MAKING MEANING OUT OF MOUNTAINS: SKIING, THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECO-POLITICS

by

MARK CHRISTOPHER JOHN STODDART

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B.A., Athabasca University, 2002

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Abstract

This research provides a sociological analysis of skiing as a form of outdoor recreation and nature tourism in British Columbia, Canada. A qualitative multi-method approach is used, combining discourse analysis, interviews with skiers, and unobtrusive field observation at Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater ski resorts. Through a focus on discourse, embodied interactions among humans and non-humans, and flows of power, this research describes an environmental ambiguity at the centre of skiing. There is a tension between interpretations of skiing as an environmentally-sustainable practice and notions of skiing as an environmental and social problem. Skiing is based on the symbolic consumption of nature and is understood by many participants as a way of entering into a meaningful relationship with the non-human environment. However, interpretations of skiing as a non-consumptive use of non-human nature are too simple. Social movement groups disrupt pro-environmental discourses of skiing by challenging the sport’s ecological and social legitimacy. Many skiers also articulate a self-reflexive environmental critique of their sport. In these instances, skiing is brought into the realm of politics. Recreational forms of interaction with the non-human environment tend to be at the periphery of environmental sociology. At the same time, sport sociologists tend to focus on the social dimensions of outdoor recreation, while bracketing out non-human nature. This research brings these two fields of inquiry into dialogue with each other, thereby addressing this double lacuna.
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Dedication

For my parents, Gary Stoddart and Dolores Stoddart, for their ongoing support.
CHAPTER I: Introduction: The Attractive Economy of Skiing

1.1 Why a Sociology of Skiing?

This research is concerned with skiing as a discursively-mediated practice that connects humans and non-humans. Through a focus on British Columbia, Canada, I will explore how skiing is intertwined with eco-politics, which includes: pro-environmental values, environmentally friendly behaviour, environmentalist identity and environmental movement political action. As I will show, skiing intersects with First Nations activism, global climate change, mass media constructions of nature, and (partially) global flows of tourism and migration. In this chapter, I highlight the main findings, provide an overview of the research methodology and describe the social context of skiing in British Columbia. I conclude with a review of prior research on skiing and snowboarding.

Skiing brings to mind images of steep, snowy mountains, sunshine and athletic men and women having fun. In the 1940s film *White Christmas*, the ski resort is associated with the magic of winter (Curtiz 1954). Ernest Hemmingway, icon of literary masculinity, was an avid skier; as was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Fry 2006). Through mass media images of resorts in the European Alps and American Rockies, skiing continues to be linked to images of celebrity and luxury. However, skiing is not only for the rich and famous. A 1990 survey of ski market trends claims that a full third of Canadian households own downhill or cross-country ski equipment, highlighting the importance of the sport to Canadian social life (P. Williams 1990). The cover of a recent book called *How to be a Canadian* even depicts a rosy-cheeked young woman with skis and red-knit sweater posed against a mountainous background (Ferguson and Ferguson 2007).

British Columbia has long been a site of “extractive development,” where nature is valued primarily as a source of raw materials for capitalist production (Luke 2002). Fur, forests, mining and fisheries all contribute to a staples economy that dominated the province in the past and continues to inform the present (Marchak 1983; Rajala 1998; Wilson 1998). However, skiing
may be thought of as part of a move towards “attractive development” (Luke 2002). An attractive economy re-imagines rural British Columbia as a space that is more “natural” than “social,” where wilderness is as important a natural resource as lumber or minerals. This renaturalized rural landscape is disengaged from the traditional staples economy and re-embedded in an economy of global tourism – what Thrift (2001) refers to as an “experience economy.” Here, the symbolic value of the landscape -- as a site of non-materially consumptive social experience -- is as important as its exchange value as a set of resources to be appropriated for capitalist production. The impending 2010 Winter Olympics, the ongoing development of new ski resorts, and the provincial government’s plans to increase the accessibility of the province’s backcountry are only a few signs of the importance of the attractive economy. In 2005, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reported that Canada’s Federal Tourism Office was moving to British Columbia. The Province’s Economic Development Minister notes that the move “signals to the rest of the country that BC is the tourism destination for Canada” (CBC News Online 2005).

Skiing is an important part of the tourist economy in British Columbia. Since the 1970s, the province has seen “the development of Whistler to a truly world-class destination, and the advent of several fine regional destinations in the interior of the province” (John Gow Consultants Ltd. 1987, 1). Whistler Blackcomb, Big White and Whitewater are only a few of the downhill ski resorts that draw locals and tourists into mountain environments every winter. The province also has several places for backcountry skiing and cross-country skiing. British Columbia is home to Canada’s oldest and largest heli-ski company, Canadian Mountain Holidays (Hudson and Miller 2005). Similarly, Cypress Mountain boasts that it is “Canada’s most popular Cross Country destination” (Cypress Mountain 2005).

To date, analysis of how outdoor recreation and nature tourism relate to environmental politics and flows of power has been underdeveloped. As such, this project adds to our
substantive knowledge about outdoor recreation and nature tourism in British Columbia. It also provides a partial account of the complexity inherent in broader shifts towards attractive economies. This analysis also foregrounds how playful interactions with mountain environments may enter into “political ecology,” where the non-human world enters politics (Escobar 1999; Latour 2004). As such, it may help inform an eco-politics of skiing within British Columbia and elsewhere.

Since its inception, environmental sociology has been concerned with environmental movements, the spread of environmental values, and social conflicts over access to natural resources (Dunlap and Catton 1979; Hannigan 1995; Schnaiberg and Gould 2000). However, despite Dunlap and Catton’s (1979) assertion that “wildland recreation” should be a key research area, recreational forms of land use have generally received less attention. At the same time, the sociology of sport has examined outdoor recreation through snowboarding, rock climbing, mountaineering and windsurfing (Rinehart and Sydnor 2003; Thorpe 2006a; Wheaton 2004). However, this work typically foregrounds “social” factors, such as gender, class and ethnicity. It largely neglects the role played by “nature” in constituting outdoor recreation. Bringing these two research areas into dialogue through the prism of skiing in British Columbia addresses this double lacuna: the marginalization of sport in environmental sociology and the marginalization of nature in the sociology of sport.

Four main claims emerge from my analysis. First, the meaning of the skiing landscape is not a fixed thing. It is actively constructed by different actors. The ski industry draws on animal symbolism and images of the mountainous sublime to link skiing and nature. By contrast, environmental and First Nations groups pose a challenge to notions of skiing as a pro-environmental practice. Environmentalist texts argue that skiing transforms pre-existing wilderness and wildlife landscapes into cultural spaces for mass tourism. Similarly, First Nations
protesters argue that new skiing development may infringe upon contested lands. These meanings often come into conflict with each other and must be negotiated.

Second, skiing is not only a “social” activity, where the non-human environment serves as a scenic background, a discourse, or a set of symbols. Drawing on theoretical work from Donna Haraway (1991; 2004[1992]; 2008) and Bruno Latour (1993; 2004; 2005), I explore how skiing brings together humans, technologies and non-human nature through discursively mediated practice. Weather is a particularly important presence within skiing, as the quality and quantity of snow profoundly shapes skiers’ embodied interactions with mountain environments. Skiers’ experience of non-human nature is also mediated throughout by several groups of technologies. These include the skis, boots, poles and specialized outdoor clothing that skiers require to participate in their sport. They also include machines for actively shaping the physical landscape to make it more appealing to skiers, or chairlifts that carry skiers up the mountains at ski resorts. Cars and airplanes also connect local skiing landscapes to nearby urban areas and to broader networks of tourist travel. In contrast with studies of the social construction of landscapes, I am interested in how skiing constructs unique “naturecultures,” where non-humans affect the social and vice versa (Franklin 2006; Haraway 2008; Law 2004b). While the circulation of discourse is a key element of how these naturecultures are constituted, my emphasis is on discursively mediated relations among humans and non-humans.

Third, skiing is not only about having fun in the snow. It is also a site where power flows between humans and nature; as well as among people. Skiing is shot through with capillary flows of power based on gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and species (Foucault 2000 [1994]b). These are relations of power that operate through everyday interaction, rather than through grand acts of exclusion or repression. These relations of power often pass unnoticed, or are taken for granted. For example, in ski industry texts the mountainous sublime is repeatedly linked to images of normalized Whiteness and masculinity. This produces gendered and racialized
versions of the skiing landscape. Participation in skiing can be influenced by gendered norms and expectations. These can privilege a “guys’ style,” which is more aggressive and oriented towards risk-taking.

Finally, accounts of skiing as simply a pro-environmental form of development do not capture the complexity of the sport’s relationship with environmental values and politics. Rather, there is a tension between notions of skiing as “sustainable development” and skiing as an environmental problem. There is an environmental ambiguity at the heart of the sport, many skiers give voice to as they reflect on their own interactions with the recreational landscape of British Columbia. Interview participants often talk about how skiing provides an experience of nature. At the same time, interviewees speak about skiing’s negative impacts on wildlife through mechanized backcountry access and new resort development, the use of energy to power chairlifts and provide access to terrain, and the connections between skiing, car use and global climate change.

1.2 Researching Skiing in British Columbia

In the previous section, I laid out the rationale for this research, as well as my main findings. Here, I will provide a brief overview of my methodological approach (a detailed discussion of research design and methodology is included as Appendix I). I will also describe the research context, with a focus on the theoretical reasons for locating my interviews and field observation in the Vancouver-to-Whistler and the Nelson regions of the British Columbia.

**Methodological overview.** This analysis is grounded in a multi-method qualitative approach that combines discourse analysis, interviewing and field observation, which is schematized in Figure 1.1 (Cresswell 2003; Fine et al 2000; Mason 2002; Miles and Huberman 1994). I use discourse analysis to examine cultural meanings of about skiing that are produced by
the ski industry, mass media and social movement groups, which circulate through the public sphere. Discourse analysis is a qualitative approach to textual analysis that examines the social uses of language by documenting recurring themes and systematic exclusions (Foucault 1978; Foucault 1991; Foucault 2003b). Discourse analysis asks who is entitled to speak through a particular discourse and who is marginalized from representation. It asks how discourse is used – and by whom – to sustain or challenge flows of power. Here, I adopt a broad definition of discourse that encompasses visual images, as well as printed text. Photographs and illustrations work as signifiers in their own right, but also amplify or build upon written text (Barthes 1973; Hall 1981).

![Figure 1.1](image)

**Figure 1.1** A multiple-method qualitative approach to researching skiing.

Several distinct textual archives are examined using this approach: newspaper articles, ski resort websites, ski magazines, environmentalist websites and First Nations websites. I examined 14 ski resort websites, focusing on key resorts and regional variation within British Columbia. I
also examined 21 ski magazine issues, drawing from seven different magazine titles, which were published between 2004 and 2007. I sampled 14 social movement websites that addressed skiing in British Columbia, including ten produced by environmentalists and four produced by First Nations groups. From a keyword search of Canadian Newsstand and LexisNexis, I used purposive sampling to select 120 newspaper articles that were published between 2001 and 2006. Of the mass media texts, 60 percent were published in British Columbia (in provincial and local newspapers), 33 percent were published elsewhere in Canada, and seven percent were published in the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia.

While discourse analysis is useful for looking at textually-mediated systems of discourse, interviewing is particularly valuable for moving beyond analyses of textually-constructed social realities (Currie 1997; Smith 1999). Through interviewing, we see how skiers interpret their embodied experience beyond the discursive worlds of texts. Using quota sampling, I conducted interviews with 45 skiers in the Vancouver-to-Whistler and Nelson regions of British Columbia (Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Kvale 1996; Rubin and Rubin 1995). The quota sample was divided into four strata of nearly equal size, defined by gender and location (11 male and 11 female skiers in the Vancouver/Whistler region; 11 male and 12 female skiers in the Nelson region). I adopted a semi-structured approach to the interviews. I used a detailed interview schedule, but moved beyond it wherever appropriate to ask follow-up questions or pursue a point of interest.

For the purposes of interview recruitment, I adopted a broad definition of “skiing,” which encompassed alpine skiers, snowboarders and telemark skiers. I also included backcountry and ski resort skiers. However, I did exclude cross-country skiers. There are three reasons for bounding the sample in this way. First, alpine (downhill) skiers, snowboarders and telemark skiers all use the same mountainous terrain in similar ways. At ski hills, they all ride chairlifts up the mountain and use gravity to move downhill. By contrast, cross-country skiers inhabit a
completely different recreational landscape. They travel through snow horizontally, without the aid of mechanized lifts, rather than going from the top of a mountain to the bottom. Second, there are connections between ski resort and backcountry skiing in British Columbia that can make a sharp distinction between the two unclear. Several ski resorts provide chairlift access to adjacent backcountry touring areas, or have a connection to nearby backcountry ski operations (cat-skiing or heli-skiing). Similarly, a significant number of alpine skiers, snowboarders and telemarkers use both ski hills and the backcountry. Finally, several ski magazines cover both ski resorts and backcountry skiing.

The final method used for the project is field research. This allows the researcher to observe the places where social phenomena regularly occur, rather than in the artificial setting of the interview, or the textual world or websites, magazines and newspapers. Between November 2006 and April 2007, I conducted 18 days of unobtrusive field observation, split evenly between Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater ski resorts (Bailey 1996; Lofland et al 2006; Mason 2002). As part of the field research, I took autoethnographic notes on my own experiences and feelings as a skier (Arluke and Sanders 1996; Ferrell 2006; Laurel Richardson 2000). Drawing upon visual sociology, I also used a digital camera to take 144 photos throughout the research process, which became part of my data set (Harper 1998; Mason 2002; Prosser and Schwartz 1998).

The textual materials, interview transcripts and typed field notes were all imported into NVIVO7 qualitative analysis software (QSR International). All of these sources were coded using the same coding scheme, which allowed me to analyse them separately, while also making comparisons across sub-sets of interviews, field notes and media texts. Following the conventions of qualitative research, I used a semi-structured approach to coding (Silverman 2000). I moved back and forth between data collection, coding and analysis, and periodically revised the coding categories and their relationships with each other.
This multiple-method qualitative approach is one means of embracing the complexity of skiing as a discursively-mediated sporting practice, which brings together humans, mountains, technologies, weather, trees and animals (Law 2004a). In Laurel Richardson’s (2000) terms, it is a way of “crystallizing” the research, each method bringing a different facet of skiing and eco-politics into view. Discourse analysis focuses on the textually-mediated discourses produced by organizational actors (mass media, ski industry, social movement groups). Interviews go beyond textually-mediated discourse to explore skiers’ own experiences of their sport and their interactions with mountain environments. Field observation provides access to embodied interactions among skiers and recreational landscapes in real time, in their “naturally” occurring environment. This particular combination of methods is productive for balancing an analysis of discourse with an analysis of embodied interaction among human skiers and non-human nature.

Having outlined how the research was carried out, I will now turn to a discussion of the social context of skiing in British Columbia. This will provide a better sense of where the research took place.

The social context of the study. My interviews with skiers focus on two distinct regions: the Vancouver-to-Whistler corridor and the Nelson area, in south-eastern BC. The field observation is also split between Whistler Blackcomb ski resort, near Vancouver; and Whitewater resort, near Nelson (see Figure 1.2). Vancouver is the largest city in the province, with a population of approximately two million. Over half of all skiers in the province also live in the Vancouver region (Canadian Ski Council 2006). The city sits between the Pacific Ocean and the Coast Mountains and has a reputation for an active population interested in the outdoors. It is home to an international airport, which serves as a gateway for tourists to Whistler Blackcomb. This may be considered the flagship resort of the BC ski industry, accounting for 6.1 million skier days during the winter of 2003/2004. While this is the largest and busiest ski resort
in the province, there are also three smaller hills nearby: Cypress Mountain, Mount Seymour and Grouse Mountain. This emphasizes the importance of including the Vancouver-to-Whistler corridor as a research site for interviews and field notes.

By contrast, Nelson is a small town of about 10,000 people. It lies about 700 kilometres east of Vancouver via the mountainous Highway 3. Since the 1980s, Nelson has moved from

Figure 1.2 Map of interviewing and field observation research sites (© Josh Wapp, 2008, by permission).
dependence on forestry towards a tourism-based economy, coupled with a prolific marijuana-driven illicit economy. While forestry is still present in the region, Nelson’s tourism economy is tied to images of mountainous wilderness. The town is close to five sizable protected areas, including: Kokanee Provincial Park, Valhalla Provincial Park, and the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy. Skiing, hiking, mountain biking and rock climbing are all popular local activities. While the Nelson area is small, in terms of population, it has a history of vocal political activism. The area was a destination for American draft-dodgers during the Vietnam War. In the 1990s it was also the site for numerous protests over forestry practices. Since 2003, the area has been home to a handful of American Iraq War deserters.

The choice to focus on the Nelson and Vancouver-Whistler regions is based on the theoretically rich contrasts between them. First, Vancouver is a large urban area, while Nelson is a rural community. Second, whereas Vancouver/Whistler Blackcomb is a coastal region and is easily accessible to tourists from outside the province, Nelson is in the interior of the province and is much less accessible. Third, Whistler Blackcomb is a major ski destination within the North American ski economy. It seems to embody the notion of the ski resort as a hyperreal, Disney-esque recreational landscape (Clifford 2002). By contrast, Whitewater is a small, locally owned ski resort, which seems to embody the sport’s waning “authenticity,” which is lamented by several writers on skiing (Allen 1998; Clifford 2002; Coleman 2004; Rothman 1998).

While the two locations have important points of difference, they also have similarities that make a comparison appealing. Both areas have recently been rated among the “best places to live” in the province. Vancouver ranked number one, while Nelson ranked number three (Culbert and Fong 2004). In addition, outdoor recreation is an important component of social life in both locations. Finally, both Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater ski resort attempt to depict themselves as environmentally friendly (Environmental Review: Whitewater Ski and Winter Resort 2006; Whistler Blackcomb: Environment 2006). Thus, despite their points of contrast,
there are important points of commonality between the two regions that makes the comparison between them theoretically interesting.

A brief foray into network analysis is particularly useful for illustrating the structural differences between Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater ski resorts, thereby providing a further rationale for choosing to focus on these two specific research sites. Network analysis is a quantitative method that allows us to describe social network relationships. The relational data used by network analysis describes how members of social networks are connected with each other (J. Scott 2000). These networks can range from small groups of individuals to large-scale networks, such as relationships between corporations, or nation states. One way to describe the political economy of the ski industry in British Columbia is to treat it as a social network that is linked through economic ownership.

Figure 1.3 is a sociogram (social network diagram) of the ownership relations among key ski resorts in British Columbia. The economic network of skiing in British Columbia consists of a few independent “star” structures, where several ski resorts are connected via a common owner. A few other resorts are members of small networks, with only one or two ties. The remainder stand alone as isolates within the network. These are privately owned resorts, often the property of a single family. At a glance, the network structure appears to be quite fragmented. This multiple star structure is distinct from a more circular structure, where the majority of points would be linked with each other, indicating a higher level of cohesion.
Figure 1.3 Sociogram of the British Columbia ski industry.
Network density is one measure of cohesion within a social network. Density measures how many ties actually exist in a network, in comparison with the total number of possible ties between all members of the network. Density is expressed as a numeric value between 0 and 1. The density of the ski resort network depicted in the sociogram is 0.037. This is quite low, indicating a low level of network cohesion. This tells us that the BC ski industry is quite fragmented in terms of economic ties; it is not marked by a high level of corporate concentration.

Cliques are subsets of nodes within a network. The largest clique in this network centres on Intrawest (which is owned by Fortress Investments Limited). Whistler Blackcomb is a member of this clique as is Panorama resort, located near Invermere in south-eastern BC. This clique also includes Blue Mountain in Ontario and Mont Tremblant in Quebec. Several American resorts are also part of this clique. These are located in California, Colorado, Vermont and elsewhere. A second clique centres on Boyne USA Resorts. Most of the resorts in this clique are located in the United States. The exception is Cypress Mountain, one of three ski resorts located close to the city of Vancouver. The third noteworthy clique centres on Resorts of the Canadian Rockies. Besides Fernie and Kimberly, both located in eastern British Columbia, this network also includes resorts in Alberta and Quebec. These three cliques illustrate that the BC ski industry is linked to broader North American economic networks.

Outside of these three cliques, there are also a few dyadic and triadic clusters. Silver Star and Big White, both located in the Okanagan region of the province, are connected through their common ownership by the Schumann family. Grouse Mountain Resorts has ownership ties to Grouse Mountain, near Vancouver; as well as to Kicking Horse, in the Rockies. Sun Peaks is a notable anomaly within this network. It is the only resort that has ownership ties outside North America, as it is connected to Nippon Cable in Japan. This company manufactures chairlift equipment for ski hills and also has ownership ties to several Japanese ski resorts.
The province has several resorts that are privately owned, often by a single family. These resorts are isolated nodes within the broader network, including Whitewater resort, near Nelson. Other isolated resorts include: Red Mountain in south-eastern BC; Mount Seymour near Vancouver; Mount Washington on Vancouver Island; Mount Revelstoke; and Shames in the northern part of the province.

Using network analysis to map the ski industry in British Columbia leads to three noteworthy observations. First, the ski industry is quite fragmented. It is not marked by a high level of cohesion or corporate concentration. Second, there is marked divide within the ski industry. The majority of resorts are essentially local, existing as isolated nodes or members of dyadic or triadic clusters. On the other side of the divide, several resorts are members of larger national and continental economic networks. If the globalization of economic ties is a nascent phenomenon, as Carroll (2007) suggests, the British Columbia ski industry does not yet appear to be a player in this process. Rather, provincial resorts are members of national and continental economic networks. Finally, Whistler Blackcomb is a structurally central resort within the BC ski industry. It is part of the largest clique in the industry, which is defined by economic ties that span North America. By contrast, Whitewater is one of the isolates within this network. Where Whistler Blackcomb is central, Whitewater is peripheral. Where Whistler Blackcomb is tied to a North American economic network, Whitewater is essentially local. These structural differences are one of the theoretical reasons for using these two areas as research sites for interviewing and field observation.

The British Columbia ski industry is not only defined by economic ties between resorts. Besides being linked to North American networks of capital, skiing is also tied to networks of mobility through tourism. Sixteen percent of all participants travel from outside the country to Canadian ski hills (Canadian Ski Council 2006). Two-thirds (67 percent) travel from the United States to ski in Canada (Beyrouti 2000). Within British Columbia, 45 percent of all skier-tourists
come from Washington State, while a further 12 percent travel from California. The United Kingdom and Japan are also significant source countries for Canadian ski tourism in general. However, Australian and New Zealand skiers are particularly prominent in BC and Alberta, where they make up 9.5 percent of skier-tourists (Canadian Ski Council 2006).

Tourist flows to the province are strongest from the United States and the rest of Canada. To a large extent, ski tourism is a continental social phenomenon. This network of flows parallels the network of economic ties within the BC ski industry. However, through tourism flows, British Columbia is also connected with the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. The tourism network is more diffuse, geographically speaking, than the network of economic ties. As such, there is an interesting tension between local/continental economic ties of ski resort ownership and continental/global flows of skier tourism and consumption.

Furthermore, just as Whistler is more firmly integrated into a North American economic network than Whitewater, so is it more deeply intertwined with these (partially) global tourist flows. Whistler is located close to an international airport and is second only to downtown Vancouver for tourism accommodation revenue in the province (BC Stats 2005). While skier-tourists do travel to Whitewater, this resort is much smaller and distant from any major international airport. If Whistler is an important nodal point in a (partially) global network of skier-tourist flows, Whitewater is a more peripheral point in this network.

1.3 Previous Research on Skiing and Snowboarding

Previous research on skiing and snowboarding contains several themes that inform the present analysis, including: historical accounts of lost authenticity; debate over the notion of skiing as environmentally sustainable; and the importance of gender and class within skiing and snowboarding. The present research builds upon the existing literature in several ways. First, the attempt to use skiing to bridge environmental sociology and the sociology of sport is novel, as
there has been little dialogue across these sub-disciplines. Second, this research uses interviewing to focus on skiers’ interpretations of their interactions with nature through their sport. Much of the existing research is based on historical documents or surveys. Third, throughout the dissertation I draw heavily on the theoretical work of Michel Foucault, Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour. This theoretical orientation is sensitive to the intersections between discourse and embodied social actors; to the importance of non-human nature within “social” life; and to the ways in which multiple forms of power flow through social action, but also between humans and non-human nature. While such a theoretical framework is familiar within science and technology studies, its application to studies of outdoor recreation and nature tourism is undeveloped (for an exception see Michael 2000a; 2000b). Finally, while my multiple-method qualitative approach is not unique, it is particularly well suited to an emphasis on the complexity of skiing as a site of interaction between humans, technologies and the environment (Law 2004a).

**Historical accounts of lost authenticity.** A central theme in much of the historical research on skiing is that there has been a gradual loss of authenticity in the sport during the twentieth century. In *From Skisport to Skiing*, Allen (1993) provides a historical overview of the evolution of modern skiing. He is concerned with the modernization and “disenchantment” of skiing as a social practice (in a Weberian sense). An important component of “skisport” as a pre-modern social practice is the Norwegian ideal of *Idraet*, which asserts that skiing is a valuable tool for developing a strong sense of morality, character and personal well-being. *Idraet* emphasizes the dual nature of skiing as a means of physical and spiritual development; it is “a life philosophy” which holds the promise of a “regenerating effect on individual body [sic], soul . . . and even nation” (Allen 1993, 171). Prior to the twentieth century, skisport (which we would recognize as a type of cross-country skiing) was the only form of skiing that was practiced.
Cross-country races that tested endurance were the main form of skiing competition. However, the twentieth century saw an important technological and social transformation in skiing. An Austrian style of downhill -- or alpine -- skiing emerged, which used a fixed-heel binding and a parallel posture. In addition, skiing competitions began to emphasize jumping and short downhill races. For Allen, these changes resulted in the negation of the spirit of *Idraet* associated with skiing. This brought about the increasing rationalization of skiing, where the “heady lure of the thrill of speed” came to dominate the sport (96). A way of life was thereby translated into “merely a leisure time amusement” (171). The world of mechanized skill hills and formal competition displaced the more “authentic” engagement with nature that is represented by *Idraet*.

Hal Rothman (1998) focuses on the expansion of the skiing economy, as part of his broader research on the spread of tourism throughout the American west during the twentieth century. Here, skiing is part of a broader trend towards the re-development of the western landscape as a tourist landscape; characterized by Las Vegas casinos, California theme parks, Rocky Mountain ski resorts and ersatz reconstructions of the “Old West.” Focusing specifically on Colorado, Philpott (2002) similarly describes how tourist boosters and ski entrepreneurs actively reshaped mining towns into tourist destinations in the post-war era. He describes how American tourists had to be taught to see the Colorado landscape as a mountain playground, dominated by big mountains and roaring rivers, rather than an inhospitable hinterland.

The early days of skiing in the American west were a time when skiing was a means of escaping the “pace of . . . life in the industrial world” (Rothman 1998, 149). Whether or not the spirit of *Idraet* had vanished, downhill skiing could still be a way to attain a “real and unavoidable contact with nature” (169). Like other authors, Rothman also believes that skiing has lost its former sense of authenticity. Writing about postmodern tourism in general, he concludes, “Places evolved into caricatures of their original identities . . . Tourism did not really destroy; it created the new, promised fresh myths, responded to the poignant pleas of a changing
culture, in the process making towns that looked the same . . but felt different” (370). The transition to a postmodern tourist economy creates ski towns defined by their surface appearance, rather than meaningful connections between skiers and mountain landscapes.

Coleman (2004) provides another useful historical account of skiers’ interactions with the Colorado landscape. Her narrative begins in the 1890s when skis were a utilitarian technology used by mailmen as a means of travel between remote mountain towns. Before long, recreational skiing began to take hold in the Aspen area as a way of escaping industrial modernity and interacting with wild nature. As Coleman writes, “Through the act of skiing, skiers could enter a landscape that felt wild and natural -- they could gain access to something fundamental, pristine, and authentic -- and they did it during a century when ‘nature’ grew both increasingly appealing and elusive” (Coleman 2004, 2). By connecting people and nature, skiing took on cultural significance, and became a source of identity formation for many participants. The sport embodied a “natural” freedom that was becoming harder to find in the modernist, industrial landscape of early twentieth century America. In the 1920s and 1930s, this notion of freedom-through-skiing was also articulated with new notions of womanhood. Coleman argues that many “women across the economic spectrum found themselves enamored with skiing downhill, which could offer them a liberating taste of speed, exhilaration, and danger” (60). Thus, skiing was also a site where a different model of womanhood, embodying individual freedom, was constructed.

Like Allen and Rothman, Coleman sees the history of skiing as a move away from the desire for authentic connections with nature, or freedom from industrial modernity. Tourist travel has become accessible to a larger part of the American population, making ski resorts easier to access. At the same time, ski resorts have become increasingly technologized places, through the ongoing development of chairlift and snow-making technologies. Changes to ski design and lift technology have made it easier to ascend and descend the mountain. This has broadened the appeal of skiing to a larger audience. At the same time, technological change has transformed
skiers’ relationships to mountain landscapes. Coleman writes, “Presenting an empty, pristine, wild, and natural landscape paradoxically became a business, with mechanization not just a necessity but a boon” (118). While images of nature continue to circulate through skiing, skiers’ relations with nature are increasingly mediated by technology. This results in the waning authenticity of the sport as a way of knowing nature.

The renaissance of cross-country skiing, beginning in the 1970s, was one response to this perceived loss of authenticity. By leaving crowded ski resorts for forested trails, cross-country skiers attempted to return to simpler forms of interaction with nature. As Fry writes, in his *Story of Modern Skiing*:

Alpine skiers, it was said, had forgotten the true appreciation of nature in winter ... By contrast, cross-country skiers, by returning to the sport’s Nordic heritage, re-discovered an awareness of the pristine natural environment in winter. They followed trails deep into silent, commercial-free fir forests, hushed by the snow blanketing tree branches and the ground (Fry 2006, 190).

For Coleman, skiing in Colorado has now become more about luxury, sex and celebrity than the sport itself. She writes “For skiers who loved serene mountain landscapes and the chance to feel alone in the wilderness, Colorado destination resorts had lost much of their appeal” (Coleman 2004, 197). As an alternative, a growing minority of skiers have turned to cross-country skiing and backcountry skiing as responses to industrialization, commercialization and the loss of authenticity.

One of the main themes that emerge from previous research is the notion that the history of the sport is characterized by waning authenticity. According to this narrative, skiing was once a way to meaningfully interact with non-human nature. However, the ski resort is becoming ever
more like Disneyland: a themed, artificial environment. This illustrates how we might think of
the contemporary ski resort as a rural, mountainous version of the “fantasy city” dedicated
to consumerism and “riskless risks” (Hannigan 1998). Similarly, drawing on Baudrillard, we might
think of ski resorts as postmodern simulacra where a hyperreal version of nature is commodified
and sold to tourists. As Baudrillard writes: “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a
referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality:
a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 2001 [1981], 169). Within the present research, this has led me to
choose two distinct sites for interviewing and field research. Whistler Blackcomb is an
archetypal example of the hyperreal mountain village. By contrast, Whitewater remains small,
rural and relatively undeveloped.

The increasing mechanization of skiing and the parallel development of simulated
mountain towns for tourists also gave rise to environmentalist critiques of the sport. The Earth
Liberation Front’s arson at Vail resort -- where a chairlift, patrol lodge and restaurant were set on
fire to protest the resort’s planned expansion into lynx habitat -- is the most dramatic example of
ski development protest (Glick 2001).¹ Environmentalist pressures also led to a stricter
regulatory regime on public lands leased by the ski industry. These political responses to the
waning authenticity of skiing point us to the related question of the relationship between skiing
and environmental values.

**Skiing as environmentally sustainable?** The literature on skiing and snowboarding also
draws attention to the relationship between skiing, environmentalism and sustainability. One
definition of sustainability is “the notion that an aspect of the environment or practice can be

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¹ While the Earth Liberation Front claimed responsibility for the arson and the event was commonly framed as an
act of eco-terrorism, Glick’s (2001) account throws some doubt on this assumption and describes a range of possible
suspects for the crime.
managed into the foreseeable future” (Grafton et al 2001, 271). While this sounds relatively simple, it is open to multiple interpretations. Furthermore, we might speak of a practice as sustainable in either an absolute or a relative sense. In an absolute sense, skiing can be continued indefinitely without destroying its ecological basis or it cannot. Alternately, we might consider how sustainable skiing is relative to other industrial (mining, logging) or recreational (mountain biking, hiking) uses of the same landscape. In previous work that addresses the eco-politics of skiing, a division emerges between work that supports the notion that skiing can be a relatively sustainable form of interaction with non-human nature and work that is more pessimistic and critical.

While their work does not focus specifically on skiing, Schnaiberg and Gould (2000) invoke the sport in their discussion of how outdoor recreation and nature tourism might be a viable alternative to the “treadmill of production.” Briefly, the treadmill of production refers to the ensemble of social groups (government, corporations, workers, consumers) who have a stake in the perpetuation of existing production-oriented economies. For Schnaiberg and Gould the treadmill is intrinsically unsustainable and needs to be replaced with alternative social structures, which meet environmental and social justice criteria. In the following passage, the authors envision how the re-valuation of nature through tourism and recreation might be linked to environmental sustainability:

The sea islands of the Carolinas, the mountains of southern Appalachia . . . the ski slopes of Colorado, and many other regions rely on their natural resource endowments to provide *attraction* for tourists and recreational travelers. . . . Clearly, what may at first appear to be a turn away from an exclusive emphasis on economic sustainability may in fact be a turn toward sustainable economies (Schnaiberg and Gould 2000, 212; italics added).
Schnaiberg and Gould include skiing as part of an outdoor recreation and nature tourism economy that may act as an alternative to treadmill activities like industrial forestry and mining. However, they also express caution about the potential environmental impacts of ski resort overdevelopment.

While Fry discusses the environmental ambiguities surrounding the modern “Disney-World-full-service ski village,” he is generally positive about the environmental dimensions of skiing (Fry 2006, 306). He writes, “Among the foremost reasons that people give for wanting to ski is the desire to be in a natural environment and to enjoy the mountain scenery” (291). Beyond an interest in skiing as a way of enjoying the outdoors, many skiers also hold memberships to environmental groups. Thus, Fry posits a connection between skiing and environmentalism, despite some of the movement’s criticisms of the sport. This convergence of values is also documented by Fry (1995) in an earlier research article for *Ski Area Management*, a trade publication for the ski industry. Here, he uses survey data on ski industry workers, skiers and environmentalists to compare environmental values among these groups. A large majority (85 percent) of skiers see skiing as “an environmentally friendly/compatible sport,” while a minority of environmentalists (39 percent) express this opinion. Despite this gap, the two groups share several perspectives: that real estate development is a particularly harmful component of ski area development; that existing ski areas should expand instead of developing new areas; and that water management in ski areas should prioritize wildlife needs rather than snow-making.

In the same industry journal, Rockland (1994) uses survey data to compare skiers and the general public on their commitments to environmental values. He concludes that skiers rank at least as high as the general public. He also notes that the public and skiers do not tend to see skiing as an environmental problem, especially in comparison to other forms of outdoor recreation (such as golf and power-boating). From this analysis, he concludes that
environmentalists who emphasize to the ecological impacts of skiing “are off-base” (Rockland 1994, 58).

Weiss et al also use survey research to examine the relationship between skiing and environmental values in Austria, where skiing is the national sport (Weiss et al 1998). While skiing accounts for half of the country’s tourism, it has come under fire from environmental organizations because of its impact on alpine ecosystems and its corresponding urbanization of “natural” areas. The authors surveyed skiers, ski industry employees and Austrians who are not engaged in the ski industry. They show that skiers score relatively high on environmental values scales. However, while skiers appear to prefer green -- or “soft” -- tourism, they also demand all of the “bells and whistles” of a modern ski resort. The authors conclude that:

Ski tourists’ concerns about the environmental damage caused by overdeveloping ski resorts means that the industry might kill itself. The ski industry depends on an idealized social representation of mountains, snowy landscapes, and alpine villages. But at the same time, its Disneyfication deromanticizes these ideals (Weiss et al 1998, 377).

They argue that the ski industry should pursue an eco-tourism strategy by integrating environmental values into its normal operations. While the authors perceive the ski industry as causing environmental damage, they also view it as having the potential to become an environmentally sustainable social practice.

In Snow Business, Hudson (2000) provides a broad overview of the global ski industry. In a chapter on the environmental politics of skiing, he observes that the sport has become defined as an environmental problem in recent years. Much of the discussion focuses on the European Alps, where the culture of resort skiing has come under fire by local communities and environmental groups to a greater degree than elsewhere. Here, concern focuses on soil erosion
and pollution of the mountain environment. Like Sachs and others, Hudson asserts that the ski industry can become increasingly sustainable. A more environmentally responsible ski industry will look to trends in tourism that consider the “environmental track record of both holiday company and destination when booking a holiday” (Hudson 2000, 133).

Elsewhere, Hudson and Miller use the heli-ski company Canadian Mountain Holidays (CMH) as a case study to examine the relationship between “environmental action” and “environmental communication” (Hudson and Miller 2005). The authors begin by outlining conflicts over heli-skiing in eastern British Columbia, centred on the perceived sustainability of backcountry ski touring. The authors argue that CMH has taken important steps towards making their operation environmentally sound, but that the company has not successfully communicated their pro-environmental behaviour to customers and the surrounding community. They conclude by prescribing a combination of “environmental action” by ski companies, and “ethical communication” (marketing) about environmental initiatives. Like Weiss et al, these authors view skiing as a “viable eco-tourism industry,” if it can integrate environmental values into its operations (Hudson and Miller 2005, 137).

While several authors describe a convergence between skiing and environmental values, Sachs and Chernushenko each draw our attention to the environmental impacts of skiing. Some of the most salient environmental problems are: the amount of water withdrawn for snow-making, erosion from ski runs, loss of wildlife habitat, and impacts on vegetation (Chernushenko 1994; Sachs 2001-2002). However, both Chernushenko and Sachs view these environmental impacts as open to mitigation through “eco-efficiency” and better management practices. Chernushenko suggests several courses of action, including: limiting new development to address animal habitat destruction; improving ski hill design to reduce impacts on soil and vegetation; and limiting snow-making and using more efficient technology to conserve water and energy. Similarly, Sachs argues that the American ski industry has been a leader in greening
tourism through initiatives like the Sustainable Slopes Program (SSP). This is a voluntary program, which sets out environmental guidelines that participating ski resorts agree to in principle.

While Sachs offers a positive assessment of the Sustainable Slopes Program (SSP), Rivera and his co-authors are more critical. In a pair of articles, they argue that there is no correlation between SSP participation and environmental performance (Rivera and de Leon, 2004; Rivera et al. 2006). Under the Sustainable Slopes Program, the ski industry has adopted the environmental mitigation strategies that are easiest to implement and which are most visible to the public. For example, ski hills that participate in the program are more likely to engage in “resource conservation” strategies like recycling, water conservation and power conservation. As Rivera and de Leon write, “Ski areas enrolled in the SSP program appear to be displaying rather opportunistic behavior expecting to improve their ‘green’ reputation without actually implementing SSP’s beyond compliance environmental management principles and practices” (Rivera and de Leon 2004, 433). Ski resorts that sign on to the program are less likely to address the more intractable environmental issues associated with skiing such as growth management, animal habitat loss, or pollution from ski operations.

Clifford’s Downhill Slide (2002) provides the most damning critique of skiing as a form of sustainable development. Like Coleman and Rothman, he laments the passing of a unique skiing subculture. Clifford writes, “Long before the cultural rebellion of the 1960s, people actively exchanged the American mainstream for the countercultural joys of a winter sport that gave them an enormous sense of freedom and release” (Clifford 2002, 13). The early ski culture was often linked to environmental values and the nascent environmental movement, as the sport was seen as a way of coming to know nature. As in other accounts, Clifford laments the perceived absence of authenticity in modern skiing. The skiing subculture of the past, where
wilderness was an important part of the experience, has largely been displaced by Disney-esque simulations of wilderness at resorts like Whistler Blackcomb, Aspen and Vail.

For Clifford, the expansion of this simulated experience of nature is connected with skiing’s growing environmental impacts. He describes negative impacts to wildlife through habitat fragmentation, but also through road-kill related to increased highway traffic. Erosion, pollution, deforestation, energy use, and water use are other environmental problems associated with ski resort operations. Accounts that focus on the environmental impacts of the ski industry are important because they illuminate how skiing is not only part of a postmodern symbolic economy. In contrast with positive assessments of the sport, Clifford foregrounds the ways in which skiing also requires the continuous productive appropriation of non-human nature.

Research on skiing and the environment reveals ambiguity and competing views on the potential for sustainability. Skiing may be relatively more sustainable than extractive economic development of mountain landscapes (such as forestry or mining). However, it also carries its own impacts that question its sustainability in an absolute sense. Previous research demonstrates that, in general, skiers appear to adhere to environmental values and that there is a certain degree of convergence between skiers and environmentalists. Similarly, the view of skiing offered by Sachs, Chernushenko, Hudson and Weiss et al is suggestive of an “ecological modernization” perspective, which asserts that skiing can become increasingly more sustainable.

Ecological modernization theory is an alternative to Schnaiberg’s “treadmill of production” model of human-environment interaction (Schnaiberg 1980; Schnaiberg and Gould 2000). Mol and Spaargaren write, “Ecological modernization is used as a theoretical concept for analysing the transformation of central institutions of modern society within the boundaries of modernity, in order to solve the ecological crisis” (Mol and Spaargaren 1993, 437). This perspective asserts that sustainability is achievable within the capitalist economic structures that define modernity. However, this requires a significant commitment to technological innovation.
It also requires the transformation of organizational cultures that fail to account for the environment. Echoing Mol and Spaargaren, the ecologically-optimistic account of skiing suggests a need for the “economization of ecology” and an “ecologisation of the economy,” without radical structural transformation. By contrast, Clifford questions whether the ski industry, as it now exists, can reach this goal. Attempts to assess either the relative or absolute sustainability of skiing in British Columbia are beyond the scope of this project. Rather, the division within this research literature leads me to ask how discourses of sustainability are picked up and used by the ski industry, skiers, the mass media, and social movement groups. I am interested how sustainability becomes an interpretive resource within the eco-politics of skiing.

**Gender, class and snow.** A large part of the present analysis focuses on skiing as a site of human interaction with non-human nature. This foregrounds questions about skiing’s connections to eco-politics. By contrast, much of the existing research on skiing and snowboarding de-emphasizes the presence of non-human nature, in favour of a focus on purely “social” factors like gender and class. The ways in which sport is a site for the construction of gender has been a particularly salient theme in research on snowboarding. According to Anderson (1999), snowboarding works as a site where a particular form of hegemonic masculinity is defined and asserted. Drawing on interviews, content analysis and field observation, Anderson argues that several tactics are used by snowboarders to define the sport as a male-oriented practice. This includes incorporating fashions and music that are typically associated with Black youth subcultures, aggressive styles of personal interaction, and a pronounced emphasis on heterosexuality. While the particular form of masculinity that defines snowboarding does not simply echo hegemonic forms of masculinity found elsewhere, the construction of masculinity within snowboard subculture works to marginalize women from the sport.
Anderson provides a relatively simple narrative of hegemonic masculinity and the marginalization of women from snowboarding. By contrast, Thorpe’s work (2005; 2006a; 2006b; 2008) provides a more complex picture of the ways in which gender informs snowboarding subculture. Contra Anderson, Thorpe argues that snowboarding has been a site where women have been able to participate on a more equal basis with men than in most other sports. Especially in the early days of this young sport, female boarders found space to resist mainstream culture and to redefine their own roles (Thorpe 2006a). Similarly, snowboarding has been a site where male participants have been able to articulate forms of masculinity that are quite distinct -- more emotive and expressive -- from traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity (Thorpe 2006b).

However, snowboarding is simultaneously a site where masculinist norms are reinscribed. As Thorpe writes, “The dominant style of snowboarding has become more aggressive, perilous and exhibitionist” as the sport has evolved (Thorpe 2005, 81). This favours a male-oriented style of riding, even though individual women continue to participate and compete successfully alongside men. Hegemonic gender relations are also reproduced as women are sexualized and objectified for a male gaze in snowboarding media. Finally, the subcultural setting where traditional gender norms could be challenged has been commercialized and incorporated into consumer culture. In recent years, “female boarding became another niche market, ripe for appropriation by big business as a commercial sphere that celebrates rebellious individuality. ... the female boarder is increasingly ... situated within a commercialized variant of heterosexual femininity” (Thorpe 2006a, 221). The opposing models of gender in snowboarding exist in tension with each other. Despite this, Thorpe continues to see the emancipatory potential within snowboarding for the reconstruction of gendered identities.

Finally, Laurendeau and Sharara (2008) use a paired case study approach to look at how women in snowboarding and skydiving address gendered inequalities in their respective sports.
They authors distinguish between “reproductive” agency, wherein participants attempt to manage gender inequality as individuals without challenging its structural existence, and “resistant” agency, wherein participants attempt to transform the nature of gendered systems of power within sport. From their analysis, they conclude that strategies of reproductive agency are dominant, whereby female snowboarders may downplay the importance of their gender, avoid certain spaces, or attempt to blend in by wearing gender-neutral styles of clothing. While individual women may use sport to transform their own experience of gender, Laurendeau and Sharara are more pessimistic about the emancipatory potential of snowboarding to openly challenge structures of gender inequality.

Just as gender shapes snowboarding as a sporting practice, so does social class. Pierre Bourdieu is likely the only major theorist who has written about skiing, albeit in passing. Bourdieu (1984; 1990; 1991) asserts that sport is often a site where economic capital is required for entrée into realms where cultural capital is built up and exercised. Skiing is one example of the intersection of social class and cultural capital within a specific field. It requires more than economic capital as a condition of participation. There are also “hidden entry requirements, such as family tradition and early training, and also the obligatory clothing, bearing and techniques of sociability which keep these sports closed to the working classes . . .” (Bourdieu 1991, 370). While Bourdieu writes of skiing and cultural capital in the context of Europe, Veenstra (2007) also includes skiing in his discussion of the “West Coast lifestyle” that works as a form of cultural capital within British Columbia. This lifestyle includes hiking, skiing, yoga, cycling and kayaking as forms of recreation and bodily fitness. The West Coast lifestyle is most strongly linked with the province’s professional class. While skiing requires economic capital for participation, it is also a site for accumulating cultural capital.

Richey (2006) offers an alternative to the historical narrative of waning authenticity, which is especially attentive to the presence of class dynamics within ski culture, even as
participants engage in “masking” their own class status. He agrees that people came to Aspen as an “escape” from post-war, middle class America. However, in contrast with Rothman and Coleman, he argues that skiers performed a “masking” of class. He writes:

Aspenites lived, worked, and played in ways that blurred the traditional categories of class, such as the Marxian “bourgeoisie” and “proletariat,” whereby an elite owning class lorded over wage earners. In Aspen, members of the American elite, the men and women with considerable personal or family wealth, often played at, or pretended temporarily to be of a lower class. They carried out this act, in part, by engaging in anti-Veblenian acts of inconspicuous consumption, whereby material evidence of class or wealth was often inverted (Richey 2006, 2).

Here, cultural capital is invested in performing a working-class ski bum identity, wherein participants reject the model of conspicuous consumption that was becoming dominant in post-war America. This contrasts with Bourdieu and Veenstra’s observations about skiing as a form of cultural capital. Instead, skiers from wealthy backgrounds take on seasonal work at ski hills, restaurants and hotels. They inhabit run-down miners’ shacks and they dress as inhabitants of a frontier town. Richey emphasizes that the golden age of skiing described by Rothman and Coleman was marked by a wilful negligence of class dynamics within ski communities. At the same time, a different set of distinctions was constructed that set skiers apart from middle class, mainstream American society.

Finally, Kay and Laberge (2003) draw on Bourdieu in their textual analysis of Warren Miller’s ski film Freeriders. The authors argue that the film asserts an “imperialistic construction of freedom,” which is imposed on other people and places (Kay and Laberge 2003, 382). This defines freedom as the ability to move freely through the postmodern tourist economy and the
freedom to abdicate wage labour in favour of a life of leisure. However, the freedom promoted in ski cinema is an illusory freedom that is “found in mobility” (384). It is limited to those with the financial capital to pursue skiing full-time, such as Richey’s Aspenite ski bums. This imperialistic construction of freedom is a form of what Bourdieu terms “symbolic violence” against the “foreign” cultures that are subject to the cinematic skiing gaze. Those who lack the economic and cultural capital required for entrée into the world of skiing have abdicated their claims to freedom.

The sociology of sport literature is particularly attentive to gendered flows of power within snowboarding. Building upon this, I have chosen to use a quota sampling approach that splits my interview sample evenly between male and female participants. Similarly, I developed specific interview questions on participants’ own beliefs about the ways that gender has shaped their skiing experience. Similarly, skiing may also be interpreted as a form of cultural capital which intersects with economic capital through processes of distinction and the exercise of symbolic violence. Elsewhere, while Coleman (2004) describes how skiing produces a certain hegemonic Whiteness, this is not a dominant theme in the literature. However, intersections between ethnicity, outdoor recreation and nature tourism have been explored in other work on tourism and recreation that does not focus specifically on skiing or snowboarding (Dawson 2004; Erickson 2006a; Erickson 2006b; Jasen 1995; Martin 2004; Mawani 2005). Taken together, this literature highlights the need to be attentive – within my textual analysis, interviews and field notes – to the multiple flows of social power that may be present within skiing.

1.4 The Layout of the Dissertation

The remainder of the thesis progresses through three core chapters, each of which takes up a different dimension of skiing. In Chapter 2, I focus on the ways in which skiing landscapes are defined by diverse social actors: the ski industry, social movement groups and the mass
media. I also look at how these social constructions of the mountain landscape are taken up and interpreted by skiers. This analysis is grounded in the literature on the social construction of landscape, which focuses on the ways that distinct places are given meaning through social interaction (Greider and Garkovich 1994; Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Milton 1993; Stokowski 2002). The notion of discourse is also important here. This originates within Foucault’s work, but has also been taken up in environmental sociology (Darier 1999; Foucault 1977; Foucault 1978). While this chapter is largely concerned with the discursive construction of skiing landscapes, I wish to avoid an overly discursive conception of skiing. Rather, I view discourse as an integral force for mediating embodied practices and relations among humans and non-humans.

Chapter 3 emphasizes that relations between skiers and the landscape are not purely discursive, though discourse is quite important. Here, I examine how skiing is a site for interaction between humans and non-human nature, including: mountains, weather, trees and animals. Furthermore, these relationships are mediated through a myriad of technologies. The work of Bruno Latour (1993; 2004; 2005) and Donna Haraway (1991; 2004 [1992]; 2008) provides a valuable lexicon for this analysis. Notions of cyborgs, collectives and non-human actants emphasize that non-human nature is not only a tabula rasa that is constituted through human social action, but is co-constructed by humans and non-humans. Instead of talking about skiing as a meeting point between “society” and “nature” as separate entities, it makes more sense to speak of skiing as a “natureculture” that is constituted by humans, non-humans, technologies and discourse (Franklin 2006; Haraway 2008; Law 2004b).

Chapter 4 examines how power flows through skiing collectives in multiple forms. First, there are flows of power between humans and non-human nature. This is where skiing intersects most explicitly with environmental politics and Foucauldian forms of biopower (Foucault 2003b; Luke 1999b; Rutherford 1994). Second, First Nations protest raises questions about who has the
power to control the recreational landscape of British Columbia. Third, skiing is the site of multiple capillary flows of power based on gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality. Haraway’s (1991) “informatics of domination” is a useful tool for conceptualizing how these flows of power intersect and circulate through discourses and cyborg bodies.

While each of these chapters focuses on different elements of skiing, I wish to emphasize continuity rather than difference. Thus, I suggest that these chapters work as a triptych of sorts. The triptych is a three-panelled painting. While each panel is bound by its own frame, the lines of each panel bleed out into the adjoining panels. While we can focus our attention on any one panel at a time, in order to appreciate particular details; it is by stepping back and considering the work as a whole that we see the larger picture. In the final chapter, I take such a step backwards to examine how the separate parts connect with each other. I conclude by describing how the present analysis might inform an eco-politics of skiing.
CHAPTER II: Skiing Naturecultures and the Mountainous Sublime

The meaning of the mountain landscapes where skiing takes place is constructed by a variety of different social actors. These include the ski industry, environmentalists, First Nations protesters, the mass media and skiers. In this chapter, I show how there is not a single meaning of the skiing landscape, which is fixed in nature, but multiple meanings. These meanings are articulated through discourse and may come into conflict with each other, producing “contested natures” (Macnaghten and Urry 1998). While this chapter focuses largely on the symbolic meanings attributed to skiing landscapes, my focus on discourse is a starting point for further analysis of embodied interactions between humans and non-humans through skiing. I begin this chapter with an introduction to the theoretical framework of the social construction of landscapes, as well as several relevant key concepts from Michel Foucault. I then proceed to examine how the meaning of skiing landscapes is articulated by the ski industry, skiers, social movement groups and the mass media.

2.1 Discourse and the Construction of Landscapes

The social construction of landscapes. According to environmental constructionist perspectives, “nature” and “the environment” are not pre-social entities that exist outside society (Eder 1996; Hannigan 1995; Macnaghten and Urry 1998). Rather, the environment can only be known through social interaction. While the mountains where skiing takes place are constituted by rocks, trees and snow; the meaning of these places is actively constructed by social actors. The social construction of nature refers to the meanings that are attributed to particular places, species, or environmental phenomena. For example, a forest may be constructed as a precious wilderness, a source of valuable timber, or a site of recreation for hikers and mountain bikers. While there is something other-than-human beyond the “horizon of the social,” the nature that we know is inevitably translated, as the other-than-human is incorporated into systems of
scientific knowledge or media representation (Sandilands 1999). Nature is produced and interpreted by competing “claims-makers,” such as environmentalists, policy makers and scientists (Hannigan 1995). The result is that there is no singular “nature,” only “natures,” which “derive from and provide resources for various kinds of contestation over and objections to transformations of the ‘natural’” (Macnaghten and Urry 1998, 22). The meanings attached to these “natures” are not fixed across place and time. They may change historically or vary across cultures. As Allen (1993) documents, interactions with mountains and snow by Norwegian immigrants in American mining towns in the 1800s was tied to cultural norms of Idraet that focused on personal strength and development. However, the spirit of Idraet is harder to identify at a modern ski resort like Whistler Blackcomb, which is oriented towards nature as a setting for leisure, tourism and consumption. The analytical task is to map out these constructions: how they come into being, how they are maintained, how they are challenged, and how they lose social currency and fade away.

This leads to the idea that particular landscapes are socially constructed. Greider and Garkovich define “landscape” as the “symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment, of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs” (Greider and Garkovich 1994, 1). Similarly, Gieryn notes that by being “interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” social interaction imbues places with meaning (Gieryn 2000, 465). This distinguishes landscape from “space” as a pre-social, physical location. Abstract space “is what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out” (465). That is, once space is brought into social interaction it becomes a landscape. The same places can have multiple meanings, as space is interpreted by different social actors. The version of the mountain landscape articulated by the ski industry may be quite different, even opposed, to the versions articulated by environmentalists or First Nations protesters. Therefore,
any particular geographical location may be subject to conflicting meanings with attendant political effects.

The social construction of landscape is achieved through a variety of communication media, such as newspapers, film, books, the internet and conversation. Constructions of landscape are politically relevant, as the dominance of one construction will privilege some social actors at the expense of others. Thus, constructions of place have power effects. This is illustrated by Milton, who documents how “rural recreation” constructions of landscape have been superimposed over constructions of the Northern Irish countryside as a “place of work” (Milton, 1993). It is also illustrated by Torgerson (1999), who notes that environmentalist “constructions of place” have risked dislocating First Nations constructions of place during conflicts over forestry resources in British Columbia.

Macnaghten and Urry (1998) argue that social constructions of landscape have been characterized by the dominance of the visual senses, where the natural world is perceived primarily through the look, or the gaze. They trace the primacy of the gaze to the 19th century, with the advent of landscape painting, where nature became the subject of aesthetic appreciation in its own right. From this point onwards, the primacy of the gaze has been reinforced by the spread of photography and new modes of travel: the train and the private car. We have become accustomed to experiencing nature through the camera lens, or through the framed window of a moving vehicle. Elsewhere, Urry (2002) offers the key concept of the “tourist gaze” as a tool to describe how places are re-constructed so that they appeal to tourist consumption. This term highlights the way that tourists also interact with the landscape as an image. It is something to look upon, rather than a place to feel, smell, hear, or taste. As objects of the tourist gaze,

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2 In an essay that pre-dates Macnaghten and Urry’s analysis by a century, Simmel writes about how the genre of landscape painting works to pull “distinct elements from within the continuous flow and unbroken unity of nature” and rearrange them for an aesthetic gaze. This invests new social meaning and “emotional significance” into a re-figured nature (Kemple 2007).
landscapes become sights/sites to be recorded on film or video. Within skiing, this is illustrated at Whistler Blackcomb by the prevalence of people taking photos of themselves posed with the Coast Mountains as a backdrop, often at specifically demarcated “viewpoints.”

As MacCannell also argues, the social practice of tourism has profound impacts on the places where it occurs. He writes, “tourism is not just an aggregate of merely commercial activities; it is also an ideological framing of history, nature, and tradition; a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs” (MacCannell 1992, 1). Locals and developers actively shape recreational and leisure landscapes to appeal to tourists. As tourists engage with these landscapes they take up and further shape their meaning. For example, MacCannell argues that the American National Parks can be interpreted as museum pieces for memorializing a lost nature. He writes, “The great parks are not nature in any original sense. They are marked-off, interpreted, museumized nature. The park is supposed to be a reminder of what nature would be like if nature still existed. As a celebration of nature, the park is the 'good deed' of industrial civilization” (115). As such, protected wilderness areas are produced as tourist landscapes, as much as they are places for conservation and ecological integrity.

Philpott (2002) provides another example of the connections between tourism and the social construction of landscape. He chronicles the transformation of Colorado from a rugged, wild, mining landscape into a recreational and tourist landscape. Tourism boosters and ski entrepreneurs actively encouraged shifts in the cultural meaning of Colorado, from mining to ski area development (from “yellow gold” to “white gold”) in the post-war period. This active reconstruction of the landscape through newspapers advertisements and travel magazines relied on the repeated use of stereotypical images: big mountains, snow, golden aspens, roaring rivers. The creation of a new landscape on top of the old required active attempts to inculcate desire among tourists. Potential visitors had to be taught to understand the Colorado landscape in a whole new way.
**Foucault’s discourse theory.** Much of the work on the social construction of landscape does not draw explicitly on Foucault. However, his key concepts of discourse and power/knowledge are valuable for looking at how places are constructed, as well as the power-effects of these processes. Discourse is a central medium through which constructions of nature are created, reproduced and challenged. By articulating the connections between discourse, knowledge and power, Foucault’s work also points to the ways competing constructions of the landscape are not simply different. They are embedded in politics and flows of social power. In this analysis, I am concerned with discourse in a broad sense. Discourse is not limited to printed text, but also encompasses the visual images found in magazines and websites, which are also important for creating meaning (Hall 1981). Furthermore, discourse is not only articulated through documents like newspaper articles, magazines or internet sites. It is present in the physical environment all around us, on billboards, signs, or clothing (Barthes 1973).

Discourses are systems of thought, or knowledge claims, which assume an existence independent of a particular speaker (Foucault 1978; Foucault 1991; Foucault 2003b). Discourses are all around us in our daily lives. We constantly draw upon them as resources for social interactions with others. We might recall the discourses of academia, which we use to navigate our way through school; or discourses of medicine, which are employed by doctors and patients in clinics and hospitals. In an environmental sense, we might think of how the discourse of sustainable development is mobilized by governments to legitimize policy decisions (Luke 1999b). Alternately, we can recall how the Canadian government invoked discourses of ecological risk and species preservation to provide moral legitimacy to a legally questionable action: the seizure of a Spanish fishing ship outside national jurisdiction (Matthews 1996). At Whistler Blackcomb, the landscape is dotted with signs that articulate discourses of environmental stewardship through habitat management, thereby connecting skiing and nature.
Our sense of self as individuals and our group identities are formed as we engage with a multitude of discourses and take them up as part of ourselves (Foucault 2005). Through our engagement with pro-environmental discourse, we might take on the term “environmentalist” as a way to identify ourselves. A sense of what it means to be a skier is similarly shaped by an engagement with discourses about skiing that are present at ski hills, on skiing websites, or in mass media depictions of the sport.

Foucault views power not simply as coercive power, controlled by a “repressive state apparatus” (Althusser 1971). Rather, social power is bound up with knowledge, discourse and pleasure. Through his analysis of sexuality, he illustrates how “polymorphous techniques of power” operate in a more complex and subtle way than described by earlier critical theorists of power (Foucault 1978, 11). For example, Marxist theory offers a model of society in which power generally operates as a top-down form of economic and ideological class domination. For Foucault, the problem with this model is that it reifies power and treats it as an object that can be held or passed on, like currency; or wielded by one historical actor over another like a sword or battle axe.

Foucault offers an alternative model of power, which has several characteristics. First, power is not only a macrosocial phenomenon. Rather, we must understand power as operating throughout a multiplicity of sites at a local level. Second, power is not only repressive; it is not only a tool of control wielded by one class, or a set of social institutions, over subaltern classes. Instead, power flows in multiple directions. It flows “from below” as well as “from above.” Wherever repressive “technologies of power” are mobilized, there are also opportunities for resistance (Gordon 1980). Third, Foucault argues that faith in a “great Refusal,” in the Marxian sense of proletarian revolution, is untenable (Foucault 1978, 96). Just as power operates at essentially local sites, so do “points of resistance” appear “everywhere in the power network” (95). This notion of resistance further emphasizes the localized nature of power. Taking these
characteristics together, the most important aspect of power is that it is fundamentally relational. Foucault also illustrates how discursive power changes through time and must be analyzed at specific social-historical sites. Within skiing, relations of power do not appear as grand acts of exclusion or repression. Rather, power relations within skiing -- whether based on gender, ethnicity, class or species -- operate in a more mundane, taken-for-granted manner. This makes a Foucauldian model that is sensitive to “capillary” flows of power more useful than a traditional, structuralist model (Foucault 2000 [1994]b).

For Foucault, power operates through systems of knowledge. The production and circulation of discourses are the ways in which social power is able to function. The regulation of discourse deals with who is allowed to speak on a given topic. It also concerned with the knowledges that are subjugated in the production of truth: the role of silence is also important. This is what is excluded and left unsaid in systems of discourse. As Foucault writes:

Silence itself . . . is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said . . . There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (Foucault 1978, 27).

Here, Foucault notes that we must be alert to the silences that lie outside the boundaries of acceptable debate, for they also help constitute networks of power/knowledge. Finally, while discourse and power are intimately connected, Foucault is careful to distinguish discourse from ideology. As he notes, “The delicate mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed, organized, and put into circulation, and those apparatuses are not ideological trimmings or edifices” (Foucault 2003b, 33-34). One of the main insights to draw from his work is that discourse is an important object of social analysis, in and
of itself. Discourse analysis must also be more complex than dominant ideology models would suggest. With this theoretical framework in hand, I will now turn to an analysis of how discourse is used by an array of social actors to articulate different meanings of skiing landscapes.

### 2.2 Ski Industry Constructions of the Mountain Landscape

**Skiing, nature and the mountainous sublime.** Ski magazines and ski resort websites provide a good starting point for looking at discursive constructions of the skiing landscape. Drawing inspiration from social network analysis, Figure 2.1 provides a visual overview of some of the key discursive elements articulated through ski resort websites and ski magazines (see Mische 2003; Mohr 1998). Node size reflects the relative importance of each discursive element, measured by the number of coding references to each theme. The ties between discursive elements show that these themes appear within the same coding reference. The size of the lines connecting pairs of nodes reflects the number times a pair of themes appears together. Thus, while node size shows the importance of a specific theme within the broader discourse network, line size reflects the strength of the connections between different discursive elements. This figure illustrates the centrality of tourism as a theme, which is connected to notions of wilderness and the discursive use of animals (especially bears) as symbols of nature.
In magazines like *Powder* and *SBC Skier*, readers are repeatedly shown lone (young male) skiers, positioned against a largely uninhabited wilderness of giant, snow covered mountains. This construction evokes notions of the sublime, which was ascribed to mountains by Victorian-era mountaineers enthralled by their particular embodiment of “beauty, horror and immensity” (Hansen 1991, 22). The sublime is different from the aesthetic of beauty insofar as it embodies the promise of “both pleasure and pain” (Lyotard 1984 [1979], 77). Michael further describes the natural sublime encountered through outdoor recreation as a “mixture of aesthetic pleasure and awe ... [experienced] when one places oneself before a magnificent natural feature that is, preferably, both precipitous and panoramic” (Michael 2000a, 45).

The mountainous sublime of ski texts is certainly beautiful, while also encompassing elements of awe and risk. This is suggested by recurrent photos of skiers arcing through the air and plummeting down steep chutes. Here, we see how elements of “edgework” enter into skiing,
where skiers actively engage in risky activity (Laurendeau 2006; Lyng 1990). For example, the website home page for Kicking Horse Resort features a slideshow at the top of the page. Photo after photo shows individual skiers going down steep, powdery slopes. These skiers are framed by a sublime mountain wilderness of huge, snow covered mountains; beneath clear, blue, sunny skies (Kicking Horse Mountain Resort 2006). The Whitewater website also greets the viewer with a photo of a male skier leaning into a near-vertical slope, with snow spraying off his skis. In this image, there are no other signs of human presence. The accompanying text describes Whitewater as: “Pure, Simple, Real” (Whitewater Winter Resort 2006).

The mountains are a backdrop to risk-taking and adventure, but are more than just a backdrop. Individual mountain landscapes are unique: the experience of moving downhill in Utah is seen as fundamentally different from moving through snow in the Alberta Rockies. Individualized movement through snow is accompanied by the call for skiers to move between different mountain ranges. The following excerpt likens skier-travellers to sages, following a semi-mystical quest for a connection with the mountainous sublime:

Skiers wander, like a sage from any age, using the forces of nature to accomplish incredible deeds: making pilgrimages, seeking out the legendary and mystical from nature’s most dramatic and dynamic landscapes. From Chamonix to Whistler, Tibet to Kluane, and to the Kootenays, ski bums are some of the few in modern society with the faith to follow their personal path (Spricenieks 2005-2006, 44).

Skiing landscapes are not homogenous; they are local and specific, and need to be experienced for their specificity. The following comment from an editorial in SBC Skier provides a further illustration of this: “Especially for skiers, no visual stimulus of place or conditions is complete without the physical experience in that environment, regardless of whether it’s the same physical
experience we’ve had in other places” (“Open House” 2004, 12). Thus, even where the physical actions of skiing may not vary, a unique connection is made between skiers and different mountain landscapes. The mountainous sublime of British Columbia is distinct from the mountainous sublime of Alaska or France. Moreover, the quest to experience different skiing environments is also built on the presumption of a global market in ski tourism. Unlike religious sages from other historical periods, skiers’ ability to experience new mountain landscapes is tied to their ability to traverse the globe using the infrastructure of contemporary tourism.

The figure in this vision of the skiing landscape is typically male. While women are certainly not invisible in skiing texts, they often remain at the margins of ski magazines’ written and visual construction of the landscape. As a result, the sublime mountain wilderness appears as a masculinized place. This echoes Schrepfer’s (2005) account of how wilderness has historically been constructed as a site for the performance of masculinity through sports like mountaineering. The masculine version of the mountainous sublime is built up through repeated images of the male explorer, travelling to new places. Within skiing magazines, images of male risk-taking and athletic heroism articulate a particular form of adventurous masculinity that “naturally” inhabits the mountainous sublime. Here, the object of exploration is the discovery of new snow and new lines down different mountains. Through the articulation of the mountainous sublime and masculinity, constructions of the skiing landscape are linked with flows of gendered social power.

My field notes also chronicle how signs and posters are used within the skiing landscape to draw connections to nature. There are signs that point out the boundaries of Garibaldi Provincial Park, highlighting the connection between the Whistler skiing landscape and the protected wilderness next door. The recently-opened Symphony chairlift provides access to an area that was previously reserved for backcountry skiing. As I note in my field notes from Whistler Blackcomb:
The whole Symphony area is interesting. The concept is “bringing the backcountry inbounds,” trying to create a simulation of the “backcountry experience” for Whistler Blackcomb skiers. The skiing here is definitely good – some nice big bowls that aren’t too difficult and lots of glades, with runs that are quite narrow cut among the forest. That said there is certain feeling of simulation here, coming from a backcountry skiing perspective. Things have a simulated, controlled and managed feeling. The area is also interesting for the volume of texts dealing with environmental stewardship and environmental education. There are several signs about animal habitat; a sign about climate change that details how micro-hydro produces part of the electricity used by the Symphony Chair; signs about how the area has only had 5% of trees cut for glading, versus the usual 50% for ski run development (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, February 9, 2007).

The Symphony area is meant to feel less developed than the rest of the mountain, in order to give resort skiers a taste of the “backcountry experience,” thereby providing a more “wild” version of the skiing landscape.

As work in “animal geographies” illustrates, animals are frequently used to define the meaning of particular places (C. Philo and Wilbert 2000; Wolch and Emel 1998). While I will take up the presence of material animals in the next chapter, here I wish to focus on how discursive representations of animals are invoked to create the meaning of skiing landscapes. Animals are symbolically recruited into ski industry discourse to indicate the “natural” and “wild” character of skiing landscapes. This is particularly visible in resort websites, where images of bears denote the wildness of skiing landscapes. Cypress Mountain is located just outside Vancouver, and its website draws on bears as symbols of mountainous nature. The site
contains several photos of the black bears that inhabit the forests surrounding the ski hill (Cypress Mountain, 2006). Through visual imagery, the website creates a set of connections between bears and the sublime mountain landscape, even though this particular resort is just outside Vancouver. The bears establish the “naturalness” of Cypress, despite its proximity to the city. Similarly, the Kicking Horse website prominently features photos of grizzly bears alongside images of the sublime mountain wilderness. Further emphasizing the links between skiing and nature, forged through animals, Kicking Horse is home to a “grizzly refuge” (Kicking Horse Mountain Resort 2006).

Animals also inhabit the skiing landscape as ephemeral traces on the architecture of hotels and bars. At Big White, lodgings are typically given animal names: Black Bear, Grizzly Lodge, Eagles Resort, and Ptarmigan Resort (Big White Resort 2006). Animals are also invoked in the architecture of skiing at Fernie, where hotels and pubs are named the Wolf’s Den, the Bear Paw and the Grizz Inn (Fernie Alpine Resort 2006). Both Sun Peaks and Big White also make use of bears as resort mascots. Their websites include photos of employees in bear costumes, playfully interacting with visitors (Big White Resort 2006; Sun Peaks Resort 2006).

Animals are also brought into skiing discourse as objects of environmental stewardship and management. The following statement comes from the Mount Washington website:

We operate within a larger ecosystem and should strive to be stewards of fish and wildlife habitats. ... There are measures we can take to better understand, minimize, and mitigate impacts to fish and wildlife, and in some cases, enhance habitat, particularly for species of concern. The benefits of these measures include promoting biodiversity and the natural systems that attract guests to the mountain landscape (Mount Washington Alpine Resort 2006).
Similar statements about wildlife stewardship and skiing are found on the Whistler Blackcomb website, where habitat management is part of the resort’s environmental practices (Whistler Blackcomb 2006). The Whitewater website also includes an environmental review that provides a virtual census of the animals that populate and make up their skiing landscape: mule deer, white tailed deer, black bears, grizzly bears, several bird species, and threatened mountain caribou (Cascade Environmental Resource Group 2002). The environmental review looks at soils, forests, waterways, plants and animals in light of a proposed expansion to the resort. It documents issues of concern that Whitewater will accommodate in order to expand in an environmentally sound manner. Again animals are recruited into ski industry discourse to construct skiing landscapes as places of wildness. Through animal stewardship, these texts position ski resorts as responsible managers of nature.

My field notes from Whistler Blackcomb also document how representations of animals appear as symbols throughout the skiing landscape. Recurrent images of bears, deer, and other animals articulate connections between skiing and nature. Wooden carvings of bears and eagles dot the skiing landscape (see Figure 2.2). Bears also appear as icons of Canadiana in Whistler souvenir shops, where visual connections are forged between “nature and nation” (Cronin 2007). Bears are dressed in Mountie (RCMP) uniforms, placed on t-shirts, postcards, boxer shorts and stationary. The image of the bear brings together skiing, wilderness and an idealized image of Canadian national identity, which is directed at a tourist gaze (Urry 2002; see Figure 2.3). Furthermore, animals are connected with environmental stewardship through signs that tell skiers about habitat management and the presence of bears and deer within the skiing landscape.³

³ This theme taken up in greater depth in Chapter 4.
Figure 2.2 The bear as symbol of nature at Whistler Blackcomb.

Figure 2.3 Bears in RCMP uniforms, Whistler Blackcomb.
**Skiing naturecultures.** While the notion of the skiing landscape as an uninhabited wilderness circulates throughout ski magazines, images of the mountainous sublime co-exist with images and texts that focus on technologies of mobility. These photos and narratives provide an alternate account of the meaning of the skiing landscape. Rather than the uninhabited mountainous sublime, which appears as pure “nature,” this discourse constructs skiing landscapes as simultaneously natural and social spaces, or as “naturecultures” (Franklin 2006; Haraway 2008; Law 2004b). Stories about helicopter-accessed and snow-cat skiing appear frequently in ski magazines, as do references to the chairlifts that carry skiers up the mountain. The following excerpt is from a story about a heli-skiing trip, which focuses on skiers’ interactions with nature and the technologies that allow this interaction to take place:

> Then you ride. Alpine faces, perfectly spaced trees, rolling glaciers, all on snow that rolls at your waist and flies over your shoulders, stinging your cheeks and stirring your soul. You do this over and over until your legs start to quiver. Still the guide and the helicopter pilot have to drag you back to the lodge. Tomorrow, if you're lucky, you'll do it all again. A smile permanently etched on your face (M. Scott 2006-2007, 46).

Another article focuses on the ambiguous quality of the relationship between machines and nature within skiing. The writer talks about the snowmobile-accessed backcountry skiing. Here, the machine is an intermediary between the mountainous sublime and “the industrial world”:

> We are ready to leave, but starting the snowmobile seems a sacrilege. The juxtaposition is a difficult one -- a wilderness experience made possible by a shrieking machine -- and the price worth considering. Is it worth it to be in this place? We stand there looking at the
machine for a moment, knowing the true significance of our experience. Then I pull the cord and we re-enter the industrial world with a two-stroke scream (Pogge 2006, 25).

While skiing landscapes may be represented as an uninhabited wilderness, there is a tension between this discourse and representations of skiing landscapes as naturecultures that are constituted by both non-human nature and technologies.

While the discourse of a sublime mountain wilderness is prevalent in ski magazines, ski websites more often depict the mountainous landscape as a natureculture. For example, the Big White website includes a construction diary (complete with webcam broadcast) of their Snowghost Express chairlift (Big White Resort 2006). This is accompanied by a photo gallery, with forty or fifty photos that chronicle the construction of the new lift. By contrast with the visual discourse of the mountainous sublime, most of the photos on the Big White website depict social groups, often located in the built environment of the ski resort village. In general, ski resort websites place more emphasis on the technologies of skiing, such as chairlifts and snow-making, than ski magazines do. They also spend much more time highlighting and promoting the built spaces of ski resorts: hotels, restaurants, lodges.

Within ski resort websites, skiing landscapes are as much social spaces as they are wilderness. This blurring of the social and the natural into a natureculture is also seen in my field notes. The following excerpt is written about Glacier Lodge, which is about two-thirds of the way up Blackcomb Mountain:

The skiing space at Glacier Lodge is meant to evoke a certain “rustic” feel, with lots of wood (tables, chairs, walls, ceiling and exposed rafters) and exposed metal piping. Also, hanging from the ceiling are these kind of wooden sculptures, or laminated driftwood, twisted together. The colour scheme is wood-brown and green, evoking the forest outside
on the mountain. The walls are also made largely of glass – huge windows, that emphasize the natural light (though there are also ceiling lights, but these seem only to augment the natural light). The glass walls, use of wood and green paint also lets the interior ski space bleed out into the forest outside – a sense of blurred boundaries between built space and skiing landscape (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, November 24, 2006).

At Whistler Blackcomb, lodges, restaurants and other built spaces feature large windows that face the mountains, ample natural light, exposed wood and colours that mimic the forest outside. This seems designed to blur the boundaries between nature and architecture; these built spaces bleed out into nature and the mountainous sublime (see Figure 2.4). Elias (1998) describes the aesthetic of kitsch as art that is produced for the sake of being sold, rather than for its own sake. The term has its roots in sketches that were made specifically for tourists in early 20th century Munich. The aesthetic of Whistler might be thought of as a sort of three-dimensional “sketch” designed for tourist consumption, connecting Canadiana, wilderness and an idealized mountain town for a tourist gaze. It is a rural, mountainous version of the “fantasy city,” which foregrounds entertainment, consumerism and “riskless risk” within a “themed environment” (Hannigan 1998).
While the lodge at Whitewater also uses unfinished wood to provide a rustic, natural feel, the effect is quite different from Whistler. Here, instead of blurring the boundaries between built spaces and the surrounding mountains, a greater sense of separation is created. As I observe in my field notes:

The ski lodge is much smaller than at Whistler. It has a rustic feel, with wooden beams and a lot of exposed wood. It has an unfinished look, but this seems less contrived than Whistler. In other words, it feels like it is actually rustic, not designed to feel so by Intrawest. The lodge also has smaller windows than Whistler, giving a feeling of a more enclosed space. While the lighting is mostly natural, the space feels much darker than at Whistler (Whitewater field notes, December 9, 2006).

At Whitewater, the lodge walls are graced with photos of the surrounding landscape, usually uninhabited, or else featuring a single skier. At the same time, ski run and chairlift names invoke
the mining history of the region: Sluice Box, Bonanza, Silver King, and Diamond Drill. In the lodge pub, old mining equipment hangs from the ceiling. Here, too, the landscape is constructed as not quite a wilderness, but as a blend of the social and the natural.

While discourses of the mountainous sublime and ski resort naturecultures are dominant, there are also other versions of the ski landscape that are articulated in ski magazines and websites. For example, there a discourse that focuses on competition and racing, where the landscape recedes far into the background and the focus is more on the skiers themselves. Here, the camera moves in close on the skier and the landscape is reduced to a backdrop. This landscape is characterized by well-groomed runs, rather than the deep, untracked powder of the sublime mountain wilderness. It is demarcated by fences and the presence of an audience. This contrasts with the wide open, uninhabited spaces of the mountainous sublime, where the only spectator is the reader sitting outside the scene. Similarly, terrain parks and half-pipes are other types of skiing landscape. These are sections of ski hills that are designed so that snowboarders and skiers can work on tricks and stunts. Here, the technological, cultural elements of the skiing landscape overpower any sense of wild nature.

There is also a certain discourse of “authenticity” that emerges in ski magazines. The more obviously human-constructed landscapes, like terrain parks or racing courses, seem to provide a less authentic skiing experience than the wilder, more “natural” landscape of the mountainous sublime. An obituary of backcountry ski guide Hans Gmoser, who died in 2006 following a cycling accident, sums this up well:

In the end, to ski is to travel fast and free -- over the untouched snow-covered country. To be bound to one slope, even to one mountain, by a lift may be convenient but it robs us of the greatest pleasure that skiing can give, that is, to travel through the wide wintry country; to follow the lure of the peaks which tempt on the horizon and to be alone for a
few days, or even a few hours in, [sic] clear, mysterious surroundings (Gmoser qtd C. Scott 2006-2007, 79).

This dominant discourse of skiing and the sublime mountain wilderness glorifies a particular type of skiing that relatively few people experience. Most skiers inhabit ski hills, which are marked by the constant presence of other people rather than isolation; groomed runs or moguls in contrast to deep powder; and the presence of lodges, chairlifts and restaurants, not wilderness. Thus, the version of skiing presumed to be most authentic remains unavailable to most skiers. The dominant discourse of ski texts focuses on the mountainous sublime, which is an object of desire, rather than reflecting the quotidian skiing naturecultures inhabited by most participants in the sport.

**Skiing landscapes as tourist spaces.** As alluded to above, the discourse of the skiing landscape as a sublime mountain wilderness is also linked with networks of tourism and migration. As MacCannell writes, “In the name of tourism, capital and modernized peoples have been deployed to the most remote regions of the world, farther than any army was ever sent” (MacCannell 1992, 1). The connections between skiing and tourism are constructed through magazine stories about travelling the globe in search of new skiing experiences. Chile, Alaska, Finland and New Zealand are a few places that are the focus of skiing-travel narratives. A piece on skiing in Iran from *Backcountry* magazine is particularly interesting. Here, a skier-tourist gaze is turned on a place that has often been constructed negatively in the mass media, as a way of creating an alternative discourse of Iran as a site of outdoor recreation and nature tourism (Petterson 2006). Another place that skiing tourism is made political is in a story about using skiing to empower young women in the Himalayas:
Our next ski adventure is one of a different kind. We want to help Dolma in her quest to empower local girls -- we want to share our skiing passion with them, and in the process learn more about their culture ... These mountain girls are natural skiers, sliding back and forth, faster and smoother with each lap. ... ‘This changed my life,’ says Dyer. ‘We’re giving them a glimpse that there’s more to life than just getting married’ (Gannett 2006, 36).

Beyond the need to experience different mountain landscapes, here skiing travel takes on a political meaning. Through skiing, young rural women learn that there is more to life than tradition dictates. If the dominant discourse is of a masculinised mountain wilderness, here this discourse is re-written through the lens of liberal feminism.

Another way in which skiing landscapes are constructed as tourist places is through the constant presence of ads for ski resorts, hotels, travel agencies and car rentals within both ski magazines and resort websites. These recurrent images of tourist travel work symbolically to construct ski landscapes as nodal points in larger networks of mobility. They are places we travel to in order to ski, replete with hotels, restaurants and tourist services. As Sheller and Urry note, the recent turn towards mobility emphasizes that “all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an ‘island’” (Sheller and Urry 2006, 209).

Cars are a particularly iconic symbol of mobility and tourism. As Barthes observes, the car is “the supreme creation of an era ... a purely magical object” (Barthes 1973, 95). As a particularly important mechanism of mobility, Urry describes networks of “automobility” as “the networks of human activities, machines, roads, buildings, signs and cultures of mobility” that create car-driver hybrids (Urry 2004, 26). As a theoretical concept, automobility focuses our attention on the ensemble of cars, roads, parking lots and discourses associated with car use. The
notion of automobility simultaneously points out how car-driver hybrids are individualized, yet how each of these car-driver hybrids is connected to a multitude of others through shared use of space (highways, parkades) and shared cultural norms. As Elliot (2004) documents, the symbolic use of cars to construct nature as a site for tourist travel is not new. Beginning in the early 20th century, Ford advertisements found a home in *National Geographic* magazine, where a dominant discourse told readers that the ability to enter into recreational nature was facilitated by the “freedom” provided by car ownership.

Similarly, ski magazines are dotted with car ads that hail readers as potential car-buyers, but which also serve to construct skiing landscapes as nodal points within mobility networks. In ski magazines, car ads repeat themes of athleticism, exploration, adventure, outdoor recreation, and access to wilderness. One advertisement tells the reader how a Toyota SUV – a specific type of “magical object” – makes the “American Wild” accessible (“The American Wild: Discover What’s Out There in a 4Runner” 2006, 157). A Honda element ad appears in a 2005 issue of *Powder*. It shows the SUV in a city, with the doors standing open. Illustrating in a literal sense how the car is a “magical object,” we peer out at a mountain wilderness through the open door of the car. The car becomes the means for urbanites to escape their everyday life and experience the mountainous sublime; it allows us to simultaneously inhabit the metropolis and nature (“Element” 2005, 76-77). These ads also illustrate Braun’s point that the culture of automobility is reproduced through a mediated “production of desire” for freedom and the “open road” (Braun 2007). While the actual landscapes of skiing might be portrayed as a mountain wilderness, access to this landscape is predicated on networks of automobility.

The construction of skiing landscapes as tourist places is also seen in my field notes from Whistler Blackcomb. Places to take photos are demarcated at the top of Whistler peak, as well as the top of the Seventh Heaven chairlift. Here, skiers are directed to the best views of the surrounding mountains so they can capture the landscape on film and bring it home as a souvenir
(see Figure 2.5). Similarly, professional photographers are also available throughout the mountain to take pictures of skier-tourists positioned against the sublime mountain landscape.

![Figure 2.5](image-url) Skiers photographing Black Tusk from Whistler Mountain.

As ski magazines and resort websites bring together images of the worlds’ mountains as potential sites for winter recreation, these mountains become objects for a tourist gaze. However, while the photos in magazines and websites are meant to be gazed upon, skiing tourism does not stop there. The specificity of skiing landscapes, as well as the constant flow of ads for ski resorts and hotel packages, shows how skiers are called upon to experience these landscapes for themselves. Skiing is about embodied interaction with the landscape, not only about the gaze. To know the mountainous sublime, the gaze is insufficient in itself. The snow, air, rock and mountains of a particular place must be felt as well as seen. As Althusser might put it (1971), readers of ski magazines and websites are interpellated as skier-tourists. They are “hailed” by these texts to imagine themselves as skier-travellers. When skiers at Whistler photograph themselves against the backdrop of the Coast Mountains, they are not only replicating images of
this particular skiing landscape for the gaze of others. They are making their own texts that show that they were there, interacting with this particular place. These photos serve as mementos of an embodied experience in a unique landscape.

2.3 Skiers’ Interpretations of the Landscape

Within skiing texts the landscape is predominantly constructed either as a sublime mountain wilderness, or as a natureculture linking machinery, architecture and nature. Furthermore, ski magazines articulate a discourse of the mountainous sublime with risk-taking forms of masculinity, through images of young men suspended mid-air; or rocketing through narrow, steep couloirs, within a mountain wilderness.

Reading skiing media. Sport-specific media, such as ski magazines, can play a vital role in articulating a sense of symbolic community among sport subculture participants (Stedman 1997). However, a typical objection to textual analysis is that we don’t know how these texts are interpreted by readers (Currie 1997; Smith 1999). Most of my interview participants are familiar with ski magazines as a genre. While only a few regularly buy and read them, most will browse them when they are around, or will pick up an issue or two over the winter. As Shantel (all names are pseudonyms) puts it, “I go for photos more than anything. If I look through a snowboard magazine it’s for the- for the shots rather than the articles” (Shantel, Nelson). Many skiers don’t necessarily read the magazines closely, but browse them. Interview participants also typically note that they enjoy looking at the pictures, but don’t pay close attention to the articles. Illustrating the importance of the gaze, as well the gendered nature of ski magazine discourse, ski photos are often referred to in magazines as “snow porn.” This is echoed by Billy: “The photos

4 Pseudonyms are used in all quotations from interview transcripts.
of the big mountain skiing in Alaska, and all of that, is just, I don’t know, it’s almost looking like, looking at a Playboy sometimes” (Billy, Nelson).

When asked for their opinions, a majority of participants (30 of 45) offered some form of critique. These fell into a few broad categories (see Table 2.1). First, several skiers find ski magazines’ emphasis on consumerism and advertising for new gear unappealing. For example:

And then, there are definitely some magazines that are really just about selling gear and looking good while skiing, and you know, throwing yourself off the highest cliffs possible (laughs). And all of that, I don’t really read those. Like, I’m kind of fascinated by them, in the same way that you’re fascinated, you know, by a car crash that you’re driving by (laughs) or something (Kristen, Vancouver-Whistler).

For many, the articulation of tourism, consumerism, wilderness and risk is unrealistic and somewhat problematic. A common response to questions about ski magazines is that “they’re all ads” (Gil, Nelson). Interestingly, more women (10) than men (5) invoked this critical discourse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ski magazines glorify risk</th>
<th>Too much advertising; over-emphasis on consumerism</th>
<th>Too male-oriented; negative portrayals of women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female participants</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male participants</td>
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<td>Vancouver participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nelson participants</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total # of interview participants who invoke critical discourse</td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
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Table 2.1 Interview participants’ critiques of ski magazines.
Second, several participants articulate a critique of ski magazines that focuses specifically on their emphasis on risk-taking and extreme skiing. They talk about how ski magazines create a “narrow” depiction of skiing, with their repeated imagery of people jumping from cliffs. This dominant discourse does not necessarily reflect participants’ own experiences or interests. For example:

I do find that the ski magazines, most of them, even *Powder*, they don’t ever talk about the more mellow kind of skiing that I feel like I participate in. I feel like it’s very hardcore, extreme, and out of my league, and not really even a reality, you know, to most people. But I mean it’s neat, because it’s almost like a freak show. You know, it’s like “holy crap, they’re crazy,” you know (laughs) or whatever (Roberta, Nelson).

Here, Roberta echoes Stebbins’ (2005) assertion that focusing on risk as the defining characteristic of many outdoor sports misses the point. While risk may be present within skiing or snowboarding (and engaging in edgework around risk can be enjoyable and rewarding), risk-seeking is often not the main criteria for sport participants.

Finally, a minority of participants respond that ski magazines are too male-oriented, or reproduce problematic images of women. For example, Kristen tells me that ski magazines “kind of interest her,” but their focus on consumerism and their portrayal of gender are unappealing. She notes that ski magazines typically show “guys doing the fun stuff in them and then the girls are mostly looking pretty” (Kristen, Vancouver-Whistler). This discourse of gender and skiing media echoes Thorpe’s (2008) recent work on gender and snowboarding media. She notes that female snowboarders often develop a “critical awareness” of media representations and challenge the idea that snowboarding is “a fulfilling activity to be engaged in by men and a ‘cute’ fashion to be consumed by women” (Thorpe 2008, 204). However, this critical discourse
is not invoked very often; it is a minority discourse among my interviewees and is articulated almost entirely by women. Here, participants talk about how women are marginalized from textual representation, while male skiers dominate ski magazines. They also talk about how women are featured as decorations for a male gaze, instead of depicted as competent skiers in their own right. Another participant describes snowboard magazines as follows:

Snowboarding magazines, a lot of the images of women are not something that I like. They’re very derogatory, is that the word? They portray women as sexual objects. ...

Often a lot of pictures are guys doing tricks and women wearing bikinis (Peg, Nelson).

On the basis of these examples and others, I suggest that the dominant discourses of the skiing landscape are not taken up wholesale by all interview participants. This is not to say that all skiers give voice to critical readings of skiing media. When I asked Jason how he felt about ski magazines’ portrayal of the sport, he replied, “They portray it not negative, totally positive. Adventurous, free. Exciting sport” (Jason, Vancouver-Whistler). His assessment of skiing media is echoed by Jake, who offers a provocative reversal of the notion that skiing media glorifies risk:

Well, I like the extreme. I like looking at it. It’s beautiful to see people flying in the air. The photography’s awesome. It’s just fantastic. Why should I look at a photo of some mundane run? So you have to go extreme to really make it interesting (Jake, Vancouver-Whistler).

Here, we see that there are multiple interpretations of skiing media, characterized by appreciation as well as critique. This illustrates that, as a particularly attentive audience, skiers do engage in
negotiated reading of skiing media. The construction of skiing landscapes that is produced and circulated through ski industry texts is not absorbed uncritically by many skiers. Rather, skiers articulate their own meanings of the skiing landscape. These meanings are grounded in skiers’ own experience and their embodied interactions with mountain environments.

**Skiers’ interpretations of the skiing landscape.** Within the interviews, I specifically asked how important participants thought the landscape was to their experience of skiing. The main themes that appear in interview talk are visualized in Figure 2.6, which treats these themes as components of a larger discourse network (Mische 2003; Mohr 1998). Again, node size reflects the relative importance of each theme within interview participants’ talk about landscape, while the size of ties between nodes reflects the frequency with which pairs of themes co-occur in the same coding reference. As is shown in this figure, the idea that the landscape is important was invoked by a majority of interview participants. Being able to look at and be within a mountain landscape is a key part of the skiing experience. For example:

Yeah, I really appreciate the mountains. The solitude and the scenery, and that feeling of isolation ... I’m a big fan of the landscape. Absolutely. I can stop on the hill and just, you know, stay there for fifteen minutes. Just quietly look around and enjoy the different species of trees, and the features of the landscape (Malcolm, Nelson).

A similar theme is articulated by Donna, who foregrounds the visual gaze the way she relates to the landscape. She also makes an interesting distinction between the skiing landscape and the urban landscape, where the skiing landscape is more “enticing”:
I must have, I’m sure, a hundred pictures of Black Tusk (laughs) in different conditions and varying light and clouds and things like that. ... It’s very rewarding, you know, on beautiful days. You sort of look around and go, “Ah.” And I mean, I suppose it would be different if you were looking out, and looking at an urban environment, obviously, buildings. ... Looking at the snow-capped peaks and the glaciers is, I mean, it’s very enticing (laughs) (Donna, Vancouver-Whistler).

The importance of the landscape is often described in terms of gazing out at the surrounding mountains. This shows how the landscape is understood in visual terms by skiers.

Figure 2.6 Relationships between selected elements of skiers’ discourse.
The skiing landscape is also often defined, particularly by interview participants in Vancouver and Whistler, as a semi-wilderness. It is a natural space that contrasts with less attractive urban environments. This was alluded to by Donna and is further emphasized by Dennis: “If I was looking at skyscrapers all around me and I was skiing, it wouldn’t quite be the same. I’d probably go somewhere else. But, uh, being on the top of a mountain is fully, few feelings quite like being on top of a mountain” (Dennis, Vancouver-Whistler). For several participants, the skiing landscape is a refuge from everyday life in an urban setting. Here, skiers give voice to a nature-society dichotomy, where skiing is a means of entering into and gazing upon nature.

A similar theme emerges when participants talk about the role played by forests in the skiing landscape. For several participants, forests are an important part of the landscape as something to gaze upon, but also as part of the landscape that they can interact with through tree-skiing (skiing through forested terrain, instead of down cleared runs). Several participants, particularly among Nelson female interviewees, also talk about how clearcuts left over from logging mar the landscape and make it less beautiful and less appealing. Ana describes a backcountry ski day in Goat Range provincial park, near Nelson, saying, “Up Dennis Creek when we had a clear view and I could see all the clearcuts around, it kind of makes me (sighs) and it’s discouraging” (Ana, Nelson). The traces of industrial forestry are viewed as a negative part of the skiing landscape. Talk about forests and clearcuts also distinguishes skiing as a more nature-oriented activity, in opposition to the productive use of nature by the forest industry.

While the importance of the skiing landscape is asserted by most skiers I interviewed, it is often seen as more of a bonus, or an add-on to their experience. For example, when I asked about the importance of landscape, one Nelson area snowboarder replied, “Well, it’s not the number one factor (laughs). You know? The ride’s the number one factor. That’s just a bonus” (Gil, Nelson). For many skiers, the relative beauty of the landscape doesn’t necessarily determine
where they will go skiing – access and cost may have more to do with that – but it is appreciated as an important part of the skiing experience. Overall, the pleasure derived from the visual gaze seems less important than having good weather (deep snow or sunshine) and spending time with friends.

Similarly, a few respondents told me that they hadn’t really thought much about the importance of landscape before, but are now coming to appreciate it. For example, one Nelson area participant talks about how it wasn’t something she was conscious of until new development started at Red Mountain: “I hadn’t realized how important it was until they started building condos in the view at Red. You know?” (Sofia, Nelson). Here, the importance of landscape may be latent, but comes to the surface when pre-existing versions of the landscape are disturbed. For some skiers, an awareness of landscape lies beneath their conscious articulation of their experience.

I have described how the landscape is constructed for a visual gaze for readers of magazines and websites, as well as for skiers and tourists at ski hills. However, part of the magazine discourse is that skiing landscapes are something to feel. In the following example, an author writes about skiing as a lifestyle of “tortured hedonism” and foregrounds the embodied, material nature of skiers’ interactions with the landscape:

Perhaps most importantly, we understand the inherent irony of our chosen sport -- that bizarre combination of ambition and decadence, effort and indulgence, labor and leisure. The bitter cold of first chair leads to an infinite freedom, screaming down the fall line, a magnificent white wake billowing behind. Trudging up a steep, seemingly endless boot-pack, our burning lungs are exchanged for a buoyant glide through the heart of winter. Each run ends in exhaustion, beginning anew as we load the chair or strap on skins for another round of tortured hedonism (England 2005, 43).
Pleasure and excitement are balanced by discomfort, physical effort and exhaustion. Skiers don’t just look at the mountains, they feel them. Alex illustrates this with his description of how the first days of a new season leave their marks on the skiing body:

I mean, gosh, the first day skiing, or the second one after that, I can barely walk. I just feel like someone’s beaten the crap out of me. So, it takes me a good week of skiing to get, you know, out of the soreness of just dealing with the vibration, and, you know, having my legs burn (laughs) when I’m cruising down the run (Alex, Nelson).

The embodied nature of skiers’ interactions with the landscape is also illustrated in recurrent talk of how important exercise, exhaustion and pushing physical boundaries are for many skiers. For example:

But also I think getting in a good, solid, long day. And just feeling really exhausted by the end of the day. Um, I’d rather have not very good snow conditions, not very good visibility, and just push myself the whole day ... (Kathlyn, Vancouver-Whistler).

Particularly when talking about backcountry skiing, a large number of interviewees told me about their feelings of satisfaction when they hiked up the mountain under their own power. Similarly, many skiers do not only see trees as a visual part of the landscape, but as things to interact with through tree skiing.

Talk about the embodied physicality of skiing shows how it might be thought of as a practice of “somatic selfhood.” Rose (2001; 2007) defines this as a range of practices, including exercise, used to achieve physical and psychological well-being. Rose argues that there is “an
increasing stress on personal reconstruction through acting on the body in the name of a fitness that is simultaneously corporeal and psychological ... the corporeal existence and vitality of the self has become the privileged site of experiments with the self” (Rose 2007, 26). Going further, I suggest that it also illustrates how -- at least in outdoor recreation -- such practices of somatic selfhood are intertwined with the natural environments in which they take place.⁵

Landscapes are not only symbolic constructions for the gaze, like paintings hanging out in space. Rather, skiers enter into embodied relationships with the landscapes they enter into. Beyond an appreciation for the beauty of the visual surroundings, nature also “pushes back” on skiers’ bodies – or “observes and writes us” -- as skiers interact with the landscape, as illustrated by talk about exhaustion and the physical effort that skiing demands (Franklin 2003; Thrift 2001). More extreme examples of how the landscape pushes back on skiers’ bodies shows up in talk about skiing-related injuries, which appears periodically in my interviews and my field notes. In skiing, injuries leave material traces on the body. They are a rather unpleasant way in which the landscape pushes back, emphasizing in particularly harsh terms that it is not just something to be gazed upon.

2.4 Backcountry versus Resort Landscapes

Ski magazines and resort websites articulate different versions of the skiing landscape. Different versions of the skiing landscape are also described by interview participants and in mass media texts. An important boundary is drawn between the backcountry and the ski resort landscape. For example, Shantel contrasts her skiing at Whitewater with backcountry skiing:

⁵ Douglas Coupland captures this connection between skiing, landscape and somatic selfhood in the novel J-Pod, writing: “We were soon on Highway 99, headed up Howe Sound into the Coast Mountains. The alpine environment was already making me feel healthier than I really am -- which I believe is the secret allure of skiing as a sport” (Coupland 2007, 449).
It’s hard to compare them, because going up to Whitewater you’re surrounded by lots of other people generally. You know, you’re riding lifts, so you’re not using your own power to climb to the top. You know, you’re reliant on something else ... And I, you know, I get the peacefulness of a backcountry experience over the kind of hectic feeling that ski hills sometime provide (Shantel, Nelson).

Here, the ski hill is described as a more social, mechanized landscape. It is distinguished from the backcountry as a peaceful, solitary and remote landscape. The implication seems to be that backcountry skiing is a more authentic form of interaction with mountain landscapes. It requires more physical effort, it takes place further away from masses of people and it is not located in the obviously technological environment of the resort; where chairlifts, snow-making, grooming and lodges are permanent fixtures.

The backcountry landscape is closer to “wilderness” and so seems more environmentally authentic. For Maurice, backcountry skiing embodies “the whole romantic notion of just being out in the middle of nowhere” (Maurice, Nelson). This is further articulated by a Vancouver participant: “The other big part of backcountry skiing is just getting out into the wilderness on my own, or with a group of people. It doesn’t even have to be a great ski day. It doesn’t have to be great conditions. It’s just getting out that I enjoy” (Steve, Vancouver-Whistler). For several participants, especially among Vancouver and Whistler skiers, the backcountry landscape is contrasted with the resort as a more “urban” type of setting. The characteristics of solitude, quiet, lack of mechanization and the absence of people are cited as reasons for preferring the backcountry landscape.

Interestingly, many of the skiers I interviewed are themselves “hybrid” skiers. They spend most of their time at a resort (Whitewater or Whistler) and occasionally travel to the backcountry; or else they are predominantly backcountry skiers who occasionally visit resorts. In
other words, my interview participants demonstrate that there is a resort-backcountry continuum, with skiers moving from one type of landscape to the other. While a social boundary demarcates these two skiing landscapes, this does not seem to reflect a firm divide in the actual practice of skiing.

An interesting patterned silence is created through the construction of this boundary. It is not only the resort that is a natureculture. Backcountry skiing is often accessed through snow-cats, helicopters, or snowmobiles, instead of chairlifts. Even where skiers hike all the way into the backcountry under their own power, backcountry skiing is still dependent upon networks of automobility, wherein skiers use their cars to access backcountry access points. Evidently the divide between the backcountry as a wilderness landscape and the resort as a social landscape is not firm. Rather they are different forms of naturecultures and the boundary between them is somewhat permeable.

The fluidity between backcountry and ski resort boundaries is also chronicled in my field notes. Particularly at Whitewater, it is often difficult to distinguish exactly where the boundaries between the resort and the backcountry lay. There is a core of groomed runs, which are maintained by the resort. At the same time, skiers move freely into the forested areas between runs, or hike out to the chutes and bowls beyond official ski area boundaries. One of the most popular areas at Whitewater is Backside, a backcountry area outside the patrolled boundaries of the ski hill. This area is accessed using the ski area lift, followed by a 15 minute hike. Similarly, Whistler has developed the Symphony Chairlift in order to “bring the backcountry inbounds” and provide a simulated sense of the “backcountry experience” to resort skiers.

The boundary between backcountry and ski resort landscapes is not only articulated by my interview participants. It is also reproduced in mass media texts on skiing. Here, backcountry landscapes are also constructed as closer to wilderness, thereby providing a more authentic interaction with nature. This is contrasted with the more obviously technology-mediated
landscape of the resort. The resort is linked with mass tourism, while the backcountry landscape is used by fewer people. Because of its separation from mass tourism, the backcountry landscape is represented as the site for a deeper knowledge of nature. Again, this discursive boundary-work elides how both landscapes are naturecultures: one marked by the presence of chairlifts, the other by helicopters and snow-cats.

In the mass media, there is also a darker side to the backcountry-resort distinction, a sort of Jungian shadow to the greater environmental authenticity of the backcountry landscape. The backcountry is discursively constructed as a very risky landscape. One news article focuses on an avalanche survivor and juxtaposes the risk of the backcountry with its appeal: “He said the avalanche risk was ‘worth the reward’ of wilderness skiing and he would not give it up. ‘It’s better than dying of boredom, sitting at home watching CNN,’ he said” (Australian 2003, 7). If the backcountry is less technologically-mediated than the resort, it is also less controlled, more chaotic and fraught with danger. Another example of the notion of the backcountry as a risky landscape comes from an article about a pair of skiers who died when a snow cave collapsed. The article draws on the expert knowledge of a news source from the Alpine Club of Canada:

“We all engage in the same sports, and when it happens, it is sobering,” said Mike Mortimer, the Alpine Club of Canada's director of external affairs. “It sounds like it was a fluke of nature, it could have happened to anybody. It doesn't matter what you do, there is always that risk. It doesn't matter how prepared you are, it’s a hostile environment and

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6 Much of the literature on risk deals with large-scale risks, beyond the control of individuals. Here, the focus is typically on strategies of risk avoidance and management (for an archetypal example see Beck 1992). However, as Giddens (1991) notes, “cultivated risk,” where individuals seek out risk in order to master it, has become a common response to living in an increasingly managed, risk-averse society. While it is a minor part of the risk literature, several authors have turned their attention to risk-seeking, or “edgework,” within sport (for example see Laurendeau 2006; Lyng 1990; Machlis and Rosa 1990; Stebbins 2005; Stranger 1999).
there are very few living things up there. But that's the appeal of it as well”
(Zickefoose 2007, E6).

In media discourse, travel into the backcountry is unpredictable and fraught with risk. This is a “hostile” landscape, where humans arrive as explorers and adventurers, not as residents. However, in comparison with the ski hill, which is marked by the permanence of lodges and chairlifts, this inhumaness is also attractive.

When I asked my interview participants about media depictions of skiing, they often invoked this discourse of the risky backcountry landscape. Several skiers, especially those with personal backcountry experience, challenged this construction of the backcountry landscape. For these participants, the mass media exaggerate notions of how dangerous and risky backcountry skiing is. When skiers are killed by avalanches, the media are accused of sensationalizing the deaths because they are dramatic. For example:

So the common reaction to an avalanche story in the paper is this shock and horror and “Nobody should be in the backcountry, it’s so dangerous.” Blah-blah-blah. And I’m kind of, I’m like, “It’s a lot more dangerous to get in your car. It’s a lot more dangerous, statistically, to walk across the street” (Jenny, Vancouver-Whistler).

This discourse illustrates Machlis and Rosa’s (1990) observation that the media often work to amplify elements of risk inherent in outdoor recreation. For several participants, media coverage of these “dramatic” deaths is contrasted with the lack of coverage given to the mundane mortality associated with our car culture, where deaths from car accidents are often taken from granted. This media discourse gives non-skiers an unrealistic view of backcountry risk and depicts those who enter this landscape as irresponsible, or even as having a death wish. To
provide another example, Steve talks about how media coverage of backcountry risk deters people from taking up the sport: “I think it keeps some people out of the backcountry because they get this- they get this unwarranted fear about it, because the media, you know, anything that’s outside of boundaries [is] inherently risky and scary. So that keeps people out” (Steve, Vancouver-Whistler). This critique of the mass media construction of the backcountry landscape contrasts with the critique of how ski magazines glorify and over-emphasize risk-taking. In Baudrillard’s terms (2001 [1981]), when skiers talk about media depictions of their sport, several perceive textual simulacra that fail to reflect their own embodied interactions with skiing landscapes.

### 2.5 Skiing and the Contested Landscape

Skiing landscapes are not only places for leisure and tourism. By challenging new ski development on environmental or social justice grounds, social movement groups articulate their own meanings of skiing landscapes. Social movement groups articulate two discourses that are particularly noteworthy (see Figure 2.7). First, environmentalist discourse describes how new ski development transforms a wilderness landscape, inhabited by grizzly bears, caribou and other animals, into a human-centred recreational landscape. Environmentalists’ use of wilderness and wildlife discourse is similar to the mountainous sublime reproduced in ski industry texts. Here, we see how notions of wilderness can be linked to divergent eco-political standpoints. Wilderness is invoked by ski resorts who claim the power to manage the landscape; it is also invoked by environmental groups who challenge skiing’s environmental legitimacy. Drawing on

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7 As several authors note, notions of “wilderness” are also socially constructed and historically variable (for example see Braun and Wainright 2001; Cronon 1995; Luke 1997; Torgerson 1999). Environmentalist discourses of wilderness have been critiqued for their tendency to erase human presence from the environment. This is particularly problematic when First Nations presence is either rendered invisible or naturalized and made part of a historic past, thereby risking the perpetuation of neo-colonial power relations. The critique of wilderness will be taken up and discussed in more detail in the final chapter.
Laclau and Mouffe (1985), we can say that this discourse is articulated into two different “chains of equivalence” that stand in opposition to each other. One of these connects skiing, nature, animals and environmental values. The other invokes wilderness to re-define skiing as an environmental problem. Here, skiing is articulated with technology, society and mass tourism; in opposition to wildlife, nature and environmentalism.

Figure 2.7 Relationships between selected elements of social movement discourse.

Protests over the proposed Jumbo Glacier Resort are a particularly good example of the eco-politics of skiing. The proposed development would put a new resort in the Purcell Range of south-eastern BC, near the towns of Invermere and Nelson. The Jumbo Wild website tells readers that “the Jumbo Valley is a rare treasure, ecologically viable despite past and present recreation and industry activity ... In all, JGR [Jumbo Glacier Resort] would absorb 6,000
hectares of public land for redevelopment into a European resort replica” (Jumbo Creek Conservation Society 2006). West Coast Environmental Law presents similar claims in their opposition to the proposed Jumbo development:

The development calls for two gondolas, an aerial tram, and 25 ski lifts – infrastructure that would take in an estimated 6,000 hectares of critical grizzly and caribou habitat. It is adjacent to the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy and threatens to undermine the Conservancy’s value as a healthy refuge to protect biodiversity (West Coast Environmental Law 2006).

Another example of this discourse comes from the Western Canada Wilderness Committee’s website. They give their support to First Nations protests against a proposed ski development in the Melvin Creek region, north of Vancouver: “The entire St’at’imc Nation has rejected the industrial tourism ski-city proposed for Melvin Creek as being too destructive to environmental and cultural values” (Western Canada Wilderness Committee 2006). In environmental discourse, skiing transforms the landscape into a “ski city” or a “European resort replica.” By contrast with ski industry discourse, the skiing landscape is not a sublime wilderness. Instead, wilderness landscapes are re-configured by skiing and changed into something qualitatively different: a social place rather than a wild place.

Ski resort texts use animal symbols in order to link skiing with nature and environmental values. Environmental groups also bring animal discourse into their construction of natural landscapes that are threatened by ski development. The Jumbo Pass campaign provides a useful example of this. Several groups are opposed to the resort and make use of the grizzly bear as a symbol of threatened wilderness. The Sierra Club speaks on behalf of grizzly bears, wolverines
and mountain goats as non-humans that need protection from ski development, which will transform a wildlife landscape into a human-dominated tourist landscape:

Jumbo Pass has been logged and mined in the past, but is still home to one of BC's most significant grizzly bear populations. Biologists estimate there are 64 grizzly bears—a significant number considering BC's grizzly bears could number as few as 1,000. Other threatened species such as wolverine and mountain goats also inhabit the area (Sierra Club of/du Canada 2006).

Similarly, the mountain caribou is recruited as the main symbol of threatened wilderness in environmentalist campaigns against the expansion of heli-skiing in south-eastern British Columbia. Wildsight is an environmental group located near Invermere, in the East Kootenay region. They have been vocal opponents of the provincial government’s plans to increase heli-ski tenures in the province. While claiming that they are not opposed to further tourism development, they speak on behalf of the caribou to demand “responsible motorized recreation” (Wildsight 2006). According to their website, “Wildsight continues to educate the tourism sector and the government about the contradiction between their marketing of ‘Super, Natural British Columbia,’ and their simultaneous sacrifice of wilderness and wildlife.” This illustrates how the symbolic use of animals may be quite pliable. As symbols of nature, animals are connected with opposing constructions of the British Columbia landscape.

The second version of the contested skiing landscape comes from First Nations groups.8 In places like Sun Peaks and Melvin Creek, ski hill development is also framed as an act of transforming existing landscapes into something profoundly different. The following excerpt is

8 The entry of First Nations protesters into skiing is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 4.
from the Skwelkwek’welt Protection Centre website, which focuses on the conflict over the expansion of Sun Peaks resort:

It appears that the people of the Neskonlith Indian have physically re-established ourselves in the financially wealthy section of Sun Peaks. I know it has primarily been the place of ReMax Real Estate Agents and wealthy home buyers. Did you know that condos go approximately $300,000 [sic] and a single family home for $1 million dollars. What do we get out of those deals, absolutely nothing (Skwelkwek’welt Protection Centre 2006).

Here, skiing landscapes are re-defined as First Nations places. Ski development is constructed as an illegitimate intrusion onto unceded First Nations territory and should be opposed on those grounds.

Newspaper coverage of protests over skiing further illustrate that skiing landscapes may be contested landscapes. Figure 2.8 maps out relationships among particularly important elements within the mass media discourse network. Media texts reproduce environmentalist claims about skiing’s impacts on wildlife landscapes. The media also report on First Nations’ claims about skiing’s intrusions into First Nations landscapes. For example:

Proponents [of Jumbo Glacier Resort] point to the ability to offer accessible year-round skiing on the glaciers surrounding the valley, an opportunity available nowhere else in North America. But critics complain the development will threaten grizzlies and other wildlife, swamp a wilderness area and wreck established businesses that offer other outdoor activities, including heli-skiing (Wilcocks 2004, 4).
Similarly, an article about the Sun Peaks protests describes the scene as follows: “Signs reading ‘Tourism or terrorism’ and ‘Sun Peaks kills’ greeted skiers at Sun Peaks Resort Sunday as a group protested land claims issues at the village” (Hewlett 2003, A1). Another article on the Sun Peaks protests gives voice to activists’ claims that skiing development intrudes on First Nations rights and environmental values: “Protesters argued that the expansion [at Sun Peaks] will destroy several ecosystems and is proposed to be on territory that the natives have never ceded” (Nelson Daily News 2003, 3).

Figure 2.8 Relationships between selected elements of mass media discourse.

In these stories about skiing and protest, the ski industry’s construction of itself is not reproduced in a way that simply echoes ski magazines or resort websites. Rather, skiing landscapes are constructed through discourses of tourism and economic development, while
environmentalists speak on behalf of non-human nature. In an article about Jumbo Glacier Resort, we are told that the resort “has been at the centre of a long-running storm pitting environmentalists, public opponents and a Panorama-based heliski resort against tourism and economic development supporters” (Davidson 2004, 2). Another article on the Jumbo conflict echoes this discourse of wilderness values (as represented by environmentalists) in opposition to economic development (represented by the ski industry):

In an economically depressed area like the Kootenays, it is hard to understand why anyone would be against a project that promises to create 800 full-time jobs, and 1,000 person years of construction work. Could it be that in the vast wilderness around them, the people of the Kootenays see something more important than economic opportunity? (Hume 2004, A15).

Rather than mediating between competing discourses about wilderness and its relation to skiing, newspaper texts are more likely to frame social movement protest in terms of environmental values versus economic well-being. Furthermore, where animals enter into media texts, they are typically located within environmentalist discourses of threatened wilderness. This is particularly evident in the presence of the grizzly bear as an emblem of the Jumbo Pass landscape. It is also visible in the use of the mountain caribou as a symbol of threatened wilderness in the backcountry. Within the mass media, environmentalists claim the authority to speak on behalf of animals more effectively than the ski industry. Environmentalists and First Nations protesters are able to use newspaper coverage to articulate their own constructions of the BC landscape. This illuminates the potential for social movement groups to use the media to pose a challenge to the ski industry’s construction of the landscape.
2.6 Conclusions

Skiing landscapes are invested with meaning by a variety of social actors: the ski industry, skiers, social movement groups and the media. Here, we see how an environment composed of rocks, trees and snow does not have a single meaning. It has multiple meanings, which are not always compatible with each other. Different social groups actively work to construct the meaning of skiing landscapes, which occasionally become “contested natures” (Macnaghten and Urry 1998). The dominant discourses of ski magazines and websites portray the skiing landscape either as a sublime mountain wilderness, or else as a semi-wild natureculture that is constructed for a tourist gaze.

Ski magazine discourse, in particular, links skiing, risk and masculinity. This creates a gendered version of the skiing landscape, echoing observations that mountain landscapes have often been defined as sites for performing heroic acts of risk-taking masculinity (Dummit 2004; Hansen 1991; Routledge 2004; Schrepfer 2005). Drawing upon Connell (2005), we may think of this as skiing’s particular variation of “hegemonic masculinity.” As Connell writes, “At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (Connell 2005, 77). As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) are careful to point out, forms of hegemonic masculinity emerge and gain cultural currency within distinct social and historical contexts. Furthermore, cultural valued forms of hegemonic masculinity often act as ideals to aspire towards, rather than ideal types that describe “average” masculine behaviour or appearance. The hegemonic masculinity of skiing texts is marked by risk-seeking and is linked to images of the mountainous sublime. This is one way in which the social construction of landscape is linked to gendered flows of power, wherein female participants are marginalized from textual images of the skiing landscape.
The connection between constructions of the landscape and flows of power is also made visible in texts about environmental and First Nations protest. Here, the ski industry’s attempts to define the meaning of the BC landscape are contested by social movement groups. These groups are relatively successful at articulating their own version of the landscape through the media. Thus, the mass media provide sites where social movements can pose a symbolic challenge to the ski industry. Drawing upon media research, these texts demonstrate how there are “cracks in the monolith” of the mass media that can be exploited by social movement groups (Hackett 1991; also see Doyle, Elliott and Tindall 1997; Hackett et al 2000).

Animals are often used symbolically to construct the meaning of particular places. For example, several authors have described how wolves are part of competing constructions of the American, Canadian and Norwegian landscape (Anahita and Mix 2006; Brownlow 2000; Loo 2006; Skogen and Krangee 2003). For some people, the wolf is a symbol of nature that is out-of-control and threatening to human wellbeing. For others, the wolf has become a symbol of threatened wilderness in need of protection from human exploitation and overdevelopment. I have described how the ski industry uses animals like bears and deer to define skiing landscapes as natural and environmentally benevolent places. Environmentalists also use bears and mountain caribou as symbols of wilderness, but in a different way. Here, grizzlies and caribou are symbols of wilderness landscapes that are threatened with transformation into recreational and tourist landscapes through ski development. Animals enter environmentalist discourse as characters in “protective stories” that social movement actors use to mobilize political support for their opposition to ski development (Ernstson and Sorlin submitted). This illustrates how animals are brought into the social as a discursive resource in competing claims about the meaning of the British Columbia landscape.

Interview participants repeatedly emphasize the beauty of the skiing landscape as an important part of their recreational experience. However, the dominant constructions of the
landscape articulated by the ski industry are not taken up uncritically by many of these skiers, who articulate their own critiques of these dominant discourses. Furthermore, an important distinction that arises in the interviews is between the ski resort and the backcountry landscape. The backcountry landscape is seen as the site for a more authentic interaction with nature, in juxtaposition to the “social” realm of the resort landscape. The discursive boundary between the resort and the backcountry is also taken up by the media. However, media discourse also constructs the backcountry as a risky landscape, illustrating how the media may work to amplify the risk inherent in outdoor sport (Machlis and Rosa 1999).

In ski magazines and ski resort websites, different versions of the skiing landscape are articulated. Ski resorts also work to construct the meaning of their own landscapes through a variety of texts and symbols, which appear on signs and posters, or in gift shops. My field notes chronicle how Whistler Blackcomb uses discourse to construct a substantially different skiing landscape than Whitewater resort. Whistler Blackcomb spends a great deal more effort creating symbolic links between skiing with nature than Whitewater does. I have discussed four different techniques that are used to do this. First, there are signs that point to the connections between the ski resort and neighbouring Garibaldi Provincial Park. Second, the Symphony Amphitheatre area is specifically meant to act as a simulation of backcountry skiing. Third, bears, deer, eagles and other animals are present as symbols of nature throughout the skiing landscape. Fourth, on-hill lodges are designed to blur the boundaries between architecture and nature. While the Whitewater website does include material on the resort’s pro-environmental standpoint, the symbolic connections between skiing and nature are not made explicit within the resort itself. Similarly, the construction of Whistler as a tourist landscape is also made explicit through the demarcation of viewpoints, photo spots and the presence of on-hill photographers, all of which are absent at Whitewater.
It is not difficult to infer that these differences are connected. In other words, it is likely that the owners and managers of Whistler are more concerned with linking skiing and nature because they are more self-conscious of their status as a tourist landscape. As Whitewater is more peripheral to the (partially) global network of skiing tourism, perhaps its owners feel less obligated to spend a great deal of effort constructing discursive connections between skiing and nature. Alternately, if we accept that Whistler provides a more simulacral experience of the mountain landscape than Whitewater, then the more explicit attempts to symbolically link skiing and nature might be interpreted as a way of naturalizing the process of simulation in a way that is less necessary at Whitewater.

In this chapter, I have looked at skiing through the theoretical lens of social constructionism and Foucauldian discourse theory. One of the shortcomings of this approach is that it tends to reify the visual and the symbolic. As Murphy writes:

It is true that humans shape nature more than other animals and, in doing so, influence their own nature. But it is the other side that sociological constructivists, like capitalists and bureaucrats, have a tendency to ignore. Both have obscured the immense dependency of humans on their natural environment. ... Both have failed to take into account the way in which humans, as a species and as individuals, live in a world shaped by its dynamic ecosystem (Murphy 1994, 20).

For Murphy, environmental knowledge may be socially constructed, but it is constructed through interaction with non-humans. Nature and the social are fundamentally intertwined in an ongoing “dance of human agents with nature’s actants” (Murphy, 2004).

Through skiers’ narratives and my own field notes, I have demonstrated how interactions with the landscape are embodied and enacted, as well as discursive. In skiing, the landscape is
not just a sublime mountain wilderness to be gazed upon. Nature repeatedly pushes back on skier bodies through exertion, exhaustion, or the discomfort of bad weather. In more extreme cases, skier interactions with the landscape produce injury, or even death in the case of avalanche mortality. This illustrates the utility of a more materialist constructionism. While nature is constructed, it is not constructed purely through human social action. From such a perspective, other-than-human machines, animals, weather systems and plants are all relevant participants. The materiality of our embodied interactions with other-than-human nature is taken up in the following chapter.
CHAPTER III: Cyborg Skiers and Snowy Collectives

The previous chapter examined the network of discourses about skiing that are constructed by the ski industry, mass media and social movement organizations. While discourse is an integral component of skiing as a sporting practice, which connects humans, non-humans and mountain environments, it is also important to focus on how humans and non-humans enter skiing as material actors and actants. In this chapter, I draw upon theoretical work by Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway to foreground how skiing functions as a discursively mediated, but profoundly embodied set of relations among humans, non-human nature and technologies. Treating skiing as a “collective” of human actors and non-human actants, I examine skiers’ relationships with their ski gear, human social networks, weather, animals, and an array of ski resort and backcountry skiing technologies. By looking at automobility and “powder nomadism,” I also trace the connections between local skiing collectives and broader networks of mobility, tourism and migration.

3.1 Cyborgs and Collectives

Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway challenge us to reconsider relationships between humans and other-than-human nature. Their key concepts of actors and actants, collectives, cyborgs and companion species take us beyond an overly discursive understanding of skiing. “Naturecultures” are formed through skiing, which bring together humans, non-human nature and technologies (Franklin 2006; Haraway 2008; Law 2004b). Skis gear, specialized clothing, chairlifts, trees and snow all come together with human skiers to constitute skiing as a naturecultural practice. In this chapter, I draw on these concepts to show how constructionist readings of skiing landscapes can be enriched through attention to the embodied, material presence of the other-than-human.
Bruno Latour challenges the “modern constitution” that sets humans apart from nature as separate spheres, where the connections between them are suppressed, “purified” and divided (Latour 1993). In the modern constitution, we see nature as an object that is worked on by human subjects. This produces a “myth” of nature as a “Neutral Tool under complete human control,” where the other-than-human exists primarily for our exploitation and consumption (Latour 1999, 178). Instead, the non-human world is less passive than dominant accounts suggest. Humans not only act upon nature, but continuously interact with non-human nature to achieve our own ends. However, in recruiting the other-than-human into “society,” we are not the only acting subject. As Latour writes:

Humans are not specially defined by freedom any more than they are defined by speech: nonhumans are not defined by necessity any more than they are defined by mute objectivity. The only thing that can be said about them is that they *emerge in surprising fashion*, lengthening the list of beings that must be taken into account (Latour 2004, 79).

For example, in “recruiting” mountains and snow for our recreational use through skiing, snow may behave in unruly, unpredictable ways, as in the case of avalanche fatalities. Taking a less extreme example, variable snowfall from year to year can make a large difference in the number of skiers visiting a particular ski resort (thereby affecting the resort’s profitability and ability to continue operating). To denote the active character of nature in co-creating the world, Latour describes nature’s non-human “actants,” which join human actors as part of a “collective.” The term “actants” leaves open the question of intentionality among the other-than-human. We do not have to gauge the intentions of snow, trees, or grizzly bears to become sensitive to the ways that
the non-humans appear as “interveners” in the social. The other-than-human does “make a difference” in our lives (Latour 2004).

The concept of “collectives” provides a useful tool for thinking about environment and society. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour claims that, “Nature and Society are not two distinct poles, but one and the same production of successive states of societies-natures, of collectives” (Latour 1993, 139). The emphasis here is on relationship, surprising and contingent connections, and the active qualities of the other-than-human. Once we begin paying attention to “collectives,” instead of “society” and “nature,” we see how relationships between humans and non-humans forge new connections “that did not exist before and that to some degree modifies the original” human actors and non-human actants (Latour 1999, 179). The other-than-human is always present in the social; however, this presence is often hidden from view in social science narratives. As we construct our accounts of social facts, social structures, or social processes, we create blackboxes that make “the joint production of [human] actors and [non-human] artifacts entirely opaque” (183). Just like the blackbox on an airplane, as long as things run smoothly, we do not worry about what is going on inside. However, when things go wrong, we must open up the blackbox and take a closer look at what is going on among human actors and non-human actants. The invisibility of non-human actants in is a serious lacuna in social science research; we need to open our theoretical blackboxes and acknowledge that “non-humans proliferate below the bottom line of social theory” (209). Following from this notion, the analysis presented in this chapter focuses on skiing as a recreational form of land-use that creates new collectives of humans and non-humans, rather than as a meeting point between “society” (human skiers) and “nature” (everything else).

Latour is particularly interested in the ways that machines are brought into our collectives as technological actants. For human actors to achieve most of our goals, from providing ourselves with food or shelter, to writing novels and playing music, we must constantly recruit
machines. We become largely inseparable from the machines that allow us to interact with the world and with each other. Latour refers to these complex inter-relationships as “socio-technical imbroglios” of humans and non-humans (Latour 1988). Here again, he challenges the division between human subject and non-human object:

It is not because it escapes “society” that “technology” has become complex. The complexity of the socio-technical mixture is portionate to the number of new ties, bonds and knots it is designed to hold together. . . . This is why, instead of the empty distinction between social ties and technical bonds, we prefer to talk of association. To the twin question “it it social?/is it technical?” we prefer to ask “is this association stronger or weaker than that one?” (Latour 1988, 27).

The constant presence of technological objects “lend their ‘steely’ quality to the hapless ‘society’” (Latour 2005, 68). For example, skiing requires the constant presence of ski lodges, chairlifts, skis and other “steely” objects to mediate between skiers and the mountains. However, while human-machine associations run through the social, they are also typically blackboxed. Through notions of imbroglios and collectives, Latour asks us to think beyond dichotomies of the social and the non-human that posit a firm division between the two spheres.

In a similar vein, Haraway offers the metaphor of the “cyborg” for conceptualizing the blurred boundaries between the social and the natural; between the human and the non-human. She writes, “Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world” (Haraway 1991, 151). Haraway’s cyborg social world is fundamentally a co-construction of humans and non-humans. Cyborg entities are formed through interaction; they are both “social”
and “natural.” She writes, “If the world exists for us as ‘nature,’ this designates a kind of relationship, an achievement among many actors, not all of them human, not all of them organic, not all of them technological . . . nature is made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co- construction among humans and non-humans” (Haraway 2004 [1992], 66). To take on the role and identity of a skier, the skiing human must enter into a cyborg relationship with their skis, boots, poles and a whole array of other gear and outdoor clothing.

The cyborg is an interesting choice of metaphor. It is an iconic figure of science fiction literature and film. The cyborg is a hybrid being that is part organic and part mechanical, but fully neither. The cyborg is also often a villainous figure: Darth Vader from Star Wars, Adam from Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the Borg from Star Trek, and the Cylons from Battlestar Galactica are a few examples. Her choice of this tropic figure suggests that the relations formed through the blurred boundaries of society, nature and technology are not always appealing or beneficial to us. They often have unintended, destructive consequences. However, we need to take responsibility for the cyborg world as something that we have created and inherited. We cannot ignore it or wish it away, but must engage with it. This is suggested by Haraway in a recent interview, where she speaks of “inhabiting the cyborg” a figure of domination, but also notes that it is a theoretical space that “opens up radical possibilities at the same time” (Gane and Haraway 2006, 239). The cyborg qualities of skiing certainly open up possibilities to enter into meaningful interactions with mountains and forests. However, we should also be attentive to the less appealing aspects of skiing’s cyborg relationships among skiers and the other-than-human.

Haraway’s notion of the cyborg is a valuable addition to Latour’s concepts of actants, collectives, and socio-technological imbroglios. While Latour emphasizes processes and relations, the cyborg figure is more attentive to the subjectivity of individuals-in-relation. It draws our attention to individual members of cyborg social worlds, who are constituted within a field of discursive and material interaction. Unlike Latour’s human actor, cyborg subjects are
shaped through discourses of gender, race, sexuality and class. The cyborg figure remains tethered (if rather loosely) to critical theory and to feminist politics in a way that Latour’s actor-network approach is less attuned to (Gane and Haraway 2006). Similarly, Latour’s focus on machines and a generalized other-than-human “nature” pays less attention to the specificity of animals as members of our collectives. Thus, the notions of companion species and significant otherness are useful additions for describing how embodied animals enter into our collectives.

Latour and Haraway’s work is valuable because it asserts that nature is constructed through social interaction; but it is not only socially constructed. As Haraway writes, while nature “cannot pre-exist its construction,” this model of nature is emphatically distinguished from “the postmodernist observation that all the world is denatured and reproduced in images or replicated in copies” (Haraway 2004 [1992], 65-66). By emphasizing the materiality of “society” and the importance of non-humans, both authors illustrate a central problem with an overly discursive model of social constructionism. We may continue to speak of construction. However, it is less useful to speak of the construction of nature as a purely social activity, as though the other-than-human is a tabula rasa waiting for our inscriptions. Construction happens, but it happens through human interaction with machines, animals, plants, weather systems, and so on. This material, embodied version of constructionism attempts to move beyond an overly symbolic conception of “society” and nature.” At the same time, this approach focuses on hybrid processes of co-construction, which are intimately bound up with discourse and symbolic labour. As such, this framework does not mark a return to earlier forms of environmental realism, but a movement towards more complex analyses of the mutual imbrications of “the social” and “the natural,” or the material and the discursive.
3.2 The Skier as Cyborg

Skiing is not only an interaction between human skiers and mountainous nature, with nothing in between. As a form of outdoor recreation, it is mediated by a diverse array of technologies. Skiing is composed of socio-technological imbroglios and is inhabited by cyborg skiers. Michael (2000b) makes the distinction between “epochal” and “mundane” technologies. Epochal technologies have a profound social effect: think of the printing press, automobile, personal computer, or internet. By contrast mundane technologies have a quieter, less obvious presence in our daily lives. On the surface, they appear less important; they are “unnoticed, everyday, always present” (Michael 2000a, 4). Within skiing, the most prolific group of technologies are mundane technologies that are intertwined with the skiing body: skis, boots, bindings, poles, goggles and ski clothing.

These personal, mundane technologies have a history that traces back to centuries-old wooden skis. They entered into North American culture through nineteenth-century Scandinavian migration. Wooden skis and leather boots were used to transport the mail across the western mountains between small gold-rush towns, which were otherwise inaccessible during the winter (Allen 1993; Coleman 2004). As the nineteenth century passed into the twentieth, recreational and competitive skiing displaced utilitarian, work-oriented forms of skiing. Through technological change, wood and leather eventually gave way to fibreglass skis with metal edges, plastic boots, and synthetic ski clothing. These changes made skiing safer, more comfortable and easier to learn, thereby broadening its appeal (Fry 2006; Tenner 1996). Related to these technological shifts, changes in skiing technique displaced the traditional telemark turn (using free-heel bindings, the skier alternately drops each knee to create a curve that guides their turns). Alpine turns, allowed by a fixed-heel binding, permit a more upright, parallel stance; and this has dominated the sport since the 1930s (Allen 1993; Fry 2006).
While human skiers and the technologies of skiing are distinguishable – skiers take off their gear at the end of the day -- they exist as cyborg entities within skiing discourse and practice. As Borden observes of the connections between skateboards and their riders:

To someone learning to skateboard, the skateboard appears as an instrument separate to her or his body, a platform on which to balance ... By contrast the more proficient skateboarder quickly reconceives of the skateboard as at once separate to, and part of her or his body, and so integral to their relation to the external world (Borden 2001, 97).

Similarly, the skiing body is entirely dependent upon the technologies of skiing in order to relate to the mountain landscape. It does not make sense to speak of a skier without speaking of assemblages of humans, skis, bindings, boots and poles. The skiing body is not “cybernetic” in the sense of becoming increasingly tied up with “bio-medical and chemical methods ... for re-structuring, modifying, enhancing” the body (Atkinson and Wilson 2002, 385; also see Butryn and Masucci 2003). However, it does make sense to speak of skiers as cyborg assemblies of bodies and technologies, wherein skis, snowboards, boots and poles come to resemble prostheses that are essential to the production of skiing as a sporting practice.

At both Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater, the ski resort landscape is occupied by a relatively even mix of skiers and snowboarders. Especially at Whitewater, there is a notable minority of telemark skiers: this is a modern version of free-heel skiing that has enjoyed a limited resurgence in previous decades. These different technologies do have an effect on the ways riders interact with the mountains, in terms of riding style and choice of terrain. For example, because snowboarders lack poles and both feet are attached to a single board, it is difficult for them to move on flatter terrain. As a result, snowboarders will often tend to avoid gullies, flat areas or long traverses that would not deter alpine skiers or telemarkers.
Both Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater are also characterized by the prevalence of newer-looking ski gear. Newer skis tend to be shorter relative to the skiers’ height than older skis. They are also typically wider than older skis and have a more exaggerated inward curve at the waist (the centre of the ski, beneath the boot), in order to facilitate turning. These newer designs were introduced over the past ten-to-fifteen years, and have become standard at Whistler and Whitewater. On the rare occasion where I noticed a skier on older gear, the longer, straighter skis stood out dramatically and served to emphasize how newer ski gear has become the norm. At Whistler, in particular, rental gear is also highly visible (indicated by stickers from the rental shops on top of the skis). The high visibility of rental gear at Whistler, in comparison with Whitewater, underscores how this resort is a place that draws a high proportion of occasional skiers and tourists, compared with regular skiers who inhabit the mountain on an ongoing basis.

Within the system of discourses circulating through skiing, there is a sort of fetishized relationship between skiers and their gear. In ski magazines, there is an ongoing articulation of skiing celebrities (skiers who routinely appear in competitions, videos and magazine photos), sublime mountain landscapes and the latest products available for skier-consumers. Mundane technologies of skiing are constantly present in ski magazines. They are the subject of ads placed by gear manufacturers; but also appear in gear reviews and in skiing narratives, where skiers describe the gear they use. A large portion of each magazine issue is dedicated to advertisements and reviews for the main pieces of gear: skis, poles, bindings and boots; but also for goggles, gloves, and outerwear (jackets, ski pants). As Althusser (1971) might put it, the skiers reading these magazines are interpellated – hailed as subjects by the texts -- first and foremost as skier-consumers. The text calls to skiers as potential buyers of the latest gear, tempting them with promises of being able to ski with greater skill and speed.

A particularly interesting ad for Atomic Sweet Mamas – a ski designed specifically for women -- shows a young woman working at “Burger World,” a fictional fast food restaurant.
The accompanying caption is written in the woman’s voice and reads: “You think I like working nights at Burger World? Supersize this pal. I work here because I have to. How else can I afford my season pass? How else do I catch first tracks? I'll admit it. I'm obsessed” (Atomic 2006, 155). The by-line for the ad further tells the reader that the skis “won’t solve your career problems but will make you a better skier.” In other words, you may work at an uninspiring, poorly-paid job to afford your skis and pass (and one doubts whether working at Burger World would provide the economic means for new Atomic skis and a season pass), but a new pair of skis will make those first tracks better.

There is an implicit narrative of technological evolution here: ski gear is continuously improving and you need the latest gear in order to participate in the evolution of the sport. The notion of technological evolution, where changes in gear design continuously improve skiing technique, is also found in Fry’s history of skiing. He points out that this narrative was picked up and promoted by the ski industry early on:

As more technology invaded the sport, a ski came to seem like a product, such as a car or a power boat, piloted by its owner. The notion that gear was primarily responsible for how well people skied gained traction, particularly after plastic boots leveraged the mechanical power of the lower leg to make the ski’s edge carve. Marketers and ski magazines encouraged the notion (Fry 2006, 89-90).

In cyborg fashion, improving oneself in skiing is not just a matter of practice and hard work; it happens by buying the newest skis or boots. Thus, the cyborg skier is never a finished subject.
Instead of completion, the focus is on limitless progress.\footnote{This narrative of technological evolution recalls the connection between Haraway’s cyborg figure and its science fiction counterparts. In \textit{Star Trek}, the Borg are on an unending quest to assimilate new cultures and technologies as a means of self-improvement.} An editorial from \textit{Powder} invokes this narrative of technological progress: “That’s the beauty of skiing. It never gets old, never ceases to evolve. Just when you think you have it dialed, something happens -- equipment changes, technique is innovated, and just like that a new frontier opens up” (Taylor 2006, 15). In magazine discourse, the skiing cyborg is fundamentally a skiing consumer. This discourse links skiers to mundane technologies, but also to the corporations that manufacture the gear. Thus, we see that skiers are also tied into (partially) globalized flows of cultural and economic capital through gear production and consumption. Writing about hiking, Michael makes a similar point: “The pure relation is not simply localized between human individual body and immediate environment – it incorporates the global: boots mediate between distributed heterogeneous networks that encompass globalized systems and the global environment” (Michael 2000b, 119). Flows of ski gear and money move across centres of production and consumption located in the United States, France, Austria, Italy, the United Kingdom, Japan and elsewhere.

Interview participants talk about a whole range of technological actants that are part of their experience, though ski gear is the most often discussed class of skiing technologies. These include the skis, snowboards, boots, bindings, poles and clothing that enable skiers to interact with mountain landscapes. I asked how often participants buy new gear and asked about the importance of having new gear. Two dominant discourses emerge. The first is the notion that new gear is unimportant as long as the old gear functions. This can be summed up by the notion that “as long as it works it’s fine.” For example:
I don’t really think gear matters at all, actually. And I’ve been trying to also instil that in [my son]. Like, you see people with gear, you know, they’re gear heads. They’ve got everything and they’re all dressed up. And they kind of walk out of the lodge and that’s pretty much it. And I’ve been teaching for years, you know. I’ve had pretty good gear. ... But it’s not at all about the gear, as long as you’re warm and comfortable (Rosana, Nelson).

Another example of this theme comes from one of the Vancouver interviewees, who emphasizes that she always buys her ski gear used in order to save money. For her, the economic realities of gear are more important than getting the “latest, greatest technology”:

Well I’m only on my second set [of gear]. ... And I’ve never bought anything brand new. Everything is from the gear swap. And it’s all as cheap as possible. For me it’s not about having the latest, greatest technology (Kristen, Vancouver-Whistler).

Skiers who invoke this theme have a more utilitarian relationship to their gear. Several also mention the economic costs of new gear as a barrier to upgrading as often as they would like. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

I try to milk my gear to the bitter end, man. But recently, I invested a lot of money in very good gear, because I’ve never had very good gear before (laughs). Those boots, for example, I’ll probably have them for the rest of my life, unless something seriously wrong happens with them. My skis I’ve had five years. I’m very happy with them. I will probably ski them until they break, basically. You know, there’s an economic reality there too (Malcolm, Nelson).
This discourse diverges sharply from that articulated by ski magazines. It challenges the narrative of technological progress. This illustrates another way that skiers’ interactions with mediated discourses are negotiated. Even if skiers are interpellated as skier-consumers, this interpellation is often unsuccessful. For these cyborg skiers, the human body is more important than its technological counterparts. Here, the technological aspects of cyborg subjectivity are downplayed, rather than valorized. The machine is just a machine.

The second dominant discourse that emerges from the interviews does echo the ski magazine discourse of technological evolution. Here, having up-to-date gear is important because technological change produces a better cyborg skier. For example:

I want to be able to perform well. And if having something newer, like obviously when the shaped skis first came in, with some side-cut, that obviously- and the shorter length now, of course. And they still seem to be getting shorter. If that’s going to make me ski better, then of course I’m going to be interested in something like that (Donna, Vancouver-Whistler).

As ski gear evolves, so do skiers’ technical skills and their ability to interact with the landscape. This produces a better skiing experience and a more rewarding interaction with mountain environments. The following excerpt provides another example of this:

Every time I get a pair of skis, they’re better, and they work better. And now these that I have here were 1150 dollars, but I got them for three and a quarter. They’re, uh ... Atomics ... they’re fantastic. They get wider, and they carve better. These things weigh a
ton. Must be fifteen pounds. They sit in that snow, boy, you know, boom, they’re awesome (Jake, Vancouver-Whistler).

Related to this, a few interview participants also talk about how technological evolution has helped them remain in the sport as they age, as the new gear takes pressure away from the body. If the previous discourse is more human-centred in its attitude towards skiing technologies, this discourse embraces skiing as a cyborg practice that relies on socio-technological imbroglios. Interestingly, a gender difference appears among the interviews, with men more often invoking the notion of technological evolution than women. The narrative of technological evolution appears to be a somewhat more masculinised discourse.

The importance and specificity of skiers’ relationships with their gear also comes up often for skiers who do multiple modes of skiing (alpine, snowboard, telemark), or who switched from one mode to another. Here, respondents describe the ways that the different technologies facilitate different relationships between the skiing body and the mountains. One respondent talks about switching to snowboarding because it is easier on the body than skiing. Others talk about changing over to telemark ski gear because it is more conducive to backcountry travel, with its free heel bindings and lighter skis and boots. For example:

INTERVIEWER: So what made you decide to change over [from snowboarding to telemarking]?
PARTICIPANT: Uh, accessibility and- and just overall versatility of the sport.
INTERVIEWER: Right. Accessibility in terms of (more of an interest) in touring, or?
PARTICIPANT: Yeah, touring, anywhere. Even using the mountains completely different now, on skis, right? (Dennis, Vancouver-Whistler).
There are also interesting comments from multi-modal skiers, which illustrate how different gear (snowboard or skis) is chosen to adapt to the expected weather conditions, or the particular landscape they want to use on a given day. Jason describes how he chooses between his snowboard and skis, depending on the weather:

INTERVIEWER: So what makes you decide whether it’s a ski or snowboard day?

PARTICIPANT: Powder.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah?

PARTICIPANT: More than eight inches of powder and the board comes out. Less than eight inches, it’s skis.

INTERVIEWER: Okay and why is that?

PARTICIPANT: Better, uh, powder snowboarder than skier. Still learning to ski powder (Jason, Vancouver-Whistler).

Thus, we see how the mundane technologies of skiing facilitate different experiences of the mountain environment. Through these mundane technologies, the human body is able to connect to the mountains and snow as a cyborg human-with-skis/boots/bindings/poles.

3.3 “Good Skiing” Narratives: Social Networks and Good Snow

Skiing brings together human actors and mundane technologies as cyborg subjects who interact with the mountain landscapes. This type of cyborg relationship operates at the level of the individual body-gear skier. However, the cyborg skier, as an individual subject, is only one actor within a larger network. Many other actors and actants – both human and non-human -- are also present. As a way of expanding outwards from the cyborg skier as an individualized figure, I will turn to skiers’ relationships with two other groups that emerge as a particularly important
presence in many skiers’ own narratives of their sport. Throughout my interviews with skiers, I asked about the elements that make up good skiing. I also asked for specific stories about good skiing days. Two elements come up repeatedly in these good skiing narratives: social networks and good weather. The first of these focuses on relationships with other human skiers. The second focuses on snow and sunshine and non-human actants.

**Social networks within skiing collectives.** Being with friends or family members is a recurrent element of “good skiing” narratives. For example, when I asked about what makes up a good ski day, Kendra answered, “What makes a good ski day? Good people. I mean it depends. If it’s a touring day, good people. Just having a good group of people to go out with, good conversations, good times. Nice snow is always a bonus. Awesome turns is a bonus” (Kendra, Vancouver-Whistler). The dual importance of good snow and spending time with friends is also articulated by Judith. When asked about good skiing, she replies, “There’s also been some great powder days at the hill, and just being with friends and my sister and being up there and having beers at the bar” (Judith, Nelson). In these narratives, good skiing is about the intersection of social networks and snow.

The importance of family and friendship networks is also illustrated in talk about how friendship networks facilitate change from one mode of skiing to another. A Vancouver participant talks about moving into telemarking from alpine skiing because of her social network, saying, “I wasn’t a great alpine skier anyway, so I figured if I was going to learn something new, it might as well be telemarking. And I was definitely hanging out with folks who- telemark skiing was the cool thing to do” (Kristen, Vancouver-Whistler). Similarly, skiers often talk about how friends and family introduced them to skiing, often as children. This echoes Stebbins’ (2005) research on snowboarding, which also chronicles the importance of social networks in beginning a “leisure career.” For skiers who are now parents, the ability to share this sport with
their children has added a new dimension of meaning. For example, when I asked one Vancouver participant to tell me about a great ski day he’d had recently, he told a story about going to Cypress Mountain with his father and his children:

I just went up yesterday with my two children. And I went up- and I brought my- my father came along. He’s started to ski again, and he hasn’t skied in years and years. And you know, the conditions weren’t good. It was icy, and then it got cloudy, you know? But we were three generations skiing together. ... And one of the things we talk about is, you know, the great thing about skiing is you can centre a vacation around it. It’s a family activity that brings you closer together. Whereas so many other sports, especially individual sports, you just don’t interact that much (Simon, Vancouver-Whistler).

While weather and social networks are typically the dominant elements in good skiing narratives, for Simon the social dimension is particularly important and compensates for bad conditions. The importance of social networks for my interviewees contrasts sharply with the dominant discourse of ski magazines and websites, which emphasize lone skiers surrounded by the mountainous sublime. Whereas this textual discourse emphasizes individualism, my interview participants see skiing as a collective activity.

**Weather talk.** While several skiers emphasize the importance of friendship and family networks to skiing, the most often discussed non-human actant (or class of actants) in my interviews and field notes is weather: snow, sunshine, rain and wind. These actants shape the whole experience of skiing in important ways. In ski magazines and websites an ideal is created and continuously reiterated, depicting mountains covered in deep blankets of snow, under blue skies and sunshine. In my field notes, weather is an important actant and a recurring subject of
conversation among skiers. “Weather talk” is a significant part of lift-line, chairlift and pub conversation. Weather talk focuses on how much snow the mountain has and how good it is: dry, wet, light, heavy, crusty or chunky. Weather talk also focuses on snow droughts, where the mountain goes several days without snow; or on how wonderful it is to be out in the mountains on a sunny day. The following excerpt from my field notes provides an illustration of the impact of snow, wind and rain as actants:

There was 15 cm of snow overnight, which brought out lots of people early in the day. However, by early morning, freezing level was almost to the top of the mountain. Rain was off and on, heavy at times. Mixed in with occasional freezing rain and snow, as well. Weather was a major theme of skier talk on the lifts, at the lodge and at Merlin’s after skiing. People commented on how weird the conditions were and how bad the weather was. The snow was very wet and very sticky. The last couple of runs, I found myself quite alone. There is an eerie, ghost town type of feeling when you’re alone on a major run on Whistler. Because of high wind, the alpine T-bars never opened, neither did access to Blackcomb glacier or Spanky’s ladder (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, March 16, 2007).

Here, we see how an overnight snowfall draws skiers out to the mountains. However, on this particular day, new snow was followed by rain, turning Whistler Blackcomb into something of a ghost town. At the same time, high winds were a particularly unruly actant and prevented a few lifts from operating for the day.

The weather affects skiers’ interactions with mountain landscapes in a profound way. Depending on whether the snow is hard or soft, it will be easier or more difficult to carve turns and get down the hill. It can even dictate what terrain is skiable. For example, the steep,
avalanche prone terrain of Powder Keg or Ymir Peak, at Whitewater, is dangerously unskiable after twenty centimetres of new snow; while it can be safely navigated after several days without snow. For most skiers, new snow is the ideal, though sunshine can make up for a lack of fresh snowfall. There is a palpable sense of excitement in the chairlift lines early in the morning after a big snowfall. At Whitewater, I heard this referred to as “powder panic” (see Figure 3.1). When there is lots of new snow, the soundscape of the hill is punctuated by shouts and yelps of joy. However, when it has not snowed for awhile, the landscape can feel strangely silent.

Figure 3.1 Powder panic at Whitewater.

Even more than social networks, weather is the central element in good skiing narratives. When asked about good skiing, Rosana’s reply is brief and to the point:

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Um, so what would you say makes up a good ski day for you?

Answering the same question about the elements that make up a good ski day, Lou echoes the dominant textual discourse of deep snow and clear skies. He says, “Well, a great ski day would be deep, light powder, on a bright sunny day. That would be- that would be the best thing” (Lou, Nelson). The ideal for most participants is sunshine and “good snow,” a phrase that comes up quite often. When prompted to define exactly what good snow is, the answers are remarkably consistent. For example:

Good snow? ... I would describe it as soft and fluffy, like a pillow. But not too deep, so that if you fall it doesn’t hurt but it’s still easy to get back up. And yeah, just snow that kind of flies around you as you ski down it (Kristen, Vancouver-Whistler).

Good snow is about quantity – it should be deep – as well as quality: light, fresh, untracked. Frank provides another description of the importance of good snow, invoking Whistler Blackcomb advertisements as a resource most people would be able to draw on to understand the its meaning:

INTERVIEWER: So now, in general can you describe what makes up a good ski day for you?
PARTICIPANT: Snow. Period.
INTERVIEWER: And how would you describe that for somebody who wasn’t a skier?
PARTICIPANT: Well most people, at least in Vancouver, have had pretty good exposure to, you know, at least Whistler Blackcomb commercials, or something like that. So most people would understand that, you know, when [I say] powder, or lots of snow, that that’s a good thing (Frank, Vancouver-Whistler).
The inverse of this ideal -- good snow -- is bad weather: rain, fog, cloud, or whiteouts that cause bad visibility. Jason answers my question about good skiing by referring to what it is not: “A good ski day? Almost every day is a good ski day. Unless it’s raining. It’s always good unless it’s raining” (Jason, Vancouver-Whistler). My interview participants repeatedly emphasize how important snow, rain, wind and sun are for mediating the relationship between skiers and mountain landscapes. It is the foundation of good skiing, but can create serious challenges when it is unruly rather than ideal. The ideal weather described by interview participants – good snow and sunshine – corresponds to the dominant visual representation of skiing created by magazines and resort websites. What is ideal for skiers is made to seem typical in these texts.

Drawing on a season’s worth of field notes as well as my interviews, I would argue that the particular combination of big powder days, sunshine and blue skies -- the normal aesthetic of ski magazines and websites -- is rare. Rather, there is often a trade-off between good conditions for skiing and sunshine. Fresh snow is often accompanied by overcast skies and poor visibility. Bad weather is also fairly common. Rain or freezing rain can soak through ski clothing and make chairlift rides uncomfortable. When the weather is warmer, heavy, wet and sticky snow also makes turning more difficult. When weather is looked at as an actant, my field notes and interview conversations frequently diverge from the textual reality constructed by ski magazines and websites. In Baudrillard’s terms (2001 [1981]), this textual representation of skiing is an idealized simulacrum of the relationship between skiers and weather, rather than a true reflection of skiers’ embodied experience of the skiing landscape. The ideal is rarely the norm; bad weather is as much part of the skiing experience as fresh powder and bluebird skies.

In viewing weather as an actant, we see how it is an active participant in skiing collectives. As in Murphy’s (2004) analysis of ice-storms, skiing is also a site where weather is a partner in the “dance of human agents with nature’s actants.” Weather talk in interviews and in
my field notes illustrates how “nature” is not a passive setting for skiers, but interacts with skiers to produce a practice that connects humans and the other-than-human. Stories of bad weather – rain and fog, or prolonged snow droughts – show that weather can also be an unruly actant, not necessarily behaving the way skiers would like. Bad weather interrupts idealized constructions of the skiing landscape. A Vancouver participant talks about how she had to get used to conditions of poor visibility, which often prevail at Whistler, after she moved from Ontario to British Columbia:

The visibility, it was definitely something you have to adapt to. But I did get used to it. I think my balance was improved a lot from that. And my family came and visited me, and it was really, um, cloudy, and got really bad visibility, hard to see. And I could remember the feeling of when I first felt like that, and how I think I’ve become more comfortable with it (Kathlyn, Vancouver-Whistler).

Avalanches represent a much more extreme example of how the weather can become an unruly actant. Through heavy snow loading or high winds, mountain slopes can become unstable. At Whistler or Whitewater, this means that access to terrain is shut off until conditions have stabilized. This is often accomplished through active avalanche control by resort employees, who use explosives to set off controlled slides. Here, machines are recruited into skiing collectives, in order to actively construct skiing landscapes. For backcountry skiers, this kind of unruly weather may simply require waiting until the terrain has stabilized on its own; or else seeking out safer terrain, such as staying below tree-line where risk is lower. Interview participants who spend time in the backcountry talk about avalanche risk and their strategies for managing or avoiding it. In the following excerpt, Jenny talks about having to cancel a planned
trip because of avalanche conditions. As a response to the weather, she turns to the more
controlled landscape of the ski hill:

And then this year, I guess we just did [a multi-day backcountry trip at] Christmas, and
not spring break, because the conditions were getting a bit dodgy here. Like I remember
there was just a lot of tons of snow at early season, but then the avalanche thing was a
bit, I don’t know, [I] wasn’t super-comfortable with it ... There were a few weekends, or a
few times, we said, “Okay, well let’s not go [backcountry skiing], and let’s go to Whistler
instead” (Jenny, Vancouver-Whistler).

As this excerpt illustrates, talk about avalanche risk reinforces distinctions between the
backcountry landscape and the resort landscape, where the resort is viewed as a safer place. This
echoes the previous discussion about the construction of a discursive boundary between ski
resort and backcountry landscapes.

An interesting – and rather unexpected – connection between skiers, technology and the
environment that emerges from my interviews also concerns weather as an actant. When I asked
about skiers’ internet use, it became apparent that the internet works as an important technology
of skiing. While a few respondents use the internet to research new gear, or use social
networking sites devoted to skiing, these applications aren’t widely used. However, most
participants use the internet on an ongoing basis to monitor weather and avalanche conditions at
ski hills and in the backcountry. When asked about internet use and skiing, one Nelson
participant answers, “I go on ski hill websites. Check out their conditions (laughs). Check out
how much snow they have, what the temperatures are” (Rosana, Nelson). A Vancouver
participant answers the same question in a similar vein: “I go on the avalanche website a lot
throughout the winter. I’m trying to think of anything else. I definitely go on the Whistler
Blackcomb website to check out snow conditions. Um, but that would be about it” (Heather, Vancouver-Whistler). Ski hill websites and the Canadian Avalanche Association website were repeatedly cited as resources for weather monitoring. Thus, the internet works as a long-distance technology of skiing that allows skiers to anticipate how the weather will behave on a particular day and adapt their own behaviour accordingly.

Snow, sun, rain, and wind come up in interviews, field notes and ski texts as central non-human actants in skiing collectives. While not a dominant theme, interview participants also talked about how forests and trees are an important part their experience. Besides adding to the scenery of the skiing landscape, several participants talk about how much they enjoy interacting with trees through skiing. Roberta describes this as follows:

I like skiing in trees. I do like having- Like, one of the nicest things I like about Whitewater is that there is so many treed areas where you can go, and you can be skiing in the trees, and then, you know, there you are. You’re stopped and you’re in the woods. And it’s so pretty and it’s very quiet (Roberta, Nelson).

The importance of trees as actants within skiing collectives is further emphasized by Peg, who says, “And I like trees, like steep trees usually. Um, and I love that area behind Whitewater because, and the Roger’s Pass, because they’re long runs with big, beautiful trees” (Peg, Nelson). My field notes also chronicle how trees are a significant part of the Whitewater and Whistler collectives. Tree skiing, where skiers move through stands of trees between groomed runs, is popular at both resorts. Snowboard and ski tracks are visible throughout the forests at these mountains.
3.4 Animals as Significant Others

In the previous chapter, I described how animals enter into the system of discourses that circulates through skiing. Animals are used as symbols to link skiing and nature within ski websites and at ski resorts. At the same time, bears and mountain caribou are recruited into environmentalist discourse as symbols of wilderness that are threatened by ski development. However, animals not only enter into skiing as discursive symbols. They are also present in skiing collectives as material actants. They are, as Haraway (2003) puts it, “significant others” that share the mountains and forests with ski resort companies and skiers. Beyond the symbolic bears or caribou that are recruited into skiing discourse there are actual animals that share the skiing landscape, or that may be negatively affected by human activity within that landscape. As Wolch writes, “Animals as well as people socially construct their worlds and influence each other’s worlds. ... Animals have their own realities, their own worldviews; in short they are subjects, not objects” (Wolch 1998, 121; italics in original). To describe how animals are used as discursive resources is not to deny that embodied significant others are also present in skiing collectives.

Through her recent work on dog-human relations, Haraway (2003; 2008) argues that “companion species” may be a more useful metaphor than the cyborg for understanding human/non-human relationships. The cyborg is limited because it appears most often as a humanoid, anthropocentric tropic figure; though it remains valuable for focusing our attention on human/technology interfaces (Gane and Haraway 2006). An essential part of our relations with companion species is the notion of “significant otherness.” This refers to the ways in which companion animals are socially significant: they inhabit our homes and make up a meaningful part of our lives. Relations of significant otherness are defined as “partial connections,” marked by gaps of language and physiology, “within which the players are neither wholes nor parts” (Haraway 2003, 8). Here, Haraway is writing against overly symbolic conceptions of human-
animal relations, where animals enter into the social only insofar as they are vested with symbolic meaning that can be deconstructed. Instead, she emphasizes the materiality of significant otherness and the active role of companion species in constructing our shared worlds.

Throughout my interviews, I asked skiers about their experience with skiing and wildlife. Many respondents talked about how animals are not a big part of their skiing experience. A few commented that most animals are hibernating because it is winter. For example, a Nelson respondent says, “Yeah it’s winter, so a lot of things are hibernating ... Not lots of huge wildlife images come into my head, aside from birds” (Ana, Nelson). For many participants, animals are at the margins of their consciousness of skiing. However, while they may be at the margins of skiing collectives, they are certainly present. Animals come up in talk about skiing as an environmental problem and in talk about personal encounters with wildlife. Table 3.1 summarizes the frequency with which different animals were invoked by interview participants. The most frequently cited animals are birds (grouping together several distinct species) and bears, which are primarily invoked in talk about the environmental impacts of skiing.
When asked, most participants could recall animal encounters that they’ve had. Predominantly these are birds: whiskey jacks (also called grey jays), ravens, ptarmigans, or grouse. There are several examples of how birds enter into skiing collectives as significant others, who take on meaning for skiers. A Nelson participant talks about how she enjoys watching ravens while skiing. She says, “It’s interesting to see the birds. I always watch the birds. The ravens are fascinating, the way they do their big rolls when they’re happy” (Sofia, Nelson). Another example of this comes from a Whistler-based participant who describes ongoing interactions between birds and skiers:
Well, birds are around all the time. At Whistler the birds are kind of (laughs) interesting. Because there’ll be these huge lift-lines, and they have these cheeky little birds that will come up and land on your finger. And it’s become more of, like entertainment, sort of value. People feeding them and stuff ... (Kathlyn, Vancouver-Whistler).

For several interview participants, birds seem to become almost mundane and less noteworthy than larger animals.

Skiers also talk about personal encounters with other animals, including: bears (typically in spring), mountain goats, porcupines, rabbits, deer, coyotes or big cats. When asked about encountering animals through skiing, a Nelson area skier replies:

PARTICIPANT: Lots of chipmunks and squirrels, but... I see tracks. Tracks of rabbits, weasels. But, um, not anything any bigger than that. Although I did see a lynx once. A long time ago.
INTerviewER: Can you tell me a bit about that?
PARTICIPANT: I was heading up Silver King. It’s called Toad Mountain now, but we used to call it Silver King hill. And, uh, we were just trekking up to ski down and just came across him. Just for a moment saw him sitting on the snow ahead of us in the trail, and taking off through the woods. Yeah, it’s quite an experience (Lou, Nelson).

A Vancouver skier tells a similar story about a memorable encounter with a bear during a backcountry trip:
I was on a ski traverse a whole bunch of years ago and we actually were coming up to a col and there was a bear coming out of her den, with her cubs, which was one of the most incredible things I’ve ever witnessed. Just having to re-route my ski route because there was a bear there (laughs). So that was really neat (Evangalina, Vancouver-Whistler).

These passages are interesting because they illustrate how encounters with larger animals may be more meaningful to participants than the mundane presence of birds. In particular, the bear appears as a sort of sublime animal, which embodies both awe and a certain amount of fear. Thus, while animals are at the margins of skiers’ interpretations of the skiing landscape, they are present as part of that landscape, inhabiting its edges.

My field notes from Whistler and Whitewater tell a similar story as far as animals are concerned. To draw from my field notes:

I encountered a few animals today. This morning, I caught a glimpse of a black squirrel in the Crystal glades and also came across a wildlife tree: a nest in a hole about 6-7 feet up the tree trunk. From the Glacier Express chair, I also watched a raven soaring around up near the peak of the mountain. Further down, I also saw a swallow flying around from the lift I was riding (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, March 7, 2007).

The animals I personally encountered while at Whitewater and Whistler were predominantly birds: grey jays, ravens, and various other little grey birds. This contrasts with the symbolic use of larger animals like bears, wolves, and eagles in ski resort websites as a way of linking skiing, nature, and wilderness. These birds, which are more visible as significant others within skiing collectives, are less present symbolically in the discourses of skiing.
3.5 Machines and the Nature of Skiing

Shaping and moving through the skiing landscape. Ski gear is not the only class of technological actant that is recruited into skiing collectives. A range of other technologies are also recruited into skiing collectives, many as part of the ski resort infrastructure, thereby creating Latour’s “socio-technical imbroglios.” Several different machines are used to shape the mountain landscape. These include snow-grooming machines and avalanche control explosives. Parts of the mountain landscape are logged and gladed (selectively logged rather than clear-cut) to create skiable terrain. Much of this technologically-mediated construction of the skiing landscape occurs off-stage. Trees are cut outside the ski season. Similarly, snow-grooming happens during the night. Skiers arrive at a mountain that is pre-formed for their recreation. The process of transformation is blackboxed. This makes the skiing landscape appear more natural, rather than the result of active construction by ski resort companies. Unlike Whitewater, Whistler also employs snow-making machines, especially at lower elevations, to shape the skiing landscape. Through snow-making, lower portions of the mountain can stay open beyond the season permitted by weather. Snow-making can also provide snow when the weather is non-cooperative throughout the regular season.

Another class of machines provides mobility within the skiing landscape. Chairlifts are the most obvious and visible of these. Whistler Blackcomb has several lifts that provide access to a vast amount of terrain. To go from the village to the top of either Whistler or Blackcomb peak takes at least two, if not three or four lifts. Most of these are newer, high speed quad (four person) chairs. The mountain also contains a few older, slower chairlifts lifts; as well as T-bars (which moves two skiers per lift along the ground, rather than suspended in the air) that are used to access glacier terrain. In sharp contrast, Whitewater only has two older, relatively slow chairlifts. In comparison with Whistler, these lifts make Whitewater seem slightly archaic. They
reflect the slower pace of this resort compared with the busier environment of Whistler. At both mountains, chairlifts are typically visible to skiers. This contrasts with images of an uninhabited mountain wilderness that circulate through ski texts (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 The chairlift as a technology of mobility, Whistler Blackcomb.

Beyond the prevalence of chairlifts, snowmobiles are also used to move resort personnel and first aid attendants around the mountains. At Whistler, I frequently saw injured skiers being taken away by attendants on snowmobiles. In more extreme situations, helicopters may become visible when they are called upon to search for lost skiers, or to evacuate an injured skier from particularly dangerous terrain. Outside of ski resorts, helicopters and snowmobiles are also used to provide access to backcountry skiing landscapes.

Technologies of mobility come up quite often during my interviews with skiers. Often skiers mention the chairlifts that enable them to access terrain at ski resorts. They also talk about the snowmobiles, helicopters and snow-cats that provide backcountry access. These technologies of mobility are also frequently invoked in talk about skiing’s negative impacts on the
environment. One recurrent theme focuses on the energy use required to power these machines and the related pollution that they produce. A Nelson skier reflects on the environmental impacts of his own snowmobile use for backcountry access:

It’s become a very hip thing to do. Backcountry ski. To own a sled. And it’s an issue in terms of noise pollution, air pollution. So yeah, currently I have this gas-spewing machine that I probably fill up the tank six times a winter. Maybe eight times a winter. So, thirty litres about per tank, you know. That’s a fair [amount] of fossil fuel. And there’s the side of it that’s guilty. Guilty pleasure kind of thing (Maurice, Nelson).

When I asked Jason whether skiing is an environmentally friendly activity, he immediately referred to the impacts of snowmobiles used to access the backcountry:

INTERVIEWER: So do you think of skiing as an environmentally friendly activity?
PARTICIPANT: If it doesn’t include snowmobiling, yeah. Like snowmobile access would kind of defeat that.
INTERVIEWER: Right. So why is that?
PARTICIPANT: Oh, snowmobiles pollute like hell. They’re awful polluters. A lot of people want to use snowmobiles to get access. But skiing on its own? Uh, the big issue is using a chairlift. It’s diesel-powered. Or electrical powered. But besides that, it’s probably one of the more pure sports you can do (Jason, Vancouver-Whistler).

In this remark, snowmobiles and chairlifts are both cited for their energy consumption. However, snowmobiles are defined as worse for the environment than chairlifts. Beyond the energy use
issues, however, Jason sees skiing as “one of the more pure sports” in terms of interacting with nature through outdoor recreation.

Another recurring theme focuses on the impact that these machines have on wildlife in the backcountry, with a particular emphasis on helicopters and snowmobiles. In the following excerpt, Peg voices her frustration with increases in heli-skiing tenure in terms of the impact on endangered mountain caribou:

But here, especially, the helicopter skiing, and the fact that Canadian Mountain Holidays has basically, practically free rights to Crown land while we have a species, the mountain caribou, that’s on the brink of extinction. Like, how those can be happening at the same time is infuriating (Peg, Nelson).

This comment illuminates one of the most salient points of tension between skiing and environmental values. The technologies that allow skiers to interact with nature are also potentially problematic. Skiing technologies, like many technologies, carry unintended ecological consequences (Murphy 2002; Tenner 1996). This tension is generally recognized by skiers. The ambiguous relationship with the snowmobile provides one example. On one hand, snowmobiles grant backcountry access. As noted previously, the backcountry is constructed by many skiers as a more serene landscape than the ski resort, partly because of its absence of chairlifts and permanent infrastructure. On the other hand, snowmobiles are viewed as environmentally harmful in terms of energy use, pollution and impact on wildlife.

**Cameras and cell phones as technologies of skiing.** Snow grooming, avalanche control and snow-making equipment are part of the infrastructure of the ski resort. These technologies used to shape the physical skiing landscape to make it more appealing to skiers. Chairlifts,
helicopters and snowmobiles provide access to ski slopes and facilitate movement within mountain environments. These classes of machine actants are separate from skiers’ individual bodies and operate quite differently than the much more personalized technologies of skis, boots, bindings and poles. While not specifically technologies of skiing, cell phones and cameras are also used by some skiers within the skiing landscape. Like ski gear or clothing, these are personal technologies, which extend the capacities of the individual skiers’ body. However, these were generally more visible within the Whistler Blackcomb landscape than at Whitewater.

Cell phones and short-distance radios are used to communicate between skiers across the mountain landscape. I often saw people on cell phones while riding chairlifts, or in lodges, talking with friends and family members about where they were, where they should meet, which runs were in good shape, or which chairlifts were more or less crowded. On one occasion, I watched from the chairlift as a young woman attempted to carry on a cell phone conversation while skiing down a run.

The camera also appears as a technology of skiing, particularly at Whistler. I frequently saw people taking photos of themselves and each other, with the sublime mountain landscape in the background. This is particularly the case at the top of the Peak Chair at Whistler, where skiers can look out at Black Tusk peak in Garibaldi Park; or at the top of the Seventh Heaven lift on Blackcomb. Another frequent sight was people having their photos taken next to signs indicating that a particular run is for “experts only.” Previously, I noted that skiers do not only gaze at the landscape. However, the prevalence of cameras within the Whistler landscape does point to the way this place is consumed by a visual gaze. For skiers who are only visiting Whistler, the camera freezes the landscape as an image, translates it and preserves it as a memento for the tourist gaze (Urry 2002).

The extent and prevalence of technological actants distinguishes Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater. Whether chairlifts, snow grooming, avalanche control, snowmobiles, or any other
technology of skiing; these machines tend to be more prevalent and newer at Whistler than at Whitewater. If skiing collectives are naturecultures that connect humans, technologies, and nature, the constitution of these collectives is not the same across all skiing landscapes. The character of these collectives varies. The presence of skiing technologies is felt more strongly at Whistler Blackcomb than at Whitewater; here the technological mediations are more obvious.

Skiing collectives and automobility. In the previous chapter, I described how car ads appear as an element of discourse that connects skiing, tourism and mobility. There, I was concerned with how the car is used in skiing texts as a discursive image. Besides appearing in ski magazines as symbolic objects that promise access to nature, material networks of automobility also provide skiers with access to skiing terrain and connect skiing collectives -- as local sites -- to the world beyond (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2003; Urry 2004). At both Whitewater and Whistler, a large amount of space is given over to parking lots (see Figure 3.3). While school buses or charter buses are often visible in both places, private cars dominate the parking lots that line the fringes of ski resorts. These parking lots are nodal points in networks of automobility, where movement comes to a pause for several hours. At Whistler, the parking lots are located at the edges of the skiing landscape, while the resort promotes the pedestrian-oriented design of the village itself. While the ski landscape is made accessible through technologies of automobility, this connection is blackboxed at Whistler, where cars are kept to the margins of the simulacral mountain village. This recalls Philpott’s (2002) historical account of Vail, Colorado. He notes that the development of the resort was predicated on the ability to build automobility infrastructure and provide easier access to tourists, while the presence of automobility was pushed to the margins of the resort itself in order to give visitors the sense that they were in a European alpine village.
Networks of automobility also link local skiing collectives with broader networks of tourism. Whistler is tied to Vancouver through Highway 99, with its constant flow of traffic; while Whitewater is tied to Nelson by Highway 3. Through these communities, ski resorts are further tied to systems of “aeromobility,” which bring in tourists from the United States, the UK, Japan, Australia, and elsewhere (Lassen 2006). As “magic objects,” cars can also signify connections between skiing and class (Barthes 1973). Travelling the highway between Vancouver and Whistler, I regularly saw luxury cars with Washington or Alberta license plates; or large limousines shaped like Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) that are used to transport tourists from the Vancouver airport to the ski hill.

Several skiers discuss their participation in systems of automobility as another point of tension between skiing and environmental values. Automobility networks connect skiers with resorts and backcountry access points. The car is -- for most -- an essential technology of skiing.

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10 Highway 3 is also nicknamed the Powder Highway because it connects Fernie, Whitewater and Red Mountain ski resorts.
Donna describes this connection with reference to the Sea to Sky highway, which connects Vancouver and Whistler:

In a way, it’s almost the people coming up [to Whistler] here in the vehicles [that’s the biggest environmental impact]. I mean, on weekends it’s like a snake of traffic of people accessing the area (Donna, Vancouver-Whistler).

Several participants see this connection as an environmentally-problematic aspect of skiing, especially given the connections between automobility and global climate change. The following excerpt provides another illustration of this:

Well, we drive (laughs) to get there. And we drive far distances. And that’s not environmentally sustainable at all. Like we’re- like, there’s no way we’re within our footprint if we’re doing that. Like, if we wanted to be environmentally sustainable, we’d take the bus and go skiing at Grouse [instead of driving to Whistler] (Allison, Vancouver-Whistler).

Allison highlights how skiers’ choices to ski a bigger mountain, with more terrain, is linked to an active decision to engage in automobility. For Vancouverites, the North Shore Mountains are closer and can be reached through public transit. However, resorts like Grouse and Cypress do not offer the same terrain and landscape as Whistler.

Many skiers try to address this problem in their own lives, through things like car pooling, car sharing, or buying a more fuel efficient vehicle. For example, a Vancouver participant describes his strategy for mitigating the harmful effects of his reliance on automobility:
I car-share. I don’t own a vehicle. Like, I car share with another friend and (clears throat) we hardly use it. It’s just to get out of town. But the ironic thing is, the one time I am driving, it is to go skiing (laughs), right? In the winter. And it’s an SUV. It’s a big vehicle, so we can fit lots of gear, and lots of people. Um, you know, and it’s been sitting for two weeks, I haven’t used it. But if I want to go skiing this weekend, we’re going to use it (Frank, Vancouver-Whistler).

Even where the environmental harms of automobility can be mitigated, there remains an environmental ambiguity that Frank gives voice to. He articulates the irony of his own car-dependence as a medium for entering into and interacting with nature. A further example of attempting to manage the relationship between skiing and automobility comes from Jeffrey, who describes buying a Smart Car. He says, “I bought a Smart Car because of the environment. And it’s about the minimum amount of fuel I can burn. So I’m willing to put my money into that ... I’m quite aware of the environment and willing to put some effort into maintaining it” (Jeffrey, Vancouver-Whistler). These technologies of mobility are well-entrenched in the practice of skiing. At the same time, they're not entirely desirable. They intrude upon nature and make skiing less environmentally friendly than it might be.

3.6 Powder Nomads: Networks of Tourism and Migration

Skiing collectives are not closed systems with firm boundaries. Local ski areas are connected to larger-scale flows of people through systems of mobility, tourism and migration (Larsen, Axhausen and Urry 2006; Sheller and Urry 2006). I have already described how skiing landscapes are constructed as tourist places through ski resort websites and ski magazines. I have
also described how automobility – cars, highways and parking lots – connects skiing
collectives to the world beyond.

My field notes also document how Whistler, in particular, is a nodal point in a network of
global tourism. In lift lines and on gondolas, I often overheard “travel talk” about coming to
Whistler from elsewhere, becoming oriented to the mountain and the village, and comparing the
area to other regions. Similarly, it is not unusual to see skiers wearing clothing with the logos of
other resorts. Sharing lifts with strangers, I was also frequently told about making annual ski
vacation trips to Whistler. While accents and languages are not necessarily accurate identifiers,
the soundscape of Whistler is characterized by the presence of American, British and Australian
accents, as well as people speaking French, German, Spanish, or Japanese. The presence of
international flags in the village centre further illustrates how Whistler is designed to appeal to a
tourist gaze; as do the plethora of souvenir shops selling Canadiana t-shirts, stuffed animals and
postcards. Finally, the following passage from my field notes also illustrates how snow, as a
“local” actant has an influence on broader tourism networks:

There was lots of lift talk today about how Whistler village is quite booked up, because
of the lack of snow in Europe and eastern North America right now. Because we had a
strong November and December compared with everywhere else, a lot of people have
“redirected” their ski trips to Whistler (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, February 16,
2007).

This excerpt provides an example of how weather shapes skiing on a large scale, affecting how
global tourism flows through local resorts, in addition to how it effects the immediate and
embodied practice of skiing day-to-day.
Whistler is also a nodal point for flows of migration. Ski hill workers wear name-tags that indicate where they are from. A significant proportion of resort employees are from Australia or from elsewhere in Canada; though I also noticed migrants from Germany, Slovakia and elsewhere working at the hill. Talking with other skiers on chairlifts revealed stories about moving to Whistler from Ontario, Australia and the UK in order to live there for the winter. I came to think of these people as “powder nomads”: people who migrate to a ski area specifically because of the skiing landscape. Powder nomads are a more serious class of skier-tourist. They inhabit skiing collectives for the full season and often work at the hill as well as ski there. For these people, skiing and snowboarding is the focal point of their life for the duration of the winter.

The connections to networks of tourism and migration are quite different at Whitewater from those at Whistler. Based on my field notes from Whitewater, this particular skiing collective seems to be inhabited by locals more than by tourists. Standing in the lift lines at Whitewater, there is a feeling of a fairly tight knit community. The following excerpt from my field notes illustrates this:

Whitewater has a small, tight social feeling. I see people bumping into each other, acquaintances passing and saying hello. For example, one woman runs into her students and family friends. I see other people run into friends and exchange greetings and news about mutual acquaintances. There is a real social network feeling here compared with Whistler Blackcomb and much less of a feeling of the ski landscape as a tourist note. There is an absence of overt consumerism oriented towards a tourist gaze, such as the Canadiana tourist shops that are present on the mountain and in the village at Whistler (Whitewater field notes, December 9, 2006).
At Whitewater, people run into friends unexpectedly, chat in the lift-lines and get together for a few runs. While there certainly are tourists present as well, they predominantly seem to be from the United States or elsewhere in Canada. There is much less of a sense of the ski resort as a nodal point for global travel. Like Whistler, there are also a certain number of powder nomads who have travelled to Nelson and Whitewater, drawn to this region specifically because of skiing and the mountain landscape. For example, during one day at Whitewater I shared the chairlift with “an Australian woman who has been living in Nelson every winter for four years (she works ‘twenty-four/seven’ during the summer in order to spend winters in Nelson), as well as a women who has migrated to the area from Ontario via Vancouver Island” (Whitewater field notes, January 6, 2007). These powder nomads are long-term tourists, typically from Australia or elsewhere in Canada, staying in Nelson for the ski season.

My field notes from Whistler echo the resort’s own textual construction as a tourist place. By contrast, Whitewater feels more local than global; it is less connected to the networks of tourist flows that Whistler is plugged into. However, even at Whistler this tourism network is only partially global. Whistler is strongly linked to flows of people from North America, Europe, Australia and Japan. By contrast, Central and South America, Africa, Eastern Europe and much of Asia are marginal to this system of flows. This illustrates that the ability to travel to British Columbia skiing landscapes is not evenly distributed throughout the world.

My interviews with skiers further illustrate that skiing is not only a local practice. Skiers are not only engaged in interactions with local environments, but are also participants in tourism networks. Several participants talk about travelling to ski at least once a year and consider ski travel an important part of their experience. Skiing tourism allows participants to experience new, different landscapes, which are valued for their specific qualities. However, while a few respondents had travelled to Europe to ski, the main destinations tend to be regional rather than global. Participants are most likely to travel within western Canada and the western US; not to
the exotic locations described in ski magazine travel narratives (France, Japan, Chile, Iran and India, for example).

A few of my interview participants are themselves powder nomads. They have moved to Whistler or Nelson because of skiing. In the following passage, Edward talks about seeking out a ski town in the interior of British Columbia that he could relocate to because of his passion for skiing:

INTERVIEWER: So is that [skiing] part of what drew you to this area?

PARTICIPANT: Yeah, absolutely. We came out west looking for a town that had a ski hill within twenty minutes that had really good snow...

INTERVIEWER: Right. So somewhere like here or Fernie?

RESPONDENT: Here, Red [Rossland], Fernie were about the three that we were considering, yeah (Edward, Nelson).

Jason provides another example of powder nomadism. He describes his own route from Ontario to Whistler as follows:

PARTICIPANT: I’m an Ontario transplant.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And how many seasons have you been here?

PARTICIPANT: This will be my fifth winter. But I moved here seven years ago. ...

INTERVIEWER: And so was the landscape here part of the draw, or? What brought you here?

PARTICIPANT: I lived in Banff before this, and that’s- The west is always a draw. [I didn’t have a plan for] Whistler, but it was always a draw, back in Ontario. So yeah, the
landscape here definitely helps. It’s always been in my imagination, here (Jason, Vancouver-Whistler).

These reflections further illustrate how skiing isn’t embedded in a single, local landscape. Rather, imagined landscapes affect skiers’ choices to migrate from one region to another. Powder nomadism is an interesting phenomenon, where lines of migration are drawn in snow. Skiers are mobile, not attached to a single skiing collective. Conversely, skiing collectives are not closed systems, but are tied to (partially) global networks of mobility and tourism.

3.7 Conclusions

Skiing can be understood as a collective of humans and the other-than-human. Skiing is not simply a “social” practice, where nature is backgrounded as a setting for human action. Rather, skiing brings together human actors, an array of technological actants, and non-human nature, which is comprised of mountains, snow, trees and animals. Within this collective of humans and the other-than-human, skiers are intertwined with the “mundane technologies” of skiing: boots, bindings, skis, snowboards and specialized ski clothing (Michael 2000a). Skiing cannot be done without the mediation of these technologies. Therefore, it is worth conceiving of skiers as cyborg figures, where the boundaries between the human and the technological are rather fluid. To talk about “skiers” is always to speak of human-technology hybrids that go into mountain landscapes. Any experience of the skiing landscape is technologically mediated.

Figure 3.4 draws upon skiers’ interview talk, skiing texts and my field notes to map out the connections between groups of actors and actants within an ideal typical skiing collective. The shapes represent distinct groups of actors and actants that come together through skiing. These include humans (skiers and their social networks), economic structures (ski gear companies, ski resort companies, car manufacturers and tourism networks), machines (ski gear,
cars and chairlifts), and non-human nature (animals, weather and mountains). The lines among elements illustrate connections between the groups of actors and actants, with arrows used to illustrate the direction of influence that each element has upon the others. Line thickness reflects the strength of the connection between elements, as articulated in my various data sources.

Figure 3.4 Mapping the skiing collective.

The network mapped out in Figure 3.4 is an ideal type created from all of my data sources. While the diagrammatic boxing of the actants in this figure downplays their hybrid character, it is a useful heuristic device for distinguishing them from each other. This useful abstraction further masks several important differences between Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater as distinct skiing collectives. In terms of the skiers who inhabit each place, there are notable differences in terms of age, gender and ethnicity. While skiers at both resorts range in
age from grade school to those in their sixties and older, the average age at Whitewater seems younger (twenties and thirties) than at Whistler (thirties to fifties). Whistler also seems to be marked more of a gender balance than Whitewater, which feels more male-dominated. While both resorts are marked by dominant Whiteness, there is more of a multi-ethnic presence at Whistler. As nodal points in global networks of tourism, Whistler is much more central. By contrast, Whitewater presents itself less as a tourist place and has more regionalized tourism networks ties.

The presence of technologies also distinguishes the two skiing collectives. The Whistler Blackcomb landscape is crossed by 38 lifts, most of which are newer, high-speed, high-capacity chairlifts. This is a sharp contrast from the two old two-seat chairlifts that slowly move skiers up the mountain at Whitewater. Cell phones, personal radios, cameras and video cameras are also more visible at Whistler than at Whitewater. Furthermore, while birds are present as animal significant others in both places; animals are used as a discursive resource – as symbols of wilderness and nature – throughout Whistler to a greater extent than at Whitewater.

Finally, Whistler village can be described as a place of “rustic luxury.” It is a simulacral Canadian mountain village, a rural version of a “Fantasy City” dedicated to consumerism and “riskless risk” (Hannigan 1998). Whitewater is more rustic than luxurious. It lacks Whistler’s collection of high-end hotels, chic cafes, sports clothing stores and nightclubs. While less luxurious versions of these amenities are available nearby in Nelson, the ski hill itself has only one lodge building, which is dwarfed by the surrounding mountains. These comparisons between ski resorts illustrates that even though there are many commonalities across skiing collectives, there are also unique qualities that differentiate them from each other.

In the previous chapter, I noted that there is a discursive boundary drawn between the backcountry and the ski resort landscape. The former is seen as more natural place, whereas the latter is seen as a more social, technological place. However, skiers depend on the same mundane
technologies to enter into either landscape. Similarly, both types of landscape are connected to technologies of mobility: chairlifts, snowmobiles, helicopters and cars. Thus, I would argue that both backcountry skiing and resort skiing are similar in that they are technologically-mediated forms of interaction with nature. However, these relationships are different and produce distinct types of skiing collectives and different skier cyborg subjectivities.

To think about skiing as a collective of humans and the other-than-human is to become attentive to a lacuna within much research on outdoor recreation and nature tourism. When sociologists of sport examine activities like snowboarding, skateboarding, or windsurfing, the non-human environment is often bracketed out of the analysis. Instead, the focus is on how these sports are informed by class, ethnicity, gender and other flows of social power (Anderson 1999; Pohl, Borrie and Patterson 2000; Rinehart and Sydnor 2003; Thorpe 2005; Thorpe 2006a; Wheaton 2004). Mapping out the connections between sporting bodies, machines, animals and other non-humans gives us an appreciation of how nature matters within sport. The specificity of particular landscapes has important effects on participants, producing unique skiing experiences in one place that will not be replicated elsewhere.

A focus on cyborg skiers, mundane technologies, significant otherness and non-human actants also expands upon an analysis of the social construction of skiing landscapes. In the previous chapter, I argued that landscape is not only an object for a visual gaze. Skiers interact with the landscape in an embodied way. Despite assertions about the hegemony of the gaze, results of my research illustrate how nature is active in co-constructing the skiing experience. Through my interviews and field notes, I have shown that nature does “push back” on the cyborg skier’s body (Franklin 2003; Thrift 2001).

I have also previously described how animals enter skiing discourse as symbols of wildness. In this chapter, I focused on the animal significant others that skiers interact with. These are most often birds, but the range of animals invoked by skiers is broad: coyotes, deer,
bears, bobcats, moose, and more. This shows that there are embodied animals that enter into
skiing collectives, even though they might be at the margins of individual skiers’ consciousness.
It can be difficult to disentangle the relationship between the electronic bears that inhabit ski
resort websites and the embodied bears foraging for new plant growth under chairlifts in April.
Instead of attempting to resolve this tension, I suggest this shows how animals enter skiing
discourse as symbols, but are also present in skiing collectives as significant others. As symbols
and embodied actants, they shape both the meaning and practice of skiing.

An important group of actors has been absent from my account thus far. Perhaps because
of my own emphasis on recreation, leisure and tourism, the productive labour of skiing has been
at the margins of my data collection and analysis. However, this does not mean that skiing
functions without human labour. Ski area workers run chairlifts, teach lessons and provide
service at lodges, pubs and rental shops. While nothing thematically coherent emerged from my
interviews, several participants spoke about working for ski resorts, as teachers, lift operators,
patrollers and restaurant workers. While ski resort companies may offer incentives like season
passes, this labour remains largely low-paid and seasonal. Particularly at large destination
resorts, it often fails to provide the economic capital necessary to live in high-cost ski resort
communities (Clifford 2002; Rothman 1998). Productive labour is further required to produce
the technologies of skiing, which includes: ski equipment, clothing, chairlifts and snow-cats.
Labour is also required to produce and run the systems of automobility and aeromobility that
connect ski resorts and tourist flows. Beneath the symbolic economy of cyborg skiers and
wilderness landscapes, articulated by ski texts, labour is integral to the production of the skiing
experience.

Actor-network approaches to mapping out collectives are quite useful. They illuminate
how many of the connections between “society” and “nature” are severed and blackboxed in
social science research and theoretical narratives (Latour 1993; Latour 1999). However, while
this approach is good for articulating ties between actors and actants, it is perhaps less attuned to mobility within and beyond these networks (Sheller and Urry 2006). Within skiing, flows of mobility are particularly important. On a local level, this includes the mobility that is enabled by skis and snowboards themselves, as well as by chairlifts, T-bars, helicopters, snowmobiles and snow-cats. Attention to mobility also foregrounds how localized skiing collectives are connected to broader networks. Automobility is particularly important here, as it connects local skiing landscapes to surrounding cities, towns and airports, thereby providing skiers access to mountain environments.

Skiing collectives are also tied to (partially) globalized flows of tourism and migration. The skiing collectives of Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater are connected, through automobility and aeromobility, to flows of people from Australia, Europe, Asia and the United States. If contemporary social life can be characterized by emergent networks of global mobility, as several authors suggest, then skiing landscapes appear to be local places that are connected to these global flows (Bauman 2005; Larsen, Urry and Axhausen 2006; Urry 2003). While many people come as short-term visitors to Whistler Blackcomb or Whitewater, others come as longer-term residents, or powder nomads. However, these global tourism flows are inherently partial. “Global tourism” most strongly connects British Columbia with the US, Europe, Oceania and Japan. Central and South America, Africa, the Middle East, much of Europe, and most of Asia are invisible in this construction of the global. In Bauman’s (2005) vision of “liquid modernity” a new class of global nomads emerges, who “travel lightly” and are not bound to a particular place. However, these emergent elites have their shadow in the form of a global subaltern that is denied this mobility. The network of (partially) global mobility that incorporates the BC ski industry provides an example of Bauman’s contention that participation in liquid modernity is not equally available to all.
While this chapter focuses on the connections between humans and non-humans forged through skiing, I have paid little attention to the ways that power flows through this network. The next chapter describes how skiing is also a site of power relations. Flows of power are rarely made explicit; they are typically patterned silences in the discourses produced by ski texts, or in skiers’ talk. Flows of power within skiing do not appear as obvious acts of repression, but operate through quotidian interaction among people; as well as between people and the other-than-human. Power flows are normalized and largely go unnoticed. Occasionally, they are disrupted by social movement groups like environmentalists and First Nations. The question of power and the ways in which skiing enters into politics are taken up in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV: The Eco-Politics of Snow

Is skiing an “environmentally sustainable” means of interacting with nature? This is a key question when we think about how the ski industry is connected to the non-human environment, or how skiers interpret their recreational interactions with mountain landscapes. Ski industry texts, like ski websites, give the impression that skiing is environmentally sound. Ski resorts boast of their environmental awards and their habitat management practices. This image of skiing defines the sport as a form of attractive development, which focuses on the non-consumptive use of nature. Here, the product sold is experience, rather than timber or minerals. Environmental groups have occasionally challenged skiing over the ecological legitimacy of new development projects. The most extreme example of this was the Earth Liberation Front’s arson at Vail Resort in the 1990s, in protest against the resort’s planned expansion into threatened lynx habitat. Social movement discourse claims that the power relations between skiing and nature are unjust and harmful to non-humans (such as bears, mountain caribou, or other wildlife).

In this chapter, I turn to the ways eco-power – power relations between humans and non-human nature – flows through skiing. After examining the eco-politics of skiing, I turn to a discussion of the multiple ways in which more obviously “social” forms of power – grounded in gender, racialization and class – are present within skiing. Here, I examine gendered differences in participants’ experience of skiing, which often privileges a “guys’ style” of skiing. I also describe the construction of skiing landscapes as a site of normalized Whiteness. Finally, I look at the contradictory notions of class within skiing, where the discourse of “rustic luxury” co-exists with claims that entrée to skiing is available to “anyone.” Before turning to my analysis, I will review the model of power that is used as a guiding theoretical concept. This is a Foucauldian theory of power, read through environmental sociology and the work of Donna Haraway.
4.1 Power, Bio-power and the Informatics of Domination

Foucault’s model of power is closely connected to his concept of discourse, as described in Chapter 2. In the final chapter of *History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault (1978) expands upon this conception of power by introducing the notion of “biopower.” According to Foucault, power over a group of people, or a territory, was traditionally characterized by the right of the sovereign to take the life of their subordinates. More recently, another form of power has emerged, which focuses on the productivity of populations. As Foucault writes, this “biopower” is oriented towards the rational enumeration, surveillance and management of populations in the interests of health and productivity; it is “continuous, scientific, and it is the power to make live” (Foucault 2003b, 247). Biopower is the macrosocial corollary of the disciplinary power that functions at the level of individual bodies. If disciplinary power works “on the body as a machine . . . [to increase its] usefulness and its docility” then biopower works on the “species body,” through research and planning, to render it productive (Foucault 1978, 139). Finally, the appearance of the “population” as a distinct object of governance and the appearance of biopower is integral to the emergence of capitalist rationality. As Foucault notes, the capitalist mode of production requires “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (141). Elsewhere, he links this exercise of biopower to “governmentality,” where individuals and populations are exhorted to adjust and monitor their own behaviour so that they fit into dominant political and economic practices (Foucault 1994).

Through the concept of biopower, Foucault points to the intersection of discourse and governmentality; he connects individual bodies and populations. This a key instance where Foucault offers an analytic connection between microsocial and macrosocial networks of discourse and power. The notion of biopower is also of particular interest as a means of bringing Foucault into the environmental social sciences. *Society Must be Defended* collects Foucault’s
lectures at the College de France from 1975-1976, which were delivered shortly before the French publication of *History of Sexuality Volume I*. In the closing lecture Foucault alludes to the ecological side of biopower:

> Biopolitics’ last domain is . . . control over relations between . . . human beings insofar as they are a species . . . and their environment, the milieu in which they live. This includes the direct effects of the geographical, climatic, or hydrographic environment . . . And also the problem of the environment to the extent that it is not a natural environment, that it has been created by the population and therefore has effects on that population (Foucault 2003b, 245).

Here, Foucault begins to describe how elements of the natural environment are de-naturalized as they are redefined as populations or resources and fit into management regimes oriented towards increasing productivity. Within skiing, mountains themselves are brought into this process as they are logged, groomed and fitted with chairlifts and lodges to make them more “productive” for the ski industry. Unfortunately, Foucault never draws out the implications of this observation. However it foreshadows the ways in which his work has been picked up by environmental sociologists.

Darier (1999) and Rutherford each assert that biopower can usefully be extended into the ecological realm. Natural “populations” are defined as species bodies that are subject to surveillance and control by environmental scientists and governments (Rutherford 1994; Rutherford 1999). Scientific expertise produces systems of environmental power/knowledge, which construct non-human populations and make them manageable. Ski resort strategies of habitat management for the health and productivity of deer, fish or black bears might be viewed as one instance of this form of biopower. In a similar vein, Luke (1997; 1999a; 1999b) draws on
Foucauldian notions of biopower and governmentality to describe “eco-managerialist” approaches to society-nature interactions. This ecological form of biopower works towards the “redefining and then administering the earth as ‘natural resources’” that can be appropriated for capitalist production (Luke 1999a, 104). Luke terms this relationship between discourse, power and the environment “environmentality,” thereby extending Foucault’s notion of governmentality (Luke, 1999b). Similarly, we might term the ecological applications of biopower “eco-power.”

Like Foucault, Haraway articulates a model of power that poses a challenge to critical theory narratives of class struggle and ideological domination. Her “Cyborg Manifesto” alludes directly to Marx and Engels’ (1989) “Manifesto of the Communist Party” as she poses a challenge to narratives of economic class, which have been central to critical theories of power, politics and resistance (Haraway 1991). In this essay and elsewhere, Haraway argues that the social world can no longer be understood according to a binary logic of ruling class versus working class. Similarly, theories of domination based on essentialized binaries, whether of gender (men versus women), race (White versus non-White), or species (human versus non-human), are increasingly untenable. This is not to say that class, ethnicity and gender no longer have social relevance. If we experience the world through the lens of class, gender or ethnicity; it is because we take up discourses of class, gender or ethnicity, make them our own and express them through our relations with others. Haraway pushes us to think gender, class and ethnicity less as objects than as processes. As she notes, this approach “makes it harder to do anything as a list of adjectives and nouns” (Gane and Haraway 2006, 150). Writing about gender, she states:

Gender is always a relationship, not a preformed category of beings or a possession that one can have. Gender does not pertain more to women than to men. Gender is the relation
between variously constituted categories of men and women … differentiated by nation, generation, class, lineage, color, and much else (Haraway 1997, 28).

Like Foucault, Haraway emphasizes the relational and discursive elements of power. Power is capillary, running through everyday interaction; it is not only condensed in political and economic structures. Within skiing, the construction of a gendered (masculine) mountainous sublime and the symbolic marginalization of female skiers provide examples of this everyday circulation of power through discourse. These images define skiing landscapes as places for male athleticism and risk-taking, where women may be welcome, but not necessarily on equal terms.

Haraway departs from Foucault in her insistence on the growing permeability of boundaries between humans and animals, society and nature, and the organic and the technological within contemporary social life. There is not as great a distance between these paired opposites as we often tell ourselves. The purity of the human, the social and the organic is also called into question. The result is the increasing prevalence of cyborg subject positions. As discussed previously, the cyborg is a recurring, often monstrous, figure of science fiction. It is part organic and part technological, with the parts highly integrated. It is not entirely human, but not quite inhuman either. It faces us as the creation faces Dr. Frankenstein: as something monstrous that we are responsible for. For Haraway, this is a suitable metaphor for our current experience of subjectivity. We are no longer simply members of a class, a gender, a nation, or an ethnic group. Rather, we are hybrid beings, composed of multiple identity positions that overlap and intersect. She writes, “So my cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work” (Haraway 1991, 154). To echo Laclau and Mouffé’s (1985) notion of radical democracy, if there is a collective political actor it is not Marx’s working class. Rather, it is a cyborg entity, which is composed of a multiplicity of partially connected actors, human and non-
human. Discourses of gender, class, racialization and sexuality may function as tissues that bring together members of a cyborg political project; but these discourses have to be actively produced to construct this collective subject.

Haraway offers us the key concept of the “informatics of domination” as a way of thinking about these multiple flows of power (Gane and Haraway 2006; Haraway 1991). This describes how social power is not a top-down flow from elites to masses, or an objective thing; but is fundamentally a property of social relations. Power operates in dense, intersecting networks throughout our social worlds. The creation and reproduction of gendered, racialized and class-based systems of power continue to have relevance. Within skiing, we may speak of hegemonic Whiteness, and masculinity, the symbolic marginalization of First Nations from skiing landscapes, the gendered differences in participants’ experiences of their sport, and the ways in which discourses of “rustic luxury” define ski resorts as classed places. While we may analytically separate out flows of power within skiing based on gender, racialization and class – all of which are salient – it is important to see them as interconnected as well. Haraway further pushes us to think about the ways in which these systems of power are intertwined with other power relations built around sexuality, nationality, species, and so on. In a recent interview, she describes her use of this term as follows:

I used the term ‘informatics of domination’ because it got me out of saying ‘white capitalist imperialist patriarchy in its contemporary late versions’! It was also a provocation to rethink the categories race, sex, class, nation and so on. The categories don’t go away, they get intensified and redone. Maybe we should stop using the nouns. On the other hand, you can’t just stop because racializations are going on fiercely. New forms of gender – as well as old ones – are among us. You can’t just give them up (Gane and Haraway 2006, 150).
Again echoing Foucault, Haraway asserts that the exercise of power always implies the possibility of resistance. While the informatics of domination permeates all social relations, they “aren’t all powerful, they’re interrupted in a million ways … one minute they look like they control the entire planet, the next minute they look like a house of cards” (Gane and Haraway 2006,151).

Two things distinguish Haraway’s approach from Foucault’s work. First, the cyborg figure and the informatics of domination are not only applicable to human actors. Haraway’s theory of power, domination and political subjectivity expands to include animals and machines, as well as the rest of the other-than-human world. This is particularly useful for an examination of eco-power within skiing, where power relations among humans and non-human nature are particularly salient. Second, Haraway departs from Foucault in her insistence that the world is both discursively and materially constituted, by humans as well as by the other-than-human. Discourse is produced by -- and flows through -- embodied actors. Thus, taking up Foucault’s model of power through Haraway is a valuable way to retain an analytic focus on discourse and materiality. It allows us to account for flows of power that are often – but not only -- discursive, which circulate among embodied skiers and non-human members of skiing collectives.

4.2 Skiers and Eco-politics

Environmental sociologists have long focused on measuring environmental values. The environmental values literature attempts to gauge levels of concern with the environment and how these change over time or across social groups (i.e. by gender or economic class). Various measures are used for this, such as the distinction between commitment to the Human Exceptionalist Paradigm (HEP) and the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP). Whereas the former emphasizes faith in technology and human control over nature, the latter sees humanity as
embedded within and dependent upon natural systems and processes (Dunlap and Catton 1979; Dunlap et al. 2000; Van Liere and Dunlap 1983). Tindall and his co-authors measure commitment to environmentalism by asking movement adherents about political pro-environmental actions, such as writing letters, supporting boycotts, or joining protests. They also examine participation in “environmentally friendly behaviour” (EFB). This includes things that can be done in everyday life, like car-pooling or using public transit, buying organic or local food, conserving energy or water, and recycling (Tindall, Davies and Mauboulès 2003). Using a more open-ended approach that is better suited to qualitative interviewing, I asked my interview participants about several different dimensions of environmental values and behaviour, which can be brought together under the term “eco-politics.” These include: personal concerns about environmental issues, participation in formal environmental movement organizations, environmentally friendly behaviour, personal identification as an environmentalist, and typical voting behaviour. While I cannot compare this group of skiers to the general public, this material provides a profile of this group of skiers’ relationship with environmentalism.

Overall, interview participants demonstrate a high level of environmental concern. Table 4.1 illustrates the range of environmental issues discussed by interview participants and reports the number of participants who raised each issue. When asked about their environmental concerns, many participants turned immediately to the environmental impacts of skiing. Most participants also reflected on the environmental impacts of skiing when I asked about whether they thought of skiing as an “environmentally-friendly” activity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental problems discussed by interview participants</th>
<th>Vancouver-Whistler interviews: # of participants (out of 22)</th>
<th>Nelson interviews: # of participants (out of 23)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skiing as an environmental problem</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally the way that our culture treats the environment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forestry issues</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parks and protected areas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine beetles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesticides</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food security</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biodiversity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recycling</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water issues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpopulation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy use</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozone layer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 Environmental issues raised by interview participants.

Climate change also came up repeatedly as an environmental concern. This might reflect the high profile this issue currently has in the media. The following excerpt illustrates how climate change is invoked, with specific reference to skiing and to the participants’ own experience as a skier:

The global warming’s always a big thing. And ‘cause, yeah, ‘cause the snow, some years are getting worse and worse and worse. I was talking with friends about how much snow
Luciana thinks of climate change through the prism of skiing. Through skiing, she also connects a global environmental issue with her personal memories of “how much snow there used to be” in the Nelson area. Similar talk about climate change appears in the following excerpt. Sofia demonstrates her thorough knowledge of climate change to me. She links this to skiing, but emphasizes that it is a broader issue as well:

I mean global warming. We were told in ’87, in a government standing committee on the environment, chapter two said global warming is real and serious. And ski areas are going to get affected by it. But that’s pretty, sort of like, my back yard. There’s much more about it than that (Sofia, Nelson).

For several participants, concerns about climate change are linked to skiing, both because it may alter the future of their sport; but also because skiing itself contributes to climate change through energy use for chairlifts and car transportation. In this excerpt, Steve describes energy use by ski resorts and voices his hope that they will address their own contributions to climate change:

I think the ski industry, the resorts will hopefully start picking up on sustainable energy ideas and trying to look for alternative power sources to run the lifts. ‘Cause I mean, you’re riding these diesel-generated, diesel I guess, or electric. But diesel is probably the [general] option, which is not sustainable in the long run. I hope that ski areas will start looking at that (Steve, Vancouver-Whistler).
Beyond voicing concerns about the environmental impacts of ski resorts and climate change, a wide range of other issues are also raised. These include concerns about forestry, pollution, fisheries and fish farming. Several participants said that it was hard for them to isolate particular issues that they were concerned with. Instead, they are concerned about a whole network of environmental problems, which is linked to a broader culture of disrespect for the environment. Interestingly, this theme is invoked more often by female participants (9) than male participants (3), who tend to focus more on specific issues. Comparing environmental concern across regions is also interesting. The impacts of skiing and climate change are invoked by most participants. However, these two issues dominate the Vancouver interviews more than the Nelson interviews. Nelson area skiers raised concerns about natural resource issues -- water, fisheries and forestry – more often than their Vancouver counterparts.

Besides voicing concern about environmental issues, most participants also talked about engaging in environmentally friendly behaviour (EFB) in their homes and day-to-day lives. This often focuses on food choices (organic, local), or buying non-toxic and biodegradable cleaning products. Connecting environmental concern with EFB, Frank tells me, “If I had the choice between farmed salmon, or fresh salmon, I’ll pay more for the fresh, or the wild salmon” (Frank, Vancouver-Whistler). The following comment provides another example of commitment to environmentally friendly behaviour:

We buy lots of organic stuff. All of our cleaning products are not tested on animals and are phosphate free and, you know, whatever we can do. And that’s everything from.... dish soap to laundry soap to actual cleaning products ... Absolutely, that [environmental concern] factors into everything that we purchase (Sadie, Nelson).
Several participants also talk about transportation as an area that they focus their environmentally friendly behaviour. Car sharing, car pooling, owning a Smart Car, using biodiesel, or cycling instead of driving are alternative transportation choices cited by interview participants. For example, Kristen says, “I’ve actively chosen not to own a vehicle, or to drive a vehicle. And when I did have a vehicle it ran on vegetable oil, so I wasn’t using fossil fuel. ... I ride my bike everywhere” (Kristen, Vancouver-Whistler). The issue of transportation and car use is also linked to skiing by a few participants. For example, Edward talks about hitchhiking to Whitewater instead of driving as a form of carpooling:

One of the big things I do, is I try not to drive to the hill. I hitch all the time, to carpool with people. My wife takes the car because of our son. But even if she didn’t, I’d still walk down and grab a ride just to save the pollution going up there, the CO2 (Edward, Nelson).

Interestingly, Vancouver-Whistler area skiers talk more often about addressing the impacts of their car use than Nelson participants do. This may be related to the differences between living in an urban area and a small town. In a larger centre, alternatives to private car use may be more visible and available, such as infrastructure for transit and cycling. Where people live closer together, co-ordinating car-pooling or car-sharing may also be easier.

A surprisingly high proportion of interview participants had current or prior connections to formal environmental groups. This ranges from people who have made donations and bought memberships, to those who have been more active with environmental organizations. Among the groups that were cited by several participants are Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Sierra Club and Greenpeace. Similarly, quite a few people -- especially among Nelson participants --
talked about voting for the Green Party. Often, respondents expressed feeling torn between political support for the Green Party and the New Democratic Party.

The profile of these skiers describes people who are environmentally aware and concerned. However, when I asked whether people thought of themselves as environmentalists, there was ambiguity and discomfort around this label as a way of self-identifying. For example, when I asked Dennis if he would call himself an environmentalist he replied, “You know, I’d love to one day be able to call myself that. I don’t know how it would happen. I don’t know what I can do. ... I don’t know. I don’t know where to start” (Dennis, Vancouver-Whistler). A few minutes earlier, when I asked about environmental concerns, Dennis answered “all of them.” Similarly, when I asked about environmentally friendly behaviour, he said, “You know, that’s huge. Everything I purchase, I try to think about it.” This illustrates the complexity of the relationship between environmental values, actions and environmentalist identity.

Interview participants were almost evenly split between those who call themselves environmentalists and those who would not. Many people felt that while they were environmentally concerned, they were not active enough in the formal environmental movement, or they did not work to educate other people. For them, this level of engagement is a requisite part of an environmentalist identity. The following excerpt provides an example of this:

INTERVIEWER: So would you tend to call yourself an environmentalist?

PARTICIPANT: (pause) I would like to, but I don’t think I could.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Why is that?

PARTICIPANT: I don’t feel like I do enough. Like, I feel like I try to live, you know, I compost, I recycle, I do kind of- all the things which I think everyone should do. But I don’t feel like yet in my life I’ve gone beyond that ... And I feel like to call yourself an environmentalist that ... you’ve kind of taken a step beyond the norm. And I feel like I’m
the normal person who is aware of the environment and tries to be conscious of my actions and the impact they’re having (Judith, Nelson).

However, when I compared self-identified “environmentalists” with the “non-environmentalists,” there were only marginal differences in environmental concern, movement participation, Green Party support, and environmental behaviour. The main issue seems to be ambiguity about the term “environmentalist” as a label and whether people wish to be associated with it as a form of personal political identity. Drawing on interviewees’ own responses to this question, “environmentally aware,” or “environmentally conscious” would be a more relevant term than “environmentalist” for describing skiers who distance themselves from an environmentalist collective identity.

4.3 Skiing as an Environmentalist Practice

Ski websites link skiing with nature through images of sublime mountain landscapes and through the symbolic recruitment of wildlife. Thus, even when explicitly pro-environmental discourse is not invoked, skiing is articulated with nature. However, discursive work is also done to depict skiing as an environmentally friendly -- or sustainable -- form of interaction with recreational landscapes. While the main function of these websites is to interpellate users as skier-tourists, most sites also espouse pro-environmental discourse. For example, the Whistler Blackcomb website has this to say about their “Habitat Improvement Team,” an environmental restoration initiative:

The Whistler Blackcomb Habitat Improvement Team (HIT) was created in 1998 to provide the opportunity for local residents and WB employees to participate in hands-on projects benefiting the local environment. WB coordinates the volunteers for this
program, providing the tools, equipment and transportation needed and hosting après
activities after each session. HIT meets every second Tuesday evening from June to
September to embark on tree planting, mountain bike trail maintenance, erosion control,
stream and wetland stewardship and cleanup activities (Whistler Blackcomb 2006).

In these texts, ski resort commitments to environmentalism are expressed through reduced power
usage, waste reduction programs, wildlife habitat management, or the creation of pedestrian-
friendly, compact built environments.

This approach to environmentalism recalls Mol and Spaargaren’s (2000; also see
Spaargaren and Mol 1992) ecological modernization theory (EMT). This perspective asserts that
neither technological industrialization nor the social relations of capitalism per se are inherently
unsustainable. Instead, the central idea of EMT is that “fundamental transformations” are needed
within modern institutions to correct the “structural design faults” that have created
environmental damage. However, these “fundamental transformations” do not require the total
re-construction of the social structures of modern consumer capitalism. Instead, Mol and
Spaargaren argue that capitalism constantly adapts to new conditions; that environmental
degradation may appear under different relations of production; and that there are currently no
viable alternatives for a macrosocial economic system. In a similar vein, Chernushenko (1994)
and Sachs (2001-2002) each describe steps ski resorts can take to improve their environmental
practices, through resource conservation, habitat stewardship and technological adaptation.

Resort environmentalism also involves “leading” others – the public and resort
employees – through environmental education. The Mount Washington website provides one
example of this:
Because of our setting in an outdoor, natural environment and the clear connection between that natural environment and the guest experience, we have an excellent opportunity to take a leadership role in environmental education and in enhancing the environmental awareness of our guests, surrounding communities, and employees (Mount Washington Alpine Resort 2006).

Ski corporations claim that they contribute to creating environmentalist subjectivities among their employees and clientele. Individuals’ environmental consciousness is transformed through ski resorts’ educational efforts, echoing Foucault’s insights into the ways that our sense of self – our subjectivities – are formed in relation with discourse (Foucault 2000 [1994]a; Foucault 2005).

My field notes also chronicle several examples of how environmental values are invoked within the Whistler skiing landscape. To quote directly from my notes:

There are a few signs of animal stewardship discourse around the Crystal Chair area, with signs instructing skiers about the wildlife benefits of glading, in creating habitat and food sources for bear and deer. There is also a large sign about Whistler Blackcomb’s environmental stewardship in the Glacier Lodge, featuring several photos of black bears. (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, February 23, 2007).

The most prevalent signs focus on how the resort works towards animal habitat protection and enhancement for deer, bears and fish (see Figure 4.1). Animals are not only recruited symbolically as images of nature, but are also made objects of environmental management in a way that evokes Foucauldian notions of biopower, where populations are governed for productivity and health (Foucault 1978; Foucault 2003b). Here, the ski resort positions itself as a
responsible steward of animal members of skiing collectives. While wildlife habitat stewardship plans may be framed as a commitment to “sustainability,” others sceptically interpret these measures as further examples of human intrusion into the lives of animal collectives: it is a form of species-colonization (Turner 1996).

![Figure 4.1 Managing bear and deer habitat, Whistler Blackcomb.](image)

There are also instances where global climate change enters the Whistler landscape. During field observation in Whistler village, I noticed a poster for an educational event about climate change titled “Global Cooling,” with the tag line “Save our Snow.” The newly opened Symphony area is also rife with environmentally-oriented texts. While there are the usual signs about animal habitat management, there is also a prominent educational sign about climate change. Besides introducing the issue, this sign tells readers about the micro-hydro project being used to produce electricity for the chairlift. Other signs tell the viewer that the Symphony area has only had five percent of its trees cut through glading, in comparison with the fifty percent
that is normal for ski run creation. Throughout the Whistler landscape there are also signs about environmental practices, such as recycling. At the recycling stations at Glacier Lodge, skiers are interpellated through a large sign to “Help us conserve the environment.” All of these signs link skiing with an environmentalist standpoint, echoing the discourse produced by ski websites.

The recurrent invocation of environmentalist discourse at Whistler is not seen at Whitewater. Only a couple of field note entries document the explicit presence of pro-environmental discourse at this ski hill. To quote directly from my notes:

In the pub, there’s a recycling sign over the garbage can, reading “Be Aware, Save with Care.” It also asks skiers to not throw out recyclables. This is a very subtle nod to an environmentalist standpoint, which is not typically visible around Whitewater.

(Whitewater field notes, January 29, 2007).

Aside from the presence of recycling bins, there is little that portrays Whitewater as particularly environmentalist, or that attempts to “educate” skiers about environmental behaviour. Environmentalist discourse is a patterned silence within the physical landscape of the ski hill. This contrasts with the Whitewater website, which contains material on their environmental stewardship practices (Whitewater Winter Resort 2006).

In general, BC ski resorts define themselves as environmentally sound stewards of mountain landscapes. As previously discussed, this position is often disputed by environmentalists, who problematize new development and the expansion of mechanized backcountry access. The media is one site where political conflict over the meaning of these landscapes plays out. A dominant discourse in mass media texts links the ski industry with tourism and economic development, rather than to environmentalism. However, attempts by ski
industry news sources to position themselves as environmentalists are also included. In coverage of the Jumbo Glacier Resort conflict, for example, representatives of the development state that they are responding to concerns raised by environmental assessments of the project. The following excerpt from the Cranbrook *Daily Townsman* illustrates this. Grant Costello, a Vice President with the development company, invokes the provincial government’s environmental assessment approval to assert the company’s own ecological legitimacy:

“It's been very satisfying to have received primary approval through the environmental certificate issued last year and now to be in the final stages of the provincial review process.”

Costello [the resort spokesperson] says critics of the resort proposal are not as numerous as it often appears and he welcomes any meaningful input from them. “If they have information other than saying they don't want development of any kind in the Jumbo Valley, we will respond to that information. That's what a public open house is for.”

The mammoth resort has already been scaled down from its original size and several changes made, including a state-of-the-art effluent disposal system to deal with environmental and wildlife concerns, he says (Warner 2006, 1).

Because the project has been approved by the provincial government’s environmental review, resort spokespeople can frame environmentalist opposition as anti-development absolutism. Through the legitimacy granted by environmental assessment, resort developers attempt to claim the environmentalist standpoint. In doing so, they portray environmentalists as hysterical and overreacting.

A large number of media texts reproduce environmentalist discourse that questions the ecological legitimacy of skiing. Another theme that emerges from the media texts is that the ski
industry is involved in making itself increasingly sustainable through technological change. Here, the industry is depicted as paying ever-more attention to its impacts upon nature. A recurrent discourse focuses on how ski hills adopt technological improvements in order to lessen their impact on the environment and move skiing further towards sustainability. This discourse is often linked to issues around climate change. Skiing is depicted as a canary in a coalmine for the impacts of climate change, just like the world’s low-lying cities (such as Venice and New Orleans), or the melting of ice caps in the Polar Regions. Several articles discuss attempts by the ski industry to adapt to the uncertainties of climate change, through technological measures like increased snow-making and glacier preservation projects. For example:

Whistler itself is aware of the looming problem of global warming. The municipality has recently adopted standards to make itself more environmentally sustainable. And Intrawest Resorts, the operators of Whistler Blackcomb, is expecting to invest millions of dollars in new snow-making equipment over the coming years (Nanaimo Daily News 2003, A1).

Ski resorts’ attempts to address climate change are not limited to increasing snow-making and glacier preservation. In another article on climate change and skiing, the reader is told that Whistler is also improving their environmental practices through technological innovation:

Whistler Blackcomb is trying to grow back the glaciers by adding artificial snow and by building snow fences to protect them from wind erosion, DeJong says. The resort is also trying to set a good example by using fuel-efficient snow-grooming machines and the hill is even researching the viability of putting wind turbines on their mountains to produce clean energy (Efron 2005, T1).
Through Whistler’s movement towards alternative energy and energy efficiency, skiing is linked to an environmentalist standpoint. However, the links between skiing and automobility -- a technological system that has been heavily implicated in climate change – are marginalized from these media accounts. This is a notable patterned silence.

4.4 Skiing as an Environmental Problem

While the ski industry positions itself as pro-environmental stewards of mountain landscapes, environmental movement groups challenge the notion of skiing as an ecologically sustainable activity. As I described in Chapter 2, environmentalists articulate a discourse of how skiing transforms natural landscapes into social landscapes for recreation and mass tourism. Environmental groups assert that deforestation for ski runs, building resort infrastructure and installing chairlifts can still have serious ecological impacts. A central claim from environmental groups is that ski development displaces particularly sensitive wildlife, such as grizzly bears and mountain caribou. Beyond the environmental movement, several authors also chronicle the negative impacts of skiing, focusing on wildlife, the power required to run lifts, water pollution, resort waste, and water consumption for artificial snow-making (Chernushenko 1994; Clifford 2002; Hudson 2000). Articles from the science journal *Mountain Research and Development* further point to skiing’s impacts, including soil erosion, damage to vegetation, and stress to animals (Booth and Cullen 2001; Haimayer 1989; Hamr 1988; Price 1985; Ries 1996). Thus, even if skiing might be relatively more sustainable than extractive uses of mountain environments, such as mining or logging, its ecological legitimacy – in a more absolute sense -- can still be called into question.

Unsurprisingly, this interpretation of skiing as an environmental problem is largely invisible in ski resort websites, magazines and in my own field notes. While most ski resort texts
articulate a pro-environmental discourse, only a couple acknowledge the environmental impacts associated with skiing. However, when these impacts are invoked it is so that the resort can then describe how it is addressing them. For example, Mount Washington discusses the links between skiing and systems of automobility as a problem that needs to be addressed by creating transit links with local communities (Mount Washington Alpine Resort 2006). This marginal discourse further highlights how the ecologically-troublesome connections between skiing and automobility are most often a patterned silence within ski industry discourse.

Ski magazines provide a few more examples of environmental self-reflexivity, though this remains a marginal theme. In particular, this tends to focus on questions about the environmental ethics of using helicopters and snowmobiles for backcountry access. The following excerpt is from a Backcountry magazine article on heli-skiing:

> It remains to be seen if this market will take off at all. In the meantime ethical dilemmas surrounding helis in the backcountry abound. HeliCat Canada ... claims heli-accessed skiing “exerts minimal environmental impact.” This statement, self-propelled touring proponents argue, doesn’t entirely hold water: a six-passenger helicopter can use over 60 gallons of petroleum per hour, and increasing human presence in remote wilderness certainly impacts natural habitat ... (Stifler 2006, 28).

While self-reflection on mechanized backcountry access is valuable, ski magazines give little attention to the more mundane impacts of ski hills. The normal operation of skiing involves energy and water consumption, as well as significant ties with automobility. While environmental soul-searching is occasionally done around backcountry helicopter and snowmobile use, ski resorts are typically constructed as non-problematic. In a rather exceptional article, environmental reflexivity enters Powder magazine’s coverage of the conflict over the
Jumbo Glacier Resort development. The author argues that criticisms that development of the resort, the author agrees that the resort is unnecessary and undesirable are compelling. However, he concludes by stating that in spite of his misgivings, the resort will likely be too alluring to resist:

From the all-important skier’s point of view, seeing resorts like Whistler go the way of crowds and high-speed lifts, maybe a new resort [Jumbo Pass] tucked away in the wilderness isn’t such a bad idea. “None of us want it, nor do we think we need it,” says Byron Grey, a longtime Invermere local who ski tours Jumbo Pass on a weekly basis. “But make no mistake, I’ll be up there for first chair every big day.” This seems to sum up the sentiments of many BC skiers. No one thinks the province needs a Jumbo, but once the bull wheels go in and the snow starts to fall, rest assured they’ll be there, unwrapping their winter gifts (M. Scott 2005, 28).

When I asked whether skiing is environmentally sustainable, interview participants typically answered along the lines of “it depends.” For the majority of participants, the impacts of skiing seem to fall along a continuum. Self-propelled backcountry skiing is typically interpreted as more environmentally authentic than either skiing at resorts or mechanized backcountry access (helicopters, snowmobiles). In environmental terms, skiing is largely viewed with some ambiguity. It is a way of interacting with mountainous nature. At the same time, most interviewees can easily articulate an environmental critique of their own sport. One dominant theme is the ways that skiing affects wildlife, either through habitat displacement on ski hills, or else through the noise pollution of backcountry snowmobile and helicopter use. For example:
It’s always good that industry is thinking more, and they’re pressured to do so, to think more towards lower environmental impact. But lower environmental impact means nothing when it comes to- we’ve got a pristine wilderness that has grizzlies and wildlife that will be impacted. And there’s no amount of environmental sensitivity in building a resort that can prevent that. You know, our bears and wildlife are being displaced as it is as communities expand ... We’re already pushing them so far away from their original habitats that, you know, I’m very much opposed to Jumbo (Shantel, Nelson).

A Vancouver-area skier articulates a similar critique of the Jumbo Resort development, drawing on her own reading of texts. Here, we see a particularly vivid example of a skier drawing on textually-mediated discourse to inform her own reflections on the eco-politics of her sport. Having read about the project, Nicola draws on the grizzly bear as a key symbol of threatened wilderness. She also cites helicopter and car use as other ways in which wildlife is affected by skiing:

I’m against that development there [Jumbo Pass]. That is grizzly habitat, and it has shrunk so much that we cannot afford to take any more away. And I’ve also read studies that, you know, the impact on wildlife, their winter survival is so precarious, if they’re disturbed again and again with helicopters, or cars, or whatever. And they have to use up so much energy for flying away and flying up, that they don’t use for food collection and survival, that ... puts them at risk, too (Nicola, Vancouver-Whistler).

The second most prevalent environmental critique focuses on energy consumed to run chairlifts, drive to ski areas, or for snowmobile and helicopter accessed backcountry skiing. Jess argues that backcountry skiing is generally environmentally sustainable, but that ski resort skiing
is much less so, “because there’s a lot of energy going into powering those lifts. You know, that’s not human powered energy. Whereas in the backcountry it is” (Jess, Vancouver-Whistler).

Energy use is also cited by Jenny as evidence of the unsustainability of skiing:

Lots of people think of skiing as going to their Whistler condo in their Hummer-3 or whatever. And, you know, having the newest gear and the newest outfit, and going up and down lifts all day which are powered by some sort of electricity, and some sort of energy (Jenny, Vancouver-Whistler).

It is particularly interesting how often automobility was raised as an issue among interview respondents, given how this patterned silence prevails in most ski industry, media and environmental organization discourse about skiing and nature. Besides talking about the impacts of their own car use to access skiing, several participants brought up ties with automobility when I asked about the 2010 Olympics. In the following excerpt, Peg views the choice to upgrade the highway instead of revitalizing rail service as a wasted opportunity to demonstrate environmental values:

I think it’s absolutely ridiculous that they’re upgrading the Sea to Sky Highway and not building a train to go up there. That was such an opportunity to meet that mission [of a “sustainable” Olympics]. That would have been a great example that they really meant it. And I think that was a controversial issue. And I think they made the wrong decision (Peg, Nelson).

The notion that upgrading the highway for the Olympics is a wasted opportunity is a recurrent theme in my interviews. The decision not to use the Olympics as an opportunity build rail service
in the Vancouver-to-Whistler corridor is cited by several participants. This is used as evidence to bolsters their scepticism about the Olympic committee and the provincial government’s professed commitment to environmental values.

Environmental critiques of skiing co-exist with another frequent theme where skiing is linked to a pro-environmental standpoint. In this discourse, skiing increases environmental awareness because it allows people to get out and experience – and then to care for – nature. Luke sums up this interpretation of outdoor recreation as follows: “If they are done ‘with the proper attitude,’ many personal leisure pursuits, ‘like fishing, hunting, sun bathing, kayaking, canoeing, sailing, mountain climbing, hang gliding, skiing, running, bicycling and birdwatching,’ are endorsed as a path to attain clear ecological awareness” (Devall and Sessions qtd Luke 1997, 21). As one Nelson skier puts it, “I think if it [skiing] gets people out into the mountains, they’ll appreciate the beauty, and hopefully that’ll sink in and they’ll think about ... their impact on the environment by seeing it” (Edward, Nelson). A Vancouver skier links her outdoor recreation activities to her own sense of environmental consciousness. She says, “I don’t know if this is the same for the people I ski with, but it’s given me kind of a love for the wilderness. And I know that a lot of the choices I make probably stem from that experience” (Heather, Vancouver-Whistler). Speaking about backcountry skiing, Shantel tells me that this provides skiers with first-hand experience of the destruction of clearcutting, which can also lead to increased environmental consciousness: “You know, what you see when you’re up there. You’re seeing clearcuts. So ... you become more aware of the environmental destruction” (Shantel, Nelson).

This theme reflects the ski industry’s depiction of itself as ecologically benign. These different interpretations of skiing’s relationship with the environment are not mutually exclusive. For many skiers, they seem to co-exist in tension with each other. This illuminates an ambiguity that is at the heart of skiing as a form of human-nature interaction. Among the skiers I interviewed, most value their sport as a way of interacting with nature; most also demonstrate an
awareness of the environmental impacts of their recreational activity. This tension is
articulated by a woman from Nelson:

I find myself in personal conflict being a skier. As an environmentalist and, you know, loving skiing. So I’m always walking that line and trying to find a way to have as little impact as I can. But I think it’s possible (Roberta, Nelson).

Based on these interviews, moves towards making skiing more environmentally-sound would be viewed positively by a majority of participants. Overall, this group of skiers does seem to desire genuine moves towards attractive development, rather than simply being content with the environmental ambiguity within their sport.

4.5 Skiing and Social Power

Haraway’s notion of the “informatics of domination” focuses on how social power is fragmented, flowing through diverse subject positions, mediated by discourses and technologies (Haraway 1991; Gane and Haraway 2006). Without locating power in foundational categories of class, gender, or race, this model describes flows of power that are informed by intersections of class, gender and ethnicity, as well as sexuality, age and so on. Much of the discussion so far has focused on the power enjoyed by the ski industry to inhabit, manage and have a negative impact on mountain environments. I have described how this flow of power over the other-than-human has been disrupted by environmental groups. I have also described how flows of power between skiing and non-human nature are interpreted by skiers themselves. Here, I turn to the more obviously “social” forms of power that flow through skiing. I will look at three dimensions in particular: ethnicity, gender and class. While this does not exhaust the range of possibilities, these are the dimensions that emerge as particularly noteworthy through my textual analysis,
field observation and interviews. Furthermore, while I separate out these areas for the purpose of organization and clarity, it is important to bear in mind that they are intertwined.

There is an inevitable overlap between the following discussion and my analysis of the discursive construction of skiing landscapes in Chapter 2. Elements of the following discussion expand upon earlier observations about the ways in which skiing landscapes are produced as gendered and racialized places through discourse. If we recall the figure of the triptych – the three panel painting – as a metaphor for the structure of the analysis, this is one place where themes bleed most noticeably between one panel and another. Much of the material in this section deals evokes the discursive construction of skiing landscapes as processes through which gendered and racialized power operates. Discussions of ethnicity, gender and class are located here in order to foreground their connections to power and politics within skiing.

Skiing and “White Culture.” As previously noted, the visual discourse of ski resort websites and ski magazines is characterized by a normalized Whiteness, where ethnicity is bracketed out. This brings to mind MacCannell’s discussion of “White Culture” as a non-ethnicity that slips into the background as something taken for granted. He writes:

> It should be evident enough that by ‘white culture’ I am not referring to this or that enclave of mainline WASPs or Afrikaners. ‘White Culture,’ as used here, is the structural (that is, social, linguistic, and unconscious) pre-condition for the existence of ‘ethnic’ groups. White Culture is an enormous totalization which, within current social arrangements, corresponds to the being of the third ‘person’ on the plane of language, and to ‘white light’ in physics. It arrogates to itself the exclusive right to totalize and represent all other hues … (MacCannell 1992, 129).
The consistency of images of White skiers is rarely disturbed. On the occasions where ethnicity enters ski discourse, it is somewhat surprising. For example, an article from *Skier* focuses on a speed skiing event at Sun Peaks. In speed skiing, skiers use extra-long skis and wear form-fitting, aerodynamic clothing to race down a run in a straight line, achieving extremely high speeds. The article describes one of the racers as follows:

> It’s [the outfit] a pretty mackin’ look, too, none more so than Ross Anderson of Ruidoso, New Mexico, whose helmet is painted like an elaborate native headdress. A Mescalero Apache, Anderson lives the dream as a casino greeter at Ski Apache and a part-time pro speed skier. His official banner hangs proudly at the finish line, bearing an unforgettable tag line: “The Fastest American Indian on Mother Earth: 236.07 km/h” (Brooker 2006, 84).

Notably, Anderson is the only racer whose ethnicity is highlighted by the article. These episodes of making ethnicity visible are rare. They highlight the hegemonic Whiteness of skiing texts, taking Raymond Williams’ (1977) definition of hegemony as that which is ingrained in everyday common sense, but which carries power effects.

From my field notes, I would argue that textual images of skiing as a site of dominant Whiteness are exaggerated, but not unrealistic. Both Whistler and Whitewater are sites of dominant Whiteness. Though skiers of other ethnicities are present more so than in skiing texts, they are a minority within the skiing landscape. In general, Whistler Blackcomb seems to be a more multi-ethnic landscape than Whitewater. At Whistler there is often a significant minority of Asian, or Asian-Canadian, skiers and riders (both male and female, of mixed age); as well as a few Black skiers and snowboarders. For this minority, exclusion from the discursive representations of skiing may be interpreted as a form of symbolic violence (Kay and Laberge
When interactions with nature through skiing are coded as a primarily White social activity, the skiing landscape is defined as a site of dominant Whiteness.

However, to talk about Whitewater and Whistler as sites of normalized Whiteness is to ignore the way in which Whiteness is not necessarily monolithic. The dominant Whiteness of Whistler integrates Europeans, Americans, Australians, Quebecois and Anglo Canadians, among others. Thus, the normalized Whiteness of skiing also embodies (partially) globalized tourist flows. In talking about normalized Whiteness, we should bear in mind that this is perhaps an overly unifying category that masks meaningful differences.11

Another way in which normalized Whiteness produces patterned silences is in the lack of a First Nations presence in the on-hill discourses of Whistler and Whitewater. At Whistler, I saw no signs of the Squamish Nation’s inhabitation of the Coast Mountains.12 However, Whistler does incorporate “mountain man” imagery that evokes mythologies of wilderness, the Canadian hinterland and early European exploration. As I observe in my field notes:

At the mid-mountain, there’s a large wood carving (6-8 feet?) of a bearded “mountain man” with snowshoes in hand. This stands next to a hut advertising dogsled tours. This is a sort of iconography of an imagined past, linked with nature and rugged masculinity. ... The mythologies of the Whistler Blackcomb ski landscape as a place of nature and wildlife stands in contrast to the exclusion of First Nations from the landscape (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, March 2, 2007).

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11 As Supriya (1999) notes, we should not allow Whiteness to remain untheorized as a form of identity. If we take racialized identity as relational and historical for other ethnic groups, then this is also the case for social groups that are subsumed within the discourse of Whiteness.

12 By contrast, the Squamish Adventure Centre, a tourism centre located south of Whistler in the town of Squamish, contains more content about the Squamish Nation and does give visitors a greater impression of coastal British Columbia as a First Nations landscape.
Similarly, skiers’ attention at Whitewater is drawn to the mining history of the region, through old signs and props in the pub and the lodge. However, this representation of the past is marked by the invisibility of the Sinixt and the Ktunaxa, the indigenous occupants of the Kootenay landscape. Here, the history of the skiing landscape begins with the nineteenth century arrival of European mining prospectors on wooden skis with leather bindings. This evokes Coleman’s argument that skiing tourism in Colorado produces a racialized landscape, which she refers to as the “White West.” Through the construction of simulacral Alpine villages and Wild West towns, Whiteness is normalized and made dominant for a tourist gaze. Corollary to this, the participation of Hispanic and American Indian people in the social worlds of the historic West is rendered invisible, or else they are turned into “sanitized objects for consumption” at tourist sites (Coleman 2004, 171).

**First Nations protest and skiing.** First Nations presence is rarely acknowledged within skiing texts and resort spaces. When First Nations become visible within skiing, it happens primarily through eruptions of social movement activity. This illustrates how First Nations are “selectively visible” within British Columbia, appearing only within certain contexts, such as protests or performances of cultural tradition, while fading into the background of everyday life for most non-First Nations people (Miller personal communication). Ongoing land claims disputes between First Nations groups and the state in British Columbia are a key area of selective visibility (Blomley 1996; Lambertus 2004; Ratner, Carroll and Woolford 2003; Tennant 1990; Woolford 2004). Much of the provincial landscape was never ceded by treaty. Over the past few decades, First Nations groups have become increasingly vocal in their demands for redistribution of land and social resources in recognition for this historical injustice. Through tactics like protests and blockades of highways and forestry operations, First Nations protesters have brought their political demands to the provincial agenda. In response, the NDP
provincial government of the 1990s began the process of creating modern treaties, which were meant to settle the question of land control and ownership in the province. However, despite the institutionalization of modern land claims negotiations, many specific sites have remained contentious and have become focal points for First Nations activism.

These larger land claims disputes occasionally intersect with the British Columbia ski industry. For example, the St’at’imc have challenged the proposed development at Melvin Creek, north of Whistler; while members of the Secwepemc have focused on the expansion of Sun Peaks. At both areas, opposition takes the form of setting up camps and physically occupying land. Here, First Nations groups assert their presence in the landscape and challenge ski resorts’ power to occupy and manage mountain environments. In First Nations discourse, the expansion of skiing represents a threat to their prior use of the landscape. On the Skwelkwek’welt Protection Centre website, Secwepemc protesters explain their opposition to Sun Peaks’ expansion plans:

> The Secwepemc never relinquished this territory to either the provincial or federal governments by either land claim or treaty. Nevertheless, the provincial government granted a master lease for the mountains to Sun Peaks, a resort that presently encompasses three mountains and hosts over 3,600 skiable acres of terrain (Skwelkwek'welt Protection Centre, 2006).

At Sun Peaks, Secwepemc protesters enter the resort village and alter the normal flow of skiing. Within media accounts, these political tactics are viewed as socially disruptive. Furthermore, they are often criminalized and lead to the arrest of protesters. In the following excerpt from a 2002 issue of the Skwelkwek’welt Newsletter, published on Turtle Island News (a First Nations
news website), Chief Arthur Manuel responds to an injunction granted by the provincial court to Sun Peaks, which bars protesters from blockading at the resort:

“The judges reasoning in granting the injunction,” Chief Manuel said, “were the balance of convenience – but sadly, in this case it means putting the convenience of snowboarders and corporate profits above the convenience of our Elders and land-users having an adequate diet. This is our land and these are areas where our people have always gone to hunt and we were not preventing one skier from going down the mountain. But they are evicting Secwépemc women and children from their homes. It is shameful” (Manuel qtd Turtle Island News 2006).

First Nations opposition to skiing is most often framed through a discourse of access to land and the established practices that are tied to those landscapes. Here, ski development represents an unjust encroachment on land that has not been ceded through legitimate processes.

The discourse of environmental protection is also occasionally linked to First Nations politics, where ski expansion is defined as both a social justice issue and an environmental problem. For example, Ktunaxa Nation opposition is invoked by environmental groups who oppose the Jumbo Glacier Resort project (Jumbo Creek Conservation Society 2006). The articulation of First Nations and environmentalist concerns also occurs at Melvin Creek, as we see in the following excerpt from the Western Canada Wilderness Committee website:

The BC Liberals are furthermore pushing for the construction of a ski resort city high up in the Melvin Creek drainage. All in all the Liberal plan is a death sentence for the wildlife and wilderness in St’át’imc territory as well as being very damaging to the St’át’imc culture and way of life. In stark contrast to the government’s land use plan, the
St’at’imc’s land use plan has a very strong conservation theme, identifying large portions of their territory as “Protection Areas” where industrial developments such as road building, logging, mining and mineral exploration are prohibited (Western Canada Wilderness Committee 2006).

I suggest that this chain of equivalence among First Nations political interests and environmental discourse points to a particularly British Columbian form of environmental justice (also see Stoddart 2007). Traditionally, the notion of environmental justice refers to a racialized distribution of environmental risks and harms (Capek 1993). The classic case is Bullard’s (1994) work on the systematic siting of toxic waste sites near ethnic minority communities (also see Checker 2005; C. Hamilton 1995). In British Columbia, however, connections between environmentalism and social justice are often linked to questions about the distribution of environmental resources, rather than to the distribution of environmental harms (Braun and Wainright 2001; Ratner, Carroll and Woolford 2003; Torgerson 1999).

Just as environmentalist resistance to skiing is played out in the mass media, so too is First Nations protest. First Nations groups appear quite frequently in mass media articles on skiing. While not as prominent as environmental groups, they are also important social movement actors. The presence of First Nations in media accounts focuses almost entirely on protest, where protesters attempt to redefine the recreational and tourist landscapes of BC as First Nations places. When First Nations enter into skiing collectives, it is typically as an unwelcome, intrusive presence. This is consistent with the notion that media coverage of First Nations relies on a “limited repertory of storylines” that focus on “conflict and Indian antisocial behaviour” (Miller 1993). A recurring discourse that is used to delegitimize First Nations protest is that the state is the appropriate target of political action, not the ski industry. This is illustrated in an article from the Kamloops Daily News, a local newspaper which provides ongoing coverage of
the Sun Peaks conflict. Al Raine, one of the developers, asserts that Native land claims should be taken up with the province, not with Sun Peaks:

“I’ve spent a couple of million dollars and I have a legal right under the act, I can request an extension,” he said, noting his original certificate [for the development] expires Aug. 16. He hopes to hear about his extension request before that date.

What bothers him most about the situation is that native chiefs are dictating what happens on land that's under the province’s control (Young 2005, A7).

Here, skiing is constructed as an apolitical form of economic development that has been unfairly drawn into the realm of politics. This is further illustrated when skiers are interviewed about First Nations protest, as we see in another article from the Kamloops Daily News:

Chris Colella came to Sun Peaks from Washington State to enjoy the skiing. He said protesters were blaming tourists for their problems.

“It’s not our fault. We never would have known this was Native land if the protest hadn’t happened. I’m just a bystander.”

At that point a protester dressed in fatigues marched past yelling “You’re not a bystander, you’re a contributor.”

Colella disagreed.

“People come up here and they paid good money to be here. I think a protest like this puts people in a bad mood and they don’t deserve it. It’s not their fault” (Hewlett 2003, A1).
Through this discourse, ski industry news sources and skiers reframe First Nations protest as misdirected and themselves as innocents embroiled in a conflict that isn’t theirs. Another discourse used to delegitimize protest is the notion that the protesters represent a “fringe element” in First Nations communities. The majority of First Nations people are said to be more rational because they have an interest in economic development that comes from dialogue with the ski industry, rather than opposition to it.

In comparing First Nations and environmentalist opposition to ski development, there are noticeable differences in how these social movement actors enter into mass media discourse. News about First Nations often focuses on the criminalization of protest. For example, we are told in the Kamloops Daily News that the RCMP “have maintained a presence at Sun Peaks throughout the busy holiday season because of concerns aboriginal protesters might try to interfere with the ski hill’s business” (Koopmans and Youds 2001, A1). Protesters are subject to surveillance by police because of the threat of disruption they pose to the business of skiing. Similarly, an article from The Province, a Vancouver daily with provincial distribution, quotes a RCMP spokesperson who describes the potential for violence inherent in the Native protests:

“There have been some confrontations. There’s a tremendous amount of intimidation of locals passing through, people wearing camouflage, giving fictitious names. I don’t want to see anyone get hurt, but if people start pushing other people’s buttons like this, a confrontation could easily happen” (Tait qtd Fournier 2001, A4).

First Nations protesters are subjects of police surveillance; they are arrested and jailed. Implicit in news stories of criminalization is that these protests are outside the boundaries of appropriate political processes.
By contrast, environmentalists are generally not criminalized in mass media texts about skiing protest. Environmentalist opposition to skiing appears within the boundaries of appropriate political action. Exceptions to this general pattern are a few news stories about protests related to the highway expansion for the 2010 Olympics. During these protests, Betty Krawczyk, a well-known BC environmentalist, was arrested for contempt of court, tried and imprisoned. Note the difference in tone in this article from the *Globe and Mail*, one of Canada’s national daily newspapers:

The long arm of the law has caught up once again with British Columbia’s raging great-granny. Adding to a string of previous prison terms that has given her the status of legend among many environmental activists, 78-year-old Betty Krawczyk was sentenced to 10 months behind bars yesterday for trying to stop an Olympics-related road-building project (Mickleburgh 2007, A6).

In contrast with articles on First Nations protest, this story of criminalization characterizes Krawczyk as a “raging great-granny” and a “legend among ... environmentalists.” Absent is the threat of disruption or violence, which is invoked to justify the RCMP surveillance of First Nations protesters. For the most part, environmentalist opposition to skiing takes on a respectable form in media discourse. By contrast, First Nations protest is more unruly; it is a social threat that needs to be controlled by the police.

The social threat embodied in First Nations protest is not only depicted through the presence of police. Protesters’ clothing is also invoked within media stories of First Nations protest in a manner not seen at all in environmental protest stories. This brings to mind Barthes’ (2006) writing about how fashion carries its own mythologies. Similarly, Ferrell (2004) describes how clothing styles are used to do boundary work between subcultures and mass culture.
Clothing becomes a way for members of subcultural groups to express their own identity; it may also be invoked in dominant discourse as a sign of deviance and criminality. In media coverage of the criminalization of First Nations protest, news accounts repeatedly draw attention to protesters’ use of camouflage clothing. Following Barthes and Ferrell, we can see how camouflage is a signifier that connotes radicalism, social threat and disorder. For example:

The group marched through the village, banging ceremonial drums and chanting “Sun Peaks hell no.” Some wore camouflage army fatigues and covered their faces with ski masks. Others carried video cameras and recorded the march. Several police cars followed the group at a distance (Hewlett 2003, A1).

This use of camouflage as a signifier of radicalism and social threat further undermines First Nations protest as legitimate political action. This is further illustrated in the following news excerpt:

Provincial court Judge William Sundhu said the natives were on their way to becoming militants because they wore camouflage and masks and behaved in a hostile manner. He also placed each of the four on 18 months [sic] probation after jail, with terms requiring they not be within 10 kilometres of Sun Peaks Resort, or wear camouflage clothes or military fatigues (Victoria Times-Colonist 2002, A5).

The news focus on protesters’ style of dress also distinguishes First Nations and environmentalist protest. In texts on environmentalist opposition to skiing, protesters’ clothing is never invoked in news accounts. Needless to say, First Nations groups’ own accounts of their campaign against ski development focus on land control issues, not on what they are wearing. Where police
surveillance and arrests are discussed, it is the actions of the police, not the clothing of the protesters that matters.

**Skiing and gender.** Skiing texts construct skiing as a site of White Culture, where non-White skiers and First Nations inhabitants of mountain landscapes are often marginalized from representation. Similarly, skiing discourse is gendered in important ways and gender can also affect how skiers experience participation in their sport. Ski texts are dominated by male skiers, but skiing is not portrayed only as a masculinized form of interacting with nature. While women are a minority, they do appear as competent skiers, capable of taking risks. At the same time, women skiers are sexualized for a male gaze in a way that is rarely seen for male skiers. To provide an illustrative example, an issue of *Skier* includes a comparison of skiing culture in North America, South America, Japan and Europe. Highlighting the assumed male gaze of the reader, among the criteria examined are the availability and type of women in the different ski areas. A cartoon breast is used as an icon for North American (“fake”) and South American (“real”) women (“Continental Skiing” 2004, 34). As with the textual construction of normalized Whiteness, this is another way in which power operates at an everyday level through ski texts.

In ski magazines, the dominant construction of the skiing landscape features White male skiers, engaged in high-risk skiing, against the backdrop of a sublime mountain wilderness. The sublime mountain setting is a site for the performance of a certain type of heroic masculinity. The idealized masculinity of ski discourse is athletic, young (skiers are typically in their twenties and thirties) and risk-seeking. Through the articulation of risk, masculinity, and the mountainous sublime, the skiing landscape is constructed as a masculinised landscape. While women are not unwelcome, they are marginal participants. Women are included in ski magazines through occasional articles or ads featuring professional woman skiers. Other examples include a special women-centred issue of *Powder*, titled *Powder Girl*, as well as a feature article from *Kootenay...*
Mountain Culture about “she bums” (women ski bums). The latter article describes women ski bums as follows:

Their life choices of jobs, accommodations and home bases all come down to what quenches their thirst for powder. These are women who rip through fresh tree lines while pregnant, face shots at each turn, inspiring onlooking guys to mutter, “I want to ski like a girl.” Without them, a bloke’s ski-bumming fantasy shrivels up fast. Because no matter how much you live to shred, after awhile you get tired of holding your dick in your hands (Lisa Richardson 2005-2006, 38).

This is an interesting passage, which illustrates how women – when not marginalized from ski discourse – may be depicted as competent, athletic skiers. At the same time, the she bum is also sexualized as a necessary presence for the male “ski buming fantasy.”

The textual construction of a masculinised skiing landscape is not replicated in my field observation. While there are often more men than women riding at both Whistler and Whitewater, there is not typically a large gender gap in lodges and in chairlift lines. Certainly, my field notes do not reflect the marginal position of women within ski texts. However, while men seem to make up a slight majority of skiers, this gender imbalance is more pronounced among the “hard core” of skiers and riders. These are the skiers who show up first thing in the morning to line up for the first chair up the mountain, so they can compete for fresh tracks on unskied terrain. The gender gap is also more pronounced in difficult terrain, where male riders seem to make up a more pronounced majority than elsewhere.

Two particularly noteworthy themes emerge from my interviews related to gender and skiing. As in my field notes, participants note that the ski hill feels like a relatively gender-neutral landscape. However, several participants also note that parts of the skiing landscape are
more male dominated. In particular, the backcountry is seen as more of a masculinised space. This refers to the notion that there are more men than women in the backcountry. It also refers to the ways in which backcountry expertise and leadership is exercised by men, more than by women. The following interview excerpt illustrates this:

I don’t know if it has to do with being a woman, or just who ... I am, or with the experience that I’ve had. In terms of my backcountry experience, most of the times that I’ve gone out as a group, the person who has been more in charge, or more knowledgeable, has been a man. So I don’t know if I was a man, perhaps I might have taken more of that role (Judith, Nelson).

Interview participants also note that men tend to be more comfortable with the technologies of mobility, like snowmobiles, used for backcountry access. Another woman from Nelson describes this as follows:

But in the backcountry I have really noticed it’s harder to find skilled women who have the avalanche knowledge, and safety ... They do exist, certainly. Like there’s definitely really knowledgeable women out there, but less so ... This area it seems, access in the backcountry is gotten through using snowmobiles, and they’re very heavy, awkward, unwieldy machines. And so, not that women don’t have the strength, but I think that there’s definitely an intimidation with machinery. Like how to deal with the machinery. So, a lot of the women that I have toured with tour off the hill. Or tour with their partners. So yeah, that’s definitely a factor, I think, for me. In terms of how it’s shaped my experience as a woman, I think it’s given me less confidence in the backcountry as a result of that (Roberta, Nelson).
From my interviews, the impression given is that the culture of backcountry skiing is more masculinised than the culture of ski resorts. However, a few participants talk about backcountry skiing in all-woman groups as a way to hone their skills in a supportive environment. To continue, Roberta states that:

Recently, I’ve met more girlfriends that are into backcountry skiing and seem to have more knowledge in the area. And we actually have been talking about going on some woman tours. Which is very appealing to me, because I think that it would be a lot of fun and, yeah, it would be a good environment to learn more and kind of feel comfortable in that setting (Roberta, Nelson).

The notion of the backcountry as a gendered landscape is particularly interesting if we recall the recurrent theme that backcountry skiing is also seen as a site for a more authentic form of interaction with nature. At least implicit in the notion of the gendered landscape is a sort of “chain of equivalencies” that connects masculinity-backcountry-risk-nature and positions it against the articulation of gender neutral-ski resort-safety-culture (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Related to the notion of the gendered landscape is the theme that men and women approach skiing differently. As Peg puts it, there is a particular “male style” of skiing:

PARTICIPANT: I ... grew up in many ways like a tomboy, or with guys. So, that helped me push my ability. And I think that influenced me in having perhaps more of a male style.

INTERVIEWER: So, how would you describe, say guy style versus girl style?

PARTICIPANT: Well, uh, I guess guy style is a little more aggressive (Peg, Nelson).
Reflecting notions that there is a male style or female style in skiing, gendered differences in ski gear design are also evident. To draw directly from my field notes:

Note the ski and snowboard designs for “girl” skis, with softer, more pastel colours, and the use of more cartoon-like graphics, as well as quite a few graphics using flowers in the design. It’s easy to get a sense of the way in which ski technologies are gendered through graphic design, with women’s gear being generally “softer” and “cuter” and men’s, evoking images of ruggedness, strength, aggression (Whitewater field notes, January 27, 2007).

Several interview participants talk about how men’s skiing is more aggressive, faster, individualistic and oriented towards risk-taking. A male skier from Vancouver describes the link between aggression and a “good” (i.e. male) skiing style:

I think most times men are stronger, or- I’d say, more aggressive. And to be a good rider, either one, you have to be aggressive. You can’t be timid and progressive [make progress]. And I’m always amazed when I do see a very aggressive girl riding with us (Jeffrey, Vancouver-Whistler).

By contrast women’s style is described as more relaxed, less aggressive and risk-taking, more supportive and group-oriented. As one woman describes it:

________________________________________________________________________

13 This is also documented by Thorpe (2004; 2005) in her work on snowboarding and gender. My own skis, Karhu Kodiaks, are black, grey and red, with a graphic of a grizzly bear in a threatening pose. While this is fairly typical of gear for men, this contrasts with the pastel colours and flowers that are more likely to turn up on snowboards and skis made for women.
I think women in general are probably more likely to say that they’re keen on the social aspects of skiing than the steep lines and the crazy pow. And I think that that’s probably true of most women I know. I ski ... with lots of women, and I think that lots of us are into skiing, but we’re also really into the social aspects of getting out and skiing with friends (Kendra, Vancouver-Whistler).

Several participants invoke biological difference to account for differences in style, linking style to gendered differences in strength or testosterone. Cultural accounts of difference are less visible. One of the few examples of a cultural account of difference comes from Sofia, who offers the insight that there is a culture of lower expectation for women in sport. This has affected her experience of skiing:

Because if I had started out male, I would have had higher expectations of myself. I was completely surprised when I became a good skier. But I was also not an athlete before I started. But I just fell in love with skiing and kept going. But women’s expectations of their own ability have been shaped by ... a low expectation in many different arenas for a long time (Sofia, Nelson).

Similarly, two different male respondents talk about norms around masculinity that are at work within skiing. As a Nelson participant puts it, “Like many men, I think I’m encouraged to look at fear and danger, in a physical sense, and push through it. And if I don’t, that I’m not maybe being, quote, manly” (Peter, Nelson). Here, Peter evokes the combination of skiing, masculinity and risk-taking that dominates magazine discourse about the sport. Similarly, a Whistler-based
skier describes how norms around masculinity and risk work to exclude women from participation:

Well in the old days, back in the day when I was a kid, [it] was like “tuck it or fuck it; turns are for girls,” right? And so that was a misogynistic statement that would degrade women, and I guess in some ways, would challenge women, and push them to overcome that stereotype. But in other ways, you know, it might be limiting (Tim, Vancouver-Whistler).

Echoing this participant’s notion that skiing’s construction of masculinity may also prompt women to “overcome that stereotype,” a few of the women I interviewed state that they prefer riding with men, because they are more skilled, or stronger than many women skiers they know. In a sense, they have become proficient in the sport to the point they have crossed over into male style.

In thinking about gender and skiing, it is noteworthy that women seem more willing to articulate how gender affects their skiing experience than men are. When asked about how gender shapes their skiing experience, several men were either unwilling or unable to answer. A large proportion of men see no meaningful difference between men and women where skiing is concerned. Similarly, women are often inclined to see differences between guys’ style and girls’ style as simple differences, without describing one as superior to the other. By contrast, when male respondents discuss gender differences, they tend to focus on biological factors that typically work in their favour -- such as physical strength – that link “good” skiing and masculinity. These differences are invoked to explain why women perform at a lower level. While biological accounts of gender and skiing appear frequently, cultural discourses of
gendered difference are almost invisible, invoked by only a few participants to account for distinctions between guys’ style and girls’ style of riding.

**Skiing and class.** I have described how gendered and racialized flows of power work through skiing, typically in rather mundane forms that may pass unnoticed and become taken for granted. Class is another factor that comes into play in an analysis of skiing and social power. Bourdieu (1984; 1990; 1991) has written about how sport functions as a form of cultural capital, creating cultural distinctions between social classes. For him, “the most distinctive sports, such as golf, riding, skiing, or tennis” are linked with class stratification. This is due to “economic obstacles” to participation, but is also due to the “hidden entry requirements, such as family tradition and early training, and also the obligatory clothing, bearing and techniques of sociability” that facilitate participation (Bourdieu 1991, 370). While Bourdieu writes within a European milieu, Veenstra (2007) makes a similar point about British Columbia, arguing that skiing is part of a “West Coast lifestyle” that is characteristic of the province’s professional classes. While class rarely emerges as a focal point in my interviews, several participants invoke the cost of ski gear as a barrier to participation in the sport.

Ski resort websites provide a valuable point of entry for discussing class and skiing in BC. There is a tension between two dominant discourses that often appear quite close together within these texts. There is the construction of skiing landscapes as classed places through a discourse that describes hotels, restaurants and resort real estate in terms like “rustic luxury,” “rustic elegance,” or “simple luxury.” This refers to architecture that relies heavily on “natural” building materials, such as wood and stone; but which also includes fireplaces and hot-tubs as luxury features. As the Big White website describes it:
When you walk into one of the 705, 3,030 sq. ft. homes, you’ll know the true meaning of luxury. It starts with heated slate floors in the entry and bathrooms. You’ll be inspired to relax at the massive main floor windows that let you soak up incredible ski slope or Monashee Mountains views. Then there’s the warm feeling of natural comfort you’ll get from the luster of distressed hardwood flooring set against a floor-to-ceiling fireplace built of intricately set stone complete with granite hearth (Big White Ski Resort 2006).

Ski resort websites typically devote large amounts of cyberspace to real estate sales. These are typically large, expensive homes, which are sold as “retreats” from everyday urban life for family vacations. This focus on second-home sales is itself indicative of the connections between skiing and economic capital. It also highlights the way that ski hill architecture is designed for tourist consumption, rather than permanent residence within a community. As such, the architectural aesthetic of “rustic luxury” might be seen as a three-dimensional “sketch” designed for the tourist gaze: Elias’ (1998) kitsch writ large in the built environment.

However, ski industry texts also work to construct skiing as an unclassed activity. For example, the Kicking Horse website tells readers:

With an ever increasing selection of accommodation and activity options at Kicking Horse Mountain Resort and in the surrounding communities of Golden, Kicking Horse Central’s local experts will customize a vacation package that matches any budget for style and taste (Kicking Horse Mountain Resort 2006).

The notion that Kicking Horse Resort vacations can match “any budget” frames skiing in class-neutral language. In this discourse, skiing landscapes are open and accessible to everyone. In a
similar vein, the Whistler Blackcomb website contains a large section focused on accommodation (Whistler Blackcomb 2006). This includes a photo of the village at dusk, looking quaint and peaceful. There is a sense of alpine tranquility, with warm yellow light pouring out of shop windows, Christmas lights on a few trees, the snow-covered ski mountain resting in the background, and a few people walking the cobble-stone street. In language that constructs Whistler as a place where class doesn’t matter, the reader is told that the resort offers everything from “luxurious mountain chalets” to “economical hotels.” Thus, Whistler works against the notion of the resort as a classed place. This leads to conflicting images of the resort: It is characterized by an aesthetic of rustic luxury, but it also welcomes visitors of every budget. This is typical of many resort websites, which claim to offer a range of accommodations that make the skiing experience universally available. The prolific advertisements for season passes, early bird deals and family packages – where economy is stressed over luxury – also work against the notion that skiing is a class-bound social activity.

A variation on the discourse of skiing as an unclassed form of interaction with mountain environments appears in the conflict over ski development at Jumbo Pass. On the Jumbo Resort website, the developers work to mobilize a discourse of skiing as an unclassed activity. Ski resort development is not about catering to the wealthy, they claim, but about the desublimation of wilderness. According to the resort developers, they want to make the glaciers and peaks of the Jumbo valley accessible to “average Canadians” who lack the financial capital (and athletic abilities) to afford heli-skiing or cat-skiing. In responding to environmentalist critiques, the resort argues:

JCCS [Jumbo Creek Conservation Society] claims the resort will be an “exclusive” playground for the wealthy. By contrast, the “fact” is that the ski resort is not exclusive,
but is open to everyone and will give “average” Canadians the only readily available access to a 3000 metre glacier in the country (Jumbo Glacier Resort 2006).

The website further disputes environmentalist claims that the resort will create a poor imitation of a European ski village, thereby destroying the wilderness values of the BC landscape. Instead, the resort website argues that it is “sad” that many Canadian children have been to the West Edmonton Mall, or Disneyland, but few have experienced the “3000 meter glaciers of our own backyard.” Here, environmentalist opposition to development is reframed as an elitist attempt to deny people a unique mountain experience. Referring to hikers and backcountry skiers, the resort website asks, “Should all of BC’s vast high alpine continue to remain the exclusive domain of a privileged few?” (Jumbo Glacier Resort 2006). In this discourse of class, it is environmentalists who are elitist. They wish to restrict access to mountain environments to those who can afford backcountry skiing via helicopters or snow-cats.

While this tension around class pervades ski industry discourse in general, the discourse of rustic luxury is more apparent in some resorts texts than in others. For example, Whistler Blackcomb, Kicking Horse and Big White emphasize rustic luxury more than Whitewater, Fernie, or Mt. Washington. Thus, there are variations in the degree to which specific skiing landscapes might be conceived as classed places. This is further illustrated in my field notes on Whistler and Whitewater.

At Whistler, the aesthetic of rustic luxury dominates the architecture of the village (see Figure 4.2). The village is essentially a space for tourism and consumerism. It is dominated by hotels, ski gear stores, restaurants, bars, and shops selling tourist paraphernalia. Conspicuous consumption, rather than providing the essentials of day-to-day life is the focus here. Whistler is also marked by the ubiquitous presence of relatively new ski gear, as well as skiers wearing new, fashionable clothing. Whenever skiers appear with older gear or clothing, they look out of place.
Returning to Barthes’ (2006) insights into fashion, clothing and gear are more than mundane technologies that facilitate interactions between skiers and nature. Clothing and gear also carry symbolic weight, pointing to the economic and cultural capital required for entrée into the sport. Returning to the connections between skiing and automobility, there is also a notable prevalence of luxury SUVs in Whistler parking lots and on the highway between Whistler and Vancouver. Finally, the Whistler landscape is marked by the invisibility of obvious signs of economic disparity or poverty. There are no panhandlers, drug dealers, drug addicts, or other abject figures of urban life in this simulacral mountain town.

Figure 4.2 Rustic luxury at Whistler Blackcomb.

By contrast with the classed landscape of Whistler, Whitewater has a more inclusive feeling. There are often school buses at the hill, carrying children from local public schools. Whereas Whistler skiers are characterized by newer “athletic mainstream” fashion, Whitewater has a greater presence of subcultural styles, associated with “hippie” and youth subcultures.
Skiers with older gear and wearing older ski clothing are also seen more often here. The Whitewater landscape is less explicitly focused on consumerism. It also has a feeling of being rustic, without necessarily creating an aesthetic of rustic luxury. If it is possible to decouple skiing from economic class, given the significant economic capital required to buy ski gear and lift passes, Whitewater is a relatively unclassed skiing landscape, at least in comparison to Whistler Blackcomb (see Figure 4.3).

![Figure 4.3. Rustic, but less luxurious, Whitewater.](image)

**4.6 Conclusions**

**Environmental ambiguity and the eco-politics of skiing.** In previous chapters, I discussed how the meaning of skiing landscapes is not fixed. There are different interpretations of the landscape, which occasionally come into conflict with each other. I also explored the ways that skiing brings together collectives of humans and non-humans. In this chapter, I have focused
explicitly on the politics and power dynamics that flow through skiing. Within skiing, power flows among people, as well as between humans and the other-than-human.

In ski texts and in the mass media, the ski industry attempts to position itself as environmentally sustainable. A recurrent discourse focuses on how the ski industry is engaged in something akin to a project of ecological modernization (Mol and Spaargaren 2000; Spaargaren and Mol 1992). The industry is striving to improve its environmental practices within existing economic and political social structures. Technological innovation is part of this, as is stewardship of wildlife habitat. Insofar as skiing is a form of outdoor recreation and nature tourism that is engaged in a project of ecological modernization, we might conclude that it is a form of “attractive development” (Luke 2002). Skiing does not transform the provincial landscape into material resources, as do forestry, mining, or fishing; which are the province’s main extractive industries. Instead, the ski industry constructs itself as a relatively benign use of the landscape, where people come for a non-consumptive experience of the mountain environment. This interpretation is often echoed in interviews with skiers, as well.

The ski industry is arguably a relatively more sustainable form of interaction with mountain environments than the extractive industries of forestry or mining. At the same time, the production of skiing as a consumable experience requires the deforestation of ski runs, energy use for transportation and snow-making, and the displacement of local wildlife populations; all of which involves significant “withdrawals” from -- and “additions” to -- other-than-human nature (Schnaiberg 1980; Schnaiberg and Gould 2000). While skiing might be thought of as system of “symbolic exchange,” which trades on experience and the value of the image, it also requires the continuous productive appropriation of non-human nature (Baudrillard 2001 [1976]). As such, an eco-politics of skiing raises questions about the sustainability of skiing in and of itself, not only relative to other uses of the landscape.
The ski industry also invokes its wildlife stewardship in constructing a discourse of pro-environmental land use. These strategies of animal monitoring and stewardship recall Foucauldian notions of biopower. As Foucault writes, this “biopower” is “a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them” (Foucault 1978, 136). Biopower is oriented towards the rational enumeration, surveillance and management of populations in the interests of health and productivity. Expanding this notion to the non-human world, Turner writes:

Ecological management is Foucault's normalization and disciplinary control projected from social institutions onto ecosystems. The Otherness of the natural world is consumed by current social policy, and the new doctors of nature go about their mission -- evangelists labouring once more amongst wild populations ... bringing the gift of modern order and our current version of salvation -- the preservation of biodiversity (Turner 1996, 118).

This mode of biopower, which is extended to the non-human world, can be understood as eco-power, wherein non-humans are defined as populations or resources that are managed for productivity.

The environmental management of animal populations links skiing with an environmental standpoint, while obscuring the ways in which associations between skiers and animals may have harmful effects upon significant others. The power relations between humans and non-humans that are associated with skiing are made invisible as the ski industry constructs itself as a responsible steward of skiing collectives. However, relations of eco-power are not only productive. Skiing can also exclude or harm members of populations through its everyday operations. Writing against the ski industry’s construction of itself, Clifford argues that the
expansion of modern ski resorts is linked with a decline in animal populations: an expulsion of animal actants from skiing collectives. He writes:

The road kills are an obvious red flag. More subtle is the nearly invisible erosion of biodiversity and ecological richness that accompanies ski-area growth. Both on the ski mountain and off, wildlife habitat is fragmented by roads, trails, and ski slopes . . . Sensitive species such as Canada lynx, marten, and many migrating neotropical songbirds, unable to tolerate increased human presence, flee not only the disturbed areas, but also much larger regions around them (Clifford 2002, 168).

This recalls Foucault’s discussion of the Middle Ages leper colony as the iconic form of a different model of power, based on categorization and “a rigorous division, a distancing, a rule of no contact between one individual (or group of individuals) and another” (Foucault 2003a, 43). As skiing collectives are constituted, some animals are incorporated through productive forms of biopower, while those who cannot live with skiers, hotels, lodges and chairlifts are pushed out. As in the case of the leper colony, animals that do not fit into our vision of the landscape are pushed into “into a vague, external world beyond the town’s walls, beyond the limits of the community” (43).

My analysis produces a complicated picture of skiing’s relationship to sustainability and its exercise of eco-power. Interviews with skiers provide further insight into textually-mediated constructions of skiing’s sustainability. In general, the skiers whom I interviewed demonstrate a high level of environmental concern and commitment to “environmentally friendly behaviour” (Tindall, Davies and Mauboulès 2003). A significant number of interviewees also have connections to the organized environmental movement, either through personal participation or
financial donations. My quota sampling approach and small sample size makes generalizing these findings to larger populations of skiers impossible. However, this is consistent with other research, which asserts that there is a convergence of values among skiers and environmentalists (Fry 1995; Rockland 1994; Weiss et al 1998).

When talking about skiing and the environment, many participants articulate a discourse of how skiing enables people to come into contact with and care about nature. This reflects Midol and Broyer’s observation that some skiers, among the “whiz sports” movement in France, use sport to create new relationships with nature by “dropping one’s defenses, feeling the harmony, becoming the snowfield, becoming one with the scenery” (Midol and Broyer 1995, 208). This is also consistent with Schrepfer’s (2005) historical account of how participation in recreational mountaineering provided contact with nature that was an integral for many who became key members of the early American environmental movement. It further echoes Wheaton’s account of the connections between surfing and environmental activism against water pollution, articulated by the group Surfers Against Sewage in the United Kingdom (Wheaton 2007b). Among several of my interview participants, there is an important connection between the experience of skiing and the construction of environmentalist subjectivities. So far as skiing helps participants form a more pro-environmental sense of themselves, we might think of it as an environmentalist “technology of the self” (Foucault 2005; Markula and Pringle 2006; Thorpe 2008).

However, the majority of my interview participants also articulate a self-reflexive environmental critique of their sport, which often echoes environmentalist concerns with impacts on wildlife. Many of these skiers give voice to an ambiguity at the heart of the eco-politics of skiing: it is a meaningful way of interacting with nature, but it also has negative environmental impacts. Through participants’ talk about sport and the environment, narratives of skiing as a form of attractive development – or ecological modernization -- become complicated. Many of
the skiers I interviewed are not uncritical participants in their sport. Rather, they demonstrate an awareness of the contradictions inherent in skiing’s relations with nature. Regardless of whether or not skiing is more sustainable than extractive uses of mountain environments, the ski industry’s exercise of eco-power is not only productive, but also has harmful ecological effects.

**Skiing and the informatics of domination.** As well as being an area of eco-politics, skiing is also the site of more obviously social power relations, which Haraway terms the informatics of domination (Gane and Haraway 2006; Haraway 1991). Class, gender and ethnicity are the most visible manifestations of this, though these intersecting dimensions of power are not exhaustive. Earlier, I characterized skiing as a cyborg activity. For Haraway, the cyborg is not only a figure expressing blurred boundaries between humans, technologies and nature. Cyborg subjectivities are also constituted by discourses of gender, class, race, sexuality, age, and so on. In skiing texts, the archetypal, normalized skier is White, male, heterosexual, with sufficient economic capital to participate in the sport and to travel in search of new skiing experiences.

Skiing discourse reproduces a sort of hegemonic Whiteness that marginalizes skiers who are not White and racializes skiing landscapes (Coleman 2004; MacCannell 1992). In social movement and media texts, this hegemonic Whiteness is occasionally disrupted by First Nations protest. However, this protest is often framed in terms of social disorder. Ski texts also produce images of a particular form of hegemonic masculinity, which marginalizes women’s experience and participation (Connell 2005; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In ski discourse, the mountainous sublime is typically inhabited by young, fit, risk-seeking male bodies. By contrast, when gender comes up in interviews, skiers articulate differences between guys’ style and girls’ style as ways of interacting with nature through skiing. In terms of class, there is a notable tension between two discourses. The aesthetic of “rustic luxury” is invoked on ski resort websites and defines the architecture of Whistler. This co-exists with a discourse of skiing as an
unclassed activity, which allows “anyone” to experience the mountain environment. This construction of skiing renders invisible the economic barriers to participation. Skiing requires a steady and significant output of economic capital for equipment, lift tickets and gas. Thus, while skiing may be part of the British Columbian West Coast lifestyle, this is not a lifestyle that is universally available.

Going beyond these three domains of social power, skiing texts are also marked by normalized heterosexuality. The rainbow flags marking a Gay Pride ski week at Whistler were the only signs that disrupted this patterned silence throughout my textual archives, field notes and interviews. Similarly, skiing texts focus on the young, fit body. Skiers are typically in their twenties and thirties. Children are less visible in skiing texts. At the same time, while an occasional older skier may be profiled as a “pioneer,” senior skiers exist at the margins of ski discourse. This textual construction of skiing does not match my field notes, which consistently document a broader age range of skiers. Similarly, interview participants often talk about their own skiing experiences as children, as well as current experiences teaching their own children to ski.

Skiing texts are marked by hegemonic Whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality, as well as an aesthetic of rustic luxury. These dominant discourses produce skiing as a gendered, racialized and classed social practice. Whether or not skiing is an environmentally sustainable form of attractive development, it is a site for flows of power. Female skiers, non-White skiers, gay and lesbian skiers, younger and older skiers, as well as those who cannot afford entrée to the

14 While this was the only explicit sign of the disruption of normalized heterosexuality, the fact that Whistler celebrates a Gay Pride ski week at all may be viewed as a sign that the community of Whistler are more socially progressive than many towns of a similar size in British Columbia, where the declaration of Gay and Lesbian Pride days often remain contentious. Alternately, given that many gay male skiers might feel comfortable within skiing’s culture of normalized Whiteness, masculinity and rustic luxury, this also might be seen as a clever marketing strategy on the part of Interwest.
sport, are marginalized from skiing’s dominant discourses. This system of discourses constitutes the informatics of domination that characterize skiing’s textually-mediated social reality.
CHAPTER V: Discussion: Toward a Political Ecology of Skiing

I am not saying that skiing is necessarily a valid goal. But living is. Living in a particular place in a real relationship with the earth and the sky and the living beings around you ... Community is sharing a particular physical place, an environment, not only with other people but the other beings of the place and fully realizing that the needs of all the beings of that place affect how you live your life (LaChapelle 1993, 16).

Dolores LaChapelle’s *Deep Powder Snow* connects skiing with deep ecology, an environmental philosophy of “deep” identification with and sympathy for the other-than-human world. For her, skiing is a way of coming to know and care for nature because it connects us to a community of humans and non-humans. Through this research project, I have provided a critical sociological account of the relationship between skiing, non-human nature and eco-politics in British Columbia. While the research sites are essentially local, this account shows how skiing in BC intersects with broader questions about environmental sustainability, social justice, (partially) globalized flows of tourism and migration, global climate change and economic transition. Skiing provides a unique entry point into the ways that nature tourism and outdoor recreation connect humans and non-humans in a meaningful and complex way.

The title of this dissertation is *Making Meaning out of Mountains*. Through this research, I have shown that the meaning of mountains is not innate in nature, not universal, not fixed. The meaning of mountains is flexible and is articulated by different social groups: the ski industry, skiers, First Nations, environmentalists and the mass media. While the meaning of mountains is constructed, it is not only *socially* constructed. It is co-constructed by humans, chairlifts, cars, explosives, bears, whiskey jacks, snow, trees, wind and a variety of other actants. The meaning of mountains is also intertwined with capillary flows of power relating to gender, ethnicity, class,
sexuality and age. Similarly, the meaning of mountains may be contested: mountains and their inhabitants are brought into political struggles over the landscape. Mountains are meaningful for environmental sociology, as a site for recreational forms of human interaction with the other-than-human. They are likewise meaningful for sociology of sport, where they are more than a scenic backdrop to purely “social” action. In the final chapter, I bring together several of my main findings, locate the project within the broader areas of environmental sociology and the sociology of sport, and describe several potential avenues for further research. I conclude by describing some of the implications of this research for an ongoing eco-politics of skiing.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The central claim of this research is that there is an environmental ambiguity at the centre of skiing. There is a tension between interpretations of skiing as an environmentally-sustainable practice and notions of skiing as an environmental and social problem. Skiing might be interpreted as part of a broader economic shift away from “extractive development,” or the “treadmill of production,” wherein the environment is valued for the raw materials it provides for capitalist production (Luke 2002; Schnaiberg and Gould 2000). From this perspective, it is part of a growing “attractive economy,” or “experience economy,” where the experience of being in nature is valued for its own sake and becomes the object of tourist travel (Luke 2002; Thrift 2001). Like other forms of outdoor recreation and nature tourism, skiing is based on the symbolic consumption of nature. Skiing is understood by many of its participants as a way of entering into a meaningful relationship with nature. In a Foucauldian sense, skiing may serve as a means of constructing environmentalist subjectivities. Though skiing, participants may gain insight into human-nature relations and incorporate environmental values into their sense of self.
It can work as an ecological “technology of the self” (Foucault 2005; Markula and Pringle 2006; Thorpe 2008).

However, interpretations of skiing as only a non-consumptive, symbolic use of non-human nature are too simple. Skiing depends on deforestation for ski runs; water for snow-making; energy to run chairlifts, snowmobiles and helicopters. It also produces resort waste, soil and water pollution, noise pollution and permanent infrastructure that displaces animals. Interview participants repeatedly articulated self-reflexive environmental critiques of their sport. They demonstrated an awareness of the environmental ambiguity at the heart of skiing. Social movement groups further disrupt pro-environmental discourses of skiing by challenging the sport’s ecological and social legitimacy. In these instances, skiing is brought into “political ecology,” where the non-humans enter the realm of politics as actants with claims to rights (Escobar 1999; Latour 2004).

I have presented the research results in three main chapters. The first focused on discursively mediated practices of skiing and its landscapes. The second focused on the connections between embodied skiers, technologies, animals and non-human nature. The third focused on the politics and power flows embodied in skiing. Rather than seeing these as separate, I would rather view them through the metaphor of a triptych: a three-panel painting (see Figure 5.1). Though the panels are separated by their own picture frames, they are often joined by a set of hinges. The three panels also form a single picture, with lines and colours bleeding from one panel to the others. The panels are physically distinct and can be viewed separately. However, the three pictures make more sense when viewed in relationship with each other. Here, I will take a step back and describe the whole picture.
Skiing landscapes do not have an innate and immutable meaning. Rather, their meaning is actively produced through discourse. Constructions of the skiing landscape are variable and often contested. A dominant discourse in ski magazines and web sites constructs the skiing landscape as a mountainous sublime of deep powder snow and blue skies (Hansen 1991; Lyotard 1984 [1979]; Michael 2000a; Schrepfer 2005). Elsewhere in skiing texts, the landscapes appears as a semi-wild natureculture, where chairlifts are a permanent fixture alongside images of bears and other animals, which are invoked as symbols of nature. Throughout skiing’s system of discourses the landscape is linked with athletic, risk-taking masculinity, hegemonic Whiteness, and an aesthetic of rustic luxury. Thus, discursive constructions of the landscape are connected to flows of gendered, racialized and class-based social power.

The skiing landscape is also constructed for a tourist gaze. The mountain environments of British Columbia are positioned as nodal points in global networks of tourist travel (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen 2006; Urry 2002). Whistler Blackcomb, in particular, is an important node in this
network. However, this “global” network is partially developed and incomplete. BC ski resorts are linked through tourism to the rest of Canada, the United States, Europe, Japan and Oceania. However, there are few signs of participants from Africa, Central or South America, or much of Asia within this partially global network of tourism and outdoor recreation. This illustrates Bauman’s (2005) point that participation in global mobility, which characterizes liquid modernity, is not equally available to everyone.

A focus on the discursive construction of landscapes risks an overly symbolic treatment of skiing. Building on a Foucauldian interest in the discourses that circulates through skiing, I also draw on Latour (1993; 2004; 2005) and Haraway (1991; 2003; 2004 [1992]) to explore skiing as a cyborg social practice that brings humans and non-humans together within unique collectives. The skier is a cyborg subject: the skier-as-such only exists as a composite human-skis-bindings-boots-poles-clothing-goggles. This cyborg skier, a hybrid of human actor and “mundane technologies,” is what enters into mountain environments (Michael 2000a).

Skiing collectives also incorporate a broad array of embodied non-humans: mountains, snow, wind, sunshine, rain, trees and animals. Through my analysis, I have illustrated how other-than-human nature is not only a background for social action. It is also not only an object for a skier-tourist gaze. It may sometimes be treated as such by skiers. However, the “nature” of skiing is constituted by many actants, which shape skiers’ interactions with mountain environments. Skiers go into the forests to ski because they like the feeling of interacting with trees. They may stop to feed whiskey jacks, watch ravens, or may change route to avoid a bear. Fresh snow makes a good day and draws more people to the mountains, while rain is a reason to stay home. Through skiing, nature “pushes back” on the cyborg skier body (Franklin 2003; Thrift 2001). Many skiers talk about the pleasure they get from being exhausted at the end of the day. Skiing bodies are also stiff and sore the morning after going into the mountains. In extreme cases, snow is an unruly actant and skiers die in avalanches. Here, Murphy’s (2004) metaphor of
the “dance between human actors and non-human actants” is more apt than Macnaghten and Urry’s (1998) notion that our interactions with landscape are constituted through the hegemony of our visual senses.

Machines are also routinely recruited into skiing collectives. Besides the mundane technologies of ski gear and specialized outdoor clothing, technologies of mobility -- such as chairlifts, snowmobiles, helicopters and snow-cats -- enable skiers to access terrain. Snow-cats are used to groom runs; explosives are used to control avalanche risk; snow making is used to compensate for deficiencies in the weather. Machines are also recruited by ski resorts to actively construct the skiing landscape. Skiing is also connected to broader systems of automobility and aeromobility, which facilitate (partially) global flows of tourist travel (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2003; Urry 2004). By being attentive to the machines that populate skiing collectives, we further understand how the textually-produced landscape of skiing – the uninhabited mountainous sublime -- blackboxes how skiing is technologically mediated throughout (Latour 1999). Discourses of skiing also tend to ignore how connections between skiers and technologies may be ecologically problematic. The connection between skiing, automobility and global climate change comes to mind; as does the connection between mechanized backcountry access and the disruption of endangered wildlife populations.

Barthes (1973) describes “mythology” as a particular relationship between signifier, signified and sign, which the sign is naturalized by removing it from its historical and political context. Myth distorts meaning, but does not erase meaning. In the ski industry’s discursive construction of itself, there is a mythology that links skiing, nature, and environmentalism. The ski landscape is often depicted as a sublime mountain wilderness. Animals are also recruited into skiing discourse as symbols of wildness. Through animal habitat management, recycling, educational signs about climate change, or use of “alternative” energy, skiing assumes an environmentalist posture. Here, the ski industry engages in a project of “ecological
modernisation” (Mol and Spaargaren 2000; Spaargaren and Mol 1992). Alternately, the power relations between ski resorts and animal members of skiing collectives may be interpreted as a form of biopower – a productive power oriented towards monitoring populations in order to “make [them] live” (Foucault 1978; Foucault 2003b). The pro-environmental discourse of skiing is often taken up by interview participants, who see their sport as a valuable way of interacting with nature, and coming to care for mountain environments.

Without denying that there is value in attempts by the ski industry to improve its environmental practices, the discourse of skiing as an environmentalist practice is a myth – in Barthes’ sense -- that removes skiing from politics and history. This mythology is occasionally disrupted by environmental groups, who recruit animals into discourses about how skiing harms and displaces significant others. If Jumbo Glacier Resort is allowed to develop, or if heli-skiing tenures are expanded, grizzly bears and mountain caribou will be displaced from their own pre-existing collectives. In this discourse, skiing collectives are not “natural” places. Rather, skiing is accused of transforming wilderness landscapes into cultural places where tourism and human recreation dominate at the expense of the environment.

The environmentalist critique of skiing appears on environmentalist websites, as well as in mass media texts. In media accounts of skiing, environmentalists gain entrée as speakers and are effectively able to articulate their message. Environmental groups occupy an important position within the “hierarchy of credibility” of news sources which work to define skiing’s relationship with the environment (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989). Furthermore, media accounts of environmentalist discourse are not significantly different from environmentalist-produced texts. This contrasts with research on forestry conflicts in British Columbia, where environmentalist discourse is often simplified to fit media narratives of loggers versus environmentalists (Doyle, Elliott and Tindall 1997; Stoddart 2005).
One of the most surprising findings to emerge from my interviews is that this critical discourse of skiing is articulated by participants more often than the ski industry’s own pro-environmental discourse. Here, the ambiguity at the heart of skiing – the tension between these dominant discourses – is brought forward quite forcibly. While several participants appreciate how their sport brings them into mountain environments, most are also able to articulate a self-reflexive critique of the sport. Interview participants repeatedly talk about the energy used to power lifts. They also describe the displacement of wildlife through ski hill development and mechanized backcountry access. They express scepticism about commitments to “sustainability” at the 2010 Olympics, which is being hosted by Vancouver and Whistler. For many, the decision to upgrade the Sea to Sky Highway, rather than revitalize rail service along the Vancouver-to-Whistler corridor, is a lost opportunity that supports a sceptical view of the ski industry.

Similarly, while the connections between skiing, automobility and climate change are marginalized within ski industry discourse, they do not pass unnoticed by several of the skiers I interviewed.

My interviews with skiers provide insight into the ways that textually-mediated skiing discourse may be negotiated by members of its intended audiences. Most of these skiers do not simply reproduce ski industry discourse, as a dominant ideology approach might have it. Instead, they evoke ski industry and social movement discourse, as well as drawing on their own embodied experience of skiing landscapes. Participants’ engagement with skiing media and the mass media often seems to be characterized by “negotiated” reading of dominant texts, images and discourses (Hall 1980; Kitzinger 1999; G. Philo 1999; Schroder 2000).

The apolitical mythology of skiing is also disrupted by First Nations groups. Though First Nations’ presence is typically rendered invisible in the discourses of skiing, First Nations protesters occasionally emerge as a disruptive force within skiing collectives. In media texts and through the internet, members of the Secwepemc and St’at’imc Nations argue that skiing
landscapes are illegitimate transformations of First Nations places that have not been ceded by treaty. At Melvin Creek, Cayoosh Creek and Sun Peaks, the creation and expansion of skiing collectives is made political by First Nations, who claim their own power to define the meaning of the BC landscape. Viewed historically, First Nations discourse illustrates how skiing may be considered part of larger processes where nature tourism has been used as a way of asserting the colonial right to travel freely through -- and assert ownership over -- colonized territories (Dawson 2004; Jasen 1995; Mawani 2005).

Both environmentalists and First Nations protesters use the media to get their message out to the public. In media texts, First Nations protest is more often seen as unruly and socially disruptive than environmental protest. First Nations protest often takes more radical forms -- such as road blockades – and is criminalized more often than environmental protest. Furthermore, while environmental movement discourse is often taken up and articulated by skiers, this is not as clearly the case with First Nations discourse. In my interviews, questions about the Sun Peaks conflict yielded little that hung together coherently. While many skiers articulated abstract support for First Nations sovereignty, several others resisted getting into such a complex issue through the focal point of a single conflict over ski development. Others see First Nations protest as an illegitimate disruption. These participants view the conflict over Sun Peaks less as a social justice issue than a failure of the protesters to opt in to much-needed economic development. While it is difficult to say how much influence media constructions of environmental and First Nations protest informs skiers’ opinions, the parallels between media accounts and skiers’ talk are noteworthy.

The mythology produced by ski industry discourse is also marked by the invisibility of more obviously “social” flows of power. However, skiing provides an example of how power flows in the capillaries of society, outside the focal points of the state and economic institutions (Foucault 1978; Foucault 2000 [1994]a; Foucault 2003b). Here, power does not function through
ideology. Instead, skiing discourse produces a sort of hegemonic common sense. Following Gramsci (1971) and Williams (1977), to speak of hegemony in this way is to highlight something that is taken for granted, which goes unnoticed in the everyday operation of social life. Multiple forms of power flow through skiing based on gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and age. These intersecting flows of power, which circulate through discourse, constitute skiing’s “informatics of domination” (Gane and Haraway 2006; Haraway 1991). Skiing discourse constructs the mountainous sublime as a masculinised and racialized landscape. In ski texts, the cyborg skier is predominantly White, male, heterosexual and young. He has the economic capital necessary to afford gear, gain entrée to spaces of rustic luxury, and participate in global tourist networks.

The use of relatively small purposive samples for my interviews, as well as the inherently local nature of my field observation, limits my ability to generalize from these specific findings either to broader populations of skiers, or to other skiing regions. However, much of the present analysis of the interplay of discourse, embodied interaction between skiers and non-human nature, and flows of power is relevant to nature tourism and outdoor recreation in general. Furthermore, several of my findings have theoretically generalizable implications for environmental sociology and the sociology of sport.

5.2 Skiing, Sport and Environmental Sociology

In their agenda-setting piece for environmental sociology, Dunlap and Catton define three core areas for the subdiscipline: environmental values and environmental movements, natural resource use and conflicts, and outdoor recreation (Dunlap and Catton 1979). Over the past few decades, environmental sociologists have expended far more energy examining the first two areas, while leaving outdoor recreation at the margins. At the same time, sport sociologists have examined outdoor sports like snowboarding, windsurfing and skateboarding (Rinehart and Sydnor 2003; Wheaton 2004). However, analysis tends to focus on how sport is linked to gender,
racialization and class. The other-than-human is typically blackboxed as sport is treated as an essentially social activity.\(^{15}\) While work on the cyborg, or post-human, athlete brings technology into the picture, non-human nature falls away as part of the background. Through looking at skiing in BC, I have addressed this double lacuna. I have foregrounded the relevance of outdoor recreation and nature tourism as forms of human-environment interaction. At the same time, I have described the importance of other-than-human nature as an essential part of outdoor sport.

**Sociology of sport and the meaning of mountains.** Several thematics from the sociology of sport have informed this research. Sport sociology has taken up Foucault to look at how discourse is related to the construction of athletic bodies and flows of power through sport (Andrews 1993; Markula and Pringle 2006; Rail and Harvey 1995; Thorpe 2008). Sporting practices can be understood as Foucauldian technologies of the self, wherein exercise not only improves the body, but actively transforms our subjectivities. In the present research, I described how skiing may create an environmentalist subjectivity as it brings skiers into contact with mountainous nature. This echoes Schrepfer (2005) and Wheaton’s (2007b) accounts of connections between outdoor recreation and environmental awareness that are forged through mountaineering and surfing, respectively.

The body has also been taken up in sport sociology through notions of the cyborg body, or the post-human body (Atkinson and Wilson 2002; Butryn and Masucci 2003). Here, the body is considered in terms of its connections to technologies that mediate participation in sport. I have taken up this thematic in my description of cyborg skiers as unique hybrids of humans-boots-bindings-skis-poles-clothing that interact with mountain environments through the further

\(^{15}\) Wheaton’s (2007b) analysis of surfing and environmental activism in the United Kingdom provides an interesting counter-example. However, while she focuses on environmental politics, there is little sense of how the embodied presence of non-human nature (the ocean, the beach) shapes surfers’ interpretations of their sport, their changing environmental awareness, or their decisions to become involved in environmental activism.
technological mediations of cars, chairlifts, snowmobiles and helicopters. As such, this
research lends support to the notion that we may be entering a “post-human era in sport”
embodied social action (in conjunction with discourses and technologies) is less visible in
environmental sociology. This illuminates a key area where cross-pollination of these sub-
disciplines could be productive.

Sport sociology is also attuned to the ways in which power relations based on gender,
class and ethnicity flow through sport, often in capillary ways. Power often works through
cultural representation and symbolic violence, where hegemonies of normalized masculinity, or
normalized Whiteness, are produced, circulated and challenged (Kay and Laberge 2003; Thorpe
2005; Thorpe 2006b). Like Haraway’s notion of the “informatics of domination,” this model of
power is useful for understanding how skiers experience their sport. It illustrates how
recreational interactions with nature are inflected by gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality.

Sport can be the basis for subcultural identity formation and boundary-work. Recently,
the notion of subculture has been reconsidered within the sociology of sport (Atkinson and
Wilson 2002; Donnelly 2006; Wheaton 2007a). Still, several authors have emphasized the way
that snowboarding is a distinct subculture that positions itself against the mainstream represented
by skiing. Snowboarding is typically described as a youth subculture that is antagonistic towards
skiing (Edensor and Richards 2007; Heino 2000; Humphreys 1997; Vaske, Dyar and Timmons
2004). Here, snowboarding is categorized with other subcultural sports: surfing and
skateboarding. It is also linked with subcultural musical styles: grunge, hip hop and punk. In this
account snowboarders do boundary work that creates distance between their subculture and
mainstream skiing culture. Admittedly, the issue of boundary-work among different groups of
snow-riders was not a central research focus. Still, my interviews, field notes and textual analysis
does not provide strong evidence of subcultural boundary-work among different groups of skiers.
Instead, several skiers and snowboarders talk about participating in both sports (depending on weather, terrain, or who they riding with), and moving from one mode of snow-riding to another.

While socially meaningful differences may well exist between alpine skiers, snowboarders and telemarkers (as other research demonstrates), I would ask: are these differences becoming more fluid? Certainly, there are differences in skiing and snowboarding fashion. Judging by my field notes, however, these differences may be related to age as much as they are to subcultural style. For example, Donnelly (2006) argues that much of the snowboarding subculture can be read as an expression of generational angst between youth (snowboarders) and their own parents (skiers), rather than a subaltern subculture that stands truly outside the mainstream. Elsewhere, Fry (2006) argues that there is a certain irony in descriptions of subcultural boundary-work between the groups. Instead, he focuses on the continuity between snowboarding subculture and historic skiing subcultures. For him, snowboarders are re-inventing the spirit of rebellious freedom that has periodically characterized skiing, but which has been lost in the sport’s institutionalization.

As snowboarding is further integrated into capitalist networks of production and consumption that are well-established within skiing, adherence to the notion of an oppositional snowboarding subculture may become less tenable. Snowboarding -- like “extreme” sports in general – is becoming fully incorporated into mainstream systems of capitalist production and distribution. It has also been fully integrated into mass media imagery, including its use in television spectacles and unrelated advertising (Donnelly 2006). Ironically, the search for subcultural authenticity within snowboarding echoes lamentations for a historical golden age of authenticity that surface in the literature on skiing (Allen 1993; Clifford 2002; Coleman 2004; Rothman 1998). The distinction between backcountry skiing and ski resort skiing is a more important boundary that emerges from the present research. Here, backcountry skiing is often
seen as more environmentally authentic than resort skiing, even where both are practiced by the same participants. Another important distinction that emerges from my analysis is the distinction between guys’ style and girls’ style, as gendered means of interacting with mountain environments.

While these concepts from the sociology of sport provide valuable tools for environmental sociology, non-human nature is often missing from sport sociologists’ accounts of outdoor recreation. I have emphasized that the cyborg skier is located within a collective of humans and non-humans. Any subjectivity that is formed through skiing takes shape within these networks. If hegemonic masculinity or Whiteness is produced through sport, this is intertwined with the construction of recreational landscapes. The flows of power through sport are not only gendered and racialized; they also include flows of power between humans and other-than-human nature. Perhaps the greatest contribution this research can make to the sociology of sport is to articulate a call to take the other-than-human seriously as an integral part of outdoor recreation.

**Environmental sociology and the meaning of mountains.** Beyond bringing environmental sociology and the sociology of sport into dialogue with each other, this research makes several further contributions. Within the specific context of British Columbia, environmental sociology has focused on conflicts over resource use (forestry and fisheries) and environmental movement participation (Doyle, Elliott and Tindall 1997; Marchak 1983; Schreiber, Matthews and Elliott 2003; Tindall 2002). However, tourism is becoming an increasingly important part of the provincial economy. This is accompanied by political rhetoric about how tourism is a key component of economic diversification. In this context, outdoor recreation and nature tourism are often seen as an environmentally sustainable use of the provincial landscape. Writing in the context of Clayoquot Sound, where eco-tourism is linked
with environmental conflict over logging practices, both Timothy Luke and Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands have begun to cast a more critical gaze on the attractive economy (Luke 2002; Sandilands 2002). Recently, Mortimer-Sandilands has also turned her attention to Canadian National Parks as a site for the commodification of nature for tourist consumption (Mortimer-Sandilands 2007; Sandilands 2004). The present research is a further contribution to a sociological analysis of the attractive economy. As such, it adds to our limited substantive knowledge in this area. It also points to the environmental ambiguities that can exist at the heart of apparently benign forms of human-nature interaction.

This research also speaks to a longstanding theoretical debate in environmental sociology: that between environmental realism and environmental constructionism (Burningham and Cooper 1999; Buttel 1996; Lidskog 2001). To simplify, environmental realism assumes the existence of a physical environment outside the social realm, which can be accurately known through environmental science. By contrast, environmental constructionism emphasizes the ways in which environmental knowledge is always mediated by systems of discourse. There is no a priori nature that we can know without discursive mediation.

By drawing on the work of Latour and Haraway, I have emphasized the co-construction of nature and society through a complex interplay of discourse and embodied action. This involves humans, as well technologies, plants, rocks, animals and weather. As Michael aptly describes this version of constructionism, “these ‘natures’ are never ‘wholly’ constructed, they are never ‘subaltern’ by virtue of their constructedness -- they too contribute to the processes of construction (of other natures, technologies and socials)” (Michael 2000a, 142). The present research answers Murphy’s call for a “constructionist realist perspective,” wherein the actors that constitute nature and society are not only human (Murphy 2004). This perspective attempts to avoid an overly discursive conception of the non-human world, which risks stripping the other-than-human of any agency at all. At the same time, it is useful for avoiding reified divisions
between “society” and “nature” embedded in earlier, simpler forms of environmental realism. This perspective may also be extended to sociology of sport as a way of describing how sport is constituted by discourse, embodied humans, technologies and non-human nature.

Latour and Haraway’s work helps us map the networks of actants that constitute skiing as a social-environmental practice. Among these actants are animals, which are often invisible in environmental sociology’s “imagining of nature” (Tovey 2003). Elsewhere, research on animals and society tends to focus on relations with domestic animals (food animals, companion animals), or on animal rights movements. However, the animal geographies literature emphasizes that animals are used to construct the meaning of particular places. The social meanings of “wild” animals like wolves or foxes are connected with political conflicts over landscapes in rural Norway, the American Adirondack mountains, northern Canada, and the UK (Anahita and Mix 2006; Brownlow 2000; Loo 2006; Skogen and Krange 2003; Woods 2000).

While animals are not central to skiing as a social practice, they do circulate at its margins. Bears, eagles, deer and wolves enter into the discursive economy of skiing as symbols of wilderness. Skiers also encounter embodied animals while skiing: grey jays, whiskey jacks, ravens, bears, deer, coyotes, porcupines and bobcats. Thus, animals are present in skiing as discursive symbols (Arluke and Sanders 1996; Baker 2001). They are also present as embodied actants, or “significant others” to use Haraway’s (2003) phrase. This supports Tovey’s assertion that animals should be taken seriously within environmental sociology’s imagining of nature. Likewise, accounting for the presence of animals would be a step towards taking non-human nature seriously in research on outdoor sport. Elsewhere, Franklin (1999) provides a valuable account of the connections forged between humans and animals through sports like angling and hunting. Similarly Russell (1995) and Bulbeck (2005) each describe how encounters with embodied animals through ecotourism, such as orangutans or dolphins, work as forms of environmental education.
Skiing, social movements and the media. I have also looked at the ways in which social movements enter into skiing, often as a disruptive force. Wilson (1998) characterizes the British Columbia environmental movement as being excessively concerned with wilderness preservation. Wilderness discourses are often invoked by environmental groups to challenge the ski industry’s expansion within the BC landscape. As both Cronon (1995) and Luke (1997) argue, notions of “wilderness” may be a counter-productive construct for the environmental movement. It reinforces dichotomies between the human and the non-human, or between the civilized and the natural. It diverts us from questions of how to live within nature; rather than how to parcel out parts of nature for protection while the normal, unsustainable operation of capitalism continues outside preserved areas. As Cronon notes, “Idealizing a distant wilderness too often means not idealizing the environment in which we actually live, the landscape that for better or worse we call home” (Cronon 1995, 85).

First Nations groups also enter into skiing as important social movement actors. Skiing is problematized as an infringement on unceded First Nations land. Here, environmentalism and social justice are connected through questions about the distribution of environmental goods: the question of who controls which parts of the provincial landscape. I believe this directs our attention to a broader conception of environmental justice than the established model. The environmental justice perspective, which emerged through American-based research, focuses on the misdistribution of environmental harms, such as exposure to toxic waste (Bullard 1994; Capek 1993). This work points out that environmental degradation and risk are not “democratic,” as Beck (1992) asserts. While this conception of environmental justice is certainly important, a different model may be called for in British Columbia, where political conflict often focuses on the equitable distribution of environmental “goods,” as well as “bads” (also see Stoddart 2007).
Finally, the mass media are key sites for the construction of environmental knowledge. They are also sites where environmental problems are transformed into large-scale political issues (Doyle, Elliott and Tindall 1997; Hannigan 1995; Mazur 1998). Through the media, environmental groups engage industry and the state. Media coverage also allows them to reach potential supporters and raise public awareness. Through our own interactions with the media, as audience members, we form opinions about environmental conflicts that are beyond our everyday experience. Research in this area has not documented the systematic exclusion of environmental groups from the media. Rather, environmentalists are often important news sources; they play an active role in constructing our knowledge of environmental problems. Thus, media coverage of environmental issues should not be considered ideological in a crude sense. Rather, if hegemony is at work, it functions by translating complex conflicts and issues into simple dichotomies (loggers versus greens); and by focusing on the singular and the dramatic at the expense of covering persistent, long term environmental problems (Doyle, Elliott and Tindall 1997; Hackett et al 2000; Stoddart 2005). In contrast with research on natural resource conflict, it is noteworthy that environmentalist discourse about skiing enters media texts with relatively little simplification or distortion. Environmental discourse in media texts accurately reflects environmentalists’ own internet communication. This raises the question of why this is so. I would speculate that this might have something to do with the relative power of resource industries (such as forestry) in contrast with the ski industry. In comparison with taking on the BC forest industry, environmental groups that challenge ski developers may be playing on a more level playing field.

**Methodological contributions.** I adopted a multi-method qualitative approach for this research, using a combination of text-based discourse analysis, interviewing, and unobtrusive field research. While there is nothing particularly novel about any of these individual
approaches, there are a few brief methodological points worth making. First, by going beyond discourse analysis to include interviews, I was able to touch on some of the ways that skiers engage with skiing-related media. This led to observations that ski industry discourses are not taken up uncritically by skiers, but are negotiated and sometimes contested. While not a true example of audience research, this multiple-method approach addresses a key limitation of purely textual forms of analysis, wherein audience interpretation is often inferred by the researcher (Carragee and Roefs 2004; Currie 1997; Smith 1999).

Second, I drew on autoethnography and visual sociology within the field research process, both of which are relatively new methodologies (Arluke and Sanders 1996; Ferrell 2006; Harper 1998; Mason 2002; Prosser and Schwartz 1998; Laurel Richardson 2000). Part of my field note-taking included tracking my own experiences and feelings as a skier-researcher. I also took photos in the field that could serve as reference points for writing up full notes, but which were also resources for data analysis in their own right. The autoethnographic approach was useful as a tool for building self-reflexivity into the research design. However, beyond using it in this way, I did not find autoethnography particularly useful as a data source in itself. By contrast, the process of taking and analyzing photos was productive throughout the project (including their use in presenting the research results). Visual sociology seems to hold great promise, in particular for research that takes place seriously, as advocated by Gieryn (2000).

Finally, multiple research methods were used a means for compensating for the blind spots that are created by relying on any single approach. In After Method: Mess in Social Science Research, Law (2004a) argues for methodological eclecticism and flexibility, rather than parochialism. While I have stayed within the boundaries of qualitative research (with the exception of brushing up against network analysis), this multiple-method approach was useful for capturing more of the complexity of human interactions with the other-than-human through skiing. It provided a means of “crystallization,” wherein a research area is approached from
several different angles (Laurel Richardson 2000). Through this methodological framework, I
strived to embrace the complexity of human-technology-nature networks within skiing, rather
than simplifying these networks, or attempting to purify these connections.

5.3 Directions for Further Research

I have used a multiple-method qualitative approach to get closer to the complexity of
skiing as a practice that ties together human skiers, technologies, non-human nature, social
movements and media discourse. However, making any phenomenon researchable inevitably
means bracketing things out of the analysis. Drawing on Richardson’s (2000) metaphor of
crystallization, even when we adopt a multiple-method approach in order to hold several facets
of a research area in view, other facets remain concealed. Any choice of research design
establishes limits and qualifications, but these limitations also open up opportunities for further
inquiry. Within the present research, some interview questions did not yield anything
meaningful. At other times, something in the data initially seemed interesting, but never cohered.
Social research produces its own patterned silences through what is included as data and what is
left at the margins. These patterned silences also provide directions for further research.

First, ski labour has been at the margins of this project. The voices of ski workers are
rarely heard in ski magazines, ski resort websites, or mass media texts. The productive labour of
skiing is at the margins of a dominant discourse of skiing as a symbolic form of interaction with
nature. However, skiing collectives would not function without an array of lift operators
(“lifties”), people operating grooming and snow-making equipment, food preparation staff, ski
school instructors, patrollers and first aid attendants. Similarly, mechanized backcountry ski
operations depend on guides, cooks, helicopter pilots, and snow-cat drivers. Several of my
interview participants talked about working as lifties, or instructors at ski hills. Additionally,
several ski resort websites post employment information. However, this material never cohered
into anything substantial. Thus, a more focused examination of skiing labour would be a valuable extension of the present research. Similarly, as tourism nodes, ski resorts require hotels and hotel workers. Whistler is second only to downtown Vancouver for tourism accommodation revenue. Therefore, an extension of Zuberi’s (2006) comparative analysis of hotel labour in Vancouver and Seattle to Whistler would also be worthwhile.

Second, my sample of interview participants was largely made up of advanced skiers, with years of experience. It would be reasonable to ask whether these serious skiers are more self-reflexive about their sport and their interactions with the environment than less experienced skiers. The experiences articulated by my interview participants may well not reflect those of newer skiers, or more occasional skiers. Because my sample was limited to adult participants, my interviewees’ interpretations of their sport might also be quite different from children and youth participants. Donnelly (2006) points out that much research on “extreme” sports has focused on the hard-core of participants, while neglecting more peripheral participants. This is cause for concern because it can give us a partial view of these sports, which we then take as definitive. The use of a semi-structured interview design and a relatively small sample were useful for capturing nuances of discourse about skiing and non-human nature that would have been difficult using the standardized, closed ended approach of a survey. However, the results of the present interview research could be used as the basis for a larger-scale survey, with standardized questions, which would attempt to reach a broader spectrum of skiers. Such an approach could be useful for extending the generalizability of the present findings to a larger population.

Third, when asked about participation in other sports, most of my interview participants talk about hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, cross-country skiing, or kayaking. The skiers in my sample typically engage in a variety of forms of outdoor recreation. Skiing in the winter is often balanced by hiking, mountain biking, or rock climbing in the summer. Interviewees
describe these as different means of getting outdoors and experiencing nature, or else as
different modes for travelling in the mountains. Another important line of inquiry might focus on
how different forms of outdoor recreation shape participants' interpretations of the landscape, or
how they work as distinct "technologies of the self," which construct different environmental
subjectivities (Foucault 2005; Markula and Pringle 2006; Thorpe 2008).

Fourth, the present research approached social movements largely through textual
analysis. Another wave of data collection could focus in greater depth on how social movements
enter into outdoor recreation and nature tourism. Interviews with environmentalists and members
of First Nations groups that have opposed ski development would be particularly valuable.
Within the British Columbia context, a great deal of social movement attention has focused on
forestry practices. An intriguing line of inquiry would be to explore social movement
participants’ experience of forestry politics, in comparison with the politics of outdoor
recreation. Another approach would be to compare skiing-oriented protest in British Columbia
with other regions of the world where skiing has been defined as a social and environmental
problem. An example of this would be the ongoing work of the Ski Areas Citizens Coalition in
the United States; or the campaign against ski development at the San Francisco Peaks, “a
mountain in Northern Arizona held sacred by over 13 Native American Nations” (Save the Peaks
Coalition 2007).

Fifth, the present research is limited to a narrow period of time. Archival research would
be one way of locating the current results within a broader environmental history of skiing in
British Columbia. A Foucauldian genealogical approach could focus on the historical changes
that discourses about skiing and the environment have undergone (Darier 1999; Foucault 2003b;
Tamboukou 1999). Within British Columbia, there are several possible sites for archival
research, including: the Varsity Outdoor Club archive at the University of British Columbia; the
Whistler Museum and Archives; the Mount Seymour Ski Club fonds at the North Vancouver
Museum; the Hollyburn Ridge Collection at the West Vancouver Museum; and the Red Mountain Ski Club fonds at the Rossland Historical Museum. Archival research could draw on written texts and photos to construct an environmental history of skiing and its relationship with the other-than-human in BC. Another strategy for introducing a historical dimension to the analysis would be to adopt a panel study approach to the current interviews. By returning to the same interview participants repeatedly as several years elapse, it would be possible to track changes in skiers’ interpretations of their own sport, their interactions with non-human nature, and skiing’s environmental impacts.

Sixth, network analysis was used in a limited way to map out economic ties between ski resorts in British Columbia. Social network analysis could also be used to examine corporate interlocks – network ties among individual ski area owners and corporate executives – between the ski industry and corporations in other sectors (Carroll 2007; Carroll and Fennema 2002). Network analysis of the ski industry would allow us to locate ski corporations within a broader political economy. This would allow us to evaluate the degree to which the ski industry remains integrated with the extractive economy of resource capitalism that has traditionally dominated BC. Alternately, it would allow us to assess the degree to which it is part of a separate attractive economy focused on nature tourism and outdoor recreation. Thus, we could measure the degree to which the ski industry is structurally linked to a broader project of “eco-capitalism,” where environmental sustainability is pursued within the existing structures of a capitalist economy (Adkin 1998).

Seventh, I have repeatedly discussed how “sustainability” is invoked and interpreted, by a variety of social actors, as a discursive resource within skiing. Claims are made both for and against the long-term environmental sustainability of skiing. The ski industry positions itself as pro-environmental managers of mountain landscapes. At the same time, environmental groups and many skiers articulate an environmental critique of skiing, citing impacts on animal
populations and energy use, among other issues. Attempts to assess the "actual" sustainability of skiing have been beyond the scope of this project. Instead, I have focused on different interpretations of sustainability within the eco-politics of skiing. Further research could assess skiing’s ecological impact relative to forestry and mining, which are the main extractive industries that use mountain environments in British Columbia. Alternately, comparative research could examine skiing and other recreational forms of land use, such as hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, or golfing. Ecological footprint analysis, which attempts to quantify the sum of the earth’s resources required to sustain a given practice, could be adopted for such a comparative analysis (Wackernagel and Rees 1996). This would allow us to assess the sustainability of skiing in relative terms. Through a comparative ecological footprint analysis, we could more accurately gauge whether skiing is a more or less harmful exercise of eco-power over the provincial landscape than either extractive forms of land use, or other modes of outdoor recreation and nature tourism.

Finally, I repeatedly noticed the presence of tourists and migrants who travelled to British Columbia because of skiing. Skiers travel from Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Japan and Europe; driven by the desire to see and interact with the Canadian mountain landscape. I have termed these skiers “powder nomads.” The phenomenon of powder nomadism illustrates how interactions with nature are increasingly tied to global flows of tourism and migration, through what Thrift (2001) terms the “experience economy.” Another way to extend the present research would be to follow these flows of powder nomadism outwards from British Columbia. The present project could become a paired case study through the collection of another wave of data on skiing and the environment (Ragin 1987). By looking at two distinct regions within the global tourism network, I could examine how tourism flows are linked to skiing and environmental values in a way that was not possible in the present research. A comparison across
multiple research sites would provide a better understanding of skiers’ interactions with nature in different social and physical contexts.

Australia would be a particularly appealing site for such a paired case study. Nature tourism and outdoor recreation is increasingly important to both Australia and Canada. As in Canada, images of wild, natural landscapes are important elements of Australian national identity and tourism (Hohl and Tisdell 1995; Lane and Waitt 2001; Trigger and Mulcock 2005). However, while skiing is a central part of the British Columbian tourist economy, with resorts like Whistler acting as nodal points, Australia produces more powder nomads than it attracts. An analysis of similarities and differences between these cases could help refine our knowledge of the connections between outdoor recreation, environmental politics and shifts towards an attractive economy. As Giuliananotti (2005) notes, this type of comparative research is an important, but underused, strategy for the sociology of sport. This would also foreground the ways that interactions between skiers and mountain environments are affected by global flows of tourism and migration. This line of inquiry would build upon work on how flows of tourism and migration affect our interactions with the other-than-human (Franklin 2003; Thrift 2001; Urry 2002).

5.4 Implications for an Eco-politics of Skiing

There is an environmental ambiguity at the heart of skiing. On one hand, there is the notion that skiing is an environmentally sustainable way for us to enter mountain landscapes, to get to know the environment and to care for it. Through embodied interactions with mountainous nature, skiing can help shape environmentalist subjectivities. At the same time, skiers show sensitivity to the environmental impacts of skiing through energy use, connections to automobility and displacement of wildlife from mountain environments. Here, the environmental legitimacy of skiing is challenged: skiing becomes an environmental problem. A critical analysis
of skiing highlights how it is not only an apolitical recreational practice; it involves flows of power between humans and non-humans. From this perspective, skiing is part of what Latour (2004) terms “political ecology,” where the purified boundaries between human politics and non-human nature break down (also see Escobar 1999). The results of this research lead to several observations about an environmental politics of skiing.

Treating skiing as only part of an experience economy, where nature is consumed symbolically rather than incorporated into systems of production, misses a large part of the picture. Skiing – both at resorts and in the backcountry -- also involves what Schnaiberg (1980) calls environmental “withdrawals” and “additions.” Skiing withdraws from the environment through energy use to access terrain (whether through chairlifts, snowmobiles, or cars); through water use for snow-making; and through deforestation to create ski runs (Chernushenko 1994; Clifford 2002; Hudson 2000). Additions occur through resort waste and pollution. As such, this “attractive” use of nature contains an “extractive” ghost in the machine (Luke 2002). Thus, we may ask to what extent skiing can be part of a viable alternative to the “treadmill of production” logic of our political and economic systems, as suggested by Schnaiberg and Gould (2000).

Where the ski industry constructs itself as pro-environmental stewards of mountain landscapes, the more harmful aspects of its daily operations are often rendered invisible. Just as many skiers are aware of the impacts of their sport, it is important for the ski industry to be honest about these impacts as well.

The ski industry often presents itself as pro-environmental through its eco-managerialist approach to habitat stewardship, as well as through its commitment to ecological modernization through technological innovation and adaptation. While these may be viewed as positive steps, the ski industry has failed when it comes to addressing the environmental implications of its intimate connections with technologies of mobility. In ski magazines and resort websites, automobility and aeromobility are normalized as means of accessing nature. However, this
patterned silence is disrupted by many skiers. In interviews, skiers often express their own misgivings about the amount of car use required to access the mountains and participate in their sport. Several of my interviewees also derided the choice to upgrade the Sea to Sky highway, instead of revitalizing rail service in the region, as a failed opportunity to demonstrate environmental sustainability within the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Of course, places like Whistler and Whitewater depend on flows of tourism: this is the essence of an experience economy. However, this experience economy is bound up with networks of automobility and aeromobility, which have their own environmental withdrawals (i.e. fossil fuels) and additions (i.e. greenhouse gasses). Given the connections between mobility and climate change, the failure of the ski industry to address this is ironic. The ski industry is often viewed as a canary in the coalmine for climate change (Chernushenko 1994; Elsasser and Messerli 2001; L.C. Hamilton et al 2003; L.C. Hamilton et al 2007; Harrison, Winterbottom and Sheppard 1999). In the winter of 2006-2007, media stories proliferated about the potential demise of skiing in the European Alps. Similarly, media accounts discuss the recession of glaciers at Whistler Blackcomb. However, the constant stream of traffic between Vancouver and Whistler is testimony to the ski industry’s own contributions to global climate change. This illustrates Beck’s (1992) notion of how a “boomerang effect” operates within the risk society, where those who create environmental risk (i.e. climate change) often also end up being victims of those same risks (see Figure 5.2).
Figure 5.2. Skiing, Climate Change and the Boomerang Effect.

My interviews provide a profile of skiers as concerned with the environment and interested in environmentalism. While my purposive approach to sampling makes statistical generalization impossible, this description is supported by other research on skiers and environmental values (Fry 1995; Rockland 1994; Weiss et al 1998). Given the apparent environmentalist leanings of skiers, it makes sense for the ski industry to be attentive to the critiques of environmental groups and to respond to these criticisms seriously. For example, it may be time for the ski industry to become more self-reflexive about how much ski resort expansion and mechanized backcountry skiing is necessary within British Columbia. Proposed developments like Jumbo Pass and Melvin Creek are projects that are opposed by environmentalists and First Nations groups and questioned by many skiers. One might ask whether these new resorts are actually a desirable addition to the skiing landscape of the province.

Similarly, while pro-environmental discourses and practices are present within skiing, the industry has been timid when it comes to entering into formal networks of environmental politics. Ski resorts do not necessarily have to partner with environmental groups. However,
taking a more activist stance, which is informed by environmentalist discourse, on issues like climate change and transportation policy would likely be supported by a significant proportion of skiers.

At present, skiing only seems to enter the agenda of British Columbia environmentalism when new developments threaten to intrude upon wilderness values. Skiing is problematized as environmental groups weave “protective stories” around special landscapes (Ernstson and Sorlin submitted). This further illustrates Wilson’s (1998) point that the British Columbia environmental movement has often limited itself through its focus on wilderness. The trouble is that we end up paying less attention to what goes on everyday in non-wilderness places (Cronon 1995). In the United States, a group called the Ski Areas Citizens Coalition has emerged. This group strives to provide a more rigorous environmental evaluation of ski resort practices than the ski industry’s self-regulation through the Sustainable Slopes Program. This group may provide a useful template for Canada, as a vehicle for engaging with the ski industry on the environmental politics of their mundane, everyday operations. Environmental ambiguities will likely remain at the heart of skiing. However, this would be one way to lessen the harm done to non-human members of skiing collectives.

Finally, discussions of the environmental politics of skiing should not be divorced from the social justice dimensions of ski development. First Nations groups have challenged the expansion of ski resorts as an illegitimate intrusion onto a contested landscape. While the skiers I interviewed were split on this issue, several did express support for First Nations’ sovereignty and political goals. First Nations’ challenge to ski development points to a form of environmental justice that asks who has the power to define the landscape and how environmental resources may be more equitably distributed. Similarly, flows of power through skiing – among humans, but also between humans and non-humans – should not be divorced from each other and treated as separate issues. Instead, we should be attentive to the ways in
which these forms of power intersect. In political terms, this means that environmental and First Nations groups might be attentive to how they could work in dialogue with each other. Similarly, suggestions that the ski industry become more environmentally self-reflexive are equally applicable to social justice issues. Despite Sun Peaks’ protestations to the contrary, the company is a key player in the conflict over land use between First Nations and the provincial government. In this conflict and in others, acknowledging that skiing is political – casting aside the apolitical mythology of the sport -- would be a valuable first step.
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Appendix I: Research Design and Methodology

This appendix provides a detailed discussion of the multiple method qualitative approach that I have used for this research. First, I present a general outline of the research design for the project, which combines interviews, field notes and discourse analysis. I then discuss the quota sampling and data collection strategies used, before turning to a discussion of data analysis procedures and ethical considerations related to the research. I conclude by providing a self-reflexive account that locates myself, as a researcher, within the project.

**Research Design**

This project provides a sociological analysis of skiing as a discursively-mediated social practice in British Columbia. Two problematics guide the research. First, I am interested in the ways that skiing is constructed through discourse by different social actors. These include: the ski industry, social movement organizations (environmental and First Nations groups) and the mass media. Second, I am interested in how skiing is understood by its participants. This includes the ways that skiers take up and negotiate the system of discourses that circulate through their sport. I use a multi-method qualitative approach for this project, which combines discourse analysis, interviews and field notes (Creswell 2003; Law 2004a; Mason 2002). Each of these approaches provides something the others do not. Discourse analysis allows for a larger-scale examination of the discourses of skiing that circulate in the public sphere in British Columbia. Interviewing allows us to go beyond the limits of textually-mediated discourse to examine how skiers interpret their own experiences and embodied interactions skiing landscapes. Field observation takes us out of the textual world of texts or the artificially-constructed interview setting. It permits us to observe skiing as a practice within its “natural” setting.

The strength of qualitative methodology is its focus on depth of analysis. The more open-ended, flexible approach to research is also particularly conducive to studies of how meaning is
made by social actors (Mason 2002). Qualitative methodologies provide a particularly valuable set of tools for looking at the processes whereby social actors interpret their worlds. For many authors within the qualitative research tradition, the use of multiple research strategies helps improve the validity of research (Cresswell 2003; Fine et al 2000; Mason 2002; Miles and Huberman 1994). From a more post-structuralist perspective, the idea that we can establish a single truthful account about a given phenomenon is assumed to be untenable. However, as Law (2004a) notes, multiple-method approaches are important when we want to emphasize complexity, rather than reduce it through our research. Once we begin to let nature, technologies and animals into the picture, social science research begins to look quite messy. Using multiple forms of data collection is one tactic for dealing with this messiness. Similarly, Laurel Richardson (2000) advocates multiple-method approaches as a means to “crystallize” our research: to approach it from multiple angles and hold in view more than one facet of the research problem.

**Discourse analysis.** I use discourse analysis to examine four distinct textual “archives,” both print and electronic (Foucault 1972). These include: ski resort websites, ski magazines, mass media articles about skiing, and internet material about skiing produced by environmental and First Nations groups. Within this textual analysis, I use a broad definition of discourse, which encompasses the visual images (such as photographs) embedded in websites and magazines, as well as printed text. Photographs and illustrations carry significant symbolic weight within texts. Visual images work as signifiers in their own right, but also amplify, build upon, or occasionally work against printed text (Barthes 1973; Hall 1981).

Of these archives, mass media texts are particularly important to study. They are sites where discourses of skiing circulate among the general public, providing a source of knowledge about skiing for both participants and non-participants (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1989;
The mass media are also important sites for the construction of “environmental problems” (Doyle, Elliott and Tindall 1997; Hannigan 1995; Mazur 1998). Media audiences access knowledge about the environment through newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the internet. The media provide a stage where conflicts over environmental resources are played out among environmentalists, scientists, the state and capital. Media texts reproduce dominant discourses about human relations with nature, but they also offer fissures where dominant relations between society and nature are destabilized.

Discourse analysis examines language used in social interaction (Foucault 1978; Foucault 1991; Foucault 2003b). Put simply, discourse is “language use relative to social, political and cultural formations – it is language reflecting social order but also language shaping social order, and shaping individuals’ interaction with society” (Jaworski and Coupland 1999, 3). Beginning from the premise that language is an important means by which social reality is constructed; discourse should not be seen as “a neutral medium for the transmission and reception of pre-existing knowledge” (4). Instead, discourse is “the key ingredient in the very constitution of knowledge” (4). Discourse analysis is a qualitative approach that chronicles and interprets the social use of language by looking for recurring themes and systematic exclusions. It asks who is entitled to speak through a particular discourse and who is marginalized. It asks what work particular discourses do and how discourse is used to produce, maintain or pose a challenge to social power.

There are several theoretical reasons to use discourse analysis as a methodology. First, discourse analysis focuses on the “latent content,” or underlying meaning of textual communication (Babbie 1995). This is distinct from the quantitative approach of content analysis, which focuses on the “manifest content” of the text. This is the “visible surface content,” such as words or phrases. Second, the focus on discourse is sociologically valuable because discourse influences the formation of the “social identities” of individuals and groups.
(Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Foucault 2005; Fraser 1997). Furthermore, the circulation of dominant discourses is linked to the Gramscian notion of “hegemony,” the “process wherein cultural authority is negotiated and contested” (Fraser 1997, 154; also see Gramsci 1971; Hall 1992). Thus, discourse is intimately related to questions of social power and conflict. Third, discourse analysis illuminates sites of resistance to hegemony and shows “how, even under conditions of subordination . . . [subaltern groups] participate in the making of culture” (Fraser 1997, 154). There are also pragmatic reasons for using discourse analysis. Textual analysis is unobtrusive and data are readily available through online databases. Discourse analysis also facilitates covering a longer time frame than is possible through more interactive forms of research, such as interviews or surveys.

**Interviewing.** Interviewing enables us to go beyond the limits of research that is purely textual. While discourse analysis can yield interesting results, it also contains the problem of inference. This means that it is difficult to analyze the processes through which media content is produced, or interpreted by media audiences, by looking at texts alone (Currie 1997; Smith 1999). In this project, I use interviewing to examine how skiers interpret their own recreational activity. Interviewing is a sort of “structured conversation,” through which researchers and participants engage in the construction of knowledge (Holstein and Gubrium 2003; Kvale 1996; Rubin and Rubin 1995). It is a particularly valuable research tool for learning about the ways in which individuals interpret their social worlds. The interview is different from a casual conversation in that it is guided by the researcher’s goals and by an interview schedule. As Holstein and Gubrium note, “Put simply, interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives” (Holstein and Gubrium 2003, 3). I used a semi-structured approach to interviewing, with a detailed interview schedule.
However, I moved beyond the schedule wherever appropriate, in order to ask follow up questions or to pursue a point of interest.

By connecting discourse analysis with interviews, we get a sense of how skiers interpret skiing as a lived activity beyond the discursive reality constructed by texts. Insofar as interviews examine individual beliefs and attitudes about the social world, they are similar to surveys. However, the flexible structure of interviews allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of each respondent than is possible than through survey research. Open-ended approaches to interviewing emphasize depth of response and the freedom to move beyond the confines of the interview schedule where appropriate (Kvale 1996; Cresswell 2003). However, because interviews strive for depth and detail in data collection, they are relatively time consuming. Thus, the number of respondents used in interview research is typically much smaller than in survey research.

**Field notes.** As a complement to interviewing and textual analysis, field observation allows for observations of skiing in its “natural” environment, rather than in the manufactured setting of the interview, or in the textual world of websites, newspapers and magazines. As such, I integrated field observation at Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater ski resorts as part of my data collection and analysis. Field research involves the researcher going out into places where social phenomena are naturally occurring (Bailey 1996; Lofland et al 2006; Mason 2002). It is a less artificial approach to data collection than recruiting people into research through surveys or interviews. Within field research, several standpoints are possible. Researchers may be complete observers, who avoid interacting with participants in the research site. The premise behind this position is that researchers may alter the behaviour of participants and influence research outcomes. At the other extreme, researchers may act as full participants in the
phenomena they study. Here, the premise is that full participation provides a greater sense of empathy and understanding. Between these poles, any intermediate position is possible.

The main strength of field research is that it allows the researcher to be exposed to social phenomena in real time, in their naturally occurring environment. There are also weaknesses associated with this method (Mason 2002). First, it may be difficult to gain entrée to certain social worlds. Second, gatekeepers – key informants in the research site – may unduly influence what the researcher is able to see and hear. Third, ethical questions are raised by doing research on people who have not explicitly provided their consent, even though they may be in a public place.

For this project, I adopted the standpoint of an unobtrusive participant while observing the public spaces of skiing (including ski hill lodges, chairlifts and ski runs). During each day of field observation, I participated as a skier and wrote notes during lunch-time and at the end of the day. Inspired by work in autoethnography, I also took autobiographical notes on my own experiences and feelings as a skier (Arluke and Sanders 1996; Ferrell 2006; Laurel Richardson 2000). Following work in visual sociology, I also used a digital camera to take photos that became part of my data set (Harper 1998; Mason 2002; Prosser and Schwartz 1998). While I talked informally with people on chairlifts and in lift lines, I did not carry out full interviews with people during the field research. I chose this approach to preserve the anonymity of those inhabiting the research site.

By combining textual analysis, interviews and field research, I hope to go beyond an overly discursive conception of the social, which is latent in post-structuralist approaches to discourse analysis (Currie 1997; McRobbie 1999; Smith 1999). Combining a Foucauldian focus on discourse with the theoretical concepts provided by Latour and Haraway is one way to link an analysis of skiing’s system of discourses with interview and field note data. As Law observes, Latour and Haraway build upon post-structuralism’s interest in discourse by emphasizing the
ways in which discourses are embodied by social actors (Law, 2004b). By drawing on key concepts from all three theorists, I want to emphasize the importance of embodied interaction; the presence of the other-than-human within “social” life; the ways that this is intertwined with systems of discourse; and the way that this is related to flows of power.

**Sampling and Data Collection**

I used quota sampling, which is a particular form of purposive sampling, as general approaches for this project. Purposive sampling is distinct from the random sampling approaches typical of quantitative research, where a representative sample is seen as a way of ensuring statistical generalizability. While such an approach may be well-suited to the larger samples used in survey research, it is less useful in qualitative research where -- due to a difference in focus -- smaller sample sizes are the norm. As Miles and Huberman note, “Social processes have a logic and a coherence that random sampling can reduce to uninterpretable sawdust” when smaller samples are used (Miles and Huberman 1994, 27). Here, the focus is on the particular rather than the abstract; on generating a deeper understanding of how social actors interpret their worlds; and on theoretical generalizability, or generalizable social processes (Becker 1990; Schwalbe et al 2000; Stoddart 2004). Purposive sampling approaches have become a standard within qualitative research for meeting these ends (Mason 2002; Miles and Huberman 1994; Silverman 2005; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Purposive sampling means that we select cases that we believe will be theoretically interesting and valuable, which will “maximize opportunities” for analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As David Silverman writes, “Purposive sampling demands that we think critically about the parameters of the population we are interested in and choose our sample case carefully on this basis” (Silverman 2001, 250). Quota sampling is one method of structuring a purposive sample. Quota sampling defines theoretically interesting divisions among a research population,
and then ensures a minimum level of representation for each stratum within a sampling matrix (Singleton and Straits 1999). While quota sampling is a non-random approach, it does allow us to purposively select cases that represent a broader range of the phenomena we are interested in. By adding structure to purposive sampling, it is also a more rigorous approach than simply using a sample of convenience.

**Discourse analysis.** I used discourse analysis to examine four distinct textual archives: mass media texts, ski resort websites, ski magazines, and social movement websites (a full list of all of texts is included as Appendix II). Through an analysis of texts produced by the mass media, environmental and First Nations groups, and the ski industry; I was able to examine a broad range of discourses that circulate among the public sphere. A graphic summary of the discourse analysis sampling strategy is provided in Table A1.1.
Table A1.1 Sampling matrix for discourse analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of text</th>
<th>Sampling strategy</th>
<th>Number of texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass media: A range of provincial, Canadian and</td>
<td>Keyword searching of Canadian Newsstand and LexisNexis online databases to identify</td>
<td>120 articles: 60% provincial; 33% Canadian outside BC; 7% international (US, UK,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>international sources – i.e. *Globe and Mail, Vancouver</td>
<td>populations of texts. Purposive sampling of this population.</td>
<td>Australia).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sun</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material produced by British Columbian environmental</td>
<td>Keyword searching of online search engines (i.e. Google) to identify material</td>
<td>14 websites: 10 environmental groups (4 local, 4 provincial, 2 national); 4 First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>groups and First Nations (SMOs).</td>
<td>produced by SMOs in BC, which address skiing as a social/environmental problem.</td>
<td>Nations websites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relevant groups were also identified through mass media texts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiing-oriented websites: Ski resort sites, plus</td>
<td>Websites connected to research area resorts; resorts that are the subject of SMO</td>
<td>14 websites: 10 ski resort sites; 4 community-oriented sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community-oriented sites</td>
<td>protest; other resorts selected for regional variation. Community-oriented</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>websites discussed by interview participants added to the sample.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ski magazines</td>
<td>A broad range of magazines, focusing on those identified by ski websites as</td>
<td>21 magazine issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>particularly prestigious, or discussed by interview participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>169</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mass media texts were collected in two separate waves. The first set focused on British Columbia sources, including major dailies with provincial distribution -- *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province* -- as well as regional papers and magazines. Focusing on the five year period from 2001 to 2006, I used the Canadian Newsstand Pacific Region database to identify a population of texts. I used a keyword search of the terms [ski OR skier* OR skiing] in
combination with the terms [environment* OR nature OR protest*]. As a purposive strategy, this directed the sample towards stories about skiing, nature, the environment, environmentalism, or political protest. I limited the results to articles in which the whole article was available, rather than only an abstract. This returned a population of 4173 potentially relevant articles, or approximately 800 to 900 articles per year. As a purposive approach, I broke down the texts by year. I then sorted the results by relevance rather than chronologically (i.e. the highest-ranking texts are the ones with the greatest occurrence of the keywords), and collected the ten most relevant articles per year. During this process, I excluded any false hits that did not have anything to do with skiing (i.e. which talked about water-skiing). I also excluded articles that were reprinted in different newspapers, or in different editions of the same paper. This gave me a sample of sixty mass media texts to work with.

The second wave of media texts was collected later in the project. These focused on a broader range of media sources. I used the full Canadian Newsstand database to search for articles about skiing in BC published throughout Canada between 2001 and 2006. I duplicated the earlier keyword search strategy, but added “British Columbia” as a necessary keyword. This search turned up 1214 hits. I sorted these by relevance and browsed the 150 top-ranked articles manually. Excluding duplicate articles from the first data set, as well as false hits, this gave me a purposive sample of 35 texts. I then duplicated this search using LexisNexis, which enabled me to expand the sample to international media sources. Using the same time period, I focused on “general news” articles published in “major papers.” This turned up 102 hits. Once again, I sorted these by relevance. I browsed the whole set manually, excluding false hits and duplicate articles. This gave me another 33 texts to work with. After another search for duplicate articles, I

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16 In this database “*” is a wild-card figure. For example, skier* will treat skier or skiers as acceptable hits.
17 As the first wave text search was conducted in September, 2006, only 641 articles were available for that year.
arrived at a second set of 60 articles, bringing the total media text archive to 120 documents. These were imported to NVIVO7 software for qualitative analysis (QSR International).

The second set of texts I examined were online materials produced by Social Movement Organizations that addressed skiing in British Columbia. For this data set, I began by looking for online material produced by environmental and First Nations groups who appeared as news sources in the mass media archive. From there, I used Google to search for additional material, using a similar keyword strategy as the one I used for the mass media texts. While I had initially hoped to use 25 Social Movement Organization (SMO) websites, the 14 sites included in the analysis are exhaustive of material that I found specifically related to skiing and British Columbia. These sites include ten environmental sites (including those produced by a mix of regional, provincial and national groups) and four First Nations-produced sites. I downloaded all of the relevant material from these sites to pdf files, using Adobe Acrobat 8 (Adobe Systems Incorporated). This enabled me to work with these texts in NVIVO7.

The third group of texts consists of online materials related to skiing in British Columbia. Here, the main focus was on ski resort websites. I downloaded three levels of each site to pdf files using Adobe Acrobat 8, as a way of getting a general overview of the sites. I then appended any further material specifically dealing with the environment to the pdf document. I began with the key ski resorts in my interview and field note research areas: Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater. I then downloaded the websites for resorts that have been problematized by SMOs: Sun Peaks, Jumbo Glacier Resort, and Cypress Mountain. I then added several other resorts to ensure regional variation: Mount Washington (Vancouver Island), Big White (Okanagan), Fernie (East Kootenay), and Kicking Horse (BC Rockies). Finally, I added the Red

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18 Downloading three levels of a site means taking the home page, then every page that the home page links to (this is the second level), then every page that the second level links to. As a way of managing document size, I limited this process by opting to “stay on the same server.” Thus, while I could see links to sites outside the ski resort sites (to companies like WestJet airline or Budget car rentals), I was able to keep the pdf documents from becoming too unwieldy to work with.
Mountain site because it came up repeatedly in my Nelson interviews as another important local skiing destination. Because of my interviews, I also decided to add sites that are more “community-oriented,” rather than produced by ski resorts themselves. These are sites run by skiers, often dedicated to publishing skier-produced photos, videos and gear reviews. They are places for skiers to come together online and share stories and tips. Four of these sites were invoked by my interview participants, all of which I added to this textual archive. Again, all of these texts were imported to NVIVO7 for coding and analysis.

The final set of texts used for this phase of the project consists of ski magazines. I had been collecting ski magazines informally since beginning to conceptualize this research. Between 2004 and 2007, I purchased 21 issues of various ski magazines. I gave particular attention to titles that were cited on ski websites. I also focused on titles that were brought up by my interview participants. Beyond this, I explored a range of the ski magazines that are available around Vancouver and Nelson. For each of the magazines, I first read through the issue and highlighted particularly interesting passages. Afterwards, I wrote notes on each issue in NVIVO7, where the notes could be coded and analyzed.

**Interview sampling.** Two criteria guided the quota sample selection for interview respondents. First, I wanted to balance the sample between male and female respondents, even though more men participate in the sport than women. Gender has been identified by several writers on sport and outdoor recreation as an important category of analysis. As Giulianotti (2005) notes, it is one of the key social markers within the world of sport. For example, research on mountaineering and hiking illuminates the connections between outdoor recreation and gendered networks of social power (Dummit 2004; Hansen 1991; Pohl, Borrie and Patterson 2000; Routledge 2004). Mountaineering, camping and hiking are sites where hegemonic masculinity is constructed. Snowboarding also works as a site where a particular form of
hegemonic masculinity is defined and asserted to marginalize women from the sport (Anderson 1999). At the same time, participation in these sports can be sites for challenging hegemonic masculinity and asserting female independence (Thorpe 2005; Thorpe 2006b).

The second point of division focuses on skier location, which is another key analytical category in research on sport and outdoor recreation. Comparative research across locations is one of the most valuable -- but underused -- research strategies for sport sociology (Giulianotti 2005; Stokowski 2002). I split my sample between interviewees in the Vancouver/Whistler Blackcomb region and the Nelson region, which is home to the Whitewater ski resort.

Table A1.2 is a sampling matrix that illustrates how the quota sample was divided into four distinct strata based on gender and location. Following Clifford (2002), I adopted a broad definition of “skiing,” so that downhill skiers, telemark skiers and snowboarders were all eligible interview participants.19 By contrast, I excluded cross-country skiers from my sample. The main reason for this is that downhill skiers, snowboarders and telemark skiers use the same mountainous terrain in similar ways. By contrast, cross-country skiers inhabit a different recreational landscape. Initially, I had hoped to interview ten people within each matrix cell. I was able to meet my expectations, interviewing eleven participants in three of the cells, and twelve participants in the fourth. Thus, the total sample included 45 participants. Participation was limited to fully competent adult respondents who responded to the calls for participation. No one was excluded on the basis of gender, religious affiliation, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. I did exclude youth under 19 years of age, as they are considered a vulnerable population, and their participation was not integral to the research objectives.

19 The term “snow-rider” is also used as a catch-all phrase to encompass these modes of snow travel. However, I use “skiing” and “skier” as these are more widely understood.
In order to recruit respondents for the interview phase of the research, I posted notices on public bulletin boards and in local newspapers in both research locations (see Appendix III for interview recruitment material). In Vancouver and Whistler, I posted notices around Whistler village and at outdoor recreation stores, such as Mountain Equipment Co-op. I also ran ads for respondents in the *Georgia Straight* (a free Vancouver arts-oriented newspaper) and *The Pique* (a free Whistler weekly newspaper) over a period of several months. I used a similar recruitment strategy in Nelson, where I posted notices on public bulletin boards and at outdoor recreation stores. I also ran ads for respondents in the *Express* (a free weekly paper that focuses on local arts and culture) and in the *Pennywise* (another free weekly paper). In order to attract respondents, I offered a $5 incentive. Such an incentive, though not financially significant, increases response rates in social research (Dillman 1991; Warriner et al 1996).

The response in the Nelson region was quite good. I was able to complete all of the interviews during December, 2006 and January, 2007. By contrast, the recruitment process was much slower in Vancouver. Through poster advertising and newspaper advertising, I was only able to conduct 11 interviews during February and March, 2007. At this point, I amended the sampling process to include snowball sampling as a way of meeting my sampling quotas. I e-mailed prior interview participants and asked them to forward a call for participation to other skiers living in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver/Whistler Blackcomb</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson/Whitewater</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table A1.2 Sampling matrix for interviews.*
the Vancouver-Whistler corridor. Through this recruitment method, I was able to meet my quota sampling objectives at the end of April, 2007.

Appendix IV provides a detailed comparison of my interview sample with the Census Area Profiles for Vancouver, Whistler and Nelson (Statistics Canada 2007). It also describes the sample in terms of the mode of skiing participants engage in (alpine, snowboard, telemark), skill level, and years of experience. In terms of gender, there is a near-even split of male and female participants. While this reflects the general composition of Nelson and Vancouver; women are overrepresented in terms of the gender composition of Whistler, a ski town where 55 percent of the population is male. The interview sample is also highly concentrated in the 25-44 age group. While 83 percent of the Nelson sample falls in this age group, this group only makes up 28 percent of the Nelson population in general. Similarly, 73 percent of the Vancouver-Whistler sample falls in this group, compared with 33 percent of the Vancouver population and 48 percent of the Whistler population. My interview participants are also more highly-educated than the general population, with 67 percent holding a Bachelor’s degree or higher. In terms of income, interview participants are concentrated in the $21,000 to $40,000 income category, placing them close to (or slightly above) the median income for Nelson, Vancouver and Whistler.

Compared with the general population of Nelson, my interview participants are over-represented in two census occupational categories: social science, education, government service and religion; and trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations (Statistics Canada Standards Division 2001). Similarly, interviewees in Vancouver and Whistler are concentrated in two census occupational categories: social science, education, government service and religion; and art, culture, recreation and sport. In terms of marital status, more of the interview sample is single (58 percent) than the Vancouver or Nelson populations. However, this
is in line with the higher proportion of single people in the ski town of Whistler (52 percent).\textsuperscript{20} From this cursory comparison of the interview sample and the census profiles, we see a group of skiers that does not reflect the general population in these regions. Whether this reflects a difference in the population of skiers or in those who were motivated to participate in the interviews is difficult to tell.

There are also a few things worth noting about the interview sample in terms of their participation in skiing. The largest group of participants are alpine skiers (40 percent), followed by telemark skiers (24 percent), followed by snowboarders (18 percent). The remainder participate in more than one mode of skiing. In comparison with Canadian Ski Council (2006) estimates, skiers are somewhat underrepresented in the interviews, as they make up 64 percent of the larger skiing population. Snowboarders, who make up 32 percent of the larger skiing population, are similarly underrepresented. However, telemarkers are significantly overrepresented in comparison with the four percent who participate in this mode of skiing nation-wide. Partly, I believe this reflects the local skiing culture of Nelson and Vancouver. This is also likely influenced by the snowball sampling recruitment method used for several Vancouver interviews (though I don’t know which participants were recruited through which individuals via this method). However, it also raises an interesting question: Were telemark skiers disproportionately drawn to a project on skiing and the environment because they are more likely to think of their sport in these terms?

Finally, the interview sample contains a high concentration of skiers who consider themselves either advanced (58 percent) or expert (16 percent). Similarly, 47 percent of the sample has between 16 and 25 years of experience. The interview participants seem to be a very serious, dedicated group of skiers. It seems plausible that these more committed skiers are likely

\textsuperscript{20} However, this includes people living in common-law relationships, which are treated as “single” in the census profile information.
to strongly identify with the sport, and therefore more likely to notice and respond to my appeals for participation than beginners. This highlights a lacuna in the analysis that deserves to be addressed in future research.

The interview process. I took a semi-structured approach to the interviews (Kvale 1996; Rubin and Rubin 1995). Written questions served as a rough guide rather than a firm blueprint. I went beyond the written questions wherever appropriate to pursue points of interest and ask follow-up questions. Occasionally, I altered the ordering of questions to respond to the natural flow of conversation. The interview schedule also evolved as I moved through the first few interviews and made minor changes that reflected my accumulating experience. This flexible approach contrasts with the strict use of standardized research instruments in quantitative research. However, it is typical of qualitative research, where flexibility and ongoing reflexivity are seen as strengths.

The final version of the interview schedule is included as Appendix V. The interviews began with a scripted introduction, where I explained the purpose of the research project, thanked participants and asked if they had any questions about the project. The schedule contained 29 questions, divided into four broad categories. The first section focused directly on participants’ relationship with skiing. Here, I asked for “good day” stories. I also asked about the importance of landscape, animal encounters and gender, as these related to respondents’ skiing experience. The second section focused specifically on skiers’ media use, with questions about ski magazines, internet sites and coverage of skiing in the mass media.

The third section focused on environmentalism and politics. Here, I asked skiers about their environmental concerns and participation in various forms of environmentalism. I also asked about whether participants perceive skiing as “environmentally friendly” or “sustainable.” The fourth section included three case study questions, where participants were asked for their
opinion on environmental and social justice issues related to the 2010 Olympics in Whistler; the conflict between environmentalists and ski resort developers at Jumbo Pass, near Nelson; and the conflict between First Nations protesters and Sun Peaks ski resort. I did not ask these questions of all of my participants. If an interview was running too long, these questions were dropped in the interests of time. The final section of the interview included demographic questions, which were included so that I could describe my interview sample in comparison with the census area profiles of Vancouver, Whistler and Nelson. I concluded each interview by asking participants if there was anything they wanted to add that I did not ask about. This gave participants space to articulate anything they felt I should have touched on.

I informally pre-tested the interview schedule with three of my regular ski partners, including transcribing and coding. After each interview, I revised the schedule and reviewed the coding scheme for my data analysis. Through pre-testing, questions were added and deleted, and the order of questions was revised to improve the flow of conversation. After the pre-testing was completed, I erased the audio files, transcripts and coding information for these interviews.

The interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes. The length varied depending on the level of detail provided by each participant, or the degree that I diverged from the schedule. The interviews were held in locations that were selected by the participants. Most of the interviews were held in participants’ homes, or in cafes. Other interviews were conducted at my home, my office at UBC, and at Dusty’s Backside pub and Merlin’s pub in Whistler. Several interviews were also conducted by phone, where this was preferred by participants.

The interviews were recorded using a Sony Digital Voice Recorder, which provided excellent quality digital audio files to work with. In public spaces I used a clip-microphone for interview participants, while I used an ear-bud microphone for the telephone interviews. The only audio quality issues that arose related to the interviews conducted at pubs at Whistler. However, even though a live band was playing in the background at one of these interviews, I
was still able to transcribe it. As soon as possible after the interviews, I downloaded the audio files to my personal computer. Later, I personally transcribed each interview into an individual Word file, which was imported into NVIVO7 software for analysis.

The interview transcription is an incomplete account of the social interaction of the interview. It is a written translation of an audio recording of an interpersonal interaction. It is by nature a copy of a copy; it is its own social construction. As such, Poland (2003) emphasizes that the researcher should avoid cleaning up or editing the interview during transcription, in an attempt to preserve the integrity of the recording as best as possible. By contrast with Poland, other authors describe a variety of approaches to transcription. These range from a verbatim approach to transcriptions that are highly edited and cleaned up. While Poland’s advice may preserve more of the integrity of the individual interview, the alternative suggested by Rubin and Rubin (1995) is to adopt a transcribing convention that matches the level of analysis for the desired level of detail. Furthermore, as Kvale (1996) notes, the differences in written and oral communication means that interviewees can come across looking rather inarticulate in a verbatim transcript, which is full of “uhs,” “ums” and false starts. From this perspective, a detailed transcription method is most suitable for micro-level, linguistic approaches to analysis.

Since I am interested in the discourses that are mobilized by participants, rather than in linguistic subtleties, I adopted an approach of minimal editing during transcription. I did not alter any of the participants’ words, but did not transcribe every single non-linguistic utterance (uh, um, ah) and false start. Finally, Poland notes that it is worth setting out and adhering to transcription conventions in order to ensure comparability across the interviews. My own transcription protocol is included as Figure A1.1.
Field notes. The third method used in this project was unobtrusive field observation. This was split between Whistler Blackcomb, a large destination resort near Vancouver, and Whitewater resort, near Nelson. Initially, I had planned to do at least six days of observation at each resort. However, by the end of the season I had spent nine days observing and writing field notes in each location. I felt that I began to reach a point of saturation after six or seven days of observation at each resort. At this point, my notes began to feel repetitive and offered few new insights. I collected notes throughout the whole season and across a range of days: holidays and non-holidays; weekdays and weekends. Table A1.3 provides a summary of the sampling approach for the field observation. Because of the distance between the resorts, I spent several consecutive weeks in each region. Thus, the sample may be affected by the timing of field note collection in each area. While I was at Whitewater for the early season and Christmas break, I was at Whistler during the Canadian and American spring breaks. However, I did collect notes over approximately two months at both areas.
I initially took notes as “jottings” in the field (Bailey 1996; Lofland et al 2006). Jottings are abbreviated notes, which serve as prompts for full notes that are fleshed out later. They allow field researchers to take notes using a stream-of-consciousness approach, where less is filtered out or evaluated during the initial act of writing. To guide the field observation, I created an observation protocol, as suggested by Cresswell (2003), which is included as Appendix VI. This served as a useful reference guide and memory prompt during note-taking. Drawing on Bailey’s (1996) guidelines for field observation, I described elements of the physical surroundings (i.e. physical objects, sounds, weather); the appearance of members (i.e. age, dress, hairstyle); and members’ behaviour.

I used a two-column stenography pad for taking jottings in the field. I filled two and a half 120-page notebooks over eighteen days of observation at Whistler Blackcomb and Whitewater. I wrote descriptive notes in the left-hand column, reserving the right hand column for theoretical insights and for adding comments to earlier notes as I re-read them. Drawing on autoethnography, where the focus is on the researcher’s own experiences as a participant, I also took notes on my own experiences and feelings during field observation (Arluke and Sanders 1996; Ferrell 2006; Laurel Richardson 2000). While I did not make much use of these autoethnographic notes for data analysis, this was useful as a way of building self-reflexivity into the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Whistler Blackcomb</th>
<th>Whitewater</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of days of observation</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table A1.3** Sampling matrix for field notes.
My approach to field observation was also influenced by visual sociology. This uses photography and videotaping as valuable forms of data collection, which allow us – at least momentarily -- to break from the dominance of the textual in social research (Harper 1998; Mason 2002; Prosser 1998). These visual documents are analysed alongside other data sources. As Gieryn (2000) argues, a greater openness to visual data collection and analysis is important for a sociology that strives to take place seriously. I brought my digital camera with me on all of my field observation days. I took 144 photos throughout the duration of the field research (82 from Whistler Blackcomb; 62 at Whitewater). These focused on ski hill architecture, technology and signage; as well as skiers’ use of the hill. I uploaded all of the photos to my computer and kept them in separate files for Whistler and Whitewater. The photos were useful as an aid to transforming my jottings into full notes, but also as a data source in their own right.

My field observation days typically involved getting to the ski hill between 8:30am and 9:30am, then skiing until about noon. While skiing, on the chairlift, or in the lift line, I was attentive to members’ behaviour, conversation, clothing, and use of technology; as well as to the physical surroundings. I would then write jotted notes for between thirty and sixty minutes, attempting to capture as much as I could of my observations from the morning. I would then spend a few more hours skiing and observing in the afternoon. This was followed by another round of jottings at the end of the day, again lasting thirty to sixty minutes. I took photos throughout the day whenever my interest was piqued.

I used the jottings as the basis for typed notes, which were usually done the morning following field observation. As Lofland et al observe, in terms of recollection it is “reasonably safe to sleep on a day’s ... observations and to write them up the first thing the next morning” but unadvisable to wait much longer, lest forgetfulness seep in (Lofland et al 2006, 111). For each day of field research, I produced eight to twelve pages of typed (double-spaced) notes, which were imported to NVIVO7 for analysis.
Data Analysis

The textual data, interview transcripts, and typed field notes were all imported into NVIVO7 qualitative research software for analysis (QSR International). All of these materials were coded using the same coding scheme, the final version of which is included as Appendix VII. While the documents were coded using the same scheme, which allowed me to integrate my observations and results from the different modes of data collection, I kept the source materials in separate folders. Therefore, I was able to analyze the data sets separately, while also being able to make comparisons between sub-sets of interviews, field notes and media texts. Being able to analyze the data sets both separately and together was useful, as I was able to draw out similarities, as well as discrepancies, between data sets. Finally, following the conventions of qualitative research, I did not wait until all of the data collection was completed before beginning analysis. Rather, I moved back and forth between data collection, coding and analysis. Similarly, as I progressed through the coding and analysis, I periodically revised the coding categories and their relationships with each other. Silverman (2000) cautions against adhering too closely to a predefined coding scheme, as this can put blinders on the analysis and cause us to miss that which is unusual or unexpected. By adjusting the coding scheme as the research proceeded, I allowed for a higher degree of methodological reflexivity. Thus, while I began with a predefined coding scheme, new categories were added whenever they seemed relevant. As I worked through the analysis, other categories were merged together, moved from one place in the coding scheme to another, or bracketed out as satellites.

The coding scheme is divided into several main categories (or “tree nodes,” to use the language of NVIVO7), each with several second-level categories, as well as some third-level categories. The top-level node “Skiing and Environment” codes material on the following: skiing landscapes, animals, the ways skiing is linked to a pro-environmental standpoint, skiing as an
environmental problem, weather, risk, and connections between skiing and other sports. The node tree on “Skiers and Environmentalism” collects material specifically from the interviews on skiers’ environmental concerns, participation in different dimensions of environmentalism, and whether or not skiers identify as environmentalists. The “Skiing and Technology” node focuses on the multiple technologies of skiing that appear in texts, field notes, and interviews. The top-level node on the “Social Dimensions of Skiing” collects material dealing with the following: gender, social networks, class, and fashion. The node on “Skiers and Media” brings together material specifically from the interviews on ski magazines, the internet and the mass media. The “Skiing and Mobility” node is subdivided into material on tourism and migration. The tree node “Skiing, Politics and Protest” is subdivided into coding categories focused on: First Nations and skiing, the 2010 Olympics, and protest in general.

The “Skiing Subject” node focuses on typologies of skiers; as well material that illustrates how skiing might be thought of as a form of “somatic selfhood.” This refers to ways in which the body is treated as a site for re-constructing the self -- both physically and psychologically -- through a variety of techniques; such as exercise, drugs, diet and medicine (Rose 2001; Rose 2007). Other nodes chronicle how often different environmental groups enter into mass media discourse (ENGO_MASS MEDIA CITATIONS); and track the frequency that different news outlets appear in the mass media textual archive (MASS MEDIA SOURCES). The “Patterned Silences” node includes coding categories for skiing and ethnicity; as well as skiing and sexual orientation. There was little material in these nodes that cohered together into anything significant. However, I knew that I wanted to comment upon them in the analysis. Similarly the “Satellite Nodes” collect material that felt interesting during the analysis, but never cohered into anything meaningful enough for further analysis.

Taken together, these coding categories were used to arrive at more descriptive results. That is, the initial coding was intended to “stay close to the data as originally recorded” (Wolcott
As Wolcott notes, “The strategy of this approach is to treat descriptive data as fact. The underlying assumption, or hope, is that the data ‘speak for themselves’” (10). While I would express scepticism that the data ever really “speak for themselves,” the idea that description should be a distinct research phase from analysis and interpretation is valuable. In these latter stages we move further from the original data and construct sociological narratives by engaging with theoretical key concepts. Interpretive results were built up through memos and annotations that I attached to the coding categories and source documents throughout the analysis.

Finally, I assigned attributes to each of the interview transcripts, which allowed me to keep track of the demographic information for my interview respondents. By assigning attributes, I was able to draw comparisons between subsets of interview participants based on region (Vancouver-Whistler or Nelson) and gender (male or female). This also allowed me to make comparisons between my interview sample and the 2001 census profiles for Vancouver, Whistler and Nelson.

**Ethical Considerations**

The research project was reviewed by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) at the University of British Columbia (the approval certificates are included as Appendix VIII). Both the interviews and my field observation meet the BREB criteria for a minimal risk project.

The interview phase of the project used “fully competent” adults 19 years and over as respondents. The interviews did not involve deceit, or questions about sensitive topics. While there is always a possibility that participation in social research might lead to emotional harm, the risk of harm was minimal. I used several measures to manage this minimal risk, including informed consent and confidentiality. I stated at the outset of the interviews that participants could skip any questions they did not want to answer. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research and the amount of time required to participate through a scripted introduction.
They were also asked to sign a written consent form to indicate that they understood that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time without penalty (see Appendix IX).

Breach of confidentiality is a possible risk to interview participants. If someone has expressed particularly controversial views (e.g. related to environmental politics), a breach of confidentiality could have social stigmatization effects. To protect the confidentiality of participants, their names were recorded on the original interview schedule, where they were assigned a corresponding interview number for my own reference. After the interview, I entered the respondent name and interview number into a password protected Excel file (Microsoft Corporation). This file was stored on my password protected computer, where it was used to link the respondents with their interviews. Once the identifying information was entered into the Excel file, the hard copy of the interview schedule was shredded. Finally, pseudonyms are used in reporting the results.

Research participants did not receive any direct benefits from their participation in the project. They did receive a $5 incentive for their participation. This is a negligible amount given the amount of time necessary to participate and would not constitute a significant benefit for most participants. However, participants may have experienced indirect psychological benefits, such as a sense of contribution to the growth of social science knowledge. As Kvale notes, “A common experience after research interviews is that the subjects have experienced the interview as genuinely enriching, have enjoyed talking freely with an attentive listener, and have sometimes obtained new insights into important themes in their life world” (Kvale 1996, 128). Comments along these lines were expressed to me following several of the interviews.

The interviews were recorded using a Sony Digital Voice Recorder. As soon as possible following each interview, I uploaded the digital audio file to my personal computer, which is password protected. Only my PhD supervisor and I have access to the original interview
recordings. The interview transcripts, which were coded and analyzed in NVIVO7, were only identified by interview number.

As a further ethical research measure, I wrote a summary of my results and sent this by e-mail to interested interview participants. This enabled participants to raise objections if they did not believe that my interpretation of the results accurately reflected their experience. Several authors see this type of results-sharing as a means of testing whether our research accounts resonate with participants’ own interpretations (Davies 1999; Fine et al 2000; Kennedy and Davis 1996; MacGregor 2006).

Within the constructed setting of interview conversations, which involve the researcher and a single participant, ethical considerations can be addressed through standard procedures for ensuring informed consent and confidentiality. Field research raises different issues in terms of research ethics. It would be impossible to get the informed consent of everyone a researcher sees, overhears, or interacts with in a particular setting. While field research is not necessarily deceitful, the presence of the researcher often goes unnoticed by those who are being observed and written about. Here, deceit may be a sin of omission, rather than commission. While writing my field notes, I did not record information that could identify individual skiers, ski hill employees, or other members of the research site. Because the notes do not contain identifying information on particular individuals, the unobtrusive observation meets the minimum risk standards set by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board. In taking photographs, I also avoiding taking pictures that would allow individuals to be identified (i.e. photographing from further back, rather than in profile). Finally, all of the photos are kept on my own password protected computer.
A Self-reflexive Epilogue

**Personal reflexivity.** Within qualitative research, the notion of “reflexivity” is viewed as an important part of the research process (Davies 1999; Denzin 1997; Fine et al 2000; Lather 1993). It is a way of making the researcher more accountable, rather than attempting the “god trick” of removing ourselves from our research narratives (Haraway 1997). Reflexivity refers both to the act of reflecting on research design and methodology; as well as the process of locating the researcher within the research. It grows from postmodernist and post-structuralist attempts to turn a critical gaze inwards, to map the systems of power that are constructed by academic discourse. As Davies notes, this sense of radical reflexivity has made a contribution to social science practice. However, radical reflexivity risks “self absorption” and the negation of the “enterprise of social research” (Davies 1999, 5). Here, I would like to take up the challenge of self-reflexivity, while trying to avoid “empirical nihilism” (Gubrium and Holstein 1997).

I approach this research as a White male (Polish- and Irish-Canadian) in my early thirties, with several years of post-secondary education. I come from a relatively wealthy family background, though one marked by significant class mobility since my father’s childhood in the 1950s. I grew up as a _Quebeçois anglais_, on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, just outside of Ottawa. I have also been skiing as long as I can remember. My early memories of skiing include owning a pair of wooden orange and blue skis; riding the T-bar; and spending Saturdays with my father and younger brother at Edelweiss, a small hill near Wakefield, Quebec. As my brother and I improved, we started making occasional trips to Mont Tremblant, a couple of hours away in the Laurentian Mountains. By high school, skiing became something to do with friends as well as family.

I moved to Vancouver in 1993, at nineteen years of age. Shortly after moving to British Columbia, I began skiing at Whistler Blackcomb. While the size of the mountain and the quality of the snow dwarfed my experience in _les Laurentides_, the mass of people everywhere on the
mountain turned me away from ski hills for a few years. Instead, I was inspired to take up telemarking and back-country skiing. Since then, I have also lived for extended periods in Victoria and Winlaw, a small community near Nelson. After a few years of skiing in the backcountry around Kootenay Pass and Hummingbird Pass, I began to ski regularly at Whitewater. I appreciate that Whitewater is a small ski hill, where one is likely to bump into friends over the course of the day. I also appreciate the blurred boundaries between what is inside the ski hill boundaries and what is beyond, in the back-country.

While skiing has been an important way for me to experience winter landscapes, it has occasionally conflicted with my environmental sensibilities. Around 1996, I turned away from ski hills and became more interested in backcountry skiing. I was distressed with the extraordinary use of power and water at resorts like Whistler, as well as perpetual clear-cutting used to maintain ski runs. I also became interested in the controversy surrounding the proposed Jumbo Pass ski development, near Nelson. While I have returned to ski hills in recent years, I have not yet reconciled skiing and environmental politics for myself. It remains a thorny site of “political ecology,” full of troublesome connections between humans and non-humans (Escobar 1999; Latour 2004). As is repeatedly demonstrated in the research results, this environmental ambiguity is not only my own “personal trouble” but seems to be a larger “social issue” for many skiers; as well as for environmental groups that challenge the environmental legitimacy of skiing (Mills 1959).

This autobiographical sketch illustrates some of the “cultural capital” that I bring to the research project (Bourdieu 1984). My familiarity with Vancouver, Whistler and Nelson were likely assets for creating rapport with interview participants. While it is certainly possible to conduct interviews across cultural boundaries, having a similar ethnic and class background to many of my participants also may also have facilitated engagement with participants. At the same time, a sense of similarity might have led me to miss asking naive questions that could
have been quite fruitful. As a male researcher, it is possible that I was perceived differently by male and female interview participants. In particular, it is possible that female participants would have been more comfortable talking about gender and skiing with a female researcher. However, it also likely that male participants were more candid in talking about gender and skiing than they would have been with a female interviewer. I also come to this research from the standpoint of a skier. My “insider” status within skiing culture also likely facilitated rapport with interview participants. However, it also may have led me to make assumptions and take things for granted about skiing and my participants that I wouldn’t have as a naive outsider.

Reflection on the practice of research. Besides reflecting on how my research standpoint – the cultural capital I carried into the project -- may have affected the research process, it is also useful to reflect on the practice of research itself. This project spanned several years, beginning with its conceptualization in 2004. Throughout the project, I maintained a research journal as a way to build in methodological self-reflexivity. During my unobtrusive observation, I took autoethnographic notes as another way of reflecting on my research practice. In reviewing both of these sources, several themes emerge.

Reflecting on the interview process, I generally found my interview conversations interesting and enjoyable. The relatively easy recruitment process in Nelson made the first several weeks of interviewing feel exciting. By contrast, the difficulty I had recruiting in Vancouver – putting up posters and placing newspaper ads that yielded few if any results – made me feel pessimistic as the interviewing continued into February and March. Given the difficulty of recruitment, I was relieved to finish the final interviews in April, 2007, a few weeks later than I’d originally hoped.

As the interviews proceeded, I noticed that the interview interactions were affected by whether the conversations were face-to-face, or by telephone. Face-to-face settings usually
resulted in longer interviews. I believe the more personal setting made the interview more comfortable and facilitated digressions from the interview schedule, whereas the phone interviews were more businesslike in tone. Finally, though I enjoyed the interviewing process immensely, the transcription often felt slow. Throughout the summer of 2007, I also experienced a great deal of shoulder and neck pain from transcribing.21

My autoethnographic field notes provide some further insight. It was useful to keep track of my own relationship with the weather and the terrain at Whitewater and Whistler. Through autoethnography, I could see how my own experience of these landscapes informed my thinking. With Latour in mind, I became more attuned to how much I enjoy tree skiing (skiing through forested glades) as a way of interacting with the forest, which is distinct from hiking in the summer. I also became more attuned to how the weather affected my experience of the day. A couple excerpts from my field notes highlight how my own experience shaped my thinking about skiing as a collective of humans and non humans:

One phrase mentioned by a lift-mate that I quite like is “powder panic.” This is a great way to describe the slightly frantic feeling of getting up (at 6:15, before the alarm), getting out of the house as quickly as possible, driving to the hill, impatient with slower drivers, not picking up hitchhikers because of lost time getting to the lift, getting tea on the go, rushing to the lift. This is an interesting key phrase (Whitewater field notes, January 6, 2007).

21 This also illustrates how academic work is not only “mental labour” abstracted from the working body.
This first excerpt describes an epic powder day (to use skier jargon), which was one of the most enjoyable days of the season. The second excerpt was written at the end of a rainy day on Blackcomb Mountain, the antithesis of the first day:

Despite the bad weather, there were moments of the day, especially later in the day, where I’d be standing alone high in the alpine, with HIGH winds, looking at these exposed rock outcrops. There was definitely something exhilarating about being up somewhere so exposed, in the bad weather, and pushing through it. Feeling the rain and wind, and how exposed you could feel on a steep slope (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, March 16, 2007).

This autoethnographic approach led me to reconsider the notion that recreational landscapes are constructed for a visual gaze, or that our interactions with nature are dominated by the “hegemony of the visual” (Macnaghten and Urry 1998; Urry 2002). Instead, it led me to consider how nature “pushes back” on embodied participants who interact with a material place (Franklin 2003; Thrift 2001). Here, it was the small injuries suffered throughout the season, as well as the stiffness and soreness that follow a day of hard skiing, which drew my attention to the body and the active character of the landscape. The following excerpt describes nature pushing back at Whitewater:

It was an excellent day, made up of face shots, smiles, and yips of joy. I skied some great steep treed lines and had lots of untracked turns, right until the last run. I did lots of short hikes today and am left with a pleasant feeling of exhaustion. The last couple of runs were marked by the usual burning legs and loss of concentration, with more falls and faceplants (Whitewater field notes, December 12, 2006).
Similarly, insights about the connections between skiing and “automobility” – networks of roads, cars and drivers -- were sharpened by reflecting on the contrast between how much I enjoyed my skiing days at Whistler Blackcomb, and how frustrated I often felt by the drive back to Vancouver along the crowded Sea to Sky Highway (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2003; Urry 2004). The role of automobility was highlighted as I would sit in traffic on the Lion’s gate bridge -- skis on my roof-rack -- eager to leave the city in the morning, or else impatient to return home at the end of the day.

Finally, one aspect of this project troubled me throughout my research. This is the issue of seriousness, which often crops up when I describe the project to friends, family, or even colleagues. When I mention that I’m researching skiing, this often elicits a chuckle or a smile, and a comment about how easy this must be, spending all my time skiing under the guise of work. As I write in my field notes:

One thing I’ve been meaning to write about in my research journal is the light teasing I often get when I talk about my work with others, about doing a dissertation on skiing. I definitely have to deal with a sense of guilt, or defensiveness about my work as “not real work,” as getting to ski all day and call it research. While there is an element of truth to this regarding the field component (a reason I was initially reluctant to do a field component), this is of course real work, even if the topic isn’t perhaps as serious as looking at environmental disasters, or climate change. Usually, by bringing in skiing and a focus on environmental politics, environmental values, environmentalism, people come to see the project as being more serious or valid, but this dismissal or teasing is something that has bothered me throughout the project (Whistler Blackcomb field notes, February 9, 2007).
As I mention in this excerpt, the issue of seriousness initially led me to avoid building a field observation phase into the research design, as this could be seen as a frivolous use of my resources. Field observation was only included at my committee’s request. However, the insights gained from this mode of data collection and analysis has been invaluable.

**Conclusion**

In this Appendix, I have provided a detailed description of the sampling, data collection and data analysis used in this project. A multiple-method qualitative approach was used to examine skiing in British Columbia, combining discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews and unobtrusive field observation. Within the field observation context, I also drew upon autoethnographic and visual sociology methods. I used this multiple-method approach as a means of embracing the complexity of skiing as a discursively-mediated sporting practice, which brings together humans, mountains, technologies, weather, trees and animals. This particular combination of methods was productive for balancing an analysis of discourse and embodied interaction among human actors and non-human actants. It was also a fruitful counterpart to my theoretical orientation, grounded in the work of Foucault, Haraway and Latour, which was used to circumvent the divide between environmental constructionism and environmental realism. This methodological account concluded with self-reflection about the research process and my own standpoint as a researcher. I offer this self-reflexive narrative as a way of locating myself within the research and becoming more accountable.
Appendix II: Textual Archives for Discourse Analysis

Mass Media Articles


*Campbell River (BC) Courier - Islander*, "Surprise, Surprise: Mt. Washington Is Back up and Skiing This Friday," April 6, 2005.


Grant, Carolyn, "Making the Best of It: Grooming Staff at the Kimberley Alpine Resort Coming up Big as Mother Nature Doesn't Deliver," Kimberley (BC) Daily Bulletin, Feb 10, 2005.


———, "Heli-Ski Firm Trying to Block Resort; Asks Court to Kill Environmental Approval for Controversial Jumbo Glacier Project," Globe and Mail, June 18, 2005.


Munro, Margaret, "Climate Change Is Here Now, Experts Say: Floods, Fires, Drought, Disease Pose Threats," *Calgary Herald October* 3, 2006.


Robertson, Blair Anthony, "A Dream Ski Trip, Then 'Mountain Came Down'," Sacramento (CA) Bee, February 5, 2003.


Sin, Lena, "But Do You Recall the Most Threatened Reindeer of All?" *Vancouver Province*, December 27, 2006.


*Trail (BC) Times*, "Native Protesters Call for Boycott over Land Dispute," October 24, 2001.


———, "Killing Off Other Species to Save Caribou Seems Worse Than the Problem," October 28, 2006.


Social Movement Websites


**Skiing-Oriented Websites**


**Ski Magazines**


SBC Skier: Canadian Ski Culture, December 2004.


Skiing, November 2006.

RECRUITMENT NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT
MAKING MEANING OUT OF MOUNTAINS:
SKIING AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE
AND AN ECONOMY OF DISCOURSES

Research participants are needed for an interview research project on skiing and the environment. If you are a downhill skier, snowboarder, or telemark skier, you are invited to participate in interview research for a PhD thesis titled, “Making Meaning out of Mountains: Skiing as a Social Practice and an Economy of Discourses.” This interview research is being conducted by Mark C.J. Stoddart, under the supervision of Dr. David Tindall at the Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia. Participation in this research is open to adults (19 years and over) who are downhill skiers, snowboarders, or telemark skiers. Participants will receive a $5 honorarium in exchange for their participation. Interviews will last approximately one hour. If you are interested in participating, or have any questions about the project, please contact Mark Stoddart, Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia. Phone: (604) 707-0667 (Vancouver) or (250) 226-6843 (Winlaw); e-mail: mcjs@interchange.ubc.ca
Research participants needed for an interview research project on skiing and the environment

- If you are a downhill skier, snowboarder, or telemark skier, you are invited to participate in interview research for a PhD thesis titled, “Making Meaning out of Mountains: Skiing as a Social Practice and an Economy of Discourses.”

- This interview research is being conducted by Mark C.J. Stoddart, under the supervision of Dr. David Tindall at the Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia.

- Participation in this research is open to adults (19 years and over) who are downhill skiers, snowboarders, or telemark skiers.

- Participants will receive a $5 honorarium in exchange for their participation. Interviews will last approximately one hour.

If you are interested in participating, or have any questions about the project, please contact:
Mark Stoddart, PhD Student
Department of Sociology, University of British Columbia
Phone: (604) 707-0667 (Vancouver); (250) 226-6843 (Winlaw)
E-mail: mcjs@interchange.ubc.ca
Hello (NAME OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT),

Thank you again for participating in my research project, Making Meaning out of Mountains. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to e-mail the following recruitment notice for research participants to skiers and snowboards that you know in the Vancouver and Whistler regions, whom you feel may be interested in participating in the project. Your assistance with this is purely voluntary. Your past participation in the research project places you under no further obligations. If you have any questions or concerns about circulating this notice, do not hesitate to contact me (604-707-0667).

Finally, an article about the research project recently appeared in the Pique newspaper, published in Whistler. If you have an interest in seeing the article, it can be viewed at the following website:


Thank you for taking this under consideration. I will contact you again once I have preliminary results from the project to share with you.

Sincerely,

Mark C.J. Stoddart
Department of Sociology
University of British Columbia
mcjs@interchange.ubc.ca
(604) 707-0667

MAKING MEANING OUT OF MOUNTAINS: SKIING AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Downhill SKIERS, SNOWBOARDERS, or TELEMARK skiers living in the Vancouver and Whistler regions are invited to participate in interview research for a PhD thesis titled, “Making Meaning out of Mountains.” This research is being conducted by Mark C.J. Stoddart, under the supervision of Dr. David Tindall, Dept. of Sociology, University of British Columbia. Participation is open to adults (19 years and over) who are downhill skiers, snowboarders, or telemark skiers. Participants receive $5 honorarium in exchange for participation. Interviews last approximately one hour. If you are interested, or have any questions, contact Mark Stoddart, Dept. of Sociology, UBC. Phone: (604) 707-0667; e-mail: mcjs@interchange.ubc.ca
Appendix IV: Comparison of Interview Sample and 2001 Census Profiles (Vancouver, Whistler, Nelson)

### Table A4.1 Regional populations and interview sample.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (2001 Census)</th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Interview Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9,298</td>
<td>1,986,965</td>
<td>8,896</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A4.2 Regional profiles and interview sample by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender (% of total population)</th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Interview Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A4.3 Regional profiles and interview sample by age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (% of total population (2001 Census))</th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Interview Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-84</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85+</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Level of Schooling (% of population 20-64 years) (2001 Census)</td>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>Whistler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school graduation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduation and/or some postsecondary</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades certificate or diploma</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College certificate or diploma</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University certificate, diploma, or degree</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A4.4 Regional profiles and interview sample by education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income (Persons 15 years and over with income)</th>
<th>Nelson</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
<th>Whistler</th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Interview Sample Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 or less</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21,000 to $40,000</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$41,000 to $60,000</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$61,000 to $80,000</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$81,000 to $100,000</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$101,000 and over</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A4.5 Regional profiles and interview sample by income.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation (% of experienced labour force)</th>
<th>Nelson</th>
<th>Vancouver</th>
<th>Whistler</th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Interview Sample Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management occupations</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>17.28%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, finance and administration</td>
<td>15.54%</td>
<td>19.80%</td>
<td>12.38%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural and applied sciences and related occupations</td>
<td>7.82%</td>
<td>7.16%</td>
<td>4.97%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health occupations</td>
<td>5.47%</td>
<td>5.23%</td>
<td>3.96%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social science, education, government service and religion</td>
<td>9.54%</td>
<td>8.19%</td>
<td>3.31%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, culture, recreation and sport</td>
<td>2.68%</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>6.91%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and service occupations</td>
<td>28.51%</td>
<td>25.12%</td>
<td>38.37%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations</td>
<td>13.83%</td>
<td>12.39%</td>
<td>9.79%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations unique to primary industry</td>
<td>2.03%</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
<td>2.45%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations unique to processing, manufacturing and utilities</td>
<td>2.57%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>99.89%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A4.6 Regional profiles and interview sample by occupational category.\(^{22}\)

---

\(^{22}\) Because this table does not include interview participants who are retired, unemployed, or full-time students, the column totals do not add up to 100%.
### Legal Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Interview Sample Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Single</strong></td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Married</strong></td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Separated</strong></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Divorced</strong></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Widowed</strong></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A4.7 Regional profiles and interview sample by marital status.23

### Type of Skiing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Skiing</th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Female Participants</th>
<th>Male Participants</th>
<th>Interview Sample Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine skiing (including Alpine Touring)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowboarding</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telemarking</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple: alpine-snowboard</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple: alpine-telemark</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple: snowboard-telemark</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All three</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A4.8 Interview sample by type of skiing.

---

23 For comparison with the Census Profiles, common-law is classified as ‘single.’
### Table A4.9 Interview sample by skiing skill level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Level</th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Female Participants</th>
<th>Male Participants</th>
<th>Interview Sample Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table A4.10 Interview sample by years of skiing experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Skiing Experience</th>
<th>Nelson Interview Sample</th>
<th>Vancouver/Whistler Interview Sample</th>
<th>Female Participants</th>
<th>Male Participants</th>
<th>Interview Sample Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 years</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35 years</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40 years</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45 years</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50 years</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 50 years</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix V: Interview Schedule
Interview Schedule v4.3
November 4, 2006

Interview #:


Respondent’s name:


Respondent’s gender:


Location of interview (Vancouver/Nelson):


Date:           Time:


Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. It will take about one hour. I am doing this interview as part of the research for my PhD dissertation, which focuses on skiing and the environment. I will ask several questions about your history as a skier. From there, I will ask some questions about nature, the environment and politics. Your identity will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear on the interview recording or transcript. For my own reference, I will keep a separate file that links the interview recording and transcript with your identifying information. This file will be password protected and only my PhD supervisor or I will have access to it. Results of this research may appear in a journal article, academic conference paper, or a published book. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the interview at any time. You may also refuse to answer any of the questions. Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?
Section 1: Questions about skiing

1. Are you primarily an alpine skier, snowboarder, or telemark skier?

2. How old were you when you started skiing?
   a. Follow up: How many years have you been skiing for?
   b. Follow up: In terms of skill level, would you consider yourself a beginner, intermediate, advanced, or an expert skier?

3. Where do you do most of your skiing? (i.e. what ski hill or back-country area)

4. What would you say makes up a good ski day? (Prompt: What do you like about skiing?)

5. Can you tell me about one of the best ski days that you have had in the past season?

6. How important is the surrounding landscape to your ski experience?

7. Have you ever seen wildlife while skiing? (Prompt: What kinds? Can you tell me about that?)

8. Do you think your experience of skiing is shaped by being a man/woman?
   a. Follow-up: How do you think your skiing experience would be different if you were male/female?

9. Do you do other kinds of outdoor recreation besides skiing? (Prompt: What kinds?)

10. Have you ever been involved in skiing as a sport? (Prompt: Can you tell be about that?)

11. How often do you buy new ski gear?
   a. Follow up: Is it important to you to have up to date ski gear?
**Section 2: Questions about skiing and media**

12. Do you read ski magazines?
   a. Follow up: Which ones?
   b. Follow up: What do you think about how they portray skiing?

13. Do you use skier-oriented internet sites?
   a. Follow up: Which ones?
   b. Follow up: What do you think about how they portray skiing?

14. Do you pay attention to news about skiing in the mass media? (Prompt: Such as news about new resorts, avalanches, news about skiing competitions)
   a. Follow up: Which media sources do you get skiing news from?
   b. Follow up: What do you think about how skiing is portrayed in the media?

**Section 3: Questions about environmentalism and politics**

15. Are there any particular environmental issues that you are concerned about?

16. Have you ever been a member of an environmental group? (Prompt: Which groups? How were you involved?)

17. Do you try to buy environmentally friendly products? (i.e. cleaning products, food, clothing)

18. Would you call skiing an environmentally friendly activity? (Prompt: Can you tell me how you think it is/isn’t?)

19. Would you call yourself an environmentalist? (Prompt: Can you tell me more about that?)

20. I’ve asked you several questions about the environment. Now, I’d like to ask you a couple questions about your political orientation:
   a. Do you usually vote federally? Who do you usually vote for?
b. Do you usually vote for provincially? Who do you usually vote for?

c. In general, do you consider yourself more socially liberal, or socially conservative

(i.e. in terms of social values, not political party orientation)

Section 4: “Case Study” Questions

21. In 2010 the winter Olympics will be coming to Vancouver and Whistler. To prepare for the Olympics, work is being done on the Sea to Sky highway, and infrastructure for the games is being built in Vancouver and Whistler. This is an event with a global audience, which will bring large numbers of tourists to southwestern B.C. In preparing for the games, the 2010 committee and provincial government have said they want to make this the most environmentally friendly games ever. What do you think of this issue?

22. Jumbo Pass is a proposed ski development that will be located near Invermere and Nelson, in southeastern B.C. The proposed resort has been challenged by environmental groups, who say that it will displace the local grizzly bear population. Environmentalists also claim that the resort, which will be located high in the Purcell Mountains, will have significant environmental impacts because of sewage and garbage disposal. By contrast, the developer argues that the environmental impacts of the resort can be minimized and that the resort can be run in an environmentally sustainable way. What do you think about this issue?

23. The Sun Peaks ski resort is located near Kamloops. For the past several years, the resort has been planning an expansion of the ski hill. However, groups of local First Nations (Shuswap; Secwepemc) protesters have demonstrated against the expansion of the ski hill because it is located on traditional lands. At the same time, other local First Nations people
have been supportive of the resort for economic reasons. What do you think about this issue?

Section 5: Demographic information

24. How old were you on your last birthday?

25. What is your marital status?

26. What is the highest level of formal education you have received? (Follow up: in what area?)

27. What is your occupation?

28. Could you please tell me which of these categories best describes your personal income last year, before taxes:
   a. $20,000 or less
   b. $21,000 to $40,000
   c. $41,000 to $60,000
   d. $61,000 to $80,000
   e. $81,000 to $100,000
   f. $101,000 or over
Conclusion

That is the end of my questions. Thank you again for your participation.

29. Is there anything else related to skiing and the environment that you would like to talk about?

Would you like to receive a copy of the research results when the project is finished? If so, please provide an e-mail or mailing address where I can send you a summary.
Appendix VI: Field Observation Protocol

1. Observation of physical surrounding (space, setting)
   a. lighting
   b. colour
   c. smell
   d. sounds
   e. objects
   f. weather

2. Observation of members
   a. age
   b. ethnicity
   c. dress
   d. hairstyle
   e. equipment

3. Observation of behaviours
   a. verbal
   b. nonverbal

4. Observe the non-action
## Appendix VII: NVIVO7 Coding Scheme

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Appendix VIII: Behavioural Research Ethics Board Certificates of Approval
# Certificate of Approval

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**
Tindall, D.B.

**DEPARTMENT**
Sociology

**NUMBER**
B06-0677

**INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT**
UBC Campus

**CO-INVESTIGATORS**
Stoddart, Mark C. John, Sociology

**SPONSORING AGENCIES**
Unfunded Research

**TITLE**
Making Meaning out of Mountains: Skiing as a Social Practice and an Economy of Discourses

**APPROVAL DATE**
AUG 25 2006

**TERM (YEARS)**
1

**DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:**

**CERTIFICATION:**
The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

---

Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board
by one of the following:
Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair,
Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair
Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.
# Certificate of Approval

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**INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT**

UBC Campus,

**CO-INVESTIGATORS:**

Stoddart, Mark C. John, Sociology

**SPONSORING AGENCIES**

Unfunded Research

**TITLE:**

Making Meaning out of Mountains: Skiing as a Social Practice and an Economy of Discourses

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**CERTIFICATION:**

The request for continuing review of an amendment to the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

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Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board by one of the following:

- Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair,
- Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
- Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair
- Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.
Appendix IX: Interview Consent Form
CONSENT FORM

MAKING MEANING OUT OF MOUNTAINS:
SKIING AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE
AND AN ECONOMY OF DISCOURSES

Please read the following, then sign and date the consent form.

You agree to participate in this interview about skiing and the environment, titled, “Making Meaning out of Mountains: Skiing as a Social Practice and an Economy of Discourses.” This research project will examine how skiers interpret their recreational activity as a form of interaction with nature. For this research project, Mark C.J. Stoddart, a PhD Student, will interview 40 skiers about skiing and environmentalism. You have been invited to participate because you identify as a skier (downhill skier, snowboarder, or telemark skier) and you live in either the Vancouver/Whistler region or the Nelson region of British Columbia.

You understand that this research is being carried out by Mark C.J. Stoddart, for his PhD dissertation at the University of British Columbia, under the supervision of Dr. David Tindall. You also understand that the results of this research will be reported in a PhD thesis, in academic journal articles, and at academic conferences.

You understand that this interview will take approximately 1 hour to finish. Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions and you may withdraw from participation at any time without any penalty. You will be paid $5 as an incentive for your participation of this interview. The receipt of the $5 incentive is not conditional on the completion of the interview, or answering all of the questions.

You understand that your participation in this project entails minimal risk, but that participation in any research project may entail unforeseen emotional or psychological risk. Several measures will be taken to keep your identity confidential. Your name will not appear on the interview recording or transcript. A separate file will be kept that will link the interview recording and transcript with your identifying information. This file will be password protected and only the researcher and his PhD supervisor, Dr. Tindall will have access to it. The interview recording and transcript will also be password protected and will only be accessible to the researcher and his PhD supervisor. The original interview recording will be destroyed 10 years after data collection for the project has been completed.
By signing below you indicate your consent to participate in this research project. You acknowledge that you have received a copy of this consent form.

SIGNATURE:

PRINTED NAME: ____________________________ DATE: ____________________________

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research project. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research project, feel free to contact me by telephone or e-mail. You may also address any concerns to the Research Subject Information Line at the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, which can be reached at: (604) 822-8598.

Sincerely,
Mark C.J. Stoddart
PhD Student
Department of Anthropology and Sociology
E-mail: mcjs@interchange.ubc.ca
Tel: (604) 707-0667