

Foreword: Design Histories of the Olympic Games

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The modern Olympics, the elite of all sporting events, are an invented nineteenth-century tradition, formalized by the efforts of the French aristocrat and educational theorist Pierre de Frédy, Baron de Coubertin. Modern Olympism blended sports, culture, and education, and as a revival of the ancient Greek Games, it was developed within the broader milieu of antiquarianism. But at the heart of the Olympic idea was a social engineering impetus. Coubertin believed 'that through sport, athletes and spectators could constitute themselves aesthetically, morally, and socially.'¹ In tandem with supporting the development of the individual and the nation-state, the Olympics aimed to reconcile warring nations. The modern Olympics were both a stimulant and a pacifier, a means of international reconciliation but also of rivalry.

Characterized as a hybrid of urban festival and quasi-religious event, the modern Olympics have a strong ceremonial aspect that is generated by design. Since their establishment in 1896, the range of objects designed and produced to supplement the Olympics has proliferated. It has expanded from the architecture, posters, medals, tickets, uniforms, and diplomas that were part of the early Olympics, to encompass elaborate communication systems, the pictograms, the torch and the cauldron, housing for the athletes, expansive urban adornments, sophisticated stage design for the Olympic ceremonies, and a vast collection of memorabilia that includes mascots, pins, stamps, and various other products. In late modernity, the Olympics have obtained the dual character of mega-event and media event,² and design plays a role in the configuration of the mediated aspects that are part of the Games experience.

Today, inserting the Olympic apparatus into the existing urban framework of the host city is itself a major design operation. Major infrastructure projects (such as new subway lines, airports, and security systems) are introduced as means of ensuring smooth transportation and accommodation for athletes and visitors. They supposedly create a legacy for the host city and its surrounding regional and national territory. In order to comprehend the pervasive effects of Olympics in design, we should also consider the products of ambush marketing as well as the design of counter-Olympic movements by local and transnational actors.

In the last 116 years, the types of professions involved in the design of the Olympics have changed considerably. In the early twentieth century, visual artists and sculptors were frequently appointed to design graphic material, torches, and medals. De Coubertin himself was credited for the design of the Olympic rings. This slowly changed as professional designers' associations were formed. Nevertheless, a clear division of labour never existed. In the Mexico 1968 Olympics for instance, architect Eduardo Terrazas was appointed director of the urban design program and worked closely with

Beatrice Trueblood, director of publications, in overseeing the overall design production of the Olympics. In the Tokyo 1964 Olympics, design historian Katsumi Masaru served as art director, and supervised the execution of the Olympic graphics. More recently, brand consultancies (e.g. Landor for Sydney 2000, or Wolff Olins for London 2012) have been employed to create broader strategies that include multiple platforms of design.

The impact of the Olympics surpasses the obvious world of sports, and endures much longer than the event itself. The Olympics are complex, multi-sited, and involve numerous actors, from the élite to the grass-roots. Their designs become not only front-page news during the glorious Olympic days, and hostages of political ambitions or objects of disenchantment for Olympic opponents, but also agents of various networked associations in the post-Olympic eras to come.

The state of design history of the Olympic Games

The narrative of Olympic design history is currently fragmented. Segments are found in works of disparate scope, but most writings on Olympic design and its histories fall into the following four areas of scholarship:

Design/architectural history

In the first category of scholarship belong design or architectural history records, often not Olympic-focused in overall scope. These are commonly monographs of designers who have worked on major Olympic projects, either through direct commissions or after winning competitions. Cases in point include Otl Aicher's design for the Munich 1972 Olympics, or Santiago Calatrava's Athens Olympic Sports Complex.³ Many of these books are celebratory in nature, and often present the designer through the model of the master/hero.

Similar mentions of Olympic design are found in chapters or subsections of survey books, such as world histories of design. Almost every history of graphic design, for instance, has a section on the Olympics with references to the Tokyo 1964 and Munich 1972 Olympics designs.⁴ These projects are treated as paradigmatic and have become part of the canon of design history. Aspects of use, mediation, or appropriation by the wider public are largely absent from these studies. Projects of lesser value, those not considered innovative enough, or those that are products of adaptation usually have no place in these surveys. It is also very rare for these books to address the internal historicity of design for the Olympics, despite the fact that considerable knowledge transfer occurs from one Olympics to the next.⁵ Often the Olympic projects in these books are discussed as the unique results of their designers' ingenuity.

Another type of semi-historical record is books dedicated to series of Olympic projects, especially posters or other graphics (logos, flyers) and objects (mascots, medals).⁶ Often these books are lavishly illustrated; sometimes they are produced as exhibition catalogues.⁷ They usually contain descriptive information about the artefacts under consideration but make only sporadic historic assessments.

This arena is slowly changing with the work of a new generation of scholars, such as the articles presented in this volume. Examples of significant design history work in the last decades include discussions of the Barcelona Olympics, for which design played a prominent role.⁸ Recently, new scholarship of design history has appeared in specialized

journals. These texts critically examine design for Olympic Games in various geographical and historical contexts.⁹

Olympic studies

Writings by Olympic studies scholars are a second category of scholarship. Some focus on specific Olympic Games, while others offer comparative cross-cultural perspectives by looking at the Olympics through particular thematic lenses, such as international diplomacy, commercialization, or identity.¹⁰ Recently, Olympic studies scholarship is often combined with studies of other global mega-events.¹¹ Works of this type often make references to design, and at times include whole chapters on it. Since few of the authors of these publications have design expertise, writings in this area tend to present design through a specific, if not reductionist, scope. They fluctuate between presenting design as a formal exercise that aims at beautification and seeing design as an instrument of a regime, literally expressing the will of political power. Despite their frequent shortcomings from a design history perspective, these works illuminate the broader context in which design operates. They offer valuable insights about decisions that predate the design stage, such as the selection of sites where athletic venues were placed, or the shaping of the rhetorical framework of an Olympic city, which design was called to express.

Planning and urban studies

This field is largely interdisciplinary, and these studies compile various perspectives ranging from cultural geography to economy and social studies. Works in this area examine several aspects of the Olympics as crucial agents in a city's history: Olympic master plans, the impact of the Olympics on tourism, and issues of Olympic legacy. Writings in this category also address the function of the Olympics as a marketing strategy capable of 'placing a city on the map'. A number of edited anthologies offer valuable comparative perspectives.¹²

Nevertheless, most writings in this area, which look at Olympic cities on a macro scale, remain oblivious to the smaller scales that make up the city as a living entity. They emphasize the relation between urban schemes and architectural design but downplay any relation to communication design, product design, or fashion design. In doing so, they follow the current dominant logic of production that keeps these domains of design disconnected.

Media studies and cultural studies

In this category are studies that touch on Olympic design as part of media-related activities and cultural performance. The varied practices that comprise the mediation and performative aspects of the Olympics deploy various types of design (graphic design, Web design, motion graphics, stage design, event design, experience design, etc.) and are examined within a diverse category of scholarship that cuts across media studies, visual studies, sport marketing, sport sociology and cultural studies. Some of these examinations focus on the impact of media on the Olympics by looking at the ways they are shaped by advertising and broadcasting. These may look at traditional media (television and print), or new media (the Internet and new forms of citizen-journalism).¹³ In this category we also find studies that focus on the design of events, such as the staging of the opening and closing ceremonies.¹⁴ The proliferation of this interdisciplinary scholarly production (with numerous entry points, but often limited points of intersection) also corresponds to the recent transformation of the Olympics into a mega-media event.

There is a growing recognition of the need to analyse the Olympics as multi-sited phenomena that exceed the physical boundaries of the host city and are addressed to global audiences.¹⁵ As design is penetrating more and more domains of social life, including those traditionally seen as 'immaterial' (media, services, organizational strategy), and as design historians are called on to provide historical explanations of these new phenomena, Olympic Games may be seen as primary sites that register these transitions.

The present issue

These notable gaps are slowly being ameliorated by a new generation of scholars, with work that crosses the boundaries between traditional disciplines and domains of knowledge. This special issue makes no claim to a unified voice or perspective. Its aim is to register the subject of Olympic design in the scholarship of design history, and it is a very incomplete testament to the diversity of emerging approaches.

The present articles examine design's role in the politics of national representation through the Olympic Games, and its function as an agent of change. Some of the articles deal with the design of exclusive objects, such as Olympic posters and architecture, and some with the design of everyday things, such as subway signs and former Olympic parks that have been turned into public facilities. The vast temporality of Olympic design is also addressed: preparations for the Olympics, the two-week period of the Games, and the after-life of the Olympics.

Different types of design engagement are examined here. One of the articles looks at the design of graphics. Even though graphic design is the most diachronically-present design platform in Olympic campaigns, little scholarly attention has been dedicated to it. The use of graphics in the Olympics extends from the design of functional components, such as tickets, diplomas and pictograms, to the design of promotional artefacts, such as the logo, posters, banners, and, today, motion graphics and animation. Graphic design plays a major role in promoting the Olympics, as well as in broadcasting, and can be studied in terms of both its communications function and its design aspects.

Two of the articles relate to the interconnected realms of urbanism, architecture, and infrastructure. The architecture for the Olympic Games, a temporary event, leaves an important permanent legacy in the life of a city, but it is also shaped by the pre-existing spatial politics of the locality. These processes are particularly complex and catalytic when the urban realities of their host cities are in a state of major transformation, as in the examples presented here (Mexico, Athens and London).

Finally, one of the articles examines design of Olympic clothing, an area that is almost non-existent in the historiography of fashion design. Sport clothing is an important element of the Olympics, and there is constantly new research that aims at improving athletic performance. This article examines Olympic uniforms for the opening ceremony as a symbolic social practice that embodies the changing meanings of nationhood.

Three key periods are addressed in the volume's articles: early modernity (from 1896 to 1924), post-Second World War era (the 1956 and 1968 Olympics), and the twenty-first century (the 2004 and 2012 Olympics).

'Clothing the British Olympic Ideal: The Emergency of British Olympic Ceremonial Attire, 1896–1924', by Geraldine Biddle-Perry, provides valuable perspectives on the significance of the discourses of body and sport in the early twentieth century. Biddle-Perry's article focuses on British athletes' uniforms for the first four Olympics

(1896–1924), as seen during the athletes' parade, an important part of the opening ceremony. The article traces the development of the Olympic uniform, describing a shift from the wearing of competitive attire in 1896 to the use of uniforms that had become a recognizable and familiar repertoire of emblematic nationalism in 1924. This gradual development of the Olympic uniform as a medium representing national identity was paralleled by the fashioning of modern citizenry that took place in the early twentieth century. Sports became a means of shaping the performance of new social bodies, and athletic uniforms a means of embodying patriotic citizenship.

John Hughson's article, 'An Invitation to "Modern" Melbourne: the Historical Significance of Richard Beck's Olympic Poster Design', highlights the role of posters in shaping modern national discourses. Hughson looks at the poster designed by Richard Beck for the Melbourne 1956 Games. Hughson's paper is motivated by a desire to understand and evaluate the absence of human figure in Beck's poster. It explores the shift from figuration to abstraction in Olympic poster iconography as due to the influence of modernism. This shift was overdue in Olympic graphics, which until then had been dominated by neoclassicism. Instead of depicting the heroic body of the male athlete, Beck's design shows a floating invitation card in an evocative blue background. Hughson attributes this change to Beck's subscription to the tenets of modernism, which supported the organizers' desire to represent Melbourne as a 'modern destination'.

In 'Choreographing the Metropolis: Networks of Circulation and Power in Olympic Mexico', Luis Castañeda reviews a series of interconnected projects for the 1968 Mexico Olympics that had significant ideological implications in the city's gentrification process. One of them was circulation design, which Castañeda situates within a then-new international planning approach that was also applied in World Fairs and metropolitan areas. Graphic design played a crucial role within this circulatory network. Lance Wyman's Mexico 1968 logo (see cover image) was strategically adapted to diverse platforms and scales, such as the pavements around the Olympic facilities, where it was given an inhabitable dimension. The logo, despite its strong Op Art character, was assigned overtly chauvinistic interpretations being associated with Mexico's Huichol people. Its 'designerly' qualities, however, exceeded this simplistic interpretation. Castañeda demonstrates that design is rarely simply an instrument of a singular political goal. Close analysis reveals a complexity of operations that prevent the simplistic perception of design as an instrument of a regime.

Even Wergeland's article, 'When Icons Crumble: The Troubled Legacy of Olympic Design', looks at the ambiguous notion of Olympic legacy. In the history of the modern Olympics, many host cities end up with unused structures and deserted Olympic parks. The author looks at the current condition of the Athens Olympic Stadium and discovers that the 'instant monumentality' of this celebrated venue has now faded. The Olympic park, not unlike the modernist 'white cubes in decay', has been a victim of 'topocide', characterized by placelessness and neglect. London 2012 has promised to be an exception and defines the London Games as the opposite of Athens 2008. Yet Wergeland demonstrates that London is also at risk of a questionable legacy. Wergeland adds an important perspective to the Olympic discourse by examining Olympic architecture in its afterlife, departing from established approaches that focus on the conceptualization and design of an Olympic project.

These articles demonstrate that design is an important means of understanding the Olympics, and that the Olympics constitute an important context for understanding aspects of design history. They offer a small window into an area of study that is still primarily 'under construction.' While resources for these studies are ample and

accessible,¹⁶ what needs nurturing is an understanding of the richness of the subject. This volume is published with the goal of bringing exciting new research to light, and in the hope that more scholars will be encouraged to conduct research in this vast and multifaceted subject.

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If you have any comments to make in relation to this article, please go to the journal website on <http://jdh.oxfordjournals.org> and access this article. There is a facility on the site for sending e-mail responses to the editorial board and other readers.

Notes

- 1 D. Brown, 'Theories of Beauty and Modern Sport: Pierre de Coubertin's Aesthetic Imperative for the Modern Olympic Movement, 1894–1914', Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1997, p. iv., quoted in J. O. Segrave & D. Chatziefstathiou, 'Pierre de Coubertin's Ideology of Beauty from the Perspective of the History of Ideas', in *Pathways: Critiques and Discourse in Olympic Research*, R. K. Barney, M. K. Heine, K. B. Wamsley & G. H. MacDonald (eds), International Center for Olympic Studies, London, Ontario, 2008, p. 40.
- 2 M. Roche, *Mega-events & Modernity. Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture*, Routledge, London & New York, 2000.
- 3 M. Rathgeb, *Otl Aicher*, Phaidon, London & New York, 2006, pp. 77–111; A. Tzonis, *Santiago Calatrava, The Athens Olympics*, Rizzoli, New York, 2005.
- 4 Peter Dormer, *Design Since 1945*, Thames and Hudson, London & New York, 1993, pp. 95–7, 104–6; Philip B. Meggs, *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, J. Wiley & Sons, Hoboken, NJ, 2006, pp. 428–34.
- 5 This is partly achieved through the official Olympic reports, which are compiled at the end of each Olympics by a local committee. They include chapters that focus on design, especially on architecture, graphics, and products.
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- 7 See K. R. Goddy & G. L. Freedman-Harvey, *Art and Sport: Images to Herald the Olympic Games*, Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, Los Angeles, 1992.
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 - 12 G. Andranovich, M. J. Burbank & C. H. Heying, *Olympic Dreams: The Impact of Mega-events on Local Politics*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2001; J. R. Gold & M. M. Gold (eds), *Olympic Cities: City Agendas, Planning, and the World's Games, 1896–2012*, Routledge, London & New York, 2007; G. Poynter & I. MacRury (eds), *Olympic Cities and the Remaking of London*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2009.
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 - 15 J. Traganou & J. Kang, 'The Beijing National Stadium as Media-space', *Design and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2011, pp. 145–63.
 - 16 Olympic archives can be found at the Center for Olympic Studies in Lausanne (IOC), the International Centre for Olympic Studies at The University of Western Ontario, the Avery Brundage Collection at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the LA84 Foundation in Los Angeles, the Centre d'Estudis Olímpics i de l'Esport, at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, etc.