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

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

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

How history informs sociology

For decades sociologists have debated the role of history in the discipline (see Abbott, 1991; Abrams, 1982; Eliot, 1922; Goldthorpe, 1991; Griffin, 1995). C. Wright Mills (1959) described history as the ‘shank of social study’ and critical to grasping the ‘problems of our time’ (p. 143), while Griffin (1995) subscribes to the view that it is important to ‘get the history right’ not only for its own sake but also for that of sociology (p. 1274). Despite proclaiming history as important to sociological analysis and explanation, many practitioners continue to theorize social processes, patterns, and trends with scant regard for history (Rojeck & Turner, 2000). An important segment of the discipline does, however, place real importance on the power of history, and more specifically context, to elucidate sociological research. Foucault’s genealogical work, or writing a ‘history of the present’, is a good example (Goldstein, 1994). Writers such as Abrams (1982) and Skocpol (1984) have also been powerful advocates of ‘historical sociology’. This type of thinking was also central to research carried out by Eric Dunning and his colleagues at the Centre for Research into Sport and Society, University of Leicester (see Dunning, 1994; Maguire, 1995). More recently, some Physical Cultural Studies scholars have been attempting to take history and context seriously by adopting the ‘dialectic method and approach’ of articulation (Andrews, 2008, p. 56). Each of these, and other, approaches to incorporating history into socio-cultural analyses has its strengths and limitations. It is not my intention to examine these approaches in any detail (for examples see Goldthorpe, 1991; Griffin, 1995; Thorpe, 2006). Rather, in this chapter I adopt an interdisciplinary approach to history and memory to reveal contemporary snowboarding culture as ‘produced from specific social and historic contexts’, and snowboarding bodies as ‘actively engaged in the ongoing constitution of the conditions out of which they emerge’ (Andrews, 2008, p. 57). Building upon this discussion, the subsequent chapters, particularly Chapters 3 and 4, further position snowboarding bodies within the hyper-commercial and highly mediated contemporary context.

The history of snowboarding: a realist tale

The popularization of the Malibu surf-board and the escapism and hedonism of surfing, with its antiestablishment countercultural values and do-it-yourself philosophies, inspired many of the early snowboarders. In 1964, Sherman Poppen invented the Snurfer when he bolted two skis together and added a rope for stability. Jake Burton Carpenter experimented with