Our ‘Cosmopolitan Heritage’?
Iconic Mobility and Ideological Fixity in 21st-Century Olympic Artscapes

PROPOSAL
The post-Second World War Olympic Games experienced a number of structural transformations in their delivery, performance and political concerns. Encoding national, regional and cosmopolitan concerns about the political development of host cities (e.g. their cultural beautification, tourist growth or global projection of multicultural aspirations), the post-war summer Olympiads also acted as meta-narratives of national agendas. The opening and closing ceremonies in particular ‘framed’ the event, constructing the ‘public face’ hosts wished to present to the world. As mediatised images of ethno-cultural essence gained more in global circulation, marketability and malleability, ceremonial Olympism better encoded the hosts’ political self-presentation. Thus, the hosts’ artistic self-presentation and political self-narration began to coexist in a reciprocal relationship, carrying - even though not always materialising - hopes for a re-invention of regional identities.

The summer Olympics have been examined from a variety of perspectives that were often regarded in different domains of political, social and cultural theory as conflicting or mutually exclusive. Some scholars placed emphasis on the European legacy of the Olympic event, examining exclusively how its racist overtones ‘spill’ into its modern ceremonies. This dimension may separate the content of the Olympiad (e.g. sports politics) from their aesthetic form (e.g. Olympic ceremonies as such). Others argued that the multicultural ambiance of contemporary Olympic mega-events symbolically resolves the crisis generated by the calls for national development through careful urban planning that excludes segments of the national population from the ‘host nation’. The fear of terrorist attacks that could destroy the host city’s or nation’s global prestige might also necessitate a sort of cultural closure within the host nation-state, inducing and sustaining constructive-reactive mechanisms (e.g. intensification of political surveillance). This perspective is constitutive of the host’s material growth, as it still prioritises the meticulous study of the politics of urban development over the Olympiads’ performative aesthetics. A different argument holds that the disorganised nature of capitalist networks that partake in the organisation of the event as a whole and of the opening and closing ceremonies in particular have diverse, and even conflicting agendas. This argument sheds more light on media policies and management, as well as the politics of the Olympic creative industries. Yet other research portfolios focus exclusively on the products of the Olympiad: mascots, souvenirs, educational events, televised/digitised ceremonies, protocol and pageantry. This line of research, which might also look at representations without examining their underlying stereotypical basis, often omits the political subtext of the mega-event - for example, production processes and policies. Such processes would naturally link back to the creative labour that supports Olympic mega-events and which is constitutive of global human flows (Caves 2002; HESMOND?). Isolating these dimensions of the ceremonial Olympiad is increasingly being criticised: from the 1980s social theory has begun to recognise the prevalence of political, cultural and economic synergies in globalisation processes (Held 2000: 1-3). The Olympic event and its ceremonies are characteristic of such attempts to harmonise progress in these overlapping domains, at once celebrating and contesting the politics and poetics of global mobilities (of culture, terror, humans and products).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES
Diachronic and synchronic analysis

The aim of the current proposal is to investigate the modality of artistic self-presentation in Olympic ceremonies and its value as a developmental project for the host city against two chronotopes (=temporal and spatial dimensions): 1. the political background in which it takes place, and 2. La longue duree of national development (otherwise put, the global, geo-historical role of the host city and state). Hence, the project does not exclude any of the aforementioned arguments but seeks constructive ways to accommodate the positive and negative aspects of the Olympic mega-event as a supra-industry that creates, re-invents and shares regional and national culture with the world. This necessitates an engagement with the plurality of experiences that define the ceremonial aspects of the Olympic Games. More importantly, however, the research invites an investigation into the ways multiple experiences (regional, national, ethnic, gendered and globally interactive) communicate with each other. As such, the project seeks to develop a dialogue between the social policy of mobility and a social theory of migration through arts and artistic modes and tools. Given the transformation of the fabulist dimensions of the institution (Olympics as part of a Hellenic-Greek legacy of Europe) into a digitised, broadcast and politicised event, the project seeks ways to re-tell the futural history of the Games. ‘Futural history’ refers to the possibility of re-writing the exclusivist nature of Olympic legacies without writing over their discriminatory dimensions.

Looking at connections and disconnections of Olympic images from their production contexts, and representations from politics, the project builds on Appadurai’s (1990) thesis on interconnected ‘scapes’ to advocate an analysis of Olympic ‘artscapes’. As imagined blocks Olympic artscapes point to contingent meeting points, clashes and convergences of ethnoscapes (addressing the conundrums of ‘race’ and ethnicity), mediascapes (representing and communicating migrations), technoscapes (constructing and reinventing them in virtual domains), finanescapes (exploiting, dividing and situating them in economic hierarchies) and ideoscapes (ascribing them value or devaluing migrant identities). ‘Art’ is understood here as a by-product of communicative democratisation - the craft of communication (the material of everyday life) and its high aesthetics (as in fine arts) alike. These two complementary dimensions allow space for the exploration of both the political potential of ceremonial Olympic art, and its emotive/affective role in the production of national characters, tying regional representation and expression to their transnational or global counterparts. ‘Emotions’ are scaled up so as to be explored at collective and interactive levels as constitutive of ethno-national and cosmopolitan landscapes. They are therefore considered as sources of communicative (digitised, print and visual) creativity for the Olympic ceremonies.

Rationale and Thematic Arrangement

The focus on the ceremonial Olympiads of the 21st century has a political and cultural rationale:

1. First, it enables the principal investigator to detect changes or continuities in security measures devised for the safe delivery of artistic self-presentations before (Sydney 2000) and after (Athens 2004, Beijing 2008 and now London 2012) the tragic terrorist attack of 11 September 2001. Given that the Olympic event is still somehow overdetermined by its European legacy and that contemporary fears about terrorist damage of ‘national
The project will view the legacy of terror as an embedded narrative structure in Olympic ceremonies, exploring future possibilities and emerging needs. Although the main focus of the project is not terrorism as such but its artistic representations (or absences), latent engagement with the politics of terrorism in previous host countries will bring to the fore the ways Olympic legacies are tied to the heritage of European whiteness. The ways terrorism is incorporated into artistic self-presentations is traditionally kept apart from contemporary digital cultures of surveillance (e.g. Lyon 1994). Such separations partake in the staging of national authenticity as they remain protective of what anthropologists have termed ‘cultural intimacy’, the concealment of ‘disreputable’ but reassuringly familiar aspects of national traits from outsiders (Herzfeld 2005: 3). Akin to encounters in tourist settings, the space in which Olympic mega-events are enacted become meeting grounds for national security complexes too. An understanding of ‘security measures’ will extend so as to consider ecological concerns that increasingly figure in overt or covert ceremonial references. The project deliberately ascribes an *ecosystemic dimension* to ‘terror’ to match global political discourses on the mobile Islamic threat: given that the host city’s manifestos centre upon the simultaneous provision of *safe and green* Olympics, the incorporation of ecological concerns into the production of the host’s civil image is a pertinent addition (e.g. Bateson 1980; Meyer, Moore and Vilijoen 1997; Tomaselli 2007; Tzanelli forthcoming).

2. The project will focus on the origins and development of the stylistic form and content of Olympic ceremonies so as to ascertain whether they mobilise entrenched ethno-national self-presentations or resort solely to generic cultural self-narration of global plausibility. The aim is to examine convergences and divergences between broadcast representations of the host’s culture and identity and more fixed stereotyping within hosting regions and nation-states. Individual artistic initiatives that exemplify regional/urban social hierarchies and adjacent hierarchies of ‘taste’ (e.g. see Sifakakis 2007) will be considered as the alternative face of ‘Olympic cosmopolitanism’. The proposal’s focus on the 21st-century Olympics exclusively also brings to the fore perceived geopolitical differences between nation-states-hosts. Such differences and inequalities have been historically imprinted on this century’s Olympic legacies: from a former colony (Sydney, Australia) to a marginal European crypto-colony (Athens, Greece) to a former colonised country now emerging as a powerful global player (Beijing, China), to a former colonial metropolis (London, Britain), the mobility of the Olympic event *per se* both affirms and challenges its exclusive background (or, more correctly, might be affirmed or challenged by hosts). Thus far, host cities have devised ways to highlight or conceal aspects of their ‘national character’ for a variety of reasons that will be explored in detail. ‘National character’ is understood through Bourdieu’s (1977, 1999) and Elias’ (1996) constructions of *habitus* as a collection of learned bodily and linguistic attributes, but also skills of expression and articulation, that reflect the cultural space in which they were produced. Collective articulations of national character in Olympic ceremonies are subtly encoded in performances. The repression or replacement of cultural specificity with anodyne cosmopolitan characteristics becomes a gateway into the host’s character. Cultural borrowings and recycling of ideas from previous ceremonies have never
been consistently explored as a mode of cosmopolitan engagement either, even though they demonstrate (dis)continuities within Olympic mega-events. A critical study of ceremonial Olympism must take into account these phenomena, while acknowledging that audience reception may differ from the Olympic makers’ and the present researcher’s intentions and perceptions (MacKay 2004).

3. Redefine the idea of an Olympic ‘heritage’ in light of the 21st-century tele-communicative globalisation. As both the delivery of the Olympic mega-event and its final products are enduring legacies for the host, one may consider the generation of ‘legacy’ in relation to individual Olympics. At the same time, Olympic protocol and traditions carry within them unchanging formulae that counter the hosts’ cultural specificity or self-presentational needs. This interpretation of ‘heritage’ impacts upon, if not predetermines the hosts’ iconic narratives. ‘Iconic’ is defined in the project both in audiovisual (e.g. live performances of culture, televised advertisements and music) or linguistic terms (e.g. the scripts produced for the ceremonies, such as speeches, tourist brochures, postcards) and through its other adjacent material forms (e.g. coins, stamps). All these iconic dimensions of heritage create new traditions, reproduce old ones or do both in the same symbolic space (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1986). They also assist in the production of image destinations, enabling nation-hosts to brand transient Olympic ‘places’. Contemporary branding and the centuries-long Olympic tradition collaborate to fashion the hosting nation’s global identity (Lury 2004). Destination branding exemplifies the production of Olympic artsapes that thrive on ‘sign values’ (see immediately below). The emotional dimensions of branding Olympic destinations are of major importance in the search for the right ‘signs’ of ethno-cultural uniqueness. Establishing Olympic cities as good tourist and athletic hosts, they partake in the global consolidation of urban and national civility. Such emotive battles may also emerge through deliberate borrowings from previous ceremonial self-presentations, which threaten the specificity and uniqueness of individual Olympic events.

4. The project will explore the ways such heritage clashes inform the emergence and growth of an Olympic node (Lash and Urry 1987) that brings together diverse political agents and economic actors so as to produce a supra-industry that trades in ‘sign values’. ‘Sign values’ refer to interconnections and established inter-changeabilities of economic, cultural and political values. ‘Industry’ refers to the institutional and processing dimensions of the Olympic mega-event (e.g. telecommunication networks/media that broadcast the ceremonies, tourist industries represented in them or partaking in their development, adjacent catering industries such as hotel, print and food complexes). (Lash and Urry 1994; Hesmondhalgh 2002; Lash and Lury 2007; Tzanelli 2007) CHECK DAVID’S WORK. The creative labour of the Olympic industries appears to reflect regional and national policies of employment as much as it reflects the policies of individual creative industries of the node (also Caves 2002). Communications between art and labour may even find their way into ceremonial representations of the host city (as in Beijing 2008) or representations of ceremonies on the web. Generally, the Olympic node thrives on iconic representations of the host that find expression in images but also music and other commodities. Irrespective of whether the iconic mobility of ceremonial narratives clashes with the host’s ideological fixity or not, it comprises an essential aspect of the Olympic legacy. The aim of the project is to investigate when and why these clashes hinder the transcendence of the Olympic heritage’s damaging aspects (e.g. racialised and gendered fixities). As such, it seeks to develop a sophisticated understanding of various convergences between the political and moral economies of creativity without disregarding their histories (e.g. how image and music production for the ceremonies have changed or evolved over the decades).
SPECIFIC QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Main questions and hypotheses to address critically are the following:

Cluster 1. How do security concerns and measures become embedded in the delivery of Olympic ceremonies? In what ways – if any – does the legacy of terror (9/11 in light of earlier incidents such as Munich ’72) define the style, form and content of 21st-century ceremonial Olympism? How can we conceptualise the ecosystemic dimensions of ‘terror’ today (e.g. what is the role of natural disasters and problems in the production of ceremonial Olympism and Olympic Policies at large)? Do artistic self-presentations replicate the very practice of organised terror (e.g. to shift shape and move around the world in invisible ways while preserving their ideological purpose intact)?

Cluster 2. How does the host city choose to represent itself in Olympic ceremonies? Do such representations draw upon established narratives of ‘national character’ or they aspire to counter or replace them (and why)? How do these processes of memory and forgetting interact? Do differences between self-presentational modes contribute to the production of an ‘Olympic heritage’ or they are transient constructs?

Cluster 3. How can we define the notion of ‘Olympic heritage’ or ‘legacy’ theoretically and empirically? Should such definitions prioritise ethnic/national specificity or historical universality? How can we devise ways to respect such cultural nuances without elevating the exclusivist aspects of ‘national character’ narratives to the status of global values? What sort of cosmopolitan messages do different definitions of ‘heritage’ communicate (audio-visually) and what are the ethics on which they rest? How does the branding of Olympic destinations result in the transformation of progressive discourses of belonging into conservative ethno-nationalist agendas (and vice versa)? When does the conservation of Olympic sites have to play a useful role in the hosts’ economic and cultural development and when does it have to be abandoned? Who makes such decisions and why?

Cluster 4. How can we specify the ‘sign values’ on which Olympic industries develop? What sort of practices and political circumstances hold together Olympic nodes/networks? Alternatively, what contributes to their collapse? To which understanding/definition of ‘legacy’ and ‘heritage’ do Olympic nodes contribute? In what ways do these definitions endorse ‘security breaches’ by activist groups (e.g. human rights campaigners)? Is it possible at all to reconsider activist work as part of the Olympic legacies in a constructive way (and from whose point of view)? Can these conflicting agendas work together and towards the development of a progressive politics of Olympic mobility (contra fixed ideologies of ‘heritage’)?

PRIMARY MATERIALS & METHOD(OLOGY) – AMBITIOUS VERSION

Varieties of Data

The primary materials will include digital and printed sources: VHS & DVDs of the ceremonies, Internet resources such as press reports, newspaper articles and photographs of
the four Olympic events of the study. Recorded ceremonies with television commentary will be purchased and used extensively, as they provide analysis of the content of Olympic performances by informed journalists.

These resources will be complemented by print materials such as newspaper articles and other stored data that provide a form of cultural ‘translation’ of the ceremonies for external viewers/readers. Similar data will assist in the reconstruction of the socio-political context of the ceremonies and the various surrounding concerns (e.g. security measures and domestic or global political controversies that affected the delivery of individual mega-events).

A small amount of money will be allocated for the purchase of relevant images (e.g. photographs) from previous Olympic ceremonies. A research trip to Olympic sites (1 per site, where possible) will be arranged so as to ascertain the conservation and use of these facilities for the tourist development of previous Olympic hosts. These visits will assist in the production of a concise photographic album on the present and future of Olympic sites.

The principal investigator will seek to arrange on-line or telephonic interviews with organisers of previous ceremonies to complement the printed and electronic resources (2 per event, approximately 6 in total, inclusive of the current Olympiad). As a critical study of Olympic mega-events may promote research closure (an inevitable prioritisation of the researcher’s viewpoint), semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with their makers may unveil divergence of views or highlight unseen controversies during their production.

**Method(ology), Epistemology, Ethics**

The methodological framework of the project accommodates the needs of multi-sited research: digital, traditional ethnographic, photographic and mixed. Electronic fieldwork and photography will take into account epistemological concerns about ‘ways of seeing’ (therefore interpreting) materials. Given that some of these materials will be produced by the principal investigator (e.g. photographic encapsulations of sites), a self-reflexive analytical framework will have to be applied that draws upon relevant methodological schools: visual methodologies with an emphasis on feminist constructivism and discourse analysis. A combined mobilisation of hermeneutics and dialogics provides a suitable epistemological framework for the study of textual and visual materials, because it enables the researcher to consider alternative arguments while remaining critical of her own hypotheses and those of others (see for example Ricoeur 1993: 66; Oakley 1998). The obvious prevalence of the principal researcher’s viewpoint will be counterbalanced by interviews, in which organising actors will voice their own concerns, objections or alternative perspectives. As some of the information collected during interviews may be of sensitive nature, the content of this data may have to be anonymised or omitted from any published work. It is important to highlight that a project on Olympic legacies and cosmopolitan heritage promotes, in effect, research into the functions and strategic or affective dimensions of memory. Such legacies produce (but also destroy) symbolic public spaces and participatory domains – the so-called ‘public sphere’ of social theory – but also demonstrate synergies between aesthetic, emotive and rational modes of thinking and action (Trey 1992; Bell and Gardiner 1998: 6-7; Pellauer 2007). This entails that a study of Olympic heritage cannot be norm-free and ‘neutral’ – but it has to be honest about its critical political stance. Hence,
whereas the products of this work may be useful to current and future policy-makers they may not always conform to the needs of policy-making.

A consideration of data categories will also play a significant role in the process of research: whereas materials that populate public domains (digital and archival) will be regarded as official sources, photographic sources produced by the principal investigator will be considered as their informal counterpart. Photographic sources will be treated as open access materials as soon as they enter the digital domain and will remain available for public use. Although Internet materials will be used without securing consent, as they are included in de facto public domains (Homan 1991; Herring 1996; Cavanagh 1999), they will be acknowledged as primary materials in the bibliography and analysed methodologically as such. Copyright consent will have to be sought for the massive reproduction of any images from websites in the forthcoming monograph. The same policy will be followed with regards to other imagery linked to products such as music, but music analysis will be carried out independently without consent. Olympic souvenirs (mascots, flags etc...) will be photographed and individually produced images will be used in published research without consent. Because presenters’ commentary on the DVD, VHS and televised versions of the ceremonies evidently adheres to certain cultural views (often preconceptions), it will be treated as a special addition to the visual primary materials. This means that any interpretive attempts implemented on the ceremonies will have to be matched by interpretive reflections on the policies and ideologies of those media complexes and agents (e.g. journalists) that mediate the content of the mega-event.

OUTCOMES OF PROJECT

Short-term: two to three academic articles and newspaper commentary on the proposed themes.

Long-term:

- A monograph on the project
- A professionally produced website on the findings, with hyperlinks to relevant documentation and websites. A small amount of money will be sought for the completion of this task from an independent funding source.

REFERENCES


