

Olympic Survivals: The Olympic Games as a Global Phenomenon

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In this paper I do three things. First, I review some commentaries on globalization and culture, and globalization and sport. Second, I offer some selective reflections on the history of the Olympic Games, casting an analytical, periodizing eye over the 24 (Summer) Games, warning against the analysis of the Olympics on the basis of a sort of boxed-off self-referencing history of the sport event itself. Third, I review projections and claims made for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, and then discuss why and how the Olympics continues to be such a prominent player in the global politics of sport.

In the first half of 2003 some of the world's major cities – London, Madrid, Moscow, New York, Paris – and other hopefuls such as Havana, Istanbul, and Leipzig, lined themselves up for the competition to win the hosting of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. In Prague, in June of the same year, over 100 delegates from the bidding cities of Vancouver, Salzburg and Pyeongchang accompanied their teams' last-ditch presentations, hoping to sway the remaining floating votes among the 100 or so IOC (International Olympic Committee) members whose whims and fancies would determine the decision as to where to place the 2010 Winter Games.¹ Top politicians, prime ministers from Canada, Austria and South Korea lent their names to the bids, assuming obvious benefits should their city gain the victory. Such benefits, economic and/or symbolic, are notoriously difficult to identify in any precise fashion, and it is as much the ideological cant of the Olympic phenomenon that sustains its profile in the modern international world as any clear or tangible gains. This was reiterated in the rhetoric and style of the three presentations in Prague, where glitzy contemporary populism was mixed with pseudo-philosophical babble in tributes to the enduring values of

Olympism. Eventual winner Vancouver went first, entitling its presentation *The Sea to Sky Games*, and lead man John Furlong talked of the Olympics as 'a powerful platform for building a better world through sport'. He recalled the words of the immigrations officer who'd greeted him on arriving in Canada from Ireland 30 years before: 'Welcome to Canada. Make us better'. 'To give is the Canadian way', he added, telling the IOC that 'The Olympic Winter Games will make us all better'. Hockey superstar Wayne Gretzky talked of the fulfilment of his sporting dreams, which included four Stanley Cup victories, then added that 'there's no greater honour than the Olympics because there's no greater movement than the Olympics', and stated Team Canada's belief in the possibility of a world living in peace through sport. Other Winter Olympians recalled their starts in sport. Catronia Le May Doan, speed-skating gold medal winner at Nagano and Salt Lake City, emphasised the limitlessness of the bid's vision of 'an Olympic dream of forever'. This would include 50,000 event tickets in an Olympic access programme for children who could not otherwise afford to attend any events, and an international youth camp populated by two children invited from every National Olympic Committee. Furlong reappeared and pledged that if the decision went Vancouver's way, if the voters 'felt our passion', then we 'would distinguish ourselves in the cause of sport and humanity ... Our dream, like your dream, is a dream of forever'. Salzburg was next, appealing to its small-town charm and its reputation for music and culture. Mozart, born in the town, dominated the soundtrack of the video clips, and the presentation was compered by Annely Peebo, a blonde opera singer with a potentially winning smile, who was soon to warble the title line of the bid, *The Sound of (Winter) Sport*. The Austrian prime minister, Wolfgang Schussel, referred to the success story of the Olympics, stated the intent to get over 100 nations to participate in 2010, and praised sport's capacity to cultivate 'competition instead of confrontation', and to speak for peace. The head of Salzburg's music festival also emphasised the peace-stimulating dimension of cultural exchanges and intercultural understanding, beaming out her message that 'sport and art are like sun and moon', they are both 'the

source of our well being'. Pyeongchang's presentation was headed up by IOC member Dr Un Yong Kim, veteran sport campaigner for and boss of taekwondo, and chair of the association of international federations. Kim and the bid committee's chairman offered full government support for the extensive construction programmes that would be essential, support confirmed soon after by prime minister Kun Goh. Further presenters emphasised the projected venue's nickname, Peace City, and the universality of winter sports. The bid talked up the theme of a Games for all based upon fundamental principles of Peace and Humanity. Much was also made of the potential of the Games to further the process of the uniting of the two Koreas. Across all the bids ran a theme of dreams come true, grafted on to a commitment to peace and a form of humanitarianism in which Olympism could show the way forward beyond some of the most pressing problems of the age.

At every such presentation, ceremony and vote, it is clear that the appeal is never to simple economic benefits, or infrastructural upgrading, or national sentiment. Something else is claimed for the Olympics, something transcendental in relation to the grubby materialism of everyday life. A strange, spiritual sense comes to pervade the proceedings. At such moments, criticizing the Olympics is akin to laughing out loud in church.

Global culture, global sport: the Olympic Games as a global cultural event

Sociologists and social historians of sport have long recognised the centrality of the Olympics in any historical narrative of the rise and spread of international sport. Miller et al. observe how as forms of television-based popular culture, events such as the Olympics provide 'a crucial site where populations are targeted by different forms of governmental and commercial knowledge/power'.² They ask us to attempt to imagine such an event stripped of all the familiar cultural and political symbols that have become so familiar to worldwide audiences:

No comprehensive media coverage, no national flags flying, no playing of national anthems, no politicians involved in the ceremonies, no military displays, no tables comparing national standings, and athletes competing in whatever clothing they desired instead of national uniforms.³

It is of course difficult to achieve this act of the imagination. A deeply entrenched and historically claimed symbolism of co-existing national rivalries, perpetuated alongside the commercially-branded later cases of the corporatized Games, is one of the taken-for-granted mediated mega-events of contemporary global culture. Maurice Roche locates this merging of the commercial and the political on the level of global consumer culture:

Mega-events have had, and continue to have, an important role to play in the development of this global consumer culture through their long-established promotion of what I refer to ... as 'touristic consumerism'. They also contribute to understandings and experiences of 'one world' through their capacity to carry universalistic meanings and ideals. These include those associated with the benefits of peaceful cultural exchange between nations, ethnic and ideological communities (expos and Olympics), scientific and technological 'progress' (expos), human 'progress' and the value of personal and national achievement and recognition through rule-governed competition (Olympics and sport).⁴

Mega-events such as the Olympics are, for Roche, quintessential phenomena of global modernity, 'intrinsically complex processes' which combine the interests of political and economic elites and professionals from the increasingly supra-national cultural industries. These interlocking elites operate on a number of levels, Roche goes on: 'within and between urban, national and international levels ... working together in a medium-term time-horizon both to produce the events and to manage their effects'.⁵

The Olympics are, of course, more than mere reflections of social processes and trends. They are formative as well as formed, pointing the way towards new cultural formations and as such important indices of change and cultural transformation. Maguire identifies the last quarter of the nineteenth-century as a major phase in 'the international spread of sport, the establishment of international sports organizations, the growth of competition between national teams, the worldwide acceptance of rules governing specific sport forms and the establishment of global competitions such as the Olympic Games'.⁶ In this list, it is the Olympics and the very grandeur of the scale of the conception of de Coubertin (the *Rénovateur*), that constitutes a project of seriously globalizing proportion and potential, ridden with contradictions (Tomlinson, 1984) rooted in de Coubertin's aristocratic, imperialist, patriarchal roots, but nevertheless premised on a vision of an increasingly networked, compressed and orchestrated global culture. As Maguire also notes, the Olympic Games continue to provide a stage on which can be played out some of the recurring tensions of global politics. The West 'still has hegemonic control in the global sport figuration' but for non-Westerners a 'main source of potential dispute may well be the Olympic Games'.⁷ Miller et al. note the strong opposition of the Third World to the 'undemocratic ways' of the IOC's international Court of Arbitration for Sport.⁸ And the Games have provided, case after case through their history, an opportunity for the expression of national identity. Bairner has reaffirmed how, on the level of the national, different statements can be made to a world audience, in the context of the Olympics, about what it is to be American or Canadian.⁹

The Olympics operate therefore as a focus for the articulation of serious national and global political dynamics, and as a giant billboard for the elite crop of multi-national corporations that are the preferred sponsorship partners of the International Olympic Committee. These political and economic dimensions are interconnected and serve the interests of what Miller et al. (2001) call the New International Division of Cultural Labour,

which operates in the context of 'five simultaneous, uneven, interconnected processes which characterize the present moment in sport: Globalization, Governmentalization, Americanization, Televisualization, and Commodification (GGATaC)'.¹⁰ Listing all these processes may be a disservice to crisp English prose, but it is an important reminder that the economic, the political and the cultural are not separate dimensions of phenomena such as the Olympics. Studying the global reach of events such as this requires an analytical approach sensitive to the ways in which these dimensions intermesh.

Recognition of the profile of the Olympic Games is well-established in the scholarly circles of the historical and social scientific analysis of sport. The Games are not, though, always seen to be of great significance in more general approaches. In his analysis of the transnational capitalist class, one of Sklair's main propositions is that 'the globalization of the capitalist system reproduces itself through the profit-driven culture-ideology of consumerism'.¹¹ He makes no mention of the IOC, and the Olympic Games is mentioned only in footnotes, in terms of some of its policy developments around green issues and the environment,¹² and as an example of the increase in sport sponsorship of international sporting events.¹³ Sklair's analysis is on the macro-level of the workings and reach of transnational companies and capital, which he sees as powerfully entrenched in their positions: 'No social movement appears even remotely likely to overthrow the three fundamental institutional supports of global capitalism that have been identified, namely the TNCs, the transnational capitalist class, and the culture-ideology of consumerism'.¹⁴ The Olympics is in some senses, from this scale of macro perspective, just one example of the operationalization of the practices and ideologies of global capital and the trans-national companies that dominate the centres of international capital. It is not surprising therefore that they are not acknowledged to be any more or less interesting or important than any other such exemplar. More surprising is the total absence of any discussion of the Olympic Games or international sports-media events in the work of John

Tomlinson. Tomlinson's major themes are connectivity in a world characterized by 'a particular and exaggerated sense of proximity', aided by a form of 'high-profile globalizing technology', all with the potential to 'change the nature of localities'.¹⁵ Central concerns in his book are deterritorialization, hybridization, mediated communication and its consequences for cultural experience, and the question, or possibility, of cosmopolitanism. Those of us working consistently on sport would find it hard to ignore the Olympics as a major example through which to explore such themes, and associated themes, derived from Anthony Giddens, of time-space distanciation and its implications for people's experience of place. Tomlinson cites shopping malls as examples of what Giddens has called the 'phantasmagoric' nature of modern places. Olympic villages and stadia, Olympic parks and sites could equally usefully be viewed as illuminating cases of such places.

Generally, although Olympic scholarship has generated extremely valuable histories, contemporary studies and critical interventions – far too vast a range of sources to be meaningfully listed here – a challenge remains. This is the straightforward challenge of re-locating critical analyses of the Olympic phenomenon within the context of debates concerning the nature of international cultural politics, the operation of the interests of trans-national companies and international capital, and the nature of international sport's relation to global consumer culture and international markets. Any such challenge should reconsider the balance of forces that have combined to make the Games, and the so-called Movement of which the Games are an embodiment, an international phenomenon of such profile, impact and longevity.

The Olympic Games 1896-2008

The simple facts of the growth of the Olympic Games are widely established, in an expanding line-up of events, participants, media personnel, media coverage and worldwide spectators and television viewers. But the story of

the survival and eventual expansion into everyday global consciousness of the Games was not an even one. Early Games after the inaugural success in Athens in 1896 were linked to expos.¹⁶ In Paris in 1900 and in St. Louis in 1904 events with few spectators were marginal peripheral aspects of great trades shows, celebrations of expanding international trade markets. As high-profile cultural events they were insignificant flops. London in 1908 recaptured some of the revivalist momentum of the de Coubertin project. The British Olympic Association had been created in 1905, allocated a seat on the IOC, and with its well-established athletics organisation in the form of the Amateur Athletics Association it could respond to a desperate IOC, looking for a replacement host city in 1906 when Rome had withdrawn just two years before the event. The Franco-British Exhibition of 1908 became the saviour of the Olympic idea. Though by the final day 90,000 turned out to witness the marathon race, spurred on by a media picking up on British-American athletic rivalries, the event was again a marginal appendage. It is interesting to look closely at some of the surviving documentation of the time.¹⁷

The programme for the 1908 Olympic Games featured no Olympic logos or signs, and had no mention of the Olympics at all on the cover, which featured a high-jumper clad in classic white athletic kit, in an insert inside a kind of pseudo-classical door or arch-way: the programme is headlined The Great Stadium, Shepherd's Bush, London - Franco-British Exhibition 1908 6d. The Olympic Games and the '4th. International Olympiad' are not billed until page 2, after the first page advertisement for Robinson's 'Patent' Barley Water: in the ad, a polo-player is served by a man-in-waiting, horses are held by others looking on: 'For any violent exercise, BARLEY WATER is the best THIRST-QUENCHER when properly made' from R's Patent Barley. The IOC and the BOA committee line-ups feature on the third and fourth pages. The athletic contests scarcely feature in the programme. The event was seized upon by a range of advertisers, with advertisements for a range of products: a Pear's Soap baby on the back cover, McVitie's digestives, healing balm called Zam-Buk, a raincoat, Bryant and May/Swan Vestas matches, Gamage's equipment,

Piggott and Ward retailers, 'Read's Olympian Oils - The Marvellous Pain Reliever and Muscle Strengtheners' at a shilling and 2/6, available from 90 Victoria Street SW, golf balls, embrocine medication ('An antiseptic and disinfectant spirit' that 'makes old people feel young'); and Schweppes Dry Ginger Ale and Lemonade & Soda Water. Already, we see associations between athletic competition and lifestyle self-improvement consumer products. The financial potential of the Olympics was very much untapped in London's first Olympics, but the commercial dimension and potential of the event was clearly recognised.

Alongside this commercial dimension, in the promotional literature of the British Olympic Committee, an idealised rhetoric of Olympism claimed that the Ancient Games 'formed a bond between widely scattered members of the Greek race; they fostered throughout the Greek world a sense of kinship and a consciousness of common ideals which not even war was able to obscure', and that the revival of the Olympics could foster an adaptation of fruitful past 'principles of bringing together the chosen athletes of all nations in the strength of their youth and in the prime of their manhood to learn in the chivalrous and friendly rivalry of athletic contests that mutual respect and esteem, which are the only sure basis of International concord'. On this basis, the BOC desired 'that the celebration should be worthy of the Motherland of International Sport'. The 1908 London Games confirmed the fragile cultural and economic basis of the Olympics, and provided some basis for the consolidation of the project in Stockholm in 1912. The Games after the 1914-18 Great War (Antwerp 1920, Paris 1924, Amsterdam 1928) remained on a relatively modest scale, though the US presence was becoming increasingly dominant, and included powerful statements of athletic prowess by women athletes. In Amsterdam in 1928, G. Van Rossem, secretary general of the Netherlands Olympic Committee and compiler of the official report of the Games,¹⁸ could write proudly that the press needs were catered for by setting up a Press Section. The Press Stand could seat 600. 'In front of many of the seats there were small folding tables on which a typewriter could be placed or

notes made' (p.247). The account of the provision of the media facility conveys the modest scale of the event, yet also the excitement of applying the new communications technology to the international sporting event:

[Next to the] post and telegraph office a room was fitted out in which the journalists could prepare urgent reports and telegrams. The writing tables being partitioned off so that each journalist could work without interfering with the others ... offices were fitted out at the Heerengracht and in De Groote Club, where all communiqués could be found, where the journalists could work, where they could obtain all the information they desired, and where, thanks to the management of the club, they could take their meals ... Further, there were 5 telephone booths installed in the office at the Heerengracht. This measure was not necessary in the Kalverstraat office owing to its being in the close vicinity of the General Post office, where ample provision was made. (pp. 248-9)

The national Olympic association was not averse to a little self-publicity either, and 'occasionally propagative articles on Holland in general and Amsterdam in particular with suitable photos were sent out for publication, and in this connexion much assistance was afforded by the "Society for making Holland better known abroad" and by the Dutch Touring Club'. (p.253)

The Committee also took a stance on a case of competing media interests, at a time when the written press was still for many the first source of contact with news and information, and in this case the outcome of sporting encounters:

At the request of the Association Internationale de la Presse Sportive, the Committee gave up the idea of broadcasting results of the events, as the Association pointed out that this would be hardly fair to journalists whose papers had gone to much expense and trouble to

send representatives to the Games. If the foreign papers had not done this, there would not have been the propaganda made for the Games in particular and Holland in general, which there was undeniably, due to personal visits. (p.255)

The official report catalogued the scale of communications activity. 14,480 telegrams were sent from the Press Bureau in the Stadium. Athletics (1,166) and the Marathon (1,058) days generated most telegrams in the second period. Football (441) and hockey were the busiest days of the first period. You can sense the excitement at how these Olympics began to experiment with people's expectations of time and space:

The excitement which prevailed in connexion with the results of the contests and the extraordinary energy evinced by the journalists in their efforts to report to their papers as quickly as possible caused a sort of sporting rivalry among the telegraphists at Amsterdam. It was due to this fact that messages regarding the match Uruguay-Argentine were cabled from Amsterdam via New York to Buenos Aires in about 40 seconds. This incident was unique in the annals of the telegraph service and therefore deserves special mention. (p.256)

Three hundred and seventeen journalists were present during the first period of the Games. In the second period this increased to 490 and 616 respectively. At times there was pressure on space. Smaller press stands at some venues limited the number of these journalists admitted. Only 261 could cover fencing, 138 wrestling and weight-lifting, and 196 swimming. Amsterdam 1928 marks the beginning of a transformation, with international communications demonstrating the potential to speak for the internationalism of the event itself, and the national interests of the host and participating nations.

If the first eight Summer Olympics Games were relatively low-profile, politically and commercially, the Games of the 1930s were more overtly political and expressive of national interests. In this sense, the Games from 1932 to 1984 can be seen as more explicitly political projects, in the 1920s and 1930s matched by the Soviet experiments in the use of sport for display and propaganda. It was in 1928, the year of the Amsterdam Olympics and a year in which Joseph Stalin was manoeuvring his way to power, that 'the USSR produced its own large-scale international Olympic-type multi-sport event in Moscow, the first "Spartakiad" a combination of sport event and mass festival'.¹⁹ The second Spartakiad was held in Moscow in 1932. For the next twelve Olympic Games – Los Angeles, 1932; Berlin 1936; London, 1948; Helsinki, 1952; Melbourne, 1956; Rome, 1960; Tokyo, 1964; Mexico, 1968; Munich, 1972; Montreal, 1976; Moscow, 1980; and Los Angeles, 1984 – the political stakes became higher and higher. This included the exploitation of the 1936 Games in the cause of fascism and Nazism, and after the Second World War the use of the Games to fuel Cold War rivalries, once the Soviet Union was permitted into the party. The Olympics also offered nations the possibility of rehabilitation into the world community (Italy, Japan and Germany). Across this phase of the Olympic story, the explicit political motivation of intensely national interests catapulted the Games onto a new level, once the survival had been achieved in the London 1948 Games. The Games represented the wider sport cultures of the nations that participated in them. In 1929 Mussolini sought to win the 1936 Games for Rome, and at Berlin in 1936 failed again in a bid to stage the 1940 Games. But this hardly stopped the fascist sport project established by Mussolini. His regime celebrated high-profile Italian victories in Europe's first football World Cup Finals in 1934 and 1938, but the general sports project was operative across a range of levels .

In a 1933 booklet on the 'International University Games',²⁰ we have access to a discourse on the young sporting body that combines the claimed idealism of international brother- and sisterhood with the fascist project of *Il Duce*,

Benito Mussolini. The rhetoric and hyperbole of the booklet repays close scrutiny. On its front cover it features a downhill skier, on its back cover a rower (in very modernist, sharp and angular imagery, canoe in the water looking like the spout of 1970s supersonic aircraft Concorde). Inside the booklet, the photograph on the title page is of an obelisk of Mussolini, and the Italian national flag. The opening photograph in the booklet proper is of the Mussolini Stadium.

The text of the booklet begins with a paean to Romantic writers, then asserts that 'there are many new things in Italy and one more important than the rest, Italy is today the youngest country in Europe, with young people aged 20 or under making up 43% of the population'. It reports the 'wonderful progress made by Italy in this field of human activity', sport - its profile in the 1932 LA Olympic Games, Grand Prizes in other countries in motor-cars, horse shows, football matches, swimming, fencing - 'it is the result of ten years of the Fascist Regime which places in the front rank the health and the physical improvement of the Italian race ... the spirit of the Italian masses has been physically changed ... and successful efforts made to give a sporting education to young men which will strengthen their muscles today and mould their character in the future'.

French writer D. Chappert is quoted, writing in a leading Paris newspaper, telling his country's and Europe's liberals that they shouldn't be afraid to recognize and admire Italy's sports development, for sport there has become as important as anti-TB campaigns, draining marshlands, building hospitals, roads and schools: 'it is animated by the same spirit that inspired the unearthing of the glorious remains of ancient Rome and the development of aviation; sport has today become the real means of national education and stadia, sporting fields and swimming pools are being everywhere and democratically placed at the disposal of Italian youth'. Chappert's hymn to youth becomes an apologia for the fascist project:

Those entrusted with the direction of this great movement justly place university students in the front rank of the great mass of the young men they are training, almost as if they represented the real youth of the country. Youth, is in fact the title of a hymn that has become national, and it is considered as the inexhaustible source of new energies and therefore placed at the head of this renewed country.

The Duce perfectly realizes that he can fully rely on this group of keen and intelligent young men fanatical for the greatness of their country, its glory and its mission in the world.

It may be a case of collective enthusiasm, a Latin exaggeration or a Mediterranean microbe... but all the same it implies a great material organization and a practical and moral work of preparation.

Youth's foremost place in national life in fascist Italy in the 1920s and 1930s led to the organization of élite groups within the academy: Fascist University Groups (FUGs), 'initiated in 1920, side by side with the Fascist squads of action'. The latter were later incorporated into the National Party and then into the Regime, and the FUGs retained their university base, soon reaching 55,000 in number and acquiring 'the character, both as regards culture and sport, of the most complete National Union in Europe'. FUGs were promoted in their 'sporting education', lectures, travel, cruises international exchanges and reunions - 'Italian University students have acquired the conscience and pride of their status and they are now united in a mass of disciplined energies, from which the State and the Party have already selected with successful results, men of inexhaustible loyalty to fill positions of trust'.

Youth were also inculcated into the Yearly Littoriali Sporting Competition, first held in Bologna in 'the X year of the Fascist Regime'. These were designed to create and reaffirm the sporting masses, and to award prizes according to numbers and discipline and not just first places, and cultivate 'sporting spirit as a whole', reinforcing too the achievements of the first ten years of the Fascist Regime, during which 58 stadia and 493 sporting fields

were built, and 3,500 sporting associations organized. It was the second time that Italy was preparing for these International University Games, after successfully staging them in 1928. For the 1933 event, the construction of the largest stadium in the country was planned for Turin. In Rome, the Forum of Mussolini was constructed for athletic exercises, staged in front of 20,000 spectators, 'surrounded with large marble figures of athletes in repose each one representing a branch of sport. This harmonious construction recalls Graeco-Roman buildings of a similar character and its situation on the green hills of Monte Mario, is bound, even during sporting exercises ... inspiring them with the higher ideals of physical and spiritual beauty as was the case in past epochs'. These Games, held in Turin from 1-10 September 1933, were an encomium to the fascist project. All the youthful idealism in the world could not undermine the prime political project. Italy, the booklet concluded, was sure that the Games would generate 'that serene and sincere spirit of comradeship and that spiritual and sporting brotherhood which unite the youth of the entire world in a real and great "internationale"'.

Arriving from anywhere else in the world that autumn in 1933, you might have swallowed the rhetoric of the Italian state and authorities, have understandably seen yourself as a representative of a noble internationalist ideal. But from the acceptance of the invitation onwards, and certainly from the moment you entered the Turin stadium, your sporting idealism was appropriated - 'arrogated', as I have often called this process with reference to the Olympic ideal.²¹ Your sporting body would be speaking for the apologists of the Italian political project. Even winning would not change this. For all of Jesse Owens's gold medals and dignity in 1936, it made no difference whatsoever to the momentum of the Nazi project. In such cultural moments and spaces the body is an instrument of the ideology on the basis of which the sporting practice has been planned and produced. The Olympics inscribe wider cultural projects and ideologies. All the Olympic hyperbole in the world does not alter this. In the explicitly nationalist second phase in the history of the Olympic Games, they prospered primarily on the basis of their

usefulness as a vehicle for the articulation of political meanings and national rivalries. But as the Olympic project veered from crisis to crisis in the crisis-ridden 'M' years from 1968 to 1980, rocked by political protest, terrorist incursions, unprecedented losses and major boycotts, it was its combined commercial potential and political use as shown in the 1984 Games that secured its future as a mega-event of the televisual age. It was fitting that the Games marking the transformative point of these phases in Olympic history were both staged in Los Angeles.

Reporting 225 million dollar profits, based on restoration of facilities as much as new provision, celebrating the values of the free Western world after boycotting Moscow in 1980, and producing opening and closing ceremonies based on sheer Hollywood razzmatazz, the LA Games marked a point of transformation in the cultural staging and underpinning political economy of world sport. It was the first Games held under the presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch, and launched the Games into a new phase of development hand-in-hand with television companies willing to pay unheard-of sums to cover the events, and economic partners paying huge sums for their exclusive sponsorship status and rights in the TOP (the Olympic programme) scheme.²² From that point on, the Games were guaranteed a future as one of the most high-profile global commodities. The Seoul Games (1988) carried on the political mission of host cities, but the cultural-commercial-economic rebalancing of interests was best encapsulated in the cases of Barcelona (1992) and Sydney (2000), sandwiched by the attempt of Atlanta (1996) to reconfigure the worldwide audience's perception of US geography. The Games of this third phase were immersed in a developmental cultural logic of economic regeneration and global self-promotion of cities and states, justified widely and recurrently on the basis of some amorphous spiritual value of benefit to all of humankind. This logic continues to fuel the scramble to win the right to host the Games, with some of the world's top cities lining up in 2003 to do battle to win the 2012 Games.

G'day: Sydney 2000

Sydney was desperate to secure the 2000 Summer Olympics, to claim the first games of the new millennium. It was clear in its bidding documentation as to its motives.²³ The main features of Sydney's bid as outlined in the Candidature File were:

1. concentration of venues in Homebush, 14 sports there , plus press centre and village: 'Sydney Olympic park was to be the largest concentration of venues in Olympic history'.
2. many sports in Sydney Harbour Zone, yachting on the Harbour, six sports in Darling Harbour area: 'the fifth largest Olympic precinct in history'.
3. all athletes in the one Olympic village in the park 'for the first time in Olympic history'.
4. all venues within 30 minutes of Olympic Park.
5. focus on needs of athletes in all aspects of planning.
6. 'to overcome fears about distance, transport costs to Sydney for all athletes and officials would be met by the Sydney Organising Committee, in addition to free accommodation and meals in the Olympic Village'.
7. 'the freight costs of canoes and kayaks, rowing shells, yachts and all horses would be met by the Sydney Organising Committee'.
8. Sydney 'a low security risk with no known threats to the safety of the Olympic Family'.
9. 'a four-year arts festival program with a particular focus on Australia's indigenous and multicultural heritage'.
10. 'the sheer physical beauty, the warmth of its people and the temperate climate of Sydney were also highlighted as providing a perfect location for the Olympic Games'.

And Sydney's bid 'broke new ground in promising the most "environmentally friendly" Olympic Games in history' (Official Report, p.19) developing guidelines later adopted by the IOC as the standard for Summer Olympic environmental policies. Crucially, the bid committee devised a

sophisticated and comprehensive program of lobbying IOC members. IOC members made visits to Sydney to be 'briefed on the plans and to inspect progress', and 65 IOC members visited Sydney at the invitation of the bid committee, not counting delegates to the GAISF (the gathering of international sports federations) conference in the city in October 1991.

And the lobbying certainly paid dividends. On 23 September 1993, 5 bidding cities made final presentations of 30 minutes each with 15 minutes for questions. Berlin, Sydney, and Manchester started in the Monte Carlo line-up. Features of Sydney's presentation included: Olympic film footage, score to *Waltzing Matilda*, Kevin Gosper the IOC v-p and Australian Olympic Committee member speaking on the Olympics and Australia's unbroken attendance record, and showing the commitment of the country in this third consecutive Australian bid. John Fahey, New South Wales president, 'committed the NSW government to financially guarantee the Games, and carefully illustrated the solid, modern infrastructure already in place in Sydney, and stated concern for the environment. John Coates of the Australian Olympic Committee stressed 'The Athletes' Games', emphasising in particular the great 'centre stage' of harbour sites, the centrality of the Park, and the scope of the Olympic Village. Kieren Perkins, Barcelona 1500m freestyle gold medallist, spoke on freedom, safety, comfort for athletes, and 'a clean, healthy environment'. The fifth speaker was an 11-year old Sydney schoolgirl, Tanya Blencowe: 'Sydney is a friendly city where it doesn't matter where you come from. We are all Australians together. We eat together, learn together and play sport together. And that's what the Olympic Games really mean to me. It's bringing the young people of the world together to celebrate sport and friendship'. The Prime Minister Paul Keating made three main points: he lauded the Australian love of sport, freedom and democracy; claimed Australia as a representative of the Asia-Pacific region; and reaffirmed the city as an ideal venue for a safe games. 'Annita Keating followed her husband to the microphone. Dutch-born Mrs Keating spoke as a representative of the 25 per cent of all Australians born overseas, and of the

140 cultures found in Sydney, which she described as a “welcoming community” with a spirit of “friendliness and fun.” She repeated the final sentence of her speech in both French and Italian, a gesture to which the audience reacted warmly’ (Sydney Official report, p.20). The last speaker was the leader of the bidding team, Rod McGeoch, who reiterated the key messages, cited the Olympic ideals and charter, and closed with a suitably oleaginous appeal: ‘Mr. President, on behalf of our entire team, on behalf of all Australians, and on behalf of all the peoples of Oceania, we humbly submit the Sydney 2000 bid’.

IOC voting proceeded thus:

<u>City</u>	<u>Round 1</u>	<u>Round 2</u>	<u>Round 3</u>	<u>Round 4</u>
Sydney	30	30	37	45
Beijing	32	37	40	43
Manchester	11	13	11	-
Berlin	9	9	-	-
Istanbul	7	-	-	-

The Australian bid came from behind, helped by bribery and late vote switches, to win in the last round. No-one knows the real cost of winning this bid and staging the event. Rome might have pulled out of the 1906 Games with just two years to go, but if you win the right to stage a modern Games you simply have to make it happen. Just weeks before the Games, organizers were requesting and getting hundreds of millions of dollars from the New South Wales Government.

Sydney 2000 was the Bumper Summer Olympics. It welcomed more than 11,000 athletes, several thousand officials and coaches, and as the 16 days whizzed by estimates of the number of mediafolk in town reached 21,000, although official estimates had been initially put at around 15,000. Athens 2004 plans to cater for 18,000 media. The Main Press Centre at the Olympic Park was vast, and the International Broadcast Centre was dominated by US

broadcaster NBC, which had paid 705 million US dollars for the rights, and mobilized a workforce of more than 2,000. More athletes, more sports, more professionals. Bigger, bigger, bigger.

The International Olympic Committee claims that the vast majority of the world's population able to access a television will have watched the action, the opening ceremony pulling in several billion – though such claims are beyond corroboration, and more reputable estimates by independent researchers have put the figure at rather less than half the one trumpeted by the IOC. But it is beyond dispute that the summer Olympic Games does claim one of the biggest television audiences of all time. Australians, and Sydneysiders especially, responded to the Games with passion and a determination to shout for and support their own competing hopefuls, and then in the 24 hour pubs of Pyrmont and the like to party through till dawn. Australian Gold was won by the scantily clad blonde women beach volleyballers at Bondi Beach, by the muscular concrete-pillar necked water polo girls in the Aquatic Centre, as well as by the beach bums of the swimming squads and the fated and feted bridge to Aboriginal/Australian reconciliation, 400-metre gold medallist and lighter of the Olympic flame, Cathy Freeman.

When the big hopes were competing, the venues were a sell out and the great live sites of Sydney – Circular Quay, Martin Place in the Central Business District, Tumbalong Park at Darling Harbour, Pyrmont Park, The Domain atop the Royal Botanical Gardens, Belmore Park at Central Station – were throbbing with nationalist enthusiasm. The home crowds were raucously supportive of their Australian hopes, and always ready with a jeer and a boo for the athletes from the UK and the US. If there was no serious Australian competitor in an event, the crowd cheered any compatriot it could locate. At the boxing, this gave a moment of celebrity to a number of Australian referees.

It was nevertheless enthralling seeing a nation of 20 million people chasing the USA and China in the medal table, and celebrating this by waving or being draped in a national flag dominated by the flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The victorious side of the Olympics for the host nation quickly became a metaphor for both the reconciliation embodied in the dignified presence of Cathy Freeman, and the success of the new Australia of multi-cultural mix. The silver medal in the first-ever Olympic women's pole vault was won by a blonde beauty from Adelaide, with the most New-Australian of names, Tatiana Grigorieva – complete too with a recent nose job by the look of it, maybe since she relocated herself from Russia in 1996. Many of the Australian women were blonde, leggy and en route to if not already packaged up in modelling contracts. Tatiana had already got the glam shots of her, in far less than her pole-vaulting outfit, ready for the world press.

The organisers of the Games, the much maligned SOCOG (Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games) could claim an Olympic record in ticket sales, 80 odd per cent and above the sales figures for Atlanta 1996. But there weren't many sell outs for the women's soccer semis, or the softball preliminaries, or the Graeco-Roman wrestling, or the handball. In the bloated Olympic schedule you can always get to see something, be a part of the event. You won't get into the best hotels in town, even if you're a regular. Writer and expatriate Australian Clive James could not get in his usual hotel as the main hotels in Sydney were completely taken over by the IOC and its Olympic 'family'. Sydney 2000 has been widely hailed as a model event, the 'best Games ever' in the words of the outgoing Olympic president Samaranch. What can we glean from this picture of the Sydney bid and event, to account for the place of the Olympic Games in the global politics of sport? It is to this question that I turn in the concluding comments to this paper.

Concluding comments

To understand in any adequate fashion the social and cultural significance of the Olympic Games it is necessary to conduct the analysis on a number of levels: the historical, the national/local, the international/global, the economic, the political and the cultural. In the three main phases of the Olympic Games a grand socio-political project with a modest economic profile (1896-1928) was succeeded by a markedly political intensification of the event at the heart of international political dynamics (1932-1984). In the third phase (1984 onwards) the Olympic Games have been fuelled by the global reach of capital, which has held hands with the pseudo-universalist idealist hyperbole of an Olympism as it has sought to penetrate new international markets and re-image cities and regions in the international economy of a global culture.

Close consideration of the effects of Olympic Games upon the host city and the nation remains curiously inconsistent. But Seoul and Atlanta have hardly emerged as tourist hot-spots. Sydney has projected figures for increased tourism, but glances at them nervously two years on, realising the obvious point that the long, long-haul flights to Sydney from the lucrative tourist markets of North America and Western Europe are not so irresistible after all, despite the scenes from Sydney's super September in 2000. Barcelona remains the serious contender to explain in any rational way the continuing attraction of staging the Olympics. Sustained studies have demonstrated the swing from business towards tourism in statistical profiles of visitors. High-spending US and Japanese tourists fill the expensive rooms of top Barcelona hotels. Catalanian nationalists still celebrate the profile achieved by the 1992 event for their region of Spain, and for their wider political cause and ambitions. The Olympic Village is walkable from the squares and *ramblas* of the city centre, contiguous to the Olympic Port. Here, night clubs attract young hedonists, *vose* cinema screenings attract the international English-language movie fan. The beach and harbour-side base of the Olympic facilities is a base for thousands of promenaders, *flaneurs* of all types, ages and nationalities on sunny weekends. The Olympic Stadium atop the majestic Montjuic Park

stages rock concerts and regular Spanish football league matches. Barcelona knows it was worth it. Other cities convince themselves that it was, as they seek to reposition themselves in the global marketplace.

Understanding the significance of the Olympic Games in the global culture of advanced modernity is not so much about what is on the bloated and in part esoteric agenda of Olympic competition and activity programmes. It is about the global profiling of places and worldwide expansion of consumer markets. The Olympic Games, with all its ceremonial and ritual and tradition, its sucking-up to youth and internationalism, its preservation of the pristine purity of the Olympic Stadium, continues to be significant in the contemporary world because of its unique blend of the all-embracingly international, the passion for the celebration of national and/or regional identity, and the regular celebration of a global consumerism that attracts the sponsors to keep queuing up to be associated with the (however tarnished) five-rings of the Olympic logo so jealously and greedily guarded by the beneficiaries, luminaries and lawyers of the International Olympic Committee and its bogus Family.

The irrational motives that drive those still spellbound by the Olympic Games and its promises are based in the fascinating hold that the Olympics still has on the contemporary imagination, and are stimulated by the image that the Olympic Games can still convey of a world in which the most passionate national interests can be mobilized within a tolerant and inter-cultural internationalism. It is undeniable too that those feelings – manifestly exhibited in the avenues and passages of Barcelona, in the streets and places/squares of Sydney – are genuine and deeply felt. The Olympic Games may be in some senses absurd, cases of magnificent trivia²⁴ in the light-entertainment schedules of a mediated global culture. But they continue to provide a focus for the articulation of both a sense of national identity, and an international cosmopolitanism rooted in consumerism. Peculiarly, persisting across all the phases of the history of the Games is the rhetoric of spirituality,

the claim that the Games fulfil some important expressive function over and above the politics and economics of the day. They have survived and in some undeniable sense prospered despite the shifting agenda of the event itself, and the many ways in which sport has changed. They have also been exposed as amoral or corrupt, unaccountable in ways widely typical of International Non-Government Organisations, but claiming to put the guilty house in order and get back on the ethical track, expelling a few bribe-takers and establishing an agenda for reform. At the level of sport practice and performance itself, the Olympics has represented as many lows as highs in terms of moral aspirations; and, as many world sports organisations would claim, and championships would demonstrate, the Olympics is not a consistent pinnacle of technical achievement. Yet despite three such persistent critiques,²⁵ they have survived and expanded. The rhetorical idealism of the Olympic movement, ideal and the like have certainly been arrogated to good effect by hosts of the Games, for uses internal to the needs of a city, region or nation; and for purposes of wider international self-promotion. But recurrently, the global religiosity at the core of the De Coubertin vision is repeddled, institutionally and individually. We see this in early messianic tributes to Olympism, in individual lives forged by a commitment to its ideals, and in the worldwide thinking of contemporary figures. The first programme for the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games featured an article by the president of the University of California.²⁶ For him, the religious elements of the ancient Greek Olympics provided a parallel to the Games' modern mission: 'May they promote the love of play, the reciprocity of good will, and the solvent of good sportsmanship in which shall be washed away the immemorial feuds of mankind that now obscure the goal that is nevertheless so surely there and so completely attainable, the goal of "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men"'. As on July 2 2003 the three cities slugged it out for the IOC vote for 2010, the contemporaneous exhibition in the Olympic Museum featured Ella Maillart, a pioneer of sporting Swiss womanhood.²⁷ Born in 1903, the ill-health of her childhood was reversed by a strength developed through sport, particularly the outdoor activities of sailing and ski-ing. But the sports were not only

sources of physical well-being. They represented a spiritual journey, an essential aspect of her search 'for her inner being, which she discovered in an ashram in Southern India when the Second World War had just broken out in Europe'. For Maillart, all her physical efforts on the mountain and the seas were a 'search for foreign skies', part of a quest integrating the physical and the spiritual. At an IOC education event during the Sydney Olympics, focused upon a review of the Olympic truce and a consideration of its potential for contemporary initiatives and interventions, the president of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, addressed the meeting on video. He praised the Olympics for the way it provided a sight of men and women of all types, a collection of human diversity and inclusiveness. Sport, he said, shares with world affairs more generally 'the shared goal of a culture of peace'.

Making sense of the Olympics is no straightforward task. Much depends where you look, and I have argued elsewhere that the Olympic experience can be seen as comparable to the theme park or the Disney experience.²⁸ But the Olympic phenomenon remains underpinned by an enduring rhetoric of universalist spiritual idealism, and a persisting hold on the worldwide imagination. Combining this so successfully with an integrated powerful pull of the political, the cultural and the economic – as consolidated in the transformative phase after Los Angeles 1984 - the Olympic Games are likely to retain their extraordinarily prominent profile in the global cultural consciousness.

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Specialist Collection of Ephemera – the John Johnson Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

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¹ This account of the 2010 bids is based upon my notes on the presentations, relayed live from Prague to the Auditorium of the Olympic Museum, Lausanne, Switzerland, throughout the day of July 2 2003.

² See Miller et al., 2001, p. 2.

³ Miller et al., 2001.

⁴ See Roche, 2000, p. 26.

⁵ Roche, 2000, p. 233.

⁶ Maguire, 1999, p. 88.

⁷ Maguire, 1999, p. 92.

⁸ Miller et al., 2001, p. 12.

⁹ Bairner, 2000.

¹⁰ Miller et al., 2001, p. 40.

¹¹ Sklair, 2001, p. 6.

¹² Sklair, 2001, p. 251.

¹³ Sklair, 2001, p. 110.

¹⁴ Sklair, 2001, p. 296.

¹⁵ J. Tomlinson, 1999, p. 9.

¹⁶ The following detail in this paragraph draws upon Roche, 2000.

¹⁷ In doing so in what follows I draw upon the John Johnson Collection of Ephemera, at the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

¹⁸ This detail on the 1928 Games draws upon Van Rossem, 1928.

¹⁹ Roche, 2000, p. 105.

²⁰ The source is (E.N.I.T. G.U.F. 1933.XI), printed in Italy by the ENIT, Novissima, Roam, Edizione Inglesed, not paginated). I am grateful to the John Johnson Collection for access to this document.

²¹ A. Tomlinson, 1999, pp. 217-18.

²² A. Tomlinson, 2005, especially pp. 50ff.

²³ The Sydney detail draws upon the Official Report of the Games, consulted at the Olympic Museum, Lausanne, Switzerland.

²⁴ I first used the phrase ‘magnificent trivia’ in a plenary address to the Australian Drama Studies Association in Newcastle, New South Wales, in July 2000, when talking about spectacle and the Olympics - see Longworth, 2000, p. 16; and, later that year, more generally in relation to the Sydney Summer Olympics in September, referring to the media spectacle of the Games as ‘the most magnificent trivia that the world’s yet conspired to produce’ (See A. Tomlinson 2000, p. 220).

²⁵ Thanks to Lincoln Allison, editor of the book *The global politics of sport: the role of global institutions in sport* (London, Routledge: 2005), where a version of this article first appeared, for drawing out the distinction between these dimensions in response to the earliest of this paper presented in March 2003.

²⁶ This is in a copy of the programme consulted in the Olympic Museum, Lausanne, Switzerland.

²⁷ This exhibition was entitled ‘Ella Maillart 1903 –1997: Sportswoman; on the Roads of the East’.

²⁸ See A. Tomlinson, 2004.