorded interview with an athlete. Admittedly, American television viewers were deprived of sharing in any experience that might be considered festival-like because the fragmented broadcast effectively destroyed the sense of sharing in a joyous celebration, or indeed, much of ritual, during the opening ceremonies. But because they were all too aware that they had been deprived of adequate broadcast coverage of the ceremonies first, because the network had led them to expect more than what was delivered, and second, because for some, electronic correspondence with fans in other countries confirmed what had been missed out on—generic expectations were not met. Viewers were not ignorant of the existence of other genres because they had been set up to expect something that was not realized, and because they were able to interact with others to confirm their disappointed expectations.

Genre works in concert with readers and authors to generate Olympic interpretations. Over the hundred year history of the Games, notions like that of amateur athletes, or the symbol of the Olympic rings, have accumulated
meanings that, through continued exposure—and continually widened exposure—help shape Olympic genres. MacAloon's performance typology is one attempt to delineate a universal structure for the Olympics. I suggest, however, that the apparent universality of an Olympic genre structure may be attributable to a shared recognition of Olympic codes and symbols, which are then variously interpreted within culturally-shaped genre structures. The global impact of the Olympic Games facilitates the sharing of interpretations. The Western (or American?) conception outlined by MacAloon has a great deal of persuasive force because it is the dominant generic structure and is linked with many other genre structures. Thus, while some interpretive communities may not fully share in the connections made between genres as described by MacAloon, they probably recognize those generic elements.

Coubertin is not the only author whose contributions work through genre to assist readers in interpreting the Olympics. The role, for example, of radio and television producers or newspaper editors becomes paramount in the production of a generic program. American television broadcasters treat the Olympics as a generic hybrid. Initially the production property of ABC's Wide World of Sports, the Olympics have evolved into a worldwide television event. Viewers who tuned in years ago to watch competition among the world's best athletes are now bombarded with an array of historical and biographical tidbits, interspersed with the cultural history of the host country, and even, sometimes, a little actual competition. All of this is heavily peppered (or doused) with a variety of commercials. Producers seem to have struck an uneasy balance between
chummy 'up close and personal' kinds of stories, and coverage of athletes competing; between Martha Stewart being fitted for a kimono, and medal counts; between the omnipresence of figure skaters, often practicing while other competitions are actually taking place, and a saga of a World War II prisoner who returned to the mountains of Nagano in search of his former tormentor.

Genres hold people's attention by offering not just the familiar, but also something new. For readers who engage the Olympic text, the 'something new' is often the opportunity to discover the outcome of a competitive event. This presents a bit of a conundrum for television broadcasters, like CBS producers during the Nagano Games, who have difficulty deciding when to let the audience in on event results: when the contest was completed in Nagano, or when CBS broadcast the competition. The implausible 'plausibly live' coverage created problems for the CBS announcers who tried to generate some excitement and tension about the outcome of events. A good example from Nagano was the men's Super Giant Slalom ski race in which CBS tried to encourage viewer interest in Austrian Hermann Maier's run for a gold medal (there was special interest in Maier since he had survived a horrible crash in a previous race). But CBS had already announced the results of this competition on their late night Olympic coverage the previous night, on CBS's early morning Olympic coverage the day the competition was actually broadcast, and again, in the opening segments of coverage the night the event was finally broadcast. In addition,

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62 Tracy Delphia, Personal Log, broadcast coverage of Nagano Olympics for Monday, February 16, 1998; 8-11:30 p.m.
viewers had the opportunity to learn the results of competitions from other sources, like radio and newspapers, as well as through the internet which provided contemporaneous results. So, for viewers there was often no point in watching the prime time CBS broadcast of the 'competition' at all since the outcome was already known, and based on CBS's demonstrated history during the Nagano Olympics, there was little reason to expect more than a cursory showing of the sport competition (the game) itself. Once again CBS raised viewers' expectations for a certain kind of generic broadcast, but then failed to deliver. Broadcasts of the opening and closing ceremonies present the festival and ritual genres of the Olympics and are advertised by the network as celebrations of the Olympics. Coverage that is sandwiched in between is geared (according to network promotions) toward the games (sports competition) of the Olympics.

Viewers cannot be expected to use generic guidelines and expectations to help them shape interpretations if they are either unaware of what genre is being presented, or if they are being asked to continually code-switch between genres (for example sport competitions and cultural documentary pieces about Japan). The kind of generic mish-mash that seems to characterize American television's broadcast of the Olympics--particularly CBS's coverage of the Nagano Olympics--undercuts viewers efforts to make sense of what they are watching.

Television broadcasters, however, are not the only ones who have trouble categorizing the Olympics. Newspapers tend to offer coverage in both the sports section and with international (or national) news. Sometimes, as in USA Today,
they offer special sections devoted completely to the Olympics in which all aspects of Olympic coverage are presented. The advantage to print media is that readers are free to pick and choose which articles (generic types) they are interested in reading. This holds true also for electronic 'print,' although websites and discussion groups do not provide information in a format as quickly browsable as is the newspaper.

What about spectators? Spectators at the Olympics have access to the full panoply of Olympic genres according to MacAloon, even though they may not experience all of them. The point at the heart of MacAloon's theory is that spectators and participants have unmediated access to the Olympics and because of that, are in a position to experience the Olympics in ways that viewers (as consumers of a mediated broadcast of the Olympics) cannot. What this approach accomplishes however, is to privilege the primary Olympic text over secondary (mediated) texts. Obviously, the Olympics would not retain their transcultural importance if people had access to the Games only by attending them; venues could not accommodate the millions, perhaps billions, who experience and interpret the Olympics through the media; television, newspapers, and radio. Therefore, what we should consider at this point, and what I wish to suggest, is that the primary text of the Olympics, the originating text of competition and events that take place in a particular city every two years, may not be the most important text. MacAloon's emphasis on the primary text and on the interpretations of spectators and athletes glosses over the
interpretations derived from other, mediated, texts, which are important, as we have seen, to our understanding of the Olympics as a text.

Chapter Summary

MacAloon’s performative genre typology is indeed a useful one. But it should be recognized as the product of a particular perspective--a particular Western perspective--and a representation of a particular disciplinary outlook (an anthropological and semiological one). I have argued against a universal genre structure for the Olympics suggesting instead that interpretive communities utilize their own genre structures to facilitate their interpretations of the Olympic text. Interpretations may be shared by some interpretive communities, but there are no universal meanings. Therefore, genre categories like MacAloon’s should be regarded as guides for how some interpretive communities might structure their interpretations of the Olympics, but scholars should avoid generalizations that suggest that all interpretations will fit into one generic schematic.
CHAPTER V

Olympic Texts and the Proliferation of Meaning

Introduction

This chapter shifts the focus from factors like the author, reader, and genre, to a consideration of the text itself. Specifically, I will explore the nature of open versus closed texts and utilize the ideas of Umberto Eco to discuss how texts are constrained (or not) by certain kinds of interpretation. Eco's unique contribution to this area is his incorporation of information theory which is utilized to describe an inverse relationship between information and meaning. As information increases he argues, the possibilities for meaningful interpretation decrease. I will argue this is also the case with the Olympics.

Umberto Eco and Interpretation

Umberto Eco's career includes stints in publishing, journalism, television and academia--in 971 he received an academic appointment to the University of Bologna. Eco's semiotic approach has thus evolved in response to his own personal interests in mass media, communications, and "modern" or popular culture.\(^1\) Semiotics (or semiology) is not a unified discipline; rather it encompasses a range of approaches to the interpretation of signs. Eco's own work is heavily influenced by the ideas of Charles S. Peirce whose writings explore the concept of semiosis--how signs are produced and interpreted. Peirce introduced the concept of the interpretant which is the "mental effect or

thought generated by the relation between the sign and object. The interpretant itself is then identified as a sign, which has its own interpretant, ad infinitum. Peirce termed this referral of meaning in which each sign continued to produce new interpretants (signs) unlimited semiosis. Eco's work explores the limits of interpretation (including a book titled The Limits of Interpretation).

I will discuss intertextuality in depth in Chapter 5, but a cursory explanation here will serve as a supplement to some of Eco's concepts. Intertextuality posits meaning as occurring at intersections among various texts and readers. Thus, our interpretation of a broadcast of an Olympic event, say a baseball game, is the result of an intersection in understanding between our interpretations of past games, our earlier interaction with a player while getting an autograph, magazine and newspaper articles we have read (about baseball, these teams, these players), the information we got from last night's sports' broadcast, feedback from our friends who may have attended or watched this game or others with us, our co-workers (and that $10 we have riding on the baseball pool), etc. An interpretation of an Olympic baseball game by a reader then "is never a pure one between two unsullied entities, but is always "muddied" by the cultural debris which attaches to both texts and readers."
The practical effect of intertextuality is to suggest that neither the reader nor the text is the source of meaning. Rather, the locus for meaning is a constantly shifting one that cuts across texts and readers. Not only does this 'jello-like' construct make it difficult to stabilize either texts or readers for critique, but carried to its extreme, it also has the capacity to dissolve the categories of text and reader. The challenges of intertextual interpretation are important to keep in mind when considering Eco's contributions because his thoughts on semiosis and interpretation point the way to a more grounded version of intertextual analysis.

**Open Versus Closed Texts**

Eco's descriptions of open versus closed texts can be confusing at first because they defy our intuitive understandings and explanations of what 'open' and 'closed' mean. Open texts are texts of which multiple, 'correct' interpretations can be made. This is accomplished, according to Eco, when the text is made available to a particular group of readers, rather than the entire universe of readers. The point is that an open text intentionally lends itself to multiple, but not infinite (as might happen if the text were read by all readers) interpretations.

Eco does include a role for the author in his account of such textual interpretation. Authors create texts with a group of readers in mind who will be interpreting the text. For Eco, then, an open text is one in which the model
reader is "envisaged at the moment of its generation." However, Eco does not grant authorial intention. In fact, he recognizes that "in the process of communication, a text is frequently interpreted against the background of codes different from those intended by the author." Authors may have 'intentions' when they create a text and the text may be directed at a particular group of readers, but the author cannot control interpretations. Open texts are thus 'open' to various interpretations by readers; some of the interpretations may have been anticipated by the author and some may not have been anticipated. In this sense, once a text has been completed by the author, meaning ceases to issue from the author and is instead negotiated between the reader and the text. For a complex social text like the Olympics with multiple authors, the same should hold true. For example, athletes perform in events and their performances constitute Olympic texts. These texts are then open to variable interpretations. For example, all offer varying interpretations to a particular athletic performance.

Closed texts are instances of open texts carried to illogical extremes. Where an open text aims to invoke a variety of interpretations from a select group of readers, a closed text attempts to target an extremely narrow readership with the intent of conveying one particular message (eliciting one particular interpretation). According to Eco, texts that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical

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readers ... are in fact open to any possible 'aberrant' decoding. A text so immoderately 'open' to every possible interpretation will be called a closed one.\textsuperscript{6}

Closed texts, then, are almost doomed to aberrant interpretations from the start because the intended interpretation (determined, for example, by an author) is too narrow to start with. A closed text might then be thought of as an open text run amok, as interpretations run rampant and are not those intended by the author. Unlimited semiosis occurs because the intentions of the text were too limited to start with so that virtually all interpretations that result might be considered inappropriate to the text. I find it most useful to think of closed texts as 'closed' in the sense that the possibilities for textual interpretation are denied to readers from the beginning. With no range of possibilities available to accommodate differences among interpretive communities, closed texts are destined from the beginning to produce unanticipated interpretations.

Eco resists invoking sole authority for the author, reader, or text in describing how texts remain open:

...to reach an agreement about the nature of a given text does not mean either (a) that the interpreters must trace back to the original intention of its author or (b) that such a text must have a unique and final meaning ... [Open texts] support multiple interpretations, and any common agreement about them ought to concern just their open nature and the textual strategies that make them work that way. But, even though the interpreters cannot decide which interpretation is the privileged one, they can agree on the fact that certain interpretations are not contextually legitimated.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{6}Eco, \textit{The Role of the Reader}, 8.

\textsuperscript{7}Umberto Eco, "Unlimited Semiosis and Drift: Pragmatism vs. Pragmatism," \textit{The Limits of Interpretation} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 41.
While Eco avoids privileging readers or texts in the process of interpretation, he is concerned that readers' interpretations not float free of the text. It is, in fact, "the internal textual coherence [which] controls the otherwise uncontrollable drift of the reader." This 'anchoring' of the reader to some textual constraints is how Eco avoids the perils of Peirce's unlimited semiosis. For Eco's open texts, then, there are correct, as well as incorrect interpretations. It is closed texts which succumb to the infinite regress of Peirce's interpretant and which yield unlimited semiosis.

There are some possible variations on the themes of openness and closedness that Eco does not discuss. For example, what about a text that is successful at conveying a single interpretation to targeted readers? This is where Eco's example of the closed text begins. I cannot imagine such an interpretively limited text for the Olympics, but should such a text exist, it should most likely also be called a closed text because there is but one (correct) interpretation that takes place.

A more challenging problematic is determining when open texts close. In other words, how do we know when a text has an acceptable range of interpretive possibilities versus an unacceptably large range which leads to unlimited semiosis? Foregoing a hermeneutic slide-rule to the interpretive universe, it seems that this decision is, largely, intersubjective, at least from what

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I can gather so far. But Eco provides some important clues when he adapts information theory to his semiological purposes.

Information theory describes differences between 'meaning' and 'information' and how the two work in inverse proportion to one another. In general, information theory is concerned with how much and how accurately information can be communicated. Messages with large amounts of information are more difficult to communicate than smaller messages with discrete amounts of information. In order for messages to be successfully interpreted then, there must be a balance between how much information is contained in a message and the way it is conveyed.

The capacity of a message to convey information is contingent on openness; openness in the sense of the possibilities for multiple, open-ended interpretations. But this information will not mean anything unless there is some structure to it, some limitations to all the possible interpretive avenues we might pursue in making sense of the information. A sentence like 'They won the hockey game' carries a lot of information because we are free to hypothesize who the 'they' is, whom they may have played against, and what the score was. But because the sentence contains so much information, it has less meaning than a sentence like 'The Canadians beat the Americans in hockey Friday night with a score of five to three.'

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The meanings of a message are a "function of the order, the convention, and the redundancy of its structure."\textsuperscript{10} Openness is refined in Eco's thinking as "an increase in information."\textsuperscript{11} Eco considers open works the "richest form of communication" but cautions that the relationship between information and meaning "requires a delicate balance permitting the merest order within the maximum disorder."\textsuperscript{12} Most importantly, this "balance marks the limit between the undifferentiated realm of utter potential and a field of possibilities."\textsuperscript{13} Without order of some kind, we are left with nothing but \textit{white noise}, a type of message which "should give us the greatest amount of information, but which in fact gives us none at all."\textsuperscript{14} To return to my earlier example of the hockey game, a white noise message might be if someone walked into a room and commented 'They won' to someone who had no interest, knowledge, or awareness of the hockey game. There are so many possible interpretations of 'they' (who?) and 'won' (won what? won it how?) that the message is effectually meaningless.

It seems clear to me that the Olympics as a text is open to multiple interpretations. That is certainly a theme I have pursued using the concept of


\textsuperscript{12} Eco, "The Open Work in the Visual Arts," 98.

\textsuperscript{13} Eco, "The Open Work in the Visual Arts," 98.

\textsuperscript{14} Eco, "The Open Work in the Visual Arts," 96.
interpretive communities. The question to be explored now is whether the
Olympics have been reduced to a spectacular celebration that is nothing more
than a noisy background to everyday lives. In other words, have the Olympics
maintained a balance between information and meaning, or has a surfeit of
information rendered the Olympic text so open to interpretation that meaningful
interpretations are all but impossible?

The Awful Din of Olympic Texts

A good place to begin the search for an answer is with the Atlanta
Olympics of 1996. The Atlanta Games marked the centennial celebration of the
modern Games. In conjunction with that celebration, many have wondered if the
Olympic Games will survive long in the 21st century. The growth of
professionalism, politicization, nationalism and increasing commercialism are
among the factors oft cited as problems plaguing the continued success of the
Olympics. The increasing size of the Olympics in number of events, number of
athletes and countries participating, and the need for larger venues (often new)
to accommodate spectators, has concerned boosters and critics alike wondering if
the Olympics can long endure. John Lucas, for example, notes that the
Olympics "presently serve a high-minded purpose" but that they "are not
immortal."^{15}

Eco's notion of open texts offers new ways to consider these concerns
and the Olympics. Since the underlying issue for many of the problems plaguing

^{15}John A. Lucas, Future of the Olympic Games, 213.
the Olympics is the perception that the Olympics have a diminished ability to positively affect lives—to convey meaningful information—then Eco's adaptation of information theory seems a particularly apt framework to address the problems. The question that can then be asked of the Olympics is whether Olympic texts are conveying so much information that the balance between information and meaning has been tipped in favor of information rather than meaning. If this is the case—and I believe it is—the Olympic movement is faced with two related problems. The first is controlling the scope, or interpretive 'reach' of the text(s) so that meanings unique to the Olympics are not diluted by meaningless information. The second problem is saturation and how biennial Olympic celebrations, rather than quadrennial Olympics as held through 1992, are accelerating the proliferation of meaning.

**The Scope of Olympic Texts**

Scores of books and articles have been written about the Olympics, yet there are relatively few attempts to provide a comprehensive overview because sports scholars, in general, recognize the enormity, and near impossibility, of such a task. Allen Guttmann's *A History of the Olympic Games* is a recent example where an author attempted an overall history, but even Guttmann is quick to note that his book is not meant to be a comprehensive exploration of the Olympics. Book treatises by sport scholars generally focus on one Olympic celebration (such as Richard Mandell's books *The Olympics of 1972*[^16] and *The

Nazi Olympics\textsuperscript{17} which focused on the 1936 Berlin Games), a person important to
the Olympic movement (like Allen Guttmann’s look at Avery Brundage in The
Games Must Go On\textsuperscript{18} or John MacAlloon’s detailed exploration into the life of
Baron Pierre de Coubertin (This Great Symbol\textsuperscript{19})) or an Olympic athlete (for
example Jesse Owens: An American Life\textsuperscript{20}).

Books that claim to be complete histories are usually compilations of
statistics with thumbnail sketches of major events that marked each Olympic
celebration.\textsuperscript{21} Viewers and spectators’ guides also attempt to provide a complete
overview and while they generally list statistics, they may also provide
information on the rules and history of each sport. The Olympic Factbook has
been published for each summer and winter Games since 1992. The edition for
the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta has about 850 pages of information, plus an

\begin{footnotes}


\footnote{Allen Guttmann, The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic
Movement (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).}

\footnote{MacAlloon, This Great Symbol: Pierre de Coubertin and the Origins of the
Modern Olympic Games.}

\footnote{William J. Baker, Jesse Owens: An American Life (New York: Free Press,
1986).}

\footnote{David Wallechinsky’s The Complete Book of the Olympics (Boston: Little,
Brown and Company, 1991) and Bill Henry and Patricia Henry Yeoman’s An
Approved History of the Olympic Games: The Complete Story and Complete
Records of Every Olympics (Los Angeles: The Southern California Committee
for the Olympic Games, 1984) are good examples of statistical compilations.}
\end{footnotes}
interactive CD-ROM disc. Contrast this to a viewer's guide published just 20 years earlier for the Montreal Summer Olympics: How to Watch the Olympic Games Summer 1976 has 295 pages of information.

The issue here is not that the Olympics is too large to squeeze into the confines of one book (text) or discussion because they are, in fact, a group of related texts. For the Olympics, as they have become increasingly mediated (television in particular) have been treated as if they are one text. Sports scholars, fans, or casual viewers expect to read the Olympics as a single text. We have acquiesced to the social myth of 'The Olympics'--an Olympics that is larger than life. Our inability to absorb, respond, or critique the Olympics in its entirety prompts us to question the burgeoning size of each Olympic celebration. Difficulties in interpreting the Olympics are often thought to be partially attributable to the scope of the Olympic text. The problem is perceived with the text, not with readers, or reading strategies.

Interpretations depend on our perceptions of what the text is. Therefore, if we continue to see the Olympics as a single text we will forever be transfixed by the enormity of the hermeneutic task set out for us. What would happen though, if readers resituated themselves and responded not to the Olympic text but Olympic texts? A shift in focus like this would acknowledge that the Olympics are a group of texts that are related (that are Olympic), but that do not necessarily comprise a seamless whole. The benefit from the perspective of

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information theory, is that in acknowledging the smaller texts that interact to create the illusion of a singular text, the amount of information that must be interpreted by a reader has been reduced. This is one way in which to restore the balance between information and meaning; the information overload that results when taking on the Olympics in their entirety (primary, secondary, and tertiary texts) is reduced to a manageable load.

One of the difficulties of working with social texts, which I mentioned in the introduction, is that the boundaries of texts are, essentially, arbitrarily set. They may be suggested by authors, but readers ultimately decide what they consider to be the boundaries of a text and how they will interpret that text. Even the myth of the Olympics as a whole varies from community to community. For a scholar of the Olympics, the 'whole' may include some reference to and discussion of the activities of the International Olympic Committee, international federations, national governing bodies, and national Olympic committees as well as the usual discussion of what happens between the opening and closing ceremonies. Fans of particular sports may find their Olympic interpretations of, say, women's softball, incomplete without detailed textual information on the players, teams, selection procedures, coaches and other fine points of this one sport.

The Limits to Interpretation: Saturation and Keeping Olympic Texts Open

The modern Olympics began as a summer celebration. Beginning in 1924, Winter Games were added, with both Summer and Winter Games being held the same year. Because of the increasing size of the Games, and organizational and economic considerations, the International Olympic
Committee decided to split the Winter and Summer Games. Both Summer (Barcelona) and Winter (Albertville) Games were held in 1992, and in 1994, the Winter Games were again held (in Lillehammer) thus beginning their tenure in the third year of each Olympiad initiated by a Summer Olympics.23

Up until 1992 then, three non-Olympic years would lapse before another pair (Summer and Winter) of Olympic celebrations was held. From the standpoint of general public exposure and dialogue about the Games, this four-year cycle was characterized by periods of relative quiet. The cyclical nature of Olympiads might result in something like the following (American) scenario for the 1988 Olympics: 1987 was a pre-Olympic year in which speculation about athletes likely to make the Olympic team gradually increased through the year. The Olympic year of 1988 was marked by coverage not only of the Winter and Summer Games, but also national championships and other selection events for the teams. Interviews with athletes and coaches, as well as coverage about the safety of Seoul as a host city were featured in sports and news coverage in a variety of media. Following the close of the Games, the usual flurry of post-Olympic activity ensued: star athletes signed various commercial contracts or were guests on various talk shows or signed on as network announcers for their sport. Academics and journalists wrote and published post-mortems assessing the success or failure of the Games and readers of various kinds read these essays and engaged in their own discussions. This activity decreased through

1989 and 1990. During this quiet interim, the Olympics receded from the active consciousness of the general public, so that by the time the pre-Olympic activities for the 1992 Games began in earnest sometime in 1991, the Olympics were once again a 'novel' and interesting diversion from the mundane routines of everyday life.

The new biennial Olympic format has disrupted this cycle though because there is no longer a 'breather' period during which readers can refresh themselves before once again engaging with the Olympic text. With the new Olympic format, American society has very nearly (if not already completely) reached the point of Olympic saturation.

In the case of the 1996 Atlanta Games, the cycle now looks like this: 1995 was a pre-Olympic year for the Atlanta Summer Games. But it was also a post-Olympic year for the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Games. The summer Games dominated Olympic talk in 1996--and even more than usual for the American public because not only was this the centennial celebration, but an American city was the host city. Post-Olympic dialogue led off in 1997, but this was quickly over-shadowed by pre-Olympic talk as the focus began to look forward to 1998 and the Nagano Games. The usual post-Olympic talk may stretch into 1999, but the build-up has already begun for the Sydney Olympics of 2000. NBC, which has American broadcast rights for the Olympics through the year 2008 is already promoting itself as the home of the Olympics. Other sponsors too, continue to advertise themselves as official Olympic sponsors.
Eco describes the process of saturation in the following way:

As we get used to the stimulus, the signs that constitute it and on which we have repeatedly focused our attention--not unlike an object that we have gazed at too long, or a word whose meaning we have lingered on too obsessively--reach a sort of saturation point, after which they lose their edge, to look dull, whereas in fact it is our sensibility that has been temporarily dulled. Similarly, the memories we have integrated into our new perception, instead of remaining the spontaneous products of a stimulated mind, are eventually turned by habit into ready-made schemes, endlessly rehashed summaries. The process of aesthetic pleasure is thus blocked and the contemplated form is reduced to a conventional formula on which our overexercised sensibility can now rest.24

The new Olympic cycle, which most likely did not begin the process of saturation, has certainly accelerated it. In years past, readers had a break from the Olympics before re-engaging it. The constant onslaught of media attention to the Olympics--from networks, in magazine and newspaper articles, and by sponsors--has effectively desensitized people to the Olympics. What used to stand out as a special celebration once every four years has now become a regular and constant presence. The Olympics, which were once extra-ordinary, are now ordinary.

The delicate relationship between information and meaning is somewhat replicated in the saturation versus scope relationship. In the previous section, I suggested that the scope of the Olympics must be reduced to more interpretively 'manageable' texts. The switch from a quadrennial to a biennial format seems to have been one step in that direction. However, the move to biennial Olympic celebrations has also increased saturation. The role of the media and

24Eco, "Analysis of Poetic Language, 37."
advertisers who constantly invoke the Olympics in mundane advertising campaigns or as a routinized point of interest in sports coverage is instrumental in contributing to Olympic saturation.

The problem of resuscitating a cultural practice that suffers from saturation involves, essentially, taking a break. Eco notes that "often, to rejuvenate our dulled sensibility, we need to put it in quarantine. Then, we might again feel pleasantly surprised at the way the work [he is using a piece of music as an example] reverberates in us."\(^{25}\) If media coverage of the Olympics was concentrated on the actual competitions and activities, with perhaps reasonable (one to two weeks?) lead-in and post-events coverage, then even biennial celebrations might be enjoyed without the saturating effect that currently dilutes the Olympics. Unfortunately though, rejuvenation is not always possible. Perhaps, according to Eco, the text was addressed too directly at a particular audience which no longer exists.\(^{26}\) If readers and the text are 'out of sync'--if the text no longer has anything to offer to readers, or is structured in such a way that it can no longer be read--then saturation should be seen as just a step in the cultural evolution of a text as a text fades in importance.

Is this the fate of the Olympic text? Have we reached not just saturation, but the point where the text no longer sustains a connection to readers? No. Clearly, people are still interested in the Olympics. The fans that populate the


\(^{26}\)Eco, "Analysis of Poetic Language," 38.
newsgroup rec.sport.olympics are one example of readers who still very actively engage the Olympic text. Networks and sponsors would not continue to pay out millions for the right to associate with or broadcast the Olympics if they truly believed that the Olympics were of no interest to national audiences. Television viewership, numbers of ticketed spectators, numbers of countries and athletes participating: these all continue to rise, evidence of the persisting attraction of the Olympics for a global population. And, academics and journalists also continue their assessment of the Olympics.

Yet, all of these communities are questioning the Olympic text. The responses of newsgroup fans, and even academics and journalists, suggest, however, that the problem rests not so much with the primary Olympic text, but how that text is culturally portrayed. NBC, for example, might do well to heed the critiques of the newsgroup fans and reduce the number of commercials and provide more actual coverage of the Olympics (rather than commentary about the Olympics, or interviews with athletes about their opinions of the Olympics, and especially run-on commercial breaks).

Earlier I mentioned factors like nationalism, professionalism, commercialism and politicization that threaten the Olympics. I want to look now at two of these—professionalism and commercialism. These two examples will help illustrate how saturation threatens meaningful Olympic texts. Professionalism, set against the stage of supposed Olympic amateurism, is an example of how the Olympics are being reoriented in (American) public consciousness as a routine sport competition. Commercialism—strongly tied to
broadcasting rights--illustrates the extent to which consumers are bombarded by messages that desensitize them to the Olympics as a unique occurrence.

Professionalism

Pierre de Coubertin (and others) founded the Olympics as a competitive arena for amateur athletes. In late 19th century terms, the distinction between professional and amateur athletes often devolved into a question of socioeconomic status--class. Amateur status was reserved for those athletes who took "part in sport as an avocation and not as an occupation." Amateurs, as defined in the British sports world, came to "mean gentlemen in the world of sport; amateur status became ways of keeping the social inferiors of the ruling aristocratic classes off the playing fields." Professional athletes, on the other hand, were men who earned all or part of their money with their athletic prowess. Boxing, in particular, was singled out as a sport of commoners. Pugilists were seen as rough and tumble men ready to make a buck (or a shilling) with their fists.

Although it was not really the intention of Coubertin, or staunch supporters of amateurism like Avery Brundage (International Olympic Committee president from 1952-1972), I believe the distinction between amateur and professional athletes helped situate the Olympics as an event that existed outside the experience of most people's everyday lives. Amateur athletes were either from

27 Jeffrey Segrave and Donald Chu, eds., Olympism, 36.

an economically privileged situation which allowed them the time and resources
to develop their skills, or they were extraordinary men and women who squeezed
their training into what free time they had. Stories about the success of amateur
athletes are often told with superlatives that emphasize the sacrifices, hard work,
and dedication that it took on the part of the athletes and their families.
Amateurs have been portrayed by the media which brought the Olympics to a
global audience as extraordinary people.

Whatever the route amateur athletes took to prepare for the Olympics, in
all cases these were people outside the scope of 'everyday' life. Their
contributions to the Games--not just their performances, but their stories of how
they came to be there--helped make the Olympics something special; a diversion
from ordinary experiences.

In response to a long-running discourse about the nature of amateurism,
Juan Antonio Samaranch, IOC president since 1980, has helped open the
Olympics to professional competition. Make no mistake, I am not suggesting a
return to a Coubertinian notion of amateurism, but I am suggesting that the
opening of the Games to professional athletes has played a role in clearly
resituating the Olympics from the realm of the extraordinary to the ordinary.
Samaranch's intents were good because he exposed the often farcical nature of
a continued claim that athletes in the Olympics were 'amateurs' in the 19th
century sense of the word. The problem, however, is that professional sport has
its own host of morally questionable problems and the open involvement of
professional athletes has changed the nature of some competitions. Wealthier
(capitalist) nations, like the United States for example, benefit greatly from open competitions in which talent can be 'bought' and the variance in athletic talent that arrives in Olympic competition can be seen to fall more clearly along the lines of national wealth and resources for training (and commercially supporting) athletes, especially in nationally visible sports.

Basketball, developed in the U.S., is a nationally visible sport and one in which Americans take great pride. Selected professional basketball players who are regularly seen by viewers and spectators on a weekly basis came together as a 'Dream Team' for the Olympics. The inclusion of professional players who are a regular part of many viewers' lives helps bring the 'everyday' to the Olympics. The Olympic basketball games exist not as a unique competition among dedicated, hard-working (young) athletes, but as a source for often smug U.S. speculation about how well-known players will perform in a new arena. The Olympics become not so much the stage for emerging stars, but the stage upon which well-known star athletes, realigned along national rather than team or league boundaries, compete. And it is not just national boundaries, but naturalized boundaries. Hakeem Olajuwon was a controversial member of the 1996 U.S. basketball Dream Team because he was born in Nigeria, and later became a U.S. citizen. George Cantor suggests that "what bothers the critics" about Olajuwon is that his inclusion on the U.S. team "smacks of recruiting on a global scale. Wasn't the American team going to be dominant enough without
snaring Hakeem for it, too? Including him is overkill." Olajuwon was playing for the NBA in the U.S. ostensibly because he could earn more money than if he had remained in Nigeria. Capitalism--professionalism--concentrates athletic talent in wealthy countries willing to pay for athletic talent. In a spectators' guide for the Atlanta Olympics Cantor sums up the 1996 American Dream Team: "For those who felt the first Dream Team was just a bunch of big bullies, this looks like more of the same. To those who regard basketball as an esthetic experience however, more is better." The Olympics thus metamorphose into a 'world championship,' something which seems to our sports sensibilities to be just one more stage in sports competition, not something special or out of the ordinary.

Because some professional athletes arrive already as stars, they bring a whole range of other texts to the Olympic arena with them. Squabbles with teammates or spectators (outright altercations if you consider a player like Charles Barkley of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic team), sponsorship deals and multi-million dollar contract negotiations are examples of other texts that are introduced into Olympic dialogue as a result of the introduction of professional athletes.

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30Cantor, "Basketball," 74.
These competing texts increase the information that circulates among Olympic texts. I believe it also dilutes what may have been unique to Olympic texts. If the same kinds of conversations and texts are present in both professional basketball and the Olympics, then what is to set the Olympics off as something special? Yes, there are aspects of the Olympic competitions that are unique (for example, they are marked by special ceremonies). But, increasing professionalism is linking the Olympics more closely to commercial influences that make up most of our daily lives. Consider for example, this observation of men's basketball and the 1992 U.S. Dream Team:

...many American journalists professed to be embarrassed by the spectacle and called the players little better than overgrown bullies. There was a big flap over corporate logos. The official Olympics sponsor conflicted with some of the players' endorsement contracts and they attempted to conceal the brand name on their equipment. Charles Barkley threw a vicious elbow into the side of an Angolan player he outweighed by about 75 pounds; standard procedure in the NBA but an ugly scene in the Olympics.31

The gist of this message is eerily echoed as the 1996 Dream Team prepared for the gold medal game in Atlanta:

The best and worst features of the Olympic movement will be on display tonight in the Georgia Dome when the overkill of Dream Team III takes on Yugoslavia, a fragment of a country and of a team. As gold medal competition, this borders on farce. Yugoslavia can come no closer than the other nations that have met the United States in basketball since the NBA era was ushered in four years ago.32

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31Cantor, "Basketball," 83.

After a 30 minute scare in which the Yugoslavian team thwarted the efforts of the Dream Team, the United States team gained momentum and eventually won, 95 to 69. These texts introduced by professionalism link the Olympics and more 'mundane' sports competitions. The inclusion of professional (star) athletes is increasing the amount of information to be found in Olympic texts which in turn compromises the meaningful interpretations that can be made.

The overt professionalism found in Olympic basketball competition is not, of course, (yet) present in all sports. In fact, the Olympic charter allows for open (pro/am) competition, but it is international sports federations which make the decision as to whether amateur, professional, or pro/am qualifying events will be held to select Olympic team members. The point is that the trend toward professionalism is contributing to the information saturation of the Olympics.

Commercialism

Professionalism may be a trend in the proliferation of Olympic interpretations, but commercialism is a flood of well-entrenched information that exacerbates the proliferation of meaning. Commercialism has been a long-standing concern within the Olympic community, but in 1984, the International Olympic Committee was forced to welcome commercial (private) sponsorship.

The disastrous Summer Games in Montreal in 1976 nearly spelled the end of the Olympics. Publicly funded, the Montreal Games closed with a

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staggering one billion dollar loss. As a result, other cities were reluctant, to say the least, to bid for the dubious privilege of hosting the 1984 Summer Olympics (the 1980 Games had already been awarded to Moscow). Tehran, Iran was the only city other than Los Angeles interested. The Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Commitee (LAOOC) was awarded the Games in 1978 when Tehran withdrew from contention. One month later, the citizens of Los Angeles passed a referendum prohibiting the use of public funds to stage the Games. Peter Ueberroth, a successful businessman who led the efforts of LAOOC, met again with the IOC to convince them that the 1984 Olympics were going to have to be financed solely through private contributions (sponsorship). With no other cities interested in stepping up, the IOC was forced to acceed to LAOOC's conditions. Initially skeptical, the IOC became a more optimistic convert to this newest invasion of commercialism. The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics turned a tidy profit of about $220 million. The torch relay alone--through corporate sponsorship and private donations--netted $10.9 million.

City leaders now cast a more optimistic eye upon the Olympics. In addition to the worldwide attention--and expected long-term gains in a city's economy from the prestige of hosting the internationally celebrated Games--a

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37 Ueberroth, Made in America, 369.
host city could now expect to turn a tidy profit during the Games and also add to the city infrastructure. Only Tehran and Los Angeles had any interest in the 1984 Games, but subsequent bidding competitions have been hotly contested. Nagano was one of five cities that bid for the 1998 Winter Olympics, and the most recent host city named is Salt Lake City which was awarded the 2002 Winter Games over eight other cities. After the 1984 Games, commercialism still had (and has) its naysayers, but the opinions voiced by the IOC are tempered by the knowledge that corporate sponsorship, which also fuels the bidding wars for broadcast rights, guarantees some kind of future for the Olympics.

In 1985 the IOC formalized a sponsorship plan like the one introduced by LAOOC for the 1984 Olympics:

Corporate sponsorship didn't really expand until the summer games in Seoul in 1988, when the IOC instituted The Olympic Program (TOP), a system that formalized on a worldwide basis the exclusivity that Ueberroth had first offered... To create TOP, the IOC came up with a list of product categories it considered appropriate for Olympic sponsorship--such as

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38 Most venues constructed for Olympic competition or to house Olympic athletes are retained by cities for a variety of purposes. In Atlanta, for example, athlete housing later became university housing. The Olympic Stadium was designed for conversion to a baseball park, and the Georgia Institute of Technology acquired the aquatic center. See Joseph Dobrian, "Promoting Competition," Audacity 5, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 14.

photography or banking and insurance--and then solicited an exclusive sponsor for each category.\textsuperscript{40}

The IOC has eleven TOP sponsors signed on through 2000, some of them for much longer: Coca-Cola, IBM, John Hancock, Kodak, McDonald's, Panasonic, Samsun, Sports Illustrated, United Parcel Service, VISA, and Xerox. While commercialism is certainly more visible today than it was at the inception of the Modern Olympics, it is worth noting that two of these Olympic Partners have very long histories with the Olympics. Kodak "has been an Olympic sponsor since 1896, when its logo appeared in the book of official results\textsuperscript{41} and Coca-Cola can trace its involvement to the Amsterdam Summer Games of 1928.\textsuperscript{42}

Long-term TOP sponsors can use the official logo of the Olympics in their advertising, keeping this symbol of the Olympics at the forefront of public consciousness. McDonald's restaurants, for example, routinely display the rings signifying them as an Olympic sponsor. The regular presence of the logo devalues it as a symbol for an event through which we can suspend our everyday cares.

Other sponsors also make the most of their licensing agreements, by capitalizing on a media-fueled Olympic frenzy as the Games approach and are broadcast. Strolling the aisles in a local grocery store a few weeks before the 1998 Olympics, I spied a new breakfast cereal: USA Olympic Crunch. The

\textsuperscript{40}Dobrian, "Promoting Competition," 12.

\textsuperscript{41}Dobrian, "Promoting Competition," 12.

\textsuperscript{42}International Olympic Committee, Olympics website.
General Mills creation featured winter sport marshmallow shapes and came in two box sizes, one of which contained 'Olympic team medallions'--toy medals embossed with winter sports symbols. Betty Crocker products are a subsidiary of General Mills, and an Olympic fan interested in providing Olympic-oriented desserts had a range of "Team USA" items to choose from: Blueberry Muffin Mix (white muffins with blueberries and cherry chips), Brownie Mix (with candies in the shapes of Winter Olympic sport equipment), Cookie Mix (a white sugar cookie with blue and red candy pieces), and Red, White, and Blue Cake Mix with a matching frosting.

Consumers in the United States can munch on Olympic cereal for breakfast, drive in their Olympic-insured car to McDonald's for an Olympic-inspired lunch washed down with an Olympic soda, and enjoy a quiet evening at home watching the Olympic network on television or leafing through an Olympic magazine, while enjoying an Olympic dessert. Am I overstating the extent to which American lives are shadowed by the Olympics? Not particularly. Consider just the TOP sponsors. Mail service, credit cards, computers, fast food, copiers—all are present in that list. The TOP sponsors represent a wide range of products and services that infiltrate the daily lives of most Americans. The constant exposure the Olympics receive via these sponsors, while it ensures the fiscal (commercial) success of the Olympics, also immures us to their richer meanings.

If consumers do not personally use or purchase the products or services of Olympic sponsors, they are exposed to them on television. The International Olympic Committee extols television as "a crucial partner of the Olympic Games
because relatively few people can physically attend the Olympic Games. Therefore, it is through television coverage that most of the world experiences the Olympic Games."^43 There is a great deal of truth in this claim and the IOC estimates that at least three billion people worldwide watch the Olympics on television."^44 The IOC's lofty goals regarding broadcast coverage are set forth in the Olympic Charter which says that "the fundamental IOC television policy...is to ensure maximum presentation of the Games to the widest possible global audience free-of-charge."^45

The free-of-charge clause masks the reality of the experience of watching Olympics broadcasts. Private networks, like ABC, CBS, and NBC in the United States, depend upon commercial income and this is patently obvious to viewers who attempt to sift through the numerous commercials to actually discover the Olympic texts. During the Nagano Olympics, roughly *one-third* of the broadcast time was devoted to commercials."^46 As discussed in Chapter III, this was a constant source of frustration for fans as evidenced by comments posted to the *rec.sport.olympics* newsgroup.

NBC paid $715 million for television rights for the 2000 Sydney Olympics."^47 Viewers can expect NBC to capitalize on their role as official

[^46]: Delphia, private viewing log.
Olympic broadcaster for the U.S. NBC will have to balance the need to sell commercial time to recoup their financial investment, with the simultaneous need to generate a large viewing audience. Commercial contracts stipulate minimum viewership levels and if these are not met, then NBC will have to compensate advertisers. This balance, too, comes full circle to the relationship described by information theory. If viewers become frustrated enough by the glut of advertising contained in the broadcast of the Olympics they will tune out.

Commercials are 'information'--but not the information that (most) viewers tune in to watch. NBC for its part, wants to broadcast just enough of the Olympics texts to keep viewers interested and tuned in. CBS broadcast the Nagano Olympics to a smaller than expected audience resulting in some revenue adjustments with advertisers; the CBS audience was probably at least partially overwhelmed by the frequent and lengthy commercial breaks.

The Olympic movement has struck a Faustian bargain with commercial interests. The IOC sees television as "the engine that has driven the growth of the Olympic Movement."\(^47\) Both television and the IOC are then dependent on sponsors. All in turn rely on the patronage of an ever-growing global audience: to watch, to be inspired to attend or support the events and athletes, to purchase products. But the interest of audiences worldwide can only be sustained if the Olympics have the potential to be meaningfully interpreted. Commercial

\(^47\) International Olympic Committee, *Olympics* website.

\(^48\) International Olympic Committee, *Olympics* website.
interests trivialize the Olympics by insinuating the Olympics into the everyday lives of citizens and contriving Olympic links to mundanities like breakfast cereal or package delivery.

**Chapter Summary**

Are the Olympics still an open text? Or to rephrase, can the Olympics today be characterized as a meaningful group of texts, or merely a mish-mash of 'information' that has long ceased to have real meaning for people? I believe that the Olympics are still capable of meaningful interpretation. However the accounts of commercialism and professionalism alone suggest that Olympic texts (information) are saturating our everyday lives, rendering us insensitive to the unique impact they might otherwise have. The situation may have been tolerable for readers up until 1992, but when the IOC moved the Winter Games to the third year of each Olympiad, the flux of information was effectively doubled, which I suggest increases saturation and information and reduces the possibilities for meaningful interpretation.

Umberto Eco's adaptation of information theory for textual interpretation is a particularly powerful way to consider how Olympic interpretations have proliferated. In this chapter I have discussed the relationship between information and meaning, suggesting that Olympic texts are saturating the public consciousness so that they are increasingly interpreted as 'background noise' (or white noise)--mere information--rather than as meaningful texts to which readers are attentive. I suggested earlier in this study that the role of authors, and Pierre de Coubertin's role as founding author for the Olympics in particular, helped to
control the proliferation of meaning. I also talked about how readers' interpretations are shaped (and limited) by their membership in interpretive communities. Neither authors nor interpretive communities, however, have been able to stem the rapid expansion of information about the Olympics. Meaningful interpretations of the Olympics are being overshadowed by a glut of Olympic information. In the next chapter, I will explore intertextuality and discuss how the interactions among texts helps to expand interpretive possibilities. The same interactions that facilitate communication among different interpretive communities interested in the Olympic texts also facilitates the proliferation of *information* as well as *meaningful interpretation.*
CHAPTER VI
Olympic Texts and Intertextuality

Introduction

Intertextuality, as the name suggests, is about relationships among texts. What it means for the Olympics is that textual interpretation must take into account the constantly shifting relationships among texts. Authors, readers, genres, texts; none of these alone can adequately account for--determine--how the Olympics will be interpreted. But while none alone can determine the course interpretation will take, neither can these elements be dismissed as unimportant.

In this chapter I want to provide first an overview of intertextuality, including how an intertextual approach differs from a contextual approach to text interpretation. I will also explore how the Olympic text functions intertextually with the concepts of author, reader, and genre. John Fiske's organizational scheme for intertextuality which suggests that primary, secondary, and tertiary texts are organized along vertical and horizontal axes, will be employed, along with a consideration of how information and meaning travel along these axes.

Relationships Among Texts: Intertextuality

Julia Kristeva introduced the concept of intertextuality in 1969. She called it "transposition" to convey the notion of signs being transposed from one text to another. In practical terms, what Kristeva described was a phenomenon that

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other critics had already recognized in which individual texts included references to other texts. More complex interpretations were thus possible if readers were versed in the various references that linked texts. An astute reader’s enjoyment of the text is enhanced by understanding these intertextual references, although it is not necessary to ‘catch’ all the references in order to arrive at a meaningful textual interpretation.

The original concept of intertextuality derived from transposition was in use by literary critics in the 1970s. Because the texts in this instance were books (or other written texts), the emphasis, in line with Kristeva’s formulation, was on how one text incorporated references to other texts within it. By the late 1970s, intertextuality began to enjoy a wider usage and branched out from solely literary texts to cultural texts:

For some authors, the notion of intertextuality opens all cultural facts and artifacts to the internal exchanges between them, or it opens up words to make them yield the "infinite modalities" of language. Other writers turn to the more discursive and traditional dialogue between literary texts. Still others spring free the text itself of its referential bounds, while many read, as the perfectly apt expression goes, between the lines.²

Kristeva’s formulation of intertextuality was open to criticism because it viewed the text as a stable entity which was situated in relation to a context. In other words, the text could be located separately from the context with which it interacted. Tony Bennett describes "conventional" contextual approaches as

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ones in which "texts, readers, and contexts [are] separable elements, fixed in their relations to one another."³

Tony Bennett began moving away from Kristeva's formulation of intertextuality in the early 1980s. He suggested that Kristeva's theory still held the text 'itself' to be an unchanging cultural artifact subject to a reader's interpretive activities.⁴ Bennett's version gives more consideration to the constantly shifting nature of texts and readers. The effect of intertextuality for him is to remove agency from both texts and readers because "different reading formations...produce their own texts, their own readers, and their own contexts."⁵

In order to excavate a meaning then, it is not possible to look to just the text or the reader (or the author or genre). Instead, the creation of meaning occurs at the intersections among readers and texts.

Bennett suggests also that texts which have wide-ranging and longitudinal cultural influence depend upon intertextuality and interaction with new texts:

A condition of any text's continuing to exert long-term cultural effects within any society must be that it is constantly brought into connection or articulated with new texts, socially and politically mobilised in different


⁵Bennett, "Texts in History," 10.
ways within different class practices, differentially inscribed within the practices of educational, cultural and linguistic institutions and so on.®

The Olympics have, of course, been particularly successful in this respect. Olympic texts interact with a wide variety of texts and while the result may not be the lofty goal of world peace often advocated in official Olympic literature, the net effect is at least one of generating communication among different groups of people. American television broadcasts of the Nagano Winter Olympics included coverage of not only Olympic competitions and ceremonies, but covered Japanese customs and tours through Nagano and surrounding areas. Intercultural communication was thus fostered.

In 1987 Tony Bennett collaborated with Janet Woollacott to produce the book Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero. Bennett and Woollacott's study of Bond is particularly attuned to the possibilities of an intertextual approach. Their interest, they note,

...lies in the figure of Bond, in the diverse and changing forms in which it has been produced and circulated, and in the varying cultural business that has been conducted around, by means of and through this figure during the now considerable slice of post-war history in which it has been culturally active. Our analysis accordingly attempts to go beyond the Bond novels and films to take account of the broader range of texts and coded objects through which the figure of Bond has been put into circulation as a popular hero. In these respects, we shall argue, the figure of Bond constitutes a particular type of cultural phenomenon.7


The Olympic texts also circulate through individual figures; 1994 figure skaters Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding are a recent example. Kerrigan and Harding have been portrayed by the media in ways which open up discussions about positions that these two athletes represent; they have become symbols for culturally held values about women in general, and women athletes in particular. Beginning with what the women wore for competition, Jane Ryan sums up many of the cultural texts that intersected with the Kerrigan-Harding saga and how those texts focused attention on issues already circulating:

Indeed, the costumes fueled the national fairy tale of Tonya and Nancy. Nancy wore virginal white. She was the perfect heroine, a good girl with perfect white teeth, a 24-inch waist and a smile that suggested both pluck and vulnerability. She remained safely within skating's pristine circle of grace and femininity. Tonya, on the other hand, crossed all the lines. She wore bordello red-and-gold. She was the perfect villainess, a bad girl with truck-stop manners, a racy past and chunky thighs. ... The media frenzy tapped into our own inner wranglings about the good girl/bad girl paradox, about how women should behave, about how they should look and what they should say. The story touched a cultural nerve about women crossing societal boundaries--of power, achievement, violence, taste, appearance--and being ensnared by them.®

Other Olympians also become powerful authors of Olympic texts which link the Olympics to cultural concerns. Jesse Owens' performances in Berlin in 1936 forced some Americans (and many Germans) to reconsider racial stereotypes. The admission of Greg Louganis that he was gay and HIV-positive when he was injured during a dive in the 1988 Seoul Olympics prompted an American debate

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on the rights and responsibilities of individuals with AIDS or those who were HIV-positive.

What Bennett and Woollacott emphasized in their discussion of the texts of Bond was the importance of reading in the production of meaning. They claim that texts cannot be examined as a source of meaning, because meaning is in reality produced during the act of reading. They urge critics to "abandon the assumption that texts, in themselves, constitute the place where the business of culture is conducted, or that they can be construed as the sources of meanings or effects which can be deduced from an analysis of their formal properties."9

Texts circulate through culture and are associated with other texts, always within a shifting matrix so that connections between texts are liable to change also. The Bond texts, according to Bennett and Woollacott "have been connected to, disconnected from and reconnected to diverse cultural and ideological concerns at different moments."10

The Olympics also exemplify the process whereby texts are continually connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting with other texts. The long history of politicization of the Olympics demonstrates this process of connection and reconnection. Countries have boycotted or been banned from Olympic participation as a result of political activities that have no direct tie to the texts of Olympic sports competition. The Olympics exhibit a particular malleability which,

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9Bennett and Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond*, 59.

10Bennett and Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond*, 90.
while making them a prime example of intertextuality in action, also demonstrate how meanings can be co-opted--changed--through a web of intertextuality.

Olympic athletes or competitions are often imbued with meanings that are not directly related to the activities taking place. The Nancy Kerrigan-Tonya Harding text originated in 1994 and was recognized by the media for its potential to boost ratings of not just the 1994 Olympics, but figure skating in general. CBS, for example, lost NFL football to the Fox network in 1994 and was looking for a way to fill the sports void. CBS regularly boosted its sports ratings with professional skating "pseudo-competitions," resented by the United States Figure Skating Association (USFSA) because they "diluted the overall product" of Olympic-style (amateur) skating. The gold medal skating performances of Americans Kristi Yamaguchi in 1992 and Brian Boitano in 1988 did not pack the kind of punch that networks were looking for to generate a wide-spread interest in figure skating. But the fallout from the Kerrigan-Harding controversy refueled public interest in skating--amateur and professional. CBS spent $375-million for the broadcast rights to the Nagano Olympics and their plan was to make figure skating the centerpiece of their coverage. It was in their economic interest to keep the text alive and at the forefront of public awareness.

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12Nancy Rappaport, "Frozen A$$et$: For Sponsors and Networks Figure Skating is the Winter Olympics," *International Figure Skating* 3, no. 6 (February 1998): 66.
The women's figure skating competition in 1998 lacked the brashness of the Nancy and Tonya saga, so the networks refreshed the public's consciousness of the 1994 event in order to play the 1998 Olympic competition against it. An interview in which Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding faced each other publicly for the first time since 1994 was taped by the Fox network on December 22, 1997 and then broadcast on February 5, 1998, just one day before the opening ceremonies in Nagano. The show was titled "Breaking the Ice: The Women of 1994 Revisited" and was a weirdly strange assemblage of female skaters (not all of whom were singles skaters in 1994). Kerrigan skated to a piece of music titled "I am an Outcast"--a choice which could be interpreted as representing her own feelings following the media attention since 1994, or an intentional slap in Harding's face. The link the network was ostensibly invoking during the special was the 1994 Olympic figure skating competition, but the two-hour program really served as a setting for the tensely brief, concluding interview between the two main protagonists. The actual skating performances of Kerrigan and Harding at Lillehammer have never been so important as the surrounding texts which continue to shape our interpretations of the actual competition.

*Intertextuality versus Contextuality*

Intertextuality challenges the traditional notion of text and context in which a stable, finished, *completed* text is situated within an "extratextual"
environment." Texts interpreted contextually might be thought of as two dimensional; the text is historically situated within a particular time, place, and set of social values. But when texts are conceived of intertextually "neither text nor context are conceivable as entities separable from one another." Tony Bennett suggests that

...the question as to whether it is text or context that constrains interpretation is somewhat of a red-herring. It is also an abstract form of decisionism, since text and context are never separable from one another in the way this either/or construction suggests. The text is not an "inside" that is protected from the violations of context by some invisible film; on the contrary, it is always, in some way, invaded by the "outside," turned inside out by it. Equally, context is not an "outside" which remains aloof from the "inside" of the text; it bears in on the text, opening it up from the outside in. In this light, it is impossible to say anything of any significance about the "text in itself" without making some prior decision as to which context is to be invoked in constituting that text as an object for analysis.

Texts interpreted intertextually might be thought of as three-dimensional; texts and readers (as members of interpretive communities) are always interacting (acting upon and being acted upon) with other texts. Texts then, "should not be understood as a finished, fixed product." It is, of course, extremely difficult to talk about texts intertextually because they are not fixed, nor finished. It becomes necessary during the process of critique to 'freeze' a text at some point in time, and it might thus be argued that

13Brian G. Chang, "Deconstructing the Audience: Who Are They and What Do We Know About Them," 654.

14Bennett and Woollacott, Bond and Beyond, 262.

15Bennett, "The Text in Question," 122.

16Chang, "Deconstructing the Audience," 654.
intertextual analysis is nothing more than contextual analysis. Intertextuality is however more appropriately thought of as a theoretical stance taken toward texts rather than strictly a method of textual analysis. The process of "intertextuality calls attention to prior texts in the sense that it acknowledges that no text can have meaning without those prior texts, it is a space where 'meanings' intersect." I think that intertextual analysis makes explicit factors that Bennett and Woollacott have suggested, in their study of Bond, "that 'the text itself' is an inconceivable object." The difficulty of an intertextual approach to interpretation is that any discussion necessarily converts what is a three-dimensional process into a two-dimensional one for the purpose of discussion.

There is no 'intertext' per se. Rather, texts and readers exist in a state of intertextuality. The particular relations between texts and readers, frozen in one particular moment and viewed from a particular interpretive perspective take advantage of one intertextual arrangement, yielding one kind of interpretation. Therefore, the interpretive strategies brought to bear by different interpretive communities create interpretations that are meaningful to that interpretive community and that text. One of the more famous texts among American Olympic lore is that of Jesse Owens during the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. For much of the white American public, the irony of Owens' triumph was lost: they reveled in his ability to succeed as a black athlete in spite of Hitler's supposition

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18 Bennett and Woollacott, *Bond and Beyond*, 7.
that only 'Aryans' were capable of such spectacular athletic prowess. The African-American community, however, could not have failed to situate the irony of Owens' success in Berlin against the irony of Owens' as a hero in a country where black Americans were clearly second-class citizens.

**Vertical and Horizontal Intertextuality**

John Fiske suggests talking about intertextuality as taking place along two axes: vertical and horizontal. Horizontal intertextuality describes relations between primary texts and vertical intertextuality describes the relationships between primary texts and secondary or tertiary texts. Fiske's formulation is applied specifically to television texts, but seems a helpful model for discussing Olympic intertextuality as well because it provides a useful way for sorting through the rather fuzzy maze of intertextual relations in which texts participate.

Primary texts, in this case, would consist of activities within the Olympic Games themselves. From the 1996 Games all of the following would be examples of primary texts: a competition session at the swimming venue, the 100 meter freestyle final, Kerri Strug's vault in women's gymnastics, an appearance of Izzy at a venue, the activities at security checkpoints at the entrances to venues, and opening ceremonies. Fiske suggests that primary texts interact with each other along a horizontal axis and the interactions are "more or less specifically linked, usually along the axes of genre, character, or content."\(^{19}\)

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\(^{19}\)Fiske, *Television Culture*, 108.
Vertical intertextuality occurs when primary texts interact with secondary or tertiary texts. Secondary texts are of a different type or genre than the primary text, but they do refer explicitly to the primary text. Examples from the Olympics would include NBC’s broadcast coverage, accounts on the evening news, and magazine and newspaper reports. Fiske describes tertiary texts are those produced by the spectators or viewers themselves "in the form of letters to the press or, more importantly, of gossip and conversation." Websites, like official IOC or host city sites chronicling the results of competition and events taking place at the venues, are secondary texts. Newsgroup discussions based on secondary sources (like television broadcasts) are tertiary texts.

Primary texts maintain strong links with the International Olympic Committee or international sport federations which adhere to IOC requirements for Olympic competition, or are officially linked with Olympic activities sanctioned by the organizing committee. In this way, the interpretive potential of primary texts is more controlled than that of texts situated along the vertical axis. Secondary and tertiary texts are where the links between the Olympics and more local concerns are made, whether this is at the national, regional, or personal level. Secondary texts, like broadcasts or newspapers, attempt to make the interpretive connections between the primary Olympic texts and the interests of their audiences. Tertiary texts, like newsgroup posts, can indulge in personal narratives and relate the Olympics (whether primary or secondary texts) to

\[^20\text{Fiske, } Television Culture, 108.\]
personal experiences and seek the verification (or vilification) of their interpretations in a wider format.

Secondary and tertiary texts continually spin off of the primary texts and are propelled by the media and sponsors. The media, for example, played a very large role in linking the '94 and '98 Olympic competitions when they turned a competitive situation between Kwan and Lipinski into an updated rivalry that was supposed to mirror the tenseness of the Kerrigan-Harding rivalry. The intertextual connections leading out from one text at one point in time can be as complicated as tracing the lines in a spider web. McDonald's, for example, is interested in the Olympics as a medium through which a variety of consumers can be reached. Figure skating, which was scheduled for ten of the sixteen nights of competition at Nagano, drives the ratings that Olympic sponsors are aiming for. McDonald's is an Olympic sponsor today because of figure skating, even though they don't particularly emphasize skating over any other winter sport:

...the company's initial decision to become an Olympic sponsor nearly 30 years ago has its roots in figure skating. According to Woodward [a McDonald's spokesperson], the sponsorship was driven by Janet Lynn's comment to a TV reporter during the 1968 Olympics in Grenoble, France. Lynn said that the one thing she missed about home was McDonald's hamburgers. Although not an official sponsor at the time, the company promptly airlifted enough hamburgers to feed all of the U.S. athletes. In 1976, the restaurant became an official sponsor.²¹

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The continued involvement of McDonald's in the Winter Olympics is based on the content of the Games, but their initial commitment was the outcome of the actions of one person, Janet Lynn.

**Olympic Texts, Intertextuality, and the Author**

I have suggested elsewhere that Pierre de Coubertin functions as an unmarked author for the Olympics. The idealistic hopes that he had for the Games--such as amateur (and male!) athletes, and competition free of commercialism, politics, and nationalistic fervor--have survived in various forms, although these ideas are not always recognizably linked with Coubertin's name. Coubertin is not the only author of Olympic texts, however, and it is the multiplicity of available authorial positions that should be taken into account for intertextual interpretation.

The authors of individual Olympic texts are most often the athletes themselves. Their performances create the basic textual material around which interpretations are generated. Not all Olympic texts are competition-based however. Ross Rebagliatti, a snowboard competitor in Nagano, may be best remembered not for his gold medal winning performance, but for the flurry of media attention that ensued following his positive drug test results. The authorial link among primary texts however, is generally composed of athletes, even though other parties--such as IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch or the controversial ice dancing judges--author circulating texts.

Fiske's analysis of television programs suggests that character, content, and genre are ways in which primary texts may be intertextually linked along the
horizontal axis. Genres applied to the Olympics--like MacAloon's categories of game, ritual, festival, and spectacle--are not unique to the Olympics. Content and character therefore seem to be more likely means through which Olympic texts are connected. Athletes in Olympic texts can be likened to the role of character that Fiske uses in discussing television programs. Michael Johnson, Ross Rebegliatti, and Kerri Strugg not only create Olympic texts through their competitive activities, but are also vehicles through which meaning proliferates (meaning travels along both horizontal and vertical axes).

Olympic texts are also horizontally linked by their content; in essence they are 'Olympic.' Members of the International Olympic Committee try to control the use of the word 'Olympic' and use of the Olympic symbols. The unmarked authorial position of Pierre de Coubertin can be seen as underpinning the decisions of the IOC, but Coubertin's contributions are increasingly overlaid with the beliefs (and authorial contributions) of strong IOC presidents, most recently, Juan Antonio Samaranch. Thus, while Fiske identifies content and character as different ways in which primary texts can be linked, I instead see an additional intertextual layer in the Olympics since content is authorially guided. Samaranch and Avery Brundage are two IOC presidents whose decisions guiding the content of the Olympics (for example, the roles of amateurism or commercialism deemed acceptable for the Olympics) have had lasting effect.

Authorship occurs on the vertical axis also, with the generation of secondary and tertiary texts, and this is where intertextuality reveals the rapid proliferation of Olympic interpretations. Over three billion of us watch the
Olympics on television, and Fiske suggests that authorship is not limited to the primary texts. For sport, "the authorial role is played by the commentators"\(^{22}\) who interpret and present the primary text. The authors of many secondary texts are TV commentators, or newspaper or magazine writers who provide their own interpretation of the primary texts. Spectators at the Olympics Games become secondary level authors if they have watched a particular competition or Olympic-sponsored activity. But, spectators may utilize other secondary sources like television broadcasts later, or newspaper or magazine write-ups, or even the comments of other spectators or readers, to ultimately form tertiary texts.

Athletes, especially gold medal athletes, are authors of primary Olympic texts, but when tapped by advertisers to endorse products, they also become authors within secondary texts. The sponsor pays for the figure of the athletes as a way to link the primary text and its meanings in the mind of consumers with the advertiser's product. Readers of the advertisements for the company, or viewers of their television commercials, are encouraged to interpret the product as associated with the athlete. General Motors, for example, ran a print advertisement for the Cadillac Seville that featured two inset photos of Janet Evans: one in which she was swimming and another with the four medals she won in Barcelona around her neck. Under the picture of Evans swimming was the sentence "The technique that yields world-class performance"\(^{23}\) followed by a

\(^{22}\)Fiske, *Television Culture*, 237.

smaller print list of benefits specific to the Cadillac. Other phrases designed to link the qualities of Olympian Janet Evans to the advertiser's product include "The power behind the fluid grace" and "True champions come through over the long term."24

Interestingly, Fiske suggests that viewers of television broadcasts have access to specialized types of information that inform the tertiary interpretations that result. The television broadcasts of sports give to the viewer authorial knowledge and the power to produce meanings that go[es] with it. The constant flow of background and statistical information, of replays from all angles and at all speeds, of diagrammatic explanations of tactics, all give the viewer the insider information that is normally the preserve and privilege of the author, to be released by him/her in controlled doses throughout the progress of the narrative.25

Television viewers then, are not only readers of the Olympic texts, but in the process of reading, author their own interpretations. While these tertiary interpretations may have a limited circulation--for example, fans exchanging opinions in the living room while watching the broadcast--they may also be circulated to a wider audience. Posters to internet newsgroups author messages that provide one example of how tertiary interpretations are circulated and re-circulated.

Authors can attempt to control the proliferation of meaning at the level of the primary text. Athletes or IOC presidents like Samaranch, for example, because they are so visible at this level, can protest "I didn't mean that" if they

24General Motors Cadillac Seville, advertisement, 82-83.

feel they have been misinterpreted. The International Olympic Committee, attempting to control the tenor (content) of the Olympics, can declare some interpretations valid and others invalid as one measure of controlling interpretation.\(^\text{26}\) Authors on the vertical axis, however are less accountable for their interpretations and texts and therefore, it is along this axis that meanings proliferate. The authors of some secondary texts, notably television broadcasters, must attempt not to stray too far from the interpretations outlined by the IOC because the IOC could choose to restrict access to the primary text. The authors of tertiary texts have no such restraints, however, so that it is these interpretations which can meander in any number of directions.

**Olympic Texts, Intertextuality, and Readers**

I began Chapter III by noting that readers are the interpreters of texts. But, in an intertextual approach, the position of readers can slide into that of authors, as noted in the previous section. Readers discover gaps in texts—opportunities for multiple interpretation—and then utilize the reading practices of interpretive communities to construct their own meanings. Readers of Olympic

\(^{26}\)The IOC has some contradictions in 'official' policy versus what may actually be said by IOC members. This is one reason Samaranch is so controversial. While the official position is that the Olympics are non-political, efforts to encourage Olympic truces and commentary on world political situations tend to turn up in very visible locations. For example, Samaranch's opening speech for the 1998 Olympics included some very specific comments on world politics and the United Nations actually passed a resolution calling for an Olympic truce during the Nagano Games. More information is available on the IOC's website at www.olympic.com.
texts may access primary, secondary, or tertiary texts to help them construct interpretations.

Primary Olympic texts are organized along a horizontal textual axis, but this axis intersects not only with vertical axes, but with other horizontal axes. Olympic competitions become the sites where the institutional boundaries of the International Olympic Committee and international sport federations connect. For example, a particular gymnastics competition in Atlanta might represent a primary text for the Olympics as well as for the sport of gymnastics. These two textual groups—gymnastics and the Olympics—can reinforce interpretive potentials in each other. Gymnastics federations (national and international) host competitions every year and efforts to popularize gymnastics may include references to up-and-coming Olympic-calibre athletes. Readers who are familiar with the sport of gymnastics may have access to a whole range of textual information not available to a spectator or viewer who is watching, but not a fan of gymnastics.

Fans are the readers most likely to fuse textual interpretations along horizontal axes, and then build their interpretations upon these multiple primary texts. A gymnastics fan may have watched Kerri Strug’s vault and interpreted it as (1) a text in the 1996 Olympic competition, (2) a gymnastics text, or (3) a gymnastics performance by Kerri Strug. Other textual permutations exist (notably in this instance, some knowledge about the controversial training tactics of Strug’s coach, Bela Karolyi), but the point I am making here is that the more information a reader has access to, the more varied the interpretive possibilities.
A reader familiar with Strug’s competitive career may interpret Kerri’s vault differently than a reader who is familiar with gymnastics and Olympic competition, but who has no knowledge of Strug’s own career. The text of Strug’s final vault in Atlanta was used by some to interpret Canadian Elvis Stojko’s free skate in Nagano. Stojko was favored by many to win the gold medal, but ended up with the silver following a final performance that was affected by an injury. One person from rec.sport.olympics interpreted Stojko’s performance this way:

I think it was pretty obvious from the way Elvis was milking the injury immediately after his presentation was over awaiting the judges scores that he was going for the sympathy vote...I don’t think Elvis was bad to try it [he noticeably favored his injury as soon as his program was completed]...in fact just the opposite. I think it was a great thing for him to try but it obviously didn’t work out for him. There is no way you can convince me that someone can skate as well as he did and then barely be able to walk 2 seconds after his performance ends. I think it was in his bag of tricks (to be used only if necessary) ever since he saw gymnast Kerri Strug help her team win the gold with her heroic ankle injury vault...At least that was the REAL thing.  

A Canadian poster refuted this interpretation, and suggested to the first poster that he was "applying American standards to a Canadian athlete."28 In just two posts, the text of one skater’s performance was linked to gymnastics (and a very particular gymnastics text), as well as a general text that pitted the national characteristics of Americans and Canadians against each other, and later in the


second post, extensive use of the performances of other 1998 Olympic skaters as well as Canadian Olympic skaters of the past were invoked to support a particular interpretation of Elvis Stojko’s skating program.

After the final results of the women’s figure skating were announced, the newsgroup had a flurry of comments comparing Tara Lipinsky’s gold medal performance to Michelle Kwan’s silver medal performance. Some of the texts that were applied to an interpretation of these young women’s skating programs included the skating histories of each, the role that experience should play in the evaluation of a skater’s program, the skaters’ behavior in Nagano before the competition began, the value of a ‘traditional’ approach to skating, the performance of other skaters at previous Olympics (and their behavior after the Olympics), and the role of the parents in supporting a skater. Dante began the discussion:

Does anyone else think Tara Lipinski doesn’t deserve her gold medal? Okay so she skated great and all that blah blah blah, but I can’t help but feel for Michelle Kwan who’s older, wiser and more practised (and drew a bad number in the start order). When I think of Lipinski, I think: spoiled little brat.²⁹

Maven agreed that Tara’s personality was not as appealing as that of Michelle, but suggested that luck, parental support, and delayed puberty all enhanced Tara’s chances:

Yes, I’ll admit that I find Tara very annoying, but mostly it’s because she has had an incredible run of incredibly good luck—more so even than Oksana Baiul last Olympics...Everything has broken her way, from being

an only child of parents who were well-off enough to get her well started, to getting major media publicity before she hit her teens,...to not hitting puberty until after the 1998 Olympics...she’s so lucky she could fall into a compost heap and come up not only smelling of roses, but clutching a fistful of gold.

A viewer who knew less about the inside functioning of the skating community or the histories of individual skaters started out to credit Lipinski as the greater athlete:

As a multisport athlete who doesn’t really know much about either Michelle Kwan or Tara Lipinsky, I can tell you that IMHO Lipinsky had it all over Kwan. The Kwan routine was very reserved--maybe that’s what some traditionalists want, but the "sport" has to change if it is to last in the general public...This kid did it like an Olympic athlete--came and walked in the opening ceremonies, stayed the whole time in the athlete’s village, ate in the dining hall, and didn’t seek any special favors. As for Michelle Kwan, she showed up only for her event, did not stay in the village, but in a hotel downtown, sealed off the men’s locker room for her own use--sounds rather spoiled to me. At any rate, the better athlete won.

In the end, this poster seems to have been more concerned about the behavior of Tara and Michelle before their competition than their actual performances. The media should be 'credited' with creating many of those impressions; for example, the cutaway during the opening ceremonies for a

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30Traditionally, in the sport of figure skating, young women remained junior competitors until after puberty. Techniques for jumping and spinning must be 'relearned' when a woman skater’s center of gravity changes.


32Actually, Lipinsky stayed with her parents at their quieter hotel nights before her competitive programs.

canned interview with Kwan. Additionally, every aspect of the activities of both skaters was detailed as the media sought to construct (which was apparently, from these posts, rather successfully done) a rivalry between the two young American women.

Interpretation is not the final end product of the interactions between Olympic readers, Olympic texts, and other texts. An interpretation of Strug’s vault made at the time of the vault (while spectating or viewing) is being fine-tuned, or completely revised, as more information is learned by the reader. This constantly developing relationship is characterized by Bennett and Woollacott as follows:

The relations between texts and readers, we have suggested, are always profoundly mediated by the discursive and inter-textual determinations which, operating on both, structure the domain of their encounter so as to produce, always in specific and variable forms, texts and readers as the mutual supports of one another.®

Texts do not control the possibilities for reading practices, rather "it is the ongoing process of reading and interpretation that breathes life into texts [emphasis mine]."® Authors (individual and institutional) help set the constraints for texts that determine appropriate versus inappropriate interpretations. The reading practices of interpretive communities also help structure interpretation.

Interpretive communities encompass not only individuals but corporations and institutions as well. The reading practices of individuals are affected by their

®Bennett and Woollacott, Bond and Beyond, 249.

®Chang, "Deconstructing the Audience," 654.
membership in multiple interpretive communities. These communities in turn, are shaped by a variety of moral, economic, national, and other social values. The reading practices of other communities, however, may be 'simpler.' Olympic sponsors are influenced more by economic than by moral concerns, and these drive their reading practices of Olympic texts. Broadcasters, concerned with ratings, may also have a more limited set of constraints guiding what they see as appropriate interpretations of Olympics texts. Eavesdropping on athletes' private telephone conversations (as CBS did when Picabo Street called her mother after her competition) for example is seen as an acceptable presentation of an Olympic text by the broadcaster, but most viewers, while perhaps intrigued by the opportunity to listen in, would not have done so in person. The interpretive practices of different communities remain connected to each other, however, and this ultimately complicates the kinds of meanings that can result.

Because network broadcasts are the best representation of the primary text available to most people, viewers continue to tune in. They are not oblivious to the pitfalls of what appears on their television screen, however, and their continued patronage seems to be contingent on their ability to cut through the unsavory aspects of the broadcast to get to the elements that they find meaningful. These viewing practices have the inadvertent effect of supporting networks and their broadcast practices: viewers tolerate the commercials, and at times inane commentary in order to view the Olympics, but advertisers and broadcasters feel justified in their decreased coverage of actual Olympic events because ratings continue to be high. Viewers, of course, are not unaware that
advertisers and networks have their own agendas, and that these may not match the viewer's expectations for the Olympics. Calls for change to the Olympics need to keep in mind the inter-relatedness and yes, interdependence of different interpretive communities.

Olympic Texts, Intertextuality, and Genre

Genre is one important way in which primary texts are linked along the horizontal axis of intertextuality. MacAloon's theory of ramified performance types describes the genres of game, ritual, festival, and spectacle for the Olympics. While MacAloon's explanation accounts for much of the complexity of meaning production in the Olympic text, his account tends to privilege the interpretations of particular agents, notably athletes and spectators. In short, MacAloon's focus is squarely on the primary texts of the Olympics.

The interpretive possibilities to be found along the vertical axis using secondary and tertiary texts are glossed over in MacAloon's formulation. He rather quickly discounts television broadcasts (a secondary text) as a pale shadow of the 'real thing,' suggesting that "the sheer scale and intensity of it all [the Olympics] mock the puny efforts of the television camera to capture it in two-dimensional images." But it is the secondary texts of the Olympics, television broadcasts more specifically, that most people have contact with. Three billion people, in fact, are acquainted with the Olympics because of television broadcasts. Therefore, discussions about what the Olympics means to people,

and how those meanings are arrived at are only partially complete if secondary (or tertiary) texts are left out of the picture.

Primary and secondary texts interact and are at least partially dependent upon one another. In the case of the Bond novels and films, Bennett suggests that "the Bond novels now reach us already "humming" with meanings established by the films, and as a consequence they are hooked into orders of intertextuality to which initially they were not connected."37 This same relationship holds true for the Olympics. The primary Olympic texts that are accounted for in MacAloon's genres--the activities that take place at the venues and Olympic locations 'during' the Olympics at the host city--cannot be interpreted independently of the secondary texts, like television broadcasts. For example, organizing committees in Seoul and Nagano rearranged competition schedules to coincide with American broadcast requirements for live presentations of key events.

Tertiary texts are often the last place that scholars look for interpretive insights; the tendency is to focus on primary texts such as the events themselves, and secondary texts such as newspaper, magazine, and journal depictions, to include IOC documentation. Tertiary texts are composed and circulated by viewers and spectators, and it is through them that we can gain insights into what meanings are ultimately generated from the primary and secondary texts. The internet newsgroup rec.sport.olympics is one example of

an on-going tertiary text that discusses the Olympics. A recent search on the internet\textsuperscript{38} turned up 748,810 websites that directly or indirectly include information on the Olympics in general\textsuperscript{39}. For the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, there were 541,077 sites, 88,948 sites for the Nagano Winter Olympics of 1998, and already 51,935 sites that at least mention the Sydney Olympics of 2000.

The responses of viewers and fans to individual athletic performances are one way in which tertiary texts proliferate. Kerri Strug, the American gymnast who helped her teammates win the gold medal despite an obvious ankle injury, is a topic of discussion on at least 288 websites. The saga of ice skaters Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding, who competed in 1994, followed women’s figure skating into the 1998 Olympics and there are 11,176 sites that mention Kerrigan, and 12,373 that mention Harding. When these searches are combined, there are a total of 1,668 sites devoted to Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding.

\section*{Chapter Summary}

Both intertextuality and information theory are ways of thinking about how interpretations are made. These two theories are compatible because they both recognize that texts are open to multiple interpretations. Intertextuality does not want to foreclose the idea that there is one meaning—one final, correct meaning or interpretation waiting to be uncovered. The difficulty for thinking about

\textsuperscript{38}All of these searches were performed on June 9, 1998 using the Altavista search engine utilizing Boolean logic to link terms.

\textsuperscript{39}Some of these sites are actually secondary texts, such as official Olympic websites. But, a scan of the addresses retrieved by Altavista shows that many of them are personal web pages of fans of the Olympics or individual athletes.
interpretation intertextually is similar to one broached by Eco in talking about information theory: how do we prevent texts from succumbing to unlimited semiosis?

Umberto Eco argued in *The Limits of Interpretation* that with regards to the dialectic between texts and readers, while "it is very difficult to decide whether a given interpretation is a good one, it is, however, always possible to decide whether it is a bad one." This is because the internal coherence of texts help anchor them against unlimited semiosis. Yet, it is not texts alone that are involved in the production of meaning; it is the interaction between texts and readers. The readers of texts are members of interpretive communities and the reading practices of any community seek out a logical coherence to their interpretations. Interpretations that do not conform with the practices of the community will be excluded and recognized as aberrant. But there seems to be a vast gray area where it is often difficult to determine whether an interpretation is aberrant enough to discount, or whether we *might* consider or tolerate it. The multitude of texts--primary, secondary, and tertiary--that are brought to bear upon interpretations of the Olympics contribute, of course, to the complicated reading formations that ensue. Not all of the texts contribute to meaningful interpretation, however, and the *information* that is often generated by the media and advertisers contribute to the dilution of the Olympics.

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I suggested in the previous chapter that texts and readers (reading practices of interpretive communities) might part ways at some point. A text, or a series of texts like the Olympics, might outlive or fail to evolve in such a way that it continues to be meaningful for readers. As the 'gray areas' of interpretation enlarge, as readers question or even fail to care whether the interpretations that are made are correct, then the text loses its ability to positively impact lives. The Olympics have not yet completely deteriorated into what Eco would call a state of 'noise' (versus meaningful information). The Olympics may, however, begin to lose their appeal and gradually fade in importance. It is the movement of interpretation along the vertical axes that is most threatening because meanings generated there have no specific responsibility to adhere to the coherence that may lie within the primary text. Because I think that commercialism--so strongly linked to capitalist economies--is largely responsible for the saturation and proliferation of information, it may be that the Olympics will cease to have appeal for American readers, but continue as an important group of texts for readers in other areas of the world.
Chapter VII
Conclusions

What is the future likely to bode for the Olympics? John Lucas, who is the first and only official historian for the International Olympic Committee, has devoted his academic career to the study of the Olympics. He suggests that "nothing is forever"--and that includes the Games.¹ I do not believe, however, that the Olympics will disappear anytime soon. But I do believe that the Olympics are evolving in ways that seriously compromise their most important meanings.

What I believe I have accomplished in this study is to show that first and foremost, there is no one interpretation of the Olympics, just as there is no one Olympic text. Rather, there are Olympic texts. The question to ask of the Olympics is not "what do they mean?", which suggests a single, universal meaning. Instead, we should be concerned with the many meanings of the Olympics, taking into account the capacity for Olympic texts to be interpreted in multiple ways.

I have explored a variety of approaches to textual analysis in this study. Early chapters utilized concepts from literary criticism, while later chapters turned more toward the contributions of communication studies, and in particular, television studies. In all cases, my intent has been to suggest that the Olympics, when viewed as a collection of texts, are more accessible for analysis than when

they are treated as a single text. The process of interpretation is not linear, nor, I believe, is it fully discoverable. In this sense, I am resisting attempts to outline any method that would claim a God's-eye view of either the process of interpretation or a known set of interpretations. What is knowable are particular interpretations. Olympic scholars, therefore, can further their understanding of the Olympics and their cultural significance by assessing the impact of the Olympics through available, discoverable interpretations.

Olympic interpretations, generally speaking, can be thought of in two distinct ways. First, there are the constantly shifting interactions among Olympic texts; primary, secondary, and tertiary. Because interpretation is the result of shifting relationships among texts and readers, it is to be expected that meanings will also be subject to change. Secondly, meanings do not issue from texts alone. They are also the result of reading practices that are guided by the commonly held beliefs of readers (viewers, spectators) and the interpretive communities they make up. The interpretations that a reader makes are, like texts, contingent and never final.

The future of Olympic scholarship seems to be as much at issue as the question of the future of the Olympics themselves. It is often scholars who voice concerns about the Olympics' survival in the 21st century. yet, viewership—which I take to be an indication of general popularity—continues to increase. How do we account for the discrepancy between scholars' gloom and viewers' enjoyment of the Olympics? One tactic has been to suggest that viewers are less discriminating about what they watch (or read about, or see in person). In other
words, scholars, we are to believe, understand what the Olympics should mean, and the average viewer is sitting home passively accepting the pre-packaged meanings that broadcasters and advertisers convey. Until recently, there was no way to refute this conception. However, my use of newsgroup posts from rec.sport.olympics should suggest to other Olympics scholars, as it does to me, that at least some viewers are actively participants in the interpretation process. Tertiary texts then, are an invaluable resource for scholars who are interested in assessing which interpretations of Olympic texts are currently in circulation.

Despite the resistance of fans, advertisers and sponsors continue to utilize Olympic texts to capitalize on the popularity of the Games. The saturation of culture with 'Olympiana' (advertising slogans and campaigns, trivial products or programs that employ references to the Olympics or Olympic athletes) reduces the Olympics to the realm of the 'ordinary.' The degree to which the Olympics become a part of everyday life can best be assessed using information theory. Through it, we are able to gain a more detailed understanding of the process by which meaning proliferates.

In the course of my work on this project I have become increasingly aware of my own conflicting interpretive stances toward the Olympics. What I have realized is that these differing meanings stem from my membership in multiple interpretive communities. Three of them--fan, insider, and academic--stand out as shaping my interpretations of the Olympics. I want, therefore, to share some

A term which glosses intersecting concerns of sport scholarship, cultural studies, communication studies and others, but serves my purposes here.
of my journey of discovery because in the end each of us must negotiate the
reading practices of the different interpretive communities to which we belong in
order to arrive at our own interpretations.

I was born in 1959 and the first Olympics that I remember at all were the
1968 Games in Mexico City. More vivid yet were the 1972 Munich Olympics,
and particularly the swimming successes of Mark Spitz. ABC Wide World of
Sports, which offered coverage of Olympic qualifying and national championship
events, was a weekend ritual in our home, and during Olympic years, I recall the
Olympics being a special family television event--something that we all
anticipated watching. Over the years, the quadrennial celebration of the
Olympics became something that I looked forward to. I had a few ‘fact books’ on
the Olympics long before I developed an academic interest in them.

The boycotts that marked the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics\(^3\) resulted in
unparalleled success for American cyclists and for whatever reasons, I became
fascinated by the cycling events. I purchased a bicycle before the Games were
even over and by the end of that year had ridden my first century (100 mile
organized bicycle ride). Over the next four years I became increasingly involved
in cycling, moving from recreational riding to competition. I also got my United

\(^3\)The Soviet Union and East Germany--traditionally cycling powerhouses--boycot\text{ted the 1984 Olympics. The United States led a boycott of the 1980
Olympics held in Moscow; the boycotts were an expression of several nations’
disapproval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union claimed that
it was not \textit{boycotting} the 1984 Games, but decided not to send athletes because
the Soviet government was afraid that their athletes would be unsafe in the
United States. Other nations politically aligned with the Soviet Union followed
suit.
States Cycling Federation's [USCF] official's license and officiated at regional, national, and international sanctioned events. My interest in cycling always remained connected to my interest in the Olympics and after obtaining my certification as a massage therapist I volunteered for, and was asked to work at, a USCF training camp. My volunteer work segued into paid work with the federation and in 1988 I worked throughout the U.S. and in Europe with national cycling team members as well as at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. I assisted not only the training of Olympic athletes, but in the selection process for some of the team members. Additionally, I testified at an arbitration hearing over some of the selection decisions ultimately made by the coaching staff.

I returned to school in 1989 to pursue graduate level work in sport studies while continuing my involvement in officiating and limited work with the federation. My master's thesis focused on a period in San Jose’s bicycle track racing history, which included interviews with local cyclists who had competed in national and Olympic-selection events in the 1930s. The Olympics remained a cornerstone for my involvement in, and interest in, sport studies.

My early interest in the Olympics has continued to this day and I see myself as a fan of the Olympics. On this level, I feel that I engage with the Olympics optimistically. They provide an experience separate from the rest of my life; I can suspend my own worries and fears about what is wrong in the world when I sit in front of the TV and watch athletes from different countries compete against and celebrate with each other. My experience of the Olympics at this
level is, frankly, idealistic. I like to think that the Olympics really are an expression of what humanity can achieve if we would only put our collective minds and efforts to the task. As a fan, I watch something like Kerri Stragg's vault and am awed by her performance and what it meant for her team.

When I worked at the Olympic Training Center [OTC] and with the national and Olympic athletes of the USCF I got an insider's view of what it took to make an Olympic team. While there were certainly joyous moments, there was also intense sadness for athletes who did not make the team. More ominously, there were clearly political decisions made that had less to do with athletic ability and performance than other external factors considered by the coaches. I met, was friends with, and had extended conversations with several of the cyclists who had been involved in blood doping at the 1984 Olympics. I discovered a carefully veiled world that the mass media—even in their exposé coverage of events like the blood doping scandal—do not know about. Certainly I had no clue to activities taking place 'behind the scenes' when I watched the cycling events in 1984 and was moved enough to run out and purchase a bicycle. Having been privy to insider information, I now watch many Olympic events and wonder about the individuals involved and about those left behind. I am often surprised that both broadcasters and sports scholars seemingly accept individuals as Olympic athletes without being more interested in the process that goes on behind the scenes involving national and international federations and governing bodies.
The most difficult interpretive perspective for me to integrate is what I have learned in my academic studies of sport. While critiquing the Olympics led to new insights, it also seems to strip some of the joy from them. I feel, in some sense, that as scholars, we treat the Olympics in a Humpty-Dumpty-ish fashion. We are good at picking the Olympics apart and talking about what is wrong with them, but we have a very difficult time putting the pieces back together.

Academic writers often claim to be authorities on the Olympics—telling people what the Olympics mean (or should mean). I am uncomfortable with this practice because I think it is a mistake to privilege the interpretations of one interpretive community over those of another. Academic writing on the Olympics has to meet the stringent requirements of an academic community and sometimes in the process the joy that is felt while watching or attending the Olympics is lost in the rigor of academic critique. As an academic, I am skeptical of universal claims for the Olympics; but I am challenged to reconcile these academic understandings (my head) with what I feel (my heart) when I watch the Olympics.

My early experience of the Olympics as a fan was of course shaped by the media and by values that my family placed on watching the Olympics and conversations that we had about what the Olympics, and what the performances of athletes there meant. Many of my views about amateurism, commercialism, and politics, were shaped by the media and idealistic understandings that they parroted based on a desire for ratings and what the International Olympic Committee [IOC] said the Olympics should mean. Thus, while I didn’t know who Pierre de Coubertin was, or even really anything about the IOC or governing
bodies or any other 'official' organization, I already had a basic understanding of
the Olympics based on their largely unmarked role in shaping Olympic
interpretations. From a generic standpoint, I understood the Olympics to be, first
and foremost, a sports celebration. The opening and closing ceremonies,
interviews with athletes, tours of the Olympic Village—all these 'peripheral events'
were enhancements to the basic experience—sport.

I distinctly remember more coverage of the actual athletic performances
than have graced my television in the coverage of the last few Olympiads. I
have to wonder, too, if a generation of young Olympic fans has been lost
because the emphasis today seems to be so much more on cramming as many
commercials into an hour as possible, rather than covering anything (sport or
ceremony) Olympic. There are so many other entertainment options today too,
even on television, which means that unless a person already has some interest
in watching the Olympics, it is unlikely that a viewer armed with a remote control
is likely to linger long over the kind of coverage that is broadcast in the U.S.
these days. Even as a long-time fan of the Olympics, I became intensely
discouraged during the Nagano coverage and actually let the VCR do the work—
turning off my television before the closing ceremonies were over.

My discouragement is not universal. For some people the Olympics have
never been an important event in their lives. For others, the Olympics are the
only sports-oriented event that they read about or view. The media continues to
present the Olympics to an ever-widening international audience, which seems
to bode well for the foreseeable future of Olympic events. How those future
Olympics are interpreted depends on the reading strategies applied to them and their intersections with a burgeoning proliferation of secondary and tertiary texts. It may be that the Olympics will segue from a meaningful set of events to a background of Olympic (white) noise. The slide from meaning to merely noise may not characterize the Olympics worldwide, but instead happen only in some instances. I am thinking here especially of the United States where I believe that commercialism has reduced the Olympics to an ordinary event in the lives of people. For some, the Olympics may now mean a new scratch-off game at McDonald's and a Coke to drink--two TOP sponsors. Or 'Gold Medal Monday'--CBS's shameless self-promotion of their Monday night prime-time broadcast lineup. Or a 'gold medal' meal at a local restaurant. Ad(vertisement) infinitum.

It is not reasonable to call for a recapturing of Olympic meanings of the past (even recent past). The relationships among readers and texts are constantly shifting. But it is reasonable to seek a restoration of the balance between meaning and information that will facilitate the ability of the Olympics to positively impact lives around the world. The International Olympic Committee cannot control the proliferation of meaning, but there are some changes they can institute (for example, stipulating the percentage of broadcast time devoted to commercials when selling the broadcast rights) that would go a long way in restoring the textual coherence of the Games.

*I have known many athletes who drink Coke, but I have yet to see them run out for a big training meal of fries and a Big Mac.*
In the introduction, I told the story of the torch relay in Knoxville, Tennessee. The future of the Olympics may best be glimpsed through the eyes of the people that were there, lining the streets and cheering on the runners carrying the Olympic flame. It was not just adults lining the streets, but children too. Despite the efforts of advertisers and the media to impose Olympic meanings, the people in the crowd came to see the Olympic torch relay for themselves and to construct their own interpretations, and it seemed to have little, if anything, to do with commercialism.
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