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theories. Alana's diligence in unearthing important research discoveries from my always shifting performance archive, not to mention her admirable editorial and intellectual acumen in reading through various drafts of these pages, has saved me from many an embarrassing oversight or error. Moreover, as a practising dancer and choreographer, Alana has also challenged me to connect my often abstract claims about the political possibilities afforded by the theatrical public sphere to the material conditions of artistic production and reception. Alana's own work performing and researching site-specific art in Vancouver has provided me with an inspiring model for connecting local civic engagements of and with performance to a larger global politics of creative counter-memory.

It is only fitting, then, that just as I was completing final revisions to the typescript of this book Alana and I should find ourselves together again on a street corner participating in another roving theatrical performance by battery opera. This time, however, the work, called *Lives Were Around Me*, was by Lee Su-Feh's producing partner, David McIntosh. And this time we were both members of the audience, one purposely restricted to an intimate group of three, and committed, regardless of weather, to following McIntosh and later performer Adrienne Wong (alternating with Paul Ternes) as they led us on an hour-long guided walking tour of the historical centre of Vancouver. Except that the text for this tour was freely adapted from James Kelman's *Translated Accounts*, an abstruse, Kafkaesque novel made up of monologues detailing instances of surveillance, arrest, detention, and torture carried out in an unnamed police state. The effect was deliberately disorienting, forcing us to reexamine a part of the city that I suggest at greater length in subsequent chapters is already overdetermined with meaning, not to mention over-policed by various state apparatuses invested in the interpretation of that meaning. Then, too, the juxtaposition of textual site and cited text necessarily prompted me to import other spaces, other world stages (near and far) as dramatic referents, some of which made me feel more, some less, vulnerable; none of which gave me any clearer sense of my bearings. But, as Alana reminded me, the performance was less about retrieving a singular archive of place than it was precipitating an encounter with the full repertoire of its experiences.[40] In this respect, the neighbourhood did not disappoint. Lives *were* around us. We, *too*, had an audience. All we had to do was look.

40 For a distinction between archival (representational, institutional) and repertory (ephemeral, embodied) knowledge as it relates to performance, see Taylor, *The Archive*.

1

One world, two cities: Olympic showcases in Beijing and Vancouver

The Beijing Olympic Games will fully express the common aspiration of the Chinese people to jointly seek peace, development and common progress together with the peoples of the world, and it will highlight the fact that the 1.3 billion Chinese people of 56 ethnic groups, along with 50 million overseas Chinese, are all most enthusiastic participants in the Beijing Olympic Games. (From the official website of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games[1])

Vancouver is Canada's Pacific gateway. Like the Olympic Movement itself, Vancouver looks outward to the world beyond. Its location halfway between Asia and Europe and its embrace of multiculturalism uniquely position Vancouver to host the world. (From the introduction to the *Vancouver 2010 Bid Book*[2])

Just as winning the Olympic gold medal represents the pinnacle of achievement for an athlete so, by extension, gaining the nomination to stage the Olympics is the highest accolade that a city can now attain in the game of place promotion . . . [N]o other festival approaches the Olympics in the extent to which sporting stadia become the setting for pure theatre. (John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold[3])

1 'Goals & concepts', *The Official Website of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, http://en.beijing2008.cn/bocog/concepts/index.shtml (accessed May 2008).
2 'Introduction', *Vancouver 2010: The Sea to Sky Games*, www.vancouver2010.com/resources/PDFs/BidBook_Intro1.pdf (accessed February 2008).
3 John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Cities of Culture: Staging International Festivals and the Urban Agenda, 1851–2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 140.

For his contribution to the 2006 Sydney Biennale, curated by Charles Merewether around the theme 'Zones of Contact', China's most celebrated contemporary artist, Ai Weiwei, created *World Map*, an 8-metre long, 6-metre wide, and 1-metre high installation that used 2,000 layers of precisely cut cloth to construct and fit together in the manner of a jigsaw puzzle a replica international atlas. Given the media interest in Ai's high-profile collaboration with Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron on the design of what was to be the architectural centerpiece of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the Bird's Nest Stadium, viewers might be forgiven for initially reading *World Map* as a cynical marketing stunt, high-end advertising for the benign globalism of sport as trumpeted by the official slogan of the Beijing Games: 'One World, One Dream'. However, Ai, famous for giving the finger to Tiananmen Square, among other public spaces and world monuments, in a 1997 series of photographs called *Study of Perspective*, has never been one to toe the official party line, even when enforced as rigidly as the Communist Party of China's (CCP). Indeed, little more than a year later, in August 2007, Ai would publicly condemn the Olympics as a glorified propaganda exercise sponsored by a one-party state,[4] an incident whose performative consequences I return to in a later section of this chapter.

In fact, *World Map* is more in keeping with past works by the artist that likewise engage with the nation as at once an imaginary cultural construct authenticated by a global consumer market *and* as a real physical entity monitored by local government. So, for example, Ai is famous for deliberately destroying pottery from the Han and Ming Dynasties (more on this below), or defacing it with bright paint and logos from Coca-Cola; and in his *Map of China* series he carves monumental sculptures of the 'official' geographical mass of the People's Republic (including Taiwan) out of beams salvaged from Qing Dynasty temples. As with *World Map*, these objects' abstract metaphysical representations of place are interrupted, challenged, and rendered mutable by an audience's local – and very tactile – encounter with the medium of their performance: latex, wood, felt. As such, the fabric used in Ai's Biennale piece, and the time and effort required to cut, pile, and fit it, speak to the conflicting and situationally contingent layers of history, politics, and economics that continue to circumscribe the contact zones available between nations in this age of globalisation, with China's ability to

4 See Jonathan Watts, 'Olympic artist attacks China's pomp and propaganda', *The Guardian* (9 August 2007), www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/aug/09/china.artnews (accessed July 2008).

stage a media event as extravagant as the Beijing Olympics, no less than its ability to serve as primary manufacturer to the worldwide garment industry, dependent on abundant local supplies of cheap labour.

At the same Sydney Biennale, Vancouver-based Anishinabe-Canadian artist Rebecca Belmore, about whom I talk at greater length in chapter 4, exhibited *America 2006*. Combining textile work with sculpture, the installation saw her stitch together by hand fragments from the flags of all the countries of the Americas in a manner that at once served as a witty comment on the United States' diminishing geopolitical influence within the hemisphere (its flag ended up next to Venezuela's) and as a serious indictment of the dispossession and cultural genocide of the continents' Indigenous peoples. In Belmore's work, 'contact' thus has a very specific historical referent, and to the extent that all territory in the Americas might still be considered occupied or colonised space, borders per force remain arbitrary and transferable. And allegiance to a flag can only be defined in terms of instrumental outcomes, a point I will also return to in connection with local First Nations' protests to the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver.

A performance event like the Olympics trades equally in images of global cosmopolitanism and tribal nationalism, and most often via recourse to the very emblems used by Ai and Belmore in their respective installations: a map of the world, and various countries' individually brandished flags. As crucially, what these works also demonstrate is that it is local audiences' embodied and place-based engagements with the different symbolic registers of the national and the global that provide both international art fairs *and* international sports showcases with their real drama. In other words, the 'dream' of worldliness is revealed to be nothing less, and nothing more, than the sum of one's material location in the world. And it is here, as this chapter seeks to argue – in part by examining additional conceptual, photographic, and performance art pieces by Ai and others – that we see the city emerge to challenge the nation as the key site of local performative inquiry and global political connection.

Coincidentally, Richard and I were having drinks on a patio in Sydney in June 2003, enjoying spectacular views of the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, when our server, upon learning where we were from, informed us that Vancouver had been picked by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to host the 2010 Winter Games. It seemed strangely appropriate to be receiving this news Down Under, during the antipodean winter season, with Sydneysiders huddled under heat lamps in what for us were relatively balmy conditions, on par with what we might expect back home during our increasingly temperate summers. I

deal at greater length with the performative consequences of Vancouver weather patterns (especially recent distressing departures from the norm) at the end of this book. Here, at the outset, let me dwell a bit further on Sydney's relevance to the specific concerns of this chapter, and to the local/global approach to performance, place, and politics that this book seeks to model. That relevance has as much to do with the fact that Sydney had only narrowly beat out Beijing for the right to host the first Summer Olympics of the new millennium on a controversial fourth ballot held by IOC members in 1993,[5] as it does with comments made by the cab driver who drove Richard and I from the airport into town upon our arrival. Passing Sydney Olympic Park en route, I asked the cabbie what the venues were now used for. 'Blasted if I know, mate', came the reply. 'Friggin' white elephant, if you ask me'.

The fate of purpose-built venues has historically proven to be a telling indicator of the local impacts of Olympic Games on host cities. Do they revitalise and renew urban neighbourhoods? Or do they become derelict eyesores for nearby residents and money-pits for municipal governments? Are they long-term legacy projects designed to bolster the economic infrastructure and quality of life of poorly serviced inner-city communities or outlying suburbs? Or are they really short-term social engineering experiments, targeting for 'retraining' and/or displacement the largely poor, working-class, immigrant, and ethnic minority residents who live in these areas? And can even the best possible outcome ever justify the expense? Choosing to centralise a majority of Olympic venues, as well as the Athletes' Village, in one self-contained area, organisers of the Sydney Games helped to minimise transportation, organisational, and other logistical problems that are wont to plague events of this size. In so doing, they also transformed the former polluted industrial wasteland of Homebush Bay into a new, environmentally friendly sports complex that became the showpiece of Sydney's so-called Green Games, and that was meant to revitalise the area, post-Olympics, into a vibrant new residential neighbourhood and leisure destination. However, in the years immediately following the Olympics, 'it resembled a ghost town . . . and its vast expanses were frequently empty. With relatively few major events in the largest stadia, transport to the Park was sporadic, making it less accessible and attractive to the public'.[6] Since our visit in 2003, this picture has changed somewhat, with the area attracting elite teams to its sports complexes and increasing public

5 Alan Riding, 'Olympics to Sydney; Beijing's bid fails for 2000 Games', *Montreal Gazette* (24 September 1993), p. D1.

6 Richard Cashman, *The Bitter Sweet Awakening: The Legacy of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games* (Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 2006), p. 153.

patronage of its recreational and cultural facilities.[7] And in terms of its performative remediation of place post-Olympics, Sydney continues to offer instructive lessons for other host cities, including Beijing (which has also followed a centralised construction model for its showcase venues), Vancouver (whose Athletes' Village, in a former industrial area known as False Creek South, has been targeted for a high-profile 'greening' of the sort undertaken in Homebush Bay), and London (which is hoping to do for the Lower Lea Valley in 2012 what Canary Wharf did for the Docklands in the 1980s).

There are any number of additional ways in which the 2000 Sydney Olympics serve to inform my comparative analysis of Beijing and Vancouver as Olympic host cities in this chapter: for how they showcased (via Ian Thorpe, Cathy Freeman, and others) Australia's emergence as a global sporting power and the collective pride taken in that prowess; for how the 'made-for-media' message-making[8] and symbolic pageantry of the opening and closing ceremonies linked strategic displays of ethnicity and Aboriginality to larger performances of nationhood and cultural branding that could be exported to a global audience; and for how the *business* of spectacle extended beyond the two-weeks of the Games themselves, influencing various pre-Games arts festivals and post-Games legacy projects. All these considerations are ripe for performance studies analysis, and have been so approached by a wealth of scholars studying different Olympics from the modern era. But, as per the brief discussion of Sydney Olympic Park that stemmed from our cabbie's apparent throwaway remark, all are also part of a larger narrative about the political economy of place.

That is the main narrative I wish to tell in this chapter and helps to explain why, in using the Olympics to contextualise, at the outset of this book, Vancouver's place in the world (including its strategic location along the Pacific Rim and its historical relationship with China), I am especially concerned with integrating an analysis of selected works of artistic production and performance within a larger discussion of the performance of eventness itself, that is, the marshalling of local histories, communities, material realities, and symbolics required for the successful staging of a media spectacle of the size and scale of the Olympics. For if the global television audience for the actual sporting showcase seems to come together as a performance public only fragmentarily united around shared time zones, athletic preferences, national fervour, or

7 Michael Geller, 'Sydney's sustainability suburb', *Vancouver Sun* (10 March 2007), p. L2.

8 I borrow this phrase from Alan Tomlinson; see his 'Olympic spectacle: opening ceremonies and some paradoxes of globalization', *Media, Culture & Society* 18 (1996), p. 586.

choreographed displays of fireworks, then the different sites of performative action and activism (from urban sustainability to human rights) produced through the *organisation* of that showcase also tell us something about how counter-publics are formed not just in spot-lit scenes played on the world stage but also as a result of the behind-the-scenes mechanics and practicalities of local staging. Beginning in this way, I am attempting at once to outline the scope of performance studies as a method of critical analysis and a tool for political critique, and to demonstrate how my discussion of the local dynamics of Vancouver performance here and elsewhere in the book might be relevant to practitioners and scholars in other parts of the world – be it a London gearing up for 2012, or an Edinburgh or Glastonbury or Venice or Sao Paulo winding down annually or bi-annually from its local showcase festival. Let me return briefly to Sydney – and to my own sense of geographical *dis*-placement while there – in order to articulate more clearly how Beijing fits into this equation.

In Sydney I kept experiencing déjà vu. The Harbour Bridge reminded me of the Lion's Gate back home, the vast expanse of green known as The Domain of Vancouver's own urban oasis, Stanley Park. The ocean we share also gives each city a rich supply of accessible sandy beaches. Then, too, Canada and Australia's linked colonial past, and the forced relocation of Aboriginal peoples that forms its shameful backdrop, means that Vancouver and Sydney are home to large numbers of urban Aboriginals, many of whom live in poverty and/or, by necessity, are involved in prostitution or the drug trade. The centres for these activities are the Downtown Eastside (DTES) in Vancouver and the Kings Cross area of Sydney, both home to controversial safe injection sites, and both subject to increasing pressures related to gentrification. As Pacific Rim cities, Sydney and Vancouver also have large Asian populations, with Chinese immigration to both cities dating back to the nineteenth century and momentarily spiking in the years leading up to the 1997 transfer of Hong Kong back to the People's Republic of China. Finally, it is worth remembering that Sydney and Vancouver are both lifestyle cities with extremely inflated real-estate markets, large parts of which are controlled by offshore interests or holding companies.

In fact, it is the connection between the migratory flows of the recent Chinese diaspora and the equally migratory flows of global financial capital that at last brings me to the main point of departure for my comparative analysis of the Beijing and Vancouver Olympics in this chapter, showcasing how both cities (and others besides, including Sydney, but also Hong Kong and Shanghai) form part of an economic and geopolitical nexus of Pacific Rim property speculation and urban

redevelopment. Indeed, in terms of the performance of place, and its local/global significations, one must not underestimate the relationship between 'mega-events' like the Olympics and what Kris Olds, with particular attention to Vancouver, has called urban mega-projects (UMPs). UMPs are 'large scale (re)development projects composed of a mix of commercial, residential, retail, industrial, leisure, and infrastructure uses', often built on abandoned inner-city tracts of land (derelict ports, old railway yards, reclaimed industrial sites), and usually oriented around signature buildings that help re-brand the global visual iconicity of cities.[9] Similarly, 'mega-events', according to Maurice Roche, are 'large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance', and which are likewise designed to project a particular global image of the host city, repositioning that city 'in the world of global inter-city and economic competition'.[10] In other words, the mega-event and the mega-project both demonstrate how, in late modernity, the performance of local public cultures is always already mediated by global economic forces, producing what Olds refers to as a 'relational geography', in which the particularity of place is deterritorialised and dispersed – unevenly and contingently, to be sure – along an ever-fluctuating network of performative flows (capital, money, commodities, labour, migration, tourism, information, images, etc.), and manipulated by hidden actors, usually powerful elites.[11] The heads of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad (BOCOG) and the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games (VANOC) – Liu Qi and John Furlong, respectively – are, after all, CEOs of registered corporations, with all of the insider business access, tax loopholes, and potential conflicts of interest, that incorporation normally entails.[12] Yet, an analysis of the practices of embodied spectatorship and participation at the local level reveals that different constituent audiences often have very different political investments in the sustained performance of place that comes with what Roche calls an Olympics' 'event horizon', that is, its 'long-term (pre-event) causes/motivations and (post-event) effects'.[13]

9 Kris Olds, *Globalization and Urban Change: Capital, Culture, and Pacific Rim Mega-Projects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 6.
10 Maurice Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 10.
11 Olds, *Globalization and Urban Change*, pp. 8–9.
12 To this end, questions were raised in the media when it was discovered that VANOC was registered as a federal lobbyist but not as a provincial one; see Jeff Lee, 'Who is lobbying who [*sic*] is the name of the game', *Vancouver Sun* (30 May 2008), p. A3.
13 Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity*, p. 11.

In developing his theory of the 'sociology' of mega-events, Roche focuses his attention not just on the Olympics, but also on the historical legacy of World Expositions,[14] and in terms of the specific 'event horizon' governing my comparison of the Beijing and Vancouver Games, it is worth contextualising my argument a bit further by first looking back to the 1986 Expo in Vancouver and forward to the 2010 Expo in Shanghai. Connecting both events are the ongoing UMPs that resulted from the successful host city selection process, not to mention legendary Hong Kong business tycoon and property developer Li Ka-shing's strategic involvement in some of the more significant of those projects. After all, it was Li, chief shareholder and managing director of the property development firms Cheung Kong (CK) and Hutchison Whampoa (HW), who together with his eldest son Victor (a Canadian citizen) formed the private development firm Concord Pacific in 1987 with the aim of buying and developing the former Expo 86 lands on the north side of Vancouver's False Creek. The deal was a controversial one, not least because the British Columbia Enterprise Corporation, created by the newly reelected Social Credit government in the months following the close of Expo with the express purpose of privatising various provincial assets, announced that the 82-hectare parcel of land would be sold in one piece, thereby excluding local small-scale property developers from the list of prospective buyers; because of BC Economic Development Minister Grace McCarthy's rumoured less-than-arms-length involvement in encouraging Li to acquire the property; and because the financial arrangements negotiated by Li and the BC government – including deferred payment schedules and the province's absorption of the costs of cleaning up contaminated sections of the site – effectively meant that Concord Pacific acquired the land for less than half of what they themselves agreed it was worth.[15]

In the twenty years since the sale of the land to Concord Pacific, and in particular since the Li family transferred their majority stakeholder status in the firm to Terry Hui in 1993, the area has been transformed into one of the most densely populated downtown neighbourhoods in North America, and has become a model, in terms of urban planning, for similar developments targeted at the globe-trotting super-rich around the world.[16] And yet this global performance of place has come

14 The comparison makes historical as well as analytical sense, as in the early days of the modern Olympic movement, World Fairs served as the main events around which Baron de Coubertin and the IOC organised their fledgling sports competitions. This was, for example, the case in Paris in 1900, in St Louis in 1904, and London in 1908.

15 See Olds, *Globalization and Urban Change*, pp. 107–8 and 122.

16 To this end, former Vancouver senior planner Larry Beasley has been recruited by the government of Abu Dhabi to recreate the 'Vancouver Model' (high-density buildings combined with lots of green space and pedestrian-friendly walkways) in the oil-rich emirate. See David George-Cosh, 'The man who built Vancouver has grand plan for Abu Dhabi', *National Post* (12 April 2008), p. FP1.

17 For the full historical and social background to this phenomenon, see Olds, *Globalization and Urban Change*, pp. 141–239. See, as well, Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Global Shanghai, 1850–2010: A History in Fragments* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

at a local price – quite literally – with an increasing lack of affordable housing in Vancouver's urban core resulting in a form of enclosure that sees companies like Concord Pacific at once encroaching on and seeking to contain the social blight of the DTES, for example, through a phalanx of luxury condominium towers, most of whose units are owned internationally. As the city now looks across the water, to South False Creek, site of the 2010 Athletes' Village, and earmarked for major redevelopment thereafter, it would do well – especially in the current bear market – to seek alternative models of place promotion, ones that better reconcile local integration with global destination.

While Li's primary investment interests in Shanghai relate to the operation of container ports in the Mingdong and Pudong districts, HW's property development wing has sought to capitalise on the real estate potential associated with the extraordinary urban transformation of Shanghai into a global financial, high-tech, transportation, and trade zone centred around the Pudong New Area Project and the Lujiazui Central Finance District. Specifically, HW has a number of grand luxury property and hotel developments currently in various stages of development throughout these two areas. However, unlike Vancouver, the major development initiatives in Shanghai since the 1980s have been fuelled by the economic (and political) engines of Beijing, rather than Hong Kong. Arguably it is the Chinese government's desire to see Shanghai overtake Hong Kong as the major financial capital of Asia and, consequently, regain some of the glory of its cosmopolitan past that explains an architectural re-branding of a city now in eclipse of Tokyo as the stand-in for urban futurity in Hollywood films.[17] Something similar has happened in Beijing, in connection with the building of various signature Olympic venues, about which I will have more to say below. As yet, however, there have been no local protests in Beijing of the sort organised in Shanghai at the beginning of 2008 around the proposed extension of the city's high-speed magnetic levitation, or maglev, train through residential neighbourhoods. Taking the form of peaceful 'strolls' through city streets, and modelled on similar actions undertaken protesting the construction of a large chemical factory in the port city of Xiamen, these demonstrations have targeted what was to have been a centerpiece of Shanghai's ultra-modern, high-tech projection of itself to the world in

2010, and have left authorities flummoxed as to how to respond.[18] The actions of these protestors, together with those of grieving parents who have launched class-action lawsuits over children killed in the collapse of an elementary school during the Sichuan earthquake, or from drinking milk tainted with melamine,[19] indicate something of a sea change in Chinese politics since 1989, with a newly emancipated and financially leveraged middle class overtaking students and workers in demanding more accountability of their national government at the local level.

A telling sign that Shanghai's 2010 World Expo is seen within China as a showcase event as – if not more – significant as the Beijing Olympics is the fact that a clock counting down the Expo's opening in August 2010 was installed in Shanghai's People's Square in February 2003, more than a year before a similar clock counting down the Beijing Olympics was installed in Tiananmen Square in September 2004.[20] Of course it was an earlier countdown clock in Tiananmen, this one ticking off the days to the transfer of Hong Kong sovereignty in 1997, that established the precedent of symbolically showcasing the future-oriented temporality of China's emergence as a major player on the world stage. And if, in this regard, the coming out party that is the Beijing Olympics is being measured in the West – as an indicator of China's *social progress* – against the brutal suppression of the pro-democracy movement in Tiananmen in 1989, in China the timing of the Olympics arguably has much more to do with celebrating the country's amazing *economic progress* in the thirty years since Deng Xiaoping opened the door to global markets as part of the reform policies implemented in 1978.

While no countdown clock was put in place in anticipation of Expo 86, one was installed in February 2007 in front of the Vancouver Art Gallery to inaugurate the three-year countdown to the 2010 Olympics. The clock was an Omega, the official timekeeper of both the Beijing and Vancouver Games, and this is as good a metaphor as any for the compression and consolidation of the local specificities of space and time into the unreal, non-material scapes and flows of globalisation. But the well-orchestrated ceremonial unveilings of these various clocks

18 See Maureen Fan, 'Shanghai's middle class launches quiet, meticulous revolt', *The Seattle Times* (26 January 2008), p. A1.

19 See Edward Wong, 'Parents of schoolchildren killed in China earthquake confirm lawsuit', *The New York Times* (23 December 2008), www.nytimes.com/2008/12/23/world/asia/23quake.html (accessed December 2008); and 'Families file suit in Chinese tainted milk scandal', *The New York Times* (21 January 2009), www.nytimes.com/2009/01/21/world/asia/21milk.html (accessed January 2009).

20 Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, 'Protests and propaganda during China's Olympic year', Centre for Chinese Research Workshop, *Staging the Beijing Olympics: Visions, Tensions, and Dreams*, University of British Columbia, 12 May 2008.

3 Clockwise from top left: countdown clocks in Beijing, Vancouver, and Shanghai

also speak, metonymically, to the relevance of a performance studies approach to the Olympics as a mass public spectacle that, to adapt Guy Debord, obliges one to participate in an abstract construction of the world at the same time as it separates one from the concrete material conditions of the local as it is produced by that world (see figure 3).[21] To this end, in his influential analysis of the Olympic Games as 'a special kind of cultural performance', John MacAloon builds upon Debord (and Victor Turner) by adopting a multi-genre approach to the 'distinctive forms of symbolic action' contained within and produced by the event

21 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), p. 46.

as a 'performance system'.[22] These genres include 'spectacle' (the eye-popping visual extravaganzas of the opening and closing ceremonies); 'festival' (the joyous celebrations and public displays of festivity that accompany the Olympics as a mass gathering, some of which may be more programmatic – e.g. official Cultural Olympiads – and some more spontaneous – e.g. the winning athlete who does a victory lap around the track with his or her national flag); 'ritual' (the parade of nations, the lighting of the Olympic flame, the declaring of the event opened and closed, the athletes' and officials' pledges, the awarding of medals and playing of national anthems); and 'game' (the various sporting contests that supposedly form the foundation of the Olympics). MacAloon's genres are by no means discrete categories, and can often bleed into one another. Nor do they, as he himself states, 'exhaust the roster of performance types found in an Olympic Games'.[23] With this in mind, I want, in my own comparative analysis of the Beijing and Vancouver Olympics, to deploy as both a performance analytic and a potential tool for political critique a word that I have already invoked several times in this chapter: *showcase*.

I do so primarily because showcase, as a genre, helps to connect occasion with place, the performative with the exhibitionary,[24] through the act of public display, in this case not just of elite athletic skill, but also of modern urban aesthetics and an accompanying ethics of livability. This returns me to the earlier link I made between mega-events like the Olympics and mega-development projects that have transformed the respective built environments of Vancouver and Beijing. That is, a chief symbolic action performed by the former is to showcase the latter in the 'game of place promotion', providing visual evidence of a city's attractive and competitive position in the new world order and encouraging, in the process, tourism and further global investment. At the same time, the taxonomic (not to mention taxidermic) impulse that accompanies the museum showcase, for example, or, as per my discussion above, the World Exposition, points to the dialectical nature of such a performance genre; the specific and/or universalist principles or criteria informing the display of objects, locales, events, acts, peoples, and so on, may not be received as intended by different audiences, and may even provoke

22 John J. MacAloon, 'Olympic Games and the theory of spectacle in modern societies', in John J. MacAloon (ed.), *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), pp. 258–9.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 242.

24 On exhibition and performance, see Roche, *Mega-Events and Modernity*, p. 9, who identifies these as sub-genres of the 'complex' of cultural forms of expression that merge in mega-events such as the Olympics.

a degree of scrutiny potentially detrimental to the success of the performance. As television broadcast statistics consistently bear out, events like the Olympics really do focus the eyes of the world on a given city, and not just for the two weeks of the Games themselves. Whether or not those eyes all share in the dreams being sold in and by that city is another matter entirely, and in the sections that follow my goal has been to examine the different local, national, and international investments and contradictions in the Beijing and Vancouver Olympics' showcasing – sometimes willfully, sometimes not – of questions relating to urban sustainability, cultural heritage, and human rights. In so doing, I discuss, among other topics, official policies on green building practices and the material realities of displaced and homeless local populations; performances of culture that receive national brand approval, as well as artists seeking to challenge what that brand might be selling; and the transnational mediation of protests in Tibet and First Nations and anti-poverty activism in British Columbia. In all cases, an ancillary goal has been, wherever possible, to give some sense of the response of different local and global actors and audiences to these issues by quoting from media and personal interviews where relevant.

This last point speaks to a final crucial element that the showcase genre allows me to highlight, namely my own shifting role as researcher in relation to the two Olympic cities under discussion. As an almost twenty-year resident of Vancouver, with an active interest in local politics, access to public documents and officials connected to the Games, and the opportunity to attend various community forums (both pro and con) and cultural events related to the Olympic preparations, my ability to collect, measure, assess, and, in turn, showcase in this chapter relevant data has been largely unfettered. Not so with Beijing, where linguistic and cultural barriers, my inability to penetrate BOCOG's publicity firewall, and a tenuous grasp of the overlapping and at times competing interpretive discourses and communities at play in the Chinese media and blogosphere reporting on the Games, has somewhat compromised – and necessarily influenced – my take on local, national, and diasporic responses to the performance and politics of place on offer in the 2008 Summer Olympics. At the same time, I have been able to draw on the knowledge and expertise of a number of important friends, colleagues, and collaborators. First and foremost, in this regard, is Amy Zhang, a former student who worked for Greenpeace China as lead author of their environmental assessment of the Beijing Olympics and who, together with her partner, D'Arcy Saum, put me up when I visited Beijing in advance of the Games. Amy and D'Arcy also introduced me to friends, co-workers, artists, and activists who in turn shared with me

their views on the Olympic fever gripping their city. If, in the end, I have interpreted or applied the views of these individuals in ways that might seem anomalous or askew, this has as much to do with my own performative location with respect to Vancouver as it does with what might appear to be the non-locatability of my politics in relation to Beijing. Another way of saying this is that, in my analysis of the 'relational geography' connecting these Olympic host cities, I am aiming as well for a reciprocal temporality, demonstrating that Beijing's long march toward and lingering moment in the global spotlight is simultaneously part of Vancouver's history of local emergence as a showcase city, one subject to its own critique.

Showcasing sustainability: local paradoxes

In 2003, soon after being brought on board by Herzog and de Meuron as design consultant on the Bird's Nest, Ai embarked on a series of digital video works documenting the rapid urban transformation of Beijing. *INTERVAL* (2003) comprises 150 hours of video footage shot through the windshield of a single vehicle as it traverses every street within the circumference of Beijing's Fourth Ring Road over a continuous 16-day period. *Chang'an Boulevard* (2004) is an extended video essay on the main east–west axis through the city recorded in a manner akin to stop-motion animation. Finally, in *Beijing – The Second Ring* and *Beijing – The Third Ring* (both 2005), Ai captures CCTV-like footage of the notoriously gridlocked traffic on the two main arterial loops that encircle the centre of the city from each of the bridges that traverses them. Collectively, these works add up to a sobering environmental 'map' of a city seemingly in thrall to developmental sprawl, whatever the price. Still, it is the C-prints that make up Ai's *Provisional Landscape* series of photographs, undertaken during the same period, that I find most haunting, not least for their eerie beauty. In them Ai represents a spatially and temporally 'void' Beijing as a perpetual construction site, recording 'empty' images of areas targeted for redevelopment and repurposing in the lead up to the Olympics at the moment just after the old built environment has been demolished and just before work on the new one has begun, the detritus of the past a passive rebuke to dreams of future progress. The images, though much smaller in scale, are reminiscent of Canadian artist Edward Burtynsky's massive and visually stunning photographs of 'manufactured' industrial landscapes.

As a result of Jennifer Baichwal's award-winning documentary film on the artist, Burtynsky has become most famous for his towering portraits of several hallmarks of China's recent industrial progress,

including the Three Gorges Dam.[25] However, *An Uneasy Beauty*, a solo exhibition of the artist's work that opened at the Surrey Art Gallery in January 2009 as part of the second Vancouver Cultural Olympiad to be organised in the lead-up to the 2010 Winter Games, reminded me that he has documented the visible evidence of our planet's collective consumption and waste at sites much closer to home. The show featured twenty-four images Burtynsky shot in western Canada between 1985 and 2007, including compositionally precise photos of oil sand extraction sites at Fort McMurray, Alberta, open-pit mines in northern British Columbia, and the container port of Vancouver. Designed and exhibited as a series, the photos trace both the material roots and the spectral routes of our dependence on non-renewable energy resources, a global fuel economy that leads from Alberta's oil fields, through Vancouver's port, to the bulldozers, heavy diggers, and forklifts awaiting start-up in Ai's photos of Beijing. The human-altered landscapes in Ai's and Burtynsky's photos are likewise linked in that they are devoid of bodies and yet paradoxically demand of their viewing audiences bodily engagement, a sensorially immersive accounting of how we are locally implicated in these 'placeless' spaces by the cars we drive, the food we eat, even the entertainment and sporting spectacles we attend. At the same time, both Ai and Burtynsky have separately stated that their work is not meant to be read as an overt judgment but rather as a kind of 'monitor' or 'point of departure for discussion',[26] not as political indictments but as performance indicators. In this, Burtynksy's lens, like Ai's, would find a rich resource of subject matter in the venue building sites of any number of recent or future Olympic host cities (including Vancouver and London), where IOC-imposed conditions around sustainability as a global philosophy and the local conditions for living sustainably are frequently at odds.

Following the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, the IOC formally amended its Charter to include environmental and social sustainability as the 'third pillar', along with sport and culture and education, of the philosophy of life and the body it calls Olympism.[27] Theoretically, the linking of Olympism and sustainability has meant that each prospective host city since Lillehammer has had to outperform its

25 *Manufactured Landscapes*, dir. Jennifer Baichwal (Mongrel Media, 2006).

26 See 'Ai Weiwei: fragments, voids, sections and rings', interview with Adrian Blackwell, *Archinect* (5 December 2006), http://archinect.com/features/article.php?id=47035_0_23_0_C (accessed December 2008); and Robin Laurence, 'Landscapes beyond nature', *The Georgia Straight* (22–9 January 2009), p. 43.

27 For an – admittedly very partial – overview of 'the development of the Olympic Movement's commitment to protecting the environment', see Steven Maass, 'Going green', *Olympic Review* 64 (2007), pp. 31–7.

predecessors in trumpeting its green credentials and social commitments as part of its bid proposal. In practice, however, those commitments can seem more imagined and well-intentioned than real, and it is highly debatable what role environmental best practices play in the IOC's frequently mercurial and inscrutable decision-making process in awarding the Games. Which is why Beijing's decision to not only allocate an unprecedented US$ 12.2 billion to meet its ambitious twenty-point environmental improvement plan,[28] but also to showcase the 'Green Games' as one of three main themes of its Olympics (the other two were 'High-Tech Olympics' and 'People's Olympics') raised more than a few eyebrows among environmental activists and NGOs around the globe. This was a country, after all, that still relied on coal (the dirtiest of fossil fuels) for 70 per cent of its total energy consumption; that was putting new cars, responsible for 40 per cent of Beijing's toxic air pollution, on the roads of its capital at a rate of 1,500 per day;[29] whose water and sewage treatment systems were rudimentary at best; that had no comprehensive controls for monitoring, controlling, and reducing industrial waste disposal and pollution; where building codes and practices were subject to the whims of corrupt local officials; and that was sacrificing valuable farm land at unprecedented rates, displacing countless local residents, and exploiting scores of migrant workers, all for the sake of dubious mega-development projects like the Three Gorges Dam.

Granted BOCOG's rhetoric around its environmental goals supposedly met or exceeded has seemed, at times, like a lot of smoke and mirrors (quite literally in the case of its trumpeting of Beijing's so-called 'Blue Sky' days). It certainly ran counter to my own observations of demolished *hutongs* and the generally poor living conditions of thousands of migrant workers charged with completing construction on Beijing's Olympic venues. However, in the course of my research, and in my conversations with various Western observers working with environmental NGOs monitoring the sustainability of the Beijing Games, I was surprised to learn just how much concrete action China appeared to be taking in working towards a more comprehensive post-Olympics commitment to global climate change, as well as how the specific

28 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Beijing 2008 Olympic Games: An Environmental Review* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2007), pp. 26–8.

29 See Keith Bradsher and David Barboza, 'Pollution from Chinese coal casts a global shadow', *The New York Times* (11 June 2006), www.nytimes.com/2006/06/11/business/worldbusiness/11chinacoal.html (accessed July 2008); and Ted Conover, 'Capitalist roaders', *The New York Times Magazine* (2 July 2006), www.nytimes.com/2006/07/02/magazine/02china.html (accessed July 2008).

'greening' of Beijing was being taken up in very material and performative ways at the local level. This paradox is just one of the many that has helped 'sustain' China's careful management of the Beijing Games (along with 'unrestricted' press freedom that excluded travel to Tibet and live broadcast from the Great Wall, or designated protest zones empty of protestors), not to mention its promotion of a 'harmonious' society, more generally.

Witness, in this regard, a visual spectacle as playful and seemingly benign as China's five official mascots, or *fuwa*; while each is colour-coded to represent one of the five Olympic rings, and each carries with it a traditional Chinese blessing, BOCOG has also connected the mascots to its overall environmental message by having them symbolise the natural elements. Thus blue Beibei, a flying fish, represents the sea; the black and white panda, Jingjing, represents the forest hills; the red Olympic flame is incarnated in the fiery Huanhuan; Nini, a green flying swallow, alludes to those elusive clear blue skies; and finally Yingying, a yellow Tibetan antelope, is the lone *fuwa* who does double duty, symbolising the grass-covered earth, but also signaling Beijing's commitment to a Green Olympics more generally.[30] All the more ironic, then, that it is arguably China's ongoing depredation of the grasslands in Tibet's Qinghai Plateau (begun during the Great Leap Forward of the 1950s, when much of the area was converted to unsustainable and non-irrigable cropland), and the consequent migration of traditional herders to cities such as Lhasa in search of work, that helped fuel the outburst of protests against a recently arrived and upwardly mobile Han middle-class in March of 2008.[31] Even more ironic, in this regard, is that a photo by Liu Weiqiang that was chosen by China Central Television (CCTV), the country's main broadcast network, as one of the top ten of 2006, and which showed a herd of Tibetan antelope running, in an apparent harmonious fusing of nature and technology, underneath a railway overpass carrying a highspeed train on China's newly built Qinghai-Tibet line, turned out to have been Photoshopped.[32]

30 'The official mascots of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games', *The Official Website of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, http://en.beijing2008.cn/spirit/beijing2008/graphic/n214068254.shtml (accessed July 2008).

31 See Yoichi Shimatsu, 'Tibetan cowboys' last stand: globalism sets grasslands on fire', *New America Media* (20 March 2008), http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=ee49c44cd49f7bca788fe2f284552696 (accessed July 2008).

32 Jane Spencer and Juliet Ye, 'China eats crow over fake photo of rare antelope', *Wall Street Journal* (22 February 2008), p. A1. My thanks to Graham Johnson and Tsering Shakya, participants in the UBC Centre for Chinese Research Workshop on the Beijing Olympics in May 2008, for drawing my attention to the issue of the Tibetan grasslands and the Photoshopped image, respectively.

In March 2008, the BOCOG media offices released, as part of their ongoing monthly published updates, a *Supplement on Olympic Commitments*. Produced, like most of BOCOG's printed media propaganda, in the form of a glossy colour magazine, the *Supplement* details, among other things, the steps Beijing has taken to ensure as green a Games as possible. These include employing rigorous environmental protection guidelines in its construction and renovation of venues (especially regarding energy and water conservation); improving public transport by building two new subway lines and a rapid transit link to the airport; improving overall energy efficiency and air quality in Beijing by transitioning from coal to cleaner energy sources, such as natural gas, geothermal energy, and wind; improving water quality and conservation by upgrading municipal reservoirs and sewage networks; implementing a new management system and building new disposal facilities for the processing of domestic and industrial waste; and increasing the overall green space of Beijing to more than 50 per cent of the city's total area by, among other things, an aggressive forestation plan focused on the massive 680-hectare Olympic Forest Park and the 76 competition and training venues.[33] BOCOG's ambitious and self-congratulatory claims are largely endorsed by two independent environmental reviews of the Beijing Games conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Greenpeace, respectively. Notwithstanding a large caveat about air quality contained in its report, UNEP is 'able to conclude that considerable effort has gone into fulfilling the letter and spirit of the promise . . . to deliver a "Green Olympics"'.[34] Similarly, Greenpeace notes that 'Beijing's tremendous efforts and investment in environmental initiatives for the 2008 Games have allowed many of the city's bid commitments to be met', leaving 'an important environmental legacy for the city of Beijing in areas such as transportation infrastructure, energy efficiency, and in the development of renewable energy, water, and waste treatment capacities'.[35] Yet while commending Beijing Olympic organisers for greatly superseding Athens in its environmental commitments, Greenpeace also outlines a number of missed opportunities that fall short of the more comprehensive approach taken in Sydney, including limited transparency and engagement with third-party stakeholders and NGOs, and a lack of independently verifiable

33 See BOCOG, 'Green Beijing, green Olympics', *Supplement on Olympic Commitments* (Beijing: BOCOG, 2008), pp. 36–45.
34 UNEP, *Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, p. 14.
35 Greenpeace China (Amy Zhang, lead author), *China after the Olympics: lessons from Beijing: A Greenpeace assessment of the performance of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games* (Beijing: Greenpeace China, 2008), p. 42.

data by which to evaluate fully and completely Beijing's environmental performance.[36]

Both reports by UNEP and Greenpeace also note that Beijing's Olympic commitments regarding sustainability were developed in consort with a larger eighteen-year 'Environmental Master Plan' for the greening of the city adopted in 1997 by the Beijing Municipal Government, while BOCOG chief Liu Qi was Mayor, and that the city's aggressive efforts, among other things, to phase out ozone-depleting substances a full six years ahead of China's national deadline has established important precedents for the rest of the country to follow.[37] No doubt the CCP's commitment in its most recent (eleventh) Five-Year Plan to a mandatory 20 per cent reduction of energy consumption per unit of GDP by 2010[38] was likewise influenced by Olympics-related optics. However, such measures simultaneously speak to a more expansive and complex internal dialogue about the environment and sustainability in China that is largely not being heard outside the country, and certainly not by the leaders of industrialised Western nations who admonish China – in the highly racialised terms of First Worldism – for its environmental abuses while prevaricating on their own unmet commitments to Kyoto and other global environmental protocols (about which I will have more to say in the coda). Indeed, as respected China-watcher James Fallows has recently reported, in the pages of *The Atlantic*, while China's environmental situation is undeniably 'disastrous', it is also 'improving': 'Everyone knows about the first part. The second part is important too. Outside recognition of where and why China has made progress increases the prospects that it will make further advances. Recognition also clarifies the most important obstacles, political and economic, to such progress'.[39] In this regard, one ironic benefit to the entire planet might in fact be the CCP's unevenly autocratic control of its citizens, and the degree to which it can count on more or less uniform adherence to its slogans and edicts. That is, when the tag-team of President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao speak, at every turn (including in relation to the Olympics), of promoting a 'harmonious society', they are increasingly emphasising that economic prosperity cannot be sustained without concomitant investment in the environment. And while the recent global economic downturn might yet necessitate further revisions to the ultimate version of this message, it would appear that the Chinese

36 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
37 UNEP, *Beijing 2008 Olympic Games*, pp. 14–15; Greenpeace China, *China after the Olympics*, p. 11.
38 Greenpeace China, *China after the Olympics*, p. 11.
39 James Fallows, 'China's silver lining', *The Atlantic* (June 2008), p. 39.

government's official position – unlike that of many Western administrations – allows no room for climate-change skepticism.

However, there is equally evidence that many Chinese are not waiting to be told to change their green habits; the aforementioned protests in Xiamen and Shanghai reveal a growing environmental activist movement in China. And to judge by the number of Chinese web pages, blogs and networking sites devoted to the environment (see, for example, the 'Green Leap Forward' and 'China Dialogue'), local grassroots organising around sustainability issues, especially in urban centres like Beijing, is thriving. My favourite of these electronic sites is China's Green Beat (CGB; www.chinasgreenbeat.com). It's maintained by Zhao 'Shane' Xiangyu, a transplanted Beijinger from the coal-producing northern Heilongjiang province, and John Romankiewicz, an American expat in China on a Fulbright Scholarship; they write a blog and frequently appear together (along with their friend Sun Zhe) in quirky homemade video podcasts that mix documentary footage and voiceover with improvised scenes of sketch comedy to talk about local solutions to various environmental problems (an interesting feature on Beijing's famous three-wheeled bicycles, for example, puts the lie to a lack of comprehensive recycling programs in the city, and in one hilarious episode the hapless Sun Zhe gets some tips on 'green dating'). As it happened, while I was in Beijing the boys at CGB were collaborating with Beijing International Theatre and Entertainment, a largely expat company that performs in English, to stage *Lean, Mean and Green*, an improvised sketch comedy show, at a popular local bar called Obiwan. Structured as a reality-TV style competition between a group of rapacious industrialists and their radical environmentalist counterparts, the teams are forced to work together, in a series of increasingly whacky challenges, to find solutions to the mutual sustainability of the economy and the environment. Using physical comedy, song and dance, slides, a surprising amount of cross-dressing, and of course the dreaded audience participation, the energetic and cosmopolitan cast (including the ever-affable Sun Zhe) light-heartedly skewered the ideologically entrenched positions of both sides of the environmental debate. It was by no means great theatre, but as we settled into a booth at a popular restaurant near the Chinese Workers' Stadium (site of the Olympic football matches) after the performance, Amy, D'Arcy, and I agreed that the thematic focus on profligacy and waste found an interesting inverse formal corollary in the down and dirty staging, one that was potentially instructive for China's unique environmental situation. That is, the way this show was put together – quickly, cheaply, and improvisationally – describes not only the current popular perception of China's much-derided manufacturing

industry, for example, but also the solution to improving the overall environmental efficiency and sustainability of that and other industries. As Fallows puts it, 'the business of improving China's environment can be a very attractive business indeed'.[40]

These local successes notwithstanding, in the global visual spectacle of place promotion, all of China's real progress around the environment in connection with the Olympics inevitably ran up against the negative television optics of Beijing's omnipresent smog. Then, too, China's attempts to balance its rapid economic rise against consequent environmental depredation need to be measured against that third principle of sustainability, social development. And here, it must be noted, China has failed miserably. Left out of the reports by UNEP and Greenpeace are issues around the relocation and forcible eviction of residents in Beijing to make way for Olympic-related construction projects, and the exploitation of migrant workers engaged in completing those projects. According to the Geneva-based Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), as many as 1.5 million people will have been relocated in Beijing as a result of various 'urban development activities that were either accelerated, expanded or facilitated by the political imperative of "holding the best Olympics ever"'.[41] Forcible evictions have been widespread, with residents subject to abuse, intimidation, and even violence by developers and local authorities. Compensation packages have been grossly inadequate and the relocation of most affected residents to the outer reaches of the city, far from their places of employment, has meant that upwards of 20 per cent of them have crossed the line from 'having a sustainable low income livelihood to a genuinely precarious one'.[42] At the same time, the Chinese government has introduced new legislation restricting lawyers' abilities to represent groups of evictees, and those that have attempted to take on property developers and local authorities on these matters have tended to land in jail.[43]

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has been equally damning in its assessment of the treatment of the nearly two million migrant workers who toil in Beijing, many of them on Olympics-related construction projects. Based on interviews conducted at nine different building sites in Beijing between January and March 2007, and on follow-up interviews a year later, HRW issued a fifty-eight-page report just months before the start of the Games detailing the various abuses routinely endured by

40 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
41 Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, *Fair Play for Housing Rights: Mega-Events, Olympic Games and Housing Rights* (Geneva: COHRE, 2007), p. 168.
42 *Ibid.*
43 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

migrant workers in China's capital. These include the regular proroguing of monthly wages in favour of end-of-year or end-of-project payouts that are invariably smaller than what workers are owed, if in fact they get paid at all; a lack of legally required medical and accident insurance, despite the incredibly high rate of injury and death in their working environments; inadequate, overcrowded, and unsanitary on-site housing, with upwards of twenty men sharing quarters designed for ten, often without heat in the winter and with no washing facilities; and, finally, coordinated harassment and violence should they attempt to seek redress for any of this.[44] While HRW places much of the blame for this social catastrophe at the feet of the Chinese government, it also reserves harsh criticism for the IOC, noting in particular that Olympic officials have a moral imperative to '[s]eek independent certification that all workers employed to construct venues for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing have not been the victims of wage exploitation, inadequate safety standards and other abuses'.[45] With new construction being the single most expensive, time-consuming, and globally scrutinised of host cities' Olympic preparations, and with most mega-development projects around the world these days requiring, in some form or another, the labour of migrant workers, this is a lesson in ethical accountability that Vancouver would do well to consider in showcasing its sustainable responsibilities.

Of course, when it comes to the environment, Vancouver has perhaps the opposite image problem from Beijing. As the birthplace of Greenpeace, the home of a new generation of affluent, multi-cultural eco-hipsters who have turned urban densification and eating locally into exportable lifestyle choices, and a city whose spectacular natural setting is alone responsible for landing it at or near the top of various annual livability indices, the popular global perception of Vancouver's green cred is more or less secure. Which perhaps explains the hubris behind VANOC's licensing agreement with the provincial government and the Insurance Company of British Columbia (ICBC) to rebrand the slogan contained on the special signature car licence plates issued in advance of the 2010 Olympics. 'Beautiful British Columbia', the benignly serviceable descriptor used since 1964, was replaced with the following superlative: 'The Best Place on Earth'. But paradise, it seems, carries with it both added premiums and an expiry date: in exchange for its six-year, $15-million sponsorship deal with VANOC, ICBC raised motorists' individual insurance rates by 3.3 per cent; and the plates themselves, which also

44 Human Rights Watch, *'One Year of My Blood': Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in Beijing*, vol. 20, no. 3 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008), pp. 16–40.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

contain the 2010 Olympics' official logo, initially could only be renewed and displayed through 2012, when ICBC's deal with VANOC expires.[46]

However, along with such perceptions come added expectations, and it is perhaps no accident that on the official *Vancouver 2010* website (www.vancouver2010.com) the drop-down menu for the 'Sustainability' hot button contains the most items to click on. Indeed, VANOC is the first Olympics Organizing Committee to implement a self-reporting system on what it calls its 'sustainability performance', pledging to release five annual reports between 2005 and 2010 detailing the 'benchmarks' achieved and the 'progress' made during its 'lifespan', from 'planning and design, to construction, operations, convening the Games, then decommissioning and wind-down'. Each of these reports, of which two have so far been produced, is broken down into six main sections that together comprise VANOC's overall sustainability action plan: 'accountability'; 'environmental stewardship and impact reduction'; 'social inclusion and responsibility'; 'Aboriginal participation and collaboration'; 'economic development'; and 'sport for sustainable living'.[47] I don't propose to scrutinise in depth all of VANOC's reported claims regarding its 'performance' of sustainability. The use of local materials – including the very laudable recycling of pine-beetle infested waste wood from BC's decimated northern forests – and the attention to energy efficiency on the various Vancouver venues, together with minimising disturbances to natural ecosystems in Whistler, has been justifiably trumpeted, including by the IOC.[48] Building on the example set by Sydney, Vancouver Games organisers have also been working very hard to include members of the Four Host First Nations, on whose traditional lands the events are after all taking place, in all aspects of Olympics planning. I will have more to say about some of the cultural contradictions and internal disputes this particullar collaboration has yielded in the next section. For the time being, let me concentrate in the remainder of this section on what remains the most pressing social concern for Vancouver Olympic organisers and civic leaders, an area of sustainable *under*-performance that has prompted a lot of hand-wringing and finger-pointing by various local constituencies, and a definite image problem for the city in the lead-up to the 2010 Games.

46 As a result of the unexpected popularity of the plates, with a projected 100,000 to be sold by 2010, ICBC changed the terms of its original renewal agreement, and will now allow motorists to display the commemorative plates past 2012. See Jeff Lee, 'Licence plates prove hot', *Vancouver Sun* (13 June 2007), p. B4.

47 'Sustainability report', *Vancouver 2010*, www.vancouver2010.com/en/Sustainability/SustainabilityReport (accessed July 2008).

48 Rod Mickleburgh, 'VANOC wins praise for social conscience', *Globe and Mail* (28 February 2008), p. S1.

I am referring to the dearth of affordable social housing in Vancouver and the ongoing crisis of neglect with respect to the city's poorest inner-city neighbourhoods, particularly the notorious Downtown Eastside (DTES). The two issues are related and can be traced back, as I began this chapter by suggesting, at least in part to the city's hosting of its last big global mega-event in 1986. Indeed, before Vancouverites think about condemning Beijing for its relocation of residents in advance of its Olympics, we would do well to remember, as Kris Olds himself reminds us, that we sanctioned a similar policy of forcible evictions in preparation for Expo 86, with sources estimating that between 500 and 1,000 low-income residents were displaced, primarily from the DTES and adjacent neighbourhoods, to make way for tourist lodgings or various building projects.[49] At the same time, this area, already in economic decline for several decades owing to the loss of retail infrastructure that accompanied residential flight to the suburbs (especially by recent waves of Chinese immigrants, who were increasingly opting to settle in Richmond instead of historic Chinatown, immediately adjacent the DTES), was the unlucky beneficiary of clean-up drives trageting the sex and drug trades, then much more dispersed throughout the city, in advance of Expo. As a result, in particular, of the vice sweeps of the Davie Street corridor in the West End and the Mount Pleasant area on the east side, and with the open acknowledgment if not tacit approval of the police force, this underground economy became concentrated around a few square blocks of the DTES, with Main and Hastings, once anchored by its beautiful beaux-arts buildings, suddenly becoming a different sort of showcase, this one for urban blight and social decay. Other problems necessarily followed: a spike in homelessness (exacerbated throughout the 1990s with the rapid gentrification of nearby Gastown and Yaletown, and the conversion of many former single-room occupancy [SRO] units that rented by the day to luxury condos); a similar spike in HIV- and hepatitis-C infection rates; and serial violent crime that targeted mostly Aboriginal women and sex trade workers and that, as I detail at greater length in chapter 4, again seemed to have the tacit approval of the police.[50]

Successive municipal governments and mayors, including Philip

49 Olds, 'Canada: hallmark events, evictions, and housing rights', in Antonio Azuela *et al.* (eds), *Evictions and the Right to Housing: Experience from Canada, Chile, the Dominican Republic, South Africa, and South Korea* (Ottawa: International Development Centre, 1998), p. 4.

50 For a history of the neighbourhood, as told by the people who live and work there, see Leslie A. Robertson and Dara Culhane (eds), *In Plain Sight: Reflections on Life in Downtown Eastside Vancouver* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2005); and Paul Taylor (ed.), *The Heart of the Community: The Best of the Carnegie Newsletter* (Vancouver: New Star, 2003).

Owen, Larry Campbell, and Sam Sullivan, have paid various degrees of lip-service to the revitalisation of the DTES, attempting to counter the tide of upscale residential development by adopting various low-income housing strategies, including a one-to-one SRO replacement policy and the trading of height restrictions for agreements from developers to include a mix of social housing units in their plans.[51] In 2001, Owen, in conjunction with the provincial and federal governements, also formally adopted the Four Pillars Drug Strategy, coordinating the city's official drug policy around the related issues of prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and enforcement. It is the third pillar, harm reduction, that has proved the most controversial, as most of the publicity has focused on the opening, in September 2003, of North America's first supervised safe injection facility, Insite, in the heart of the DTES. This pilot project required a special Health Canada drug law exemption, one that expired at the end of June 2008. The City of Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health, which operates Insite, applied to the Canadian government for an extension of their exemption, and won a temporary reprieve when the BC Supreme Court struck down parts of Canada's drug laws earlier the same year. But despite a wealth of statistical evidence supporting an increase in detox enrollments and reduced rates of needle sharing and public injections, and despite the support of both levels of government in BC, the majority of Vancouver residents, and the Canadian Medical Association, there is every likelihood that the ruling federal Conservative Party, pending the results of its appeal of the BC Supreme Court decision, will permanently close Insite.[52]

This particular battle is just one of several local scenarios connected to the fate of Vancouver's 'derelict residents' in advance of the Olympics that informs James Long's recent play *The View from Above*, where global climate change combines with local class warfare to produce, in the words of one character, 'a socio-meteorological incident'. In the play, it's 2012 and it has been raining non-stop for three years; the

51 Jessica Chen, 'Regeneration of Vancouver's inner-city neighbourhoods: planning for an inclusive Olympics', Centre for Chinese Research Workshop, *Staging the Beijing Olympics: Visions, Tensions, and Dreams*, University of British Columbia, 12 May 2008. My thanks to Ms Chen, Senior Planner with the City of Vancouver Planning Department, for sharing her perspective on Vancouver's homelessness problems with me.

52 André Picard, 'Supporting Insite unethical, Clement tells doctors', *Globe and Mail* (19 August 2008), pp. A1 and A5. The City of Vancouver's 'Four Pillars drug strategy' is outlined at www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars (accessed July 2008). For a frontline account of the immediate history leading to the opening of Insite, see Nettie Wild's documentary, *FIX: The Story of an Addicted City* (Canada Wild Productions, 2002). At this writing, the federal government still had not made a decision on the renewal of Insite's special drug law exemption.

4 Tom McBeath (left) as Stuart and Kyle Rideout as Roland in the Ruby Slippers/Théâtre la seizième production of *The View from Above* at Performance Works, Vancouver, March 2008

Olympics have been cancelled and North Vancouver couple Stuart and Marsha are barely getting by on stockpiled canned goods and the occasional foraged vegetable, all the while clinging (quite literally) to the hope that they can sell their house before it slides down the hill. But they are also being terrorised by roving gangs of the drug addicted, the homeless, and the mentally ill, who, having been rounded up and forcibly evacuated from the city in the lead-up to 2010, have now broken out of their suburban asylums and have begun a mass migration back into the city. Among their ranks is Stuart and Marsha's son, Roland, a former junkie. The prodigal has returned home; he has brought friends, and they're hungry.

In one especially vivid scene Stuart and Roland have a conversation in which father explains to son his own idiosyncratic take on Vancouver's tipping point in terms of urban sustainability (see figure 4). Struggling to come up with an explanation for the soggy situation in which they find themselves, Stuart makes no attempt to link the rain to real-estate speculation, the attendant deforestation of Vancouver's north shore, or an increase in fossil-fuel emissions from his daily commutes to work alone in his car; instead, he latches onto a Dutch study he has read which claims that when significant numbers of drug addicts get together their combined dehydration somehow gives off an

electrical spark that causes a change in atmospheric pressure, resulting especially in persistent precipitation. Something else to blame the most vulnerable members of society for: the weather. A unique co-production between Théâtre la seizième and Ruby Slippers Theatre, the play actually premiered twice in the spring of 2008, once in French, and once in English. I attended performances of both productions, admiring, in particular, Patrick Pennefather's brilliant sound design, which managed to take something to which I thought I was acoustically inured as a Vancouverite – rainfall – and make it sound terrifyingly apocalyptic. But the true prescience of Long's play was confirmed to me only several months later when, in partial response to the astute and pointed questions about Vancouver's homelessness problem posed to BC Premier Gordon Campbell during his visit to the Beijing Olympics by a Chinese journalist educated at my university, city police forcibly removed several homeless people who had set up a temporary tent city in Oppenheimer Park; and when I subsequently read in the newspaper that the Mental Health Commission of Canada was set to pilot a project in Vancouver that would provide shelter and mental health and addiction treatment for as many as 300 homeless people from the DTES, and that would 'have the side effect of helping clear the poverty stricken area before the 2010 Winter Olympics'.[53] The future is now.

That future has much to do with the fact that significant new property development in the downtown core has nowhere else to go but east. All of a sudden it was in no one's economic interests to continue to ignore the DTES. This realisation, coinciding as it did with Vancouver's Olympic bid, prompted VANOC, the city, and the province to put together and sign a flurry of official agreements and statements committing them to a plan for the revitalisation of the DTES that included as much attention to community, commercial, social, and non-market housing infrastructure as it did to new development projects. The Vancouver Agreement, signed in March 2000, identified strategies for improving economic development, training and employment opportunities, affordable housing, and health and safety in the region regardless of the success of Vancouver's Olympic bid.[54] The Inner-City Inclusive Commitment Statement (ICI), signed two years later and accompanying the Olympic bid book that went forward to the IOC, contained five

53 See Mary Frances Hill, 'Homeless swept from tent city to hotels', *Vancouver Sun* (16 August 2008), p. B7; and Ian Bailey, 'Ahead of Games, Vancouver reaches out to Eastside homeless', *Globe and Mail* (15 September 2008), p. A1.

54 *Vancouver Agreement: Community Assessment of 2010 Olympic Winter Games and Paralympic Games on Vancouver's Inner-City Neighbourhoods* (February 2003), www.iocc.ca/documents/ICI_CommAssfinal.pdf (accessed April 2008).

housing commitments related to the Games: to start planning immediately for an affordable housing legacy; to protect existing rental housing stock; to provide as many alternative forms of temporary accommodation for Winter Games visitors and workers as possible; to ensure that no one is made homeless as a result of the Games; and to ensure that residents are not involuntarily displaced, evicted, or charged unreasonable rental increases as a result of the Games.[55] Once Vancouver was awarded the Games, the City of Vancouver issued its Homeless Action Plan in 2005, making 87 recommendations, including the creation of 8,000 additional subsidised housing units over the next 10 years.[56] This particular commitment was echoed by two independent reports issued by the Pivot Legal Society and the ICI Housing Table in 2006 and 2007, respectively, both stipulating as a target goal the creation of 800 new social housing units a year, and with the latter claiming that 'if hosting the [Olympic] Games is to provide a significant, enduring, and visible legacy, it should be to eliminate homelessness'.[57] In 2008 outgoing Mayor Sullivan signed the EcoDensity Charter, a general statement of principle regarding Vancouver's commitment to urban sustainability that likewise purports to take seriously the affordable housing crisis plaguing Vancouver's most vulnerable inner-city neighbourhoods.[58] Finally, Sullivan's replacement as mayor, Gregor Robertson, who heads a new left-of-centre coalition at city hall, and who campaigned on a pledge to end street homelessness in Vancouver by 2015, created the Homeless Emergency Action Team (HEAT) shortly after taking office, opening three new low-barrier shelters that serviced 300 people a night during an unseasonably cold stretch in December 2008.[59]

Yet despite the performative commitment in all of these reports to use the opportunities created by the Olympics to solve Vancouver's housing woes, among other social development issues, saying in this case has so far added up to very little doing. This accounts, in no small measure, for the D-grade awarded VANOC and the City by the

55 'Inner-City Inclusive Commitment Statement', *Vancouver 2010*, www.vancouver2010.com/resources/PDFs/CommitmentStatement_EN.pdf (accessed July 2008).

56 City of Vancouver, *Homeless Action Plan* (June 2005), pp. 28–9, http://intraspec.ca/hap05jun.pdf (accessed July 2008).

57 *Report of the Inner-City Inclusive Housing Table* (March 2007), p. 3, www.iocc.ca/documents/2007-02-27_ICIT_Final4_with_apps.pdf (accessed July 2008). See, as well, David Eby and Christopher Misura, *Cracks in the Foundation: Solving the Housing Crisis in Canada's Poorest Neighbourhood* (Vancouver: Pivot, 2006).

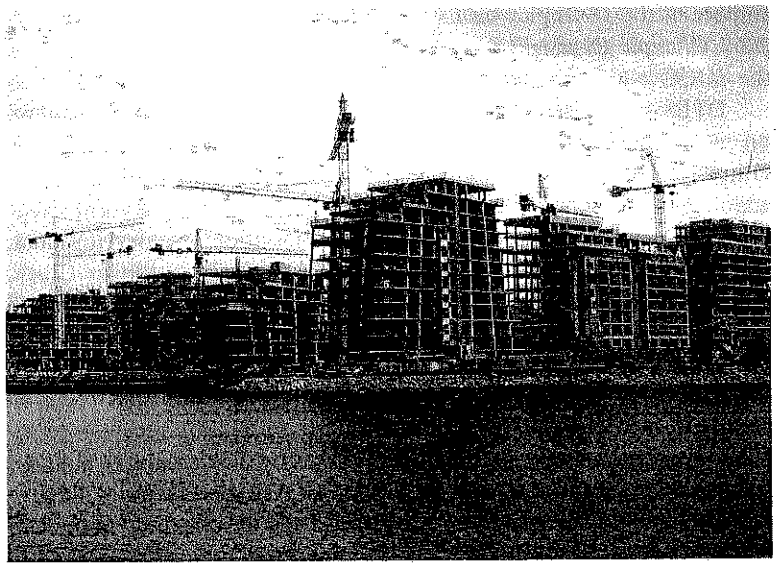
58 City of Vancouver, *Vancouver EcoDensity Planning Initiative*, www.vancouverecodensity.ca (accessed July 2008).

59 'New Vancouver homeless shelter program filled to capacity', *Vancouver Sun* (6 January 2009), www.vancouversun.com/Life/Vancouver+homeless+shelter+program+filled+capacity/1148114/story.html (accessed January 2009).

Impact of the Olympics on Community Coalition (IOCC) in its May 2007 *Olympic Oversight Interim Report Card*.[60] As we shall soon see, the IOCC and affiliated community-based organisations working in the DTES have also opted to pursue Vancouver's perceived inaction on social housing through official human rights channels like the UN. Others are not awaiting the rulings that might result, with the direct action Anti-Poverty Committee, in particular, staging squats and sleep-ins at various DTES hotels scheduled for demolition or redevelopment, repeatedly and openly vandalising the Olympic Countdown Clock, and, in one inspired bit of lunacy that combined social activism and community theatre, leading a coalition of DTES interest groups in the 'Poverty Olympics'; events included the 'poverty-line high jump', with the bar set at well over three metres, and a long jump that required competitors to leap over bedbug-infested mattresses.[61] Vancouver social housing advocates were particularly outraged by the decision of Sullivan and his fellow right-of-centre Non-Partisan Association councillors to renege, shortly after taking power in 2006, on the previous municipal administration's commitment to use money from the city's $1.2-billion Property Endowment Fund to expand on one of the key social legacy commitments contained in Vancouver's Olympic Bid Book, namely that in the post-Games conversion of the False Creek South Athletes' Village (see figure 5) to a state-of-the-art green residential community (to be called Millennium Water), there would be a healthy mix of market and social housing units. Specifically, the previous left-of-centre COPE/Vision coalition presided over by Mayor Campbell recommended that the 250 units Vancouver bid organisers said would be set aside for social housing be upped to 660 (of a total 2,000 planned units), with an additional 660 to be priced slightly below market value in order to target lower- and middle-income groups. In other words, the plan was to make False Creek South – the last stretch of undeveloped waterfront property in the city – a model sustainable, mixed community, with the initial outlay of social, affordable, and market housing in the area to be divided up equally in thirds. However, at the recommendation of City Manager,

60 The IOCC is 'a broad-based independent community coalition whose mission is to mitigate the negative impacts of the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games and to advocate for a rich post-Games, community-based legacy'. In addition to raising concerns over evictions and failed housing commitments, the interim report card also identifies serious concerns in the areas of environmental sustainability, civil liberties, and public expenditure and transparency. See IOCC, *Olympic Oversight Interim Report Card: 2010 Olympic Games*, pp. 4 and *passim*, www.iocc.ca/documents/2007-05-07_OlympicReportCard.pdf (accessed May 2007).

61 Elianna Lev, 'Poverty Olympics carries the torch for social issues', *Globe and Mail* (4 February 2008), p. S2.



5 Construction on the 2010 Athletes' Village, South False Creek, Vancouver, September 2008

Judy Rogers, who said the move would save close to $20 million and who claimed '[t]he city does not have a shortage of affordable housing sites', Sullivan's council reduced the number of social housing back down to the original 250, and eliminated the affordable, middle-income units altogether, arguing that Millennium Development Corporation could be persuaded to build these units voluntarily.[62]

That looked increasingly unlikely when it emerged, in October 2008, that the developer was in fact unable to pay its construction bills, and that the New York-based investment company providing the private financing for the project stopped advancing funds in the wake of an increasingly gloomy global economic forecast and its belief that Millennium would likely default on its loan. This prompted an emergency secret loan of $100 million by the city to Millennium under Sullivan's watch that became the focus of great controversy and public outrage during the 2008 civic election and that led, eventually, to Rogers' firing and the city assuming de facto control of the project's development soon after Robertson was sworn in as mayor. The latter decision required a legislative amendment at the provincial level to Vancouver's

62 See Frances Bula, 'City opts for less social housing in False Creek', *Vancouver Sun* (21 January 2006), p. B11.

charter so that the city might be allowed to borrow unlimited amounts of money and seek a new financing deal at lower interest rates in order to complete the project on time, and at the least amount of risk to taxpayers, who, barring a sudden upswing in the collapsed real-estate market, would potentially be on the hook for close to $1 billion, almost the exact same size of the debt that Montreal was left with after the 1976 Summer Olympics, a bill that was only paid off in full 30 years later.[63] Coincidentally, as all this was playing out, the British government announced that it was also releasing hundreds of millions of pounds of contingency funds to keep construction of London's 2012 Olympic venues on track, with the lion's share – £326 million – likewise going to their own embattled Athletes' Village.[64]

Compounding the calamity of what might have been done differently about the economic financing and social legacy of the Athletes' Village in Vancouver is a similarly shortsighted dismantling of some of the basic infrastructure that already exists in the city around low-income housing. According to David Eby, co-author of Pivot Legal Society's aforementioned housing report, longtime DTES activist, current executive director of the BC Civil Liberties Association and maintainer of one of the best community watchdog blogs devoted to the 2010 Olympics, between December 2007 and April 2008 alone a total of 448 low-income housing units – mostly SROs – were lost as a result of nine building closures in the DTES.[65] This compares with a projection of only 557 additional SROs to be built in the same area before 2010, a net gain – by these numbers – of only 109 units. By contrast, 1,597 units of market housing are projected to be built in the DTES during the same period.[66] Several of those market units will be contained within The Greenwich, the latest condominium project by Concord Pacific (celebrating its twentieth anniversary in 2008) to be greenlighted by the city's Development

63 For a full accounting of the financing costs associated with Vancouver's Athletes' Village, see David Baines, 'The devil was in the details', *Vancouver Sun* (17 January 2009), p. A5. On Montreal's paying off of its Olympic debt, see 'Quebec's Big Owe stadium debt is over', *cbcnews.ca*, www.cbc.ca/canada/montreal/story/2006/12/19/qc-olympicstadium.html (accessed August 2008).

64 Owen Gibson, 'Government forced to bail out major Olympic projects', *The Guardian* (21 January 2009), www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/jan/21/olympics-2012-funding-bailout (accessed January 2009).

65 Pivot Legal Society (David Eby, Compiler), 'Backgrounder – Vancouver low-income housing closures December 2007 to date' (9 April 2008), www.iocc.ca/documents/LowIncomeHousingClosures.pdf (accessed May 2008).

66 Wendy Pedersen and Jean Swanson, *Nothing About Us Without Us: Interim Report on Community Visioning* (Vancouver: Carnegie Community Action Project, 2008), p. 2, http://ccapvancouver.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/ccapvisionwebsm.pdf (accessed August 2008).

Permit Board. The Greenwich's address will be 58 West Hastings Street, and its units will range in price from $300,000 to well over $500,000. The project's location in the heart of the DTES and its lack of mixed market and non-market housing units outraged community activists, who lobbied both the City and Concord Pacific CEO Terry Hui repeatedly to rethink their plans.[67]

The Concord Pacific connection takes us back, once again, to 1986 and even earlier in terms of the link between Chinese migration, mega-events, the historical performance of place, and urban development (and decline) in this particular region of Vancouver. For if, as a recent local newspaper headline suggested, quoting former Director of Planning Larry Beasley, and referring specifically to an Olympics-related revitalisation of our inner-city neighbourhoods, 'Vancouver's future [is] rising in the east',[68] then Chinatown's historical proximity and inter-connected destiny to the DTES should remind us that that future stretches at least as far as Beijing, where the literal bulldozing of the past should also give Vancouverites pause. Consider, in this regard, the fate of what is today the oldest surviving building in Vancouver's Chinatown, at 51 East Pender. Built in 1889 by Yip Sang, owner of an import–export business and co-founder of the Chinese Benevolent Association, the building is currently being renovated as a private art gallery that will house the collection of the city's most successful realtor.[69]

Showcasing culture: national brandings

As an exercise in the visual branding of a place and its people, there is perhaps no bigger stage than the Olympics. A host nation and city get to impress upon the world their cultural iconicity in myriad ways: through official logos and mascots; signature architecture; souvenir programmes and merchandise; various affiliated festivals, performances, and commissioned artworks; and, most spectacularly, the opening and closing ceremonies, where the spirit of friendly international competition signalled by the lighting of the Olympic flame is preceded by a calculated promotion of singular national heritage, most often by combining folk art pageantry (song, dance, and costuming) with visual effects

67 See Jackie Wong, 'City green-lights condo against community objections', *Carnegie Community Action Project Web Log* (8 July 2008), http://ccapvancouver/wordpress/2008/07/08 (accessed July 2008).

68 See John Bermingham, 'Vancouver's future rising in the east', *Vancouver Province* (5 February 2006), p. A31.

69 See John Mackie, 'Yip family legacy lives on in renovation by condo king', *Vancouver Sun* (1 August 2008), p. A3.

of monumental scale. It should come as no surprise, then, that while cultural festivals have been associated, in one form or another, with the modern Olympics since their inception, it was Nazi Germany that, along with innovations like the torch relay (more on that below), established the template for linking youth, athleticism, ceremony, and national ideology in the choreographed displays of culture we have especially come to expect from the Olympics' opening and closing spectacles.[70]

Although, as we shall soon see, the parallels are at times uncanny, the too-easy comparisons with Nazi Germany tap into a far more historically embedded – and compensatory – discourse of 'yellow peril', and obscure the specific dynamics of how the Beijing Olympics have initiated a strategic programme of national branding that announces to the world China's newfound economic clout while also reminding us that the country is no mere *arriviste* in terms of its cultural heritage. That is, Beijing has sought to proclaim its (belated) modernity by aggressively pursuing and promoting its new *place* among the international avant-garde of world-class cities at the same time as it has carefully showcased its historical *timelessness* through various performative gestures and strategic references to Chinese antiquity and 5,000 years of tradition. Nowhere is this more evident than in the signature buildings Beijing has commissioned in the lead-up to the Olympics, including the National Stadium, the Aquatic Centre, the National Performing Arts Centre, the new CCTV building, and the new Terminal Three of Beijing Capital Airport. Each of these buildings has been designed by a major international architect or architectural firm (in order: Switzerland's Herzog and de Meuron; Australia's PTW Architects; France's Paul Andreu; Holland's Rem Koolhaas; and the UK's Sir Norman Foster). However, each project has also formally sought the input of local Chinese artists, architects, and designers – most notably, and controversially, Ai Weiwei – as native informants on everything from the ancient principles of *feng shui* to the traditional symbolic power accorded famous monuments in Beijing. Finally, the buildings that have resulted are spectacular visual landmarks whose nicknames and distinctive forms (Herzog and de Meuron's Bird's Nest, Andreu's Egg, Foster's dragon-like Terminal Three, Koolhaas's asymmetrical trapezoid) speak as much, if not more, to Westerners' clichéd understandings of Asian symbology as they do to Chinese people's investments in recognisable icons of culture. In short,

70 See Allen Guttmann, 'Berlin 1936: the most controversial Olympics', in Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young (eds), *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), pp. 65–82; and David Clay Large, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936* (New York: Norton, 2007).

6 Construction on the Bird's Nest Stadium in Beijing, November 2007

the Olympics have allowed Beijing to import a futuristic new skyline to match what is arguably its most valuable cultural export: its historical past.[71]

The spatial/temporal dynamics underscoring this process of architectural branding are especially on display not just in the design, but in the placement of the Beijing Olympics' two most recognisable landmarks, the Bird's Nest Stadium (figure 6) and the National Aquatic Centre or Water Cube. The two venues were inaccessible during my visit, cordoned off behind a heavily guarded perimeter fence as scores of migrant workers attended to last-minute plantings and grounds keeping. But even through barbed wire and under a heavy layer of smog, there is no denying the visual impact of these buildings. That impact is even more stunning at night, when thousands of lights placed within the Bird's Nest's complex web of steel girders and support columns turn the building into a sparkling piece of public sculpture, and when the translucent plastic exterior of the Water Cube is illuminated to reveal its walls of blue-green bubbles, or sea-foam. However, it is the siting of these two buildings, along with the more prosaic looking National Indoor Stadium, on the specially created Olympic Green that aligns them, quite literally, with what Susan Brownell, in her very useful discussion of how sports stadiums map onto national identity in Beijing, has identified as

71 I borrow, and adapt slightly, the import/export metaphor from Paul Goldberger; see his 'Out of the blocks', *The New Yorker* (2 June 2008), p. 70.

'the history of state power' in the city since the end of the Qing dynasty.[72] That is, the Bird's Nest and the Water Cube lie just beyond the northern end of Beijing's Fourth Ring Road, on either side of the central north–south axis that bisects the city, an axis that, as one heads south from the Olympic Green, encompasses some of the city's most important and recognisable cultural landmarks from China's imperial and communist pasts, including the Bell and Drum Towers, Jingshan Park, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square and Mao's Mausoleum, and the Temple of Heaven. This, of course, was the route that was traced in the opposite direction via the twenty-nine fireworks rings or 'footprints' that apparently lit up the Beijing sky from Tiananmen to the Bird's Nest Stadium at the outset of the opening ceremonies, but that turned out to have been mostly prerecorded and digitally inserted into the television broadcast.

So auspicious was the Olympic Green's planned location thought to be that the site was preserved from increasingly encroaching urban development by Beijing's municipal government even after the failure of its original bid for the Games in 1993.[73] However, in terms of *national* symbols of state power, Beijing Olympic organisers attracted a different kind of cultural scrutiny when they likewise opened the redesign of the central axis leading to the Olympic Green to an *international* competition. For the winner was none other than Albert Speer Jr, son of Hitler's anointed architect, who used the 1936 Olympics in Berlin as the launching pad for rebuilding, and rebranding, the capital of a new Germany. Given this coincidence it is perhaps to be expected – although by no means defensible – that critics have drawn connections between the political regimes of Nazi Germany and Communist China, and the 'totalitarian' architecture and urban planning those regimes are said to have inspired.[74]

A similar national/international nexus can be seen at work in the five Cultural Olympiads and various affiliated artistic programmes that preceded the Beijing Olympics. On the one hand, the Cultural Olympiads were used as occasions to showcase various ethnic Chinese traditions, folk arts, and pop culture, with touring productions, exhibits, and local performers from the provinces, as well as Hong Kong, Macao, and even

72 Susan Brownell, *Beijing's Games: What the Olympics Mean to China* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2008), p. 73.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

74 Nicola Smith and Flora Bagenal, 'Hitler architect's son redraws Beijing', *The Sunday Times* (12 August 2007), www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article2241705 (accessed July 2008); and Robert Macfarlane, 'Blitzed Beijing: why the Olympic city is set on abolishing its past', *Granta* 101 (spring 2008), pp. 79–94.

Taiwan, finding a hospitable reception in the capital city. At the same time, various high-profile international companies and artists were invited to Beijing and other parts of China to display their work under the auspices of Olympics-sponsored cultural exchange programmes, with the result that on a given evening in the months immediately preceding the opening ceremonies, Chinese audiences might choose from the Irish extravaganza *Riverdance*, the Broadway musical *Hairspray*, Cairo Opera's production of *Aida*, the Greek National Theatre's version of *Prometheus Bound*, or the Kirov Ballet's *Swan Lake*. As with most intercultural performance, the interface between an artistically cosmopolitan globalism and a culturally relative, even recidivist, localism can often prove a jarring and uneasy one.

So it was with my experience of two Olympics-related cultural showcases in Beijing. The first was the *Intangible Cultural Heritage* show that opened at Beijing's Cultural Palace of Nationalities the day before I arrived. Sponsored by China's Ministry of Culture, the show featured various folk artists playing traditional musical instruments, performing snippets of opera, drama, and dance, or displaying crafts and textiles. Alongside these celebrations of China's cultural diversity there were also several parallel museum exhibits devoted to different ethnic peoples and geographical regions of China, including one called 'Tibet of China: Past and Present'. Occupying two rooms, the exhibit was carefully stage-managed to convey to the viewer how primitive and hopelessly backward were the Tibetan people prior to their 'liberation' by Communist China in the 1950s. To that end, in the first room were scores of black and white photos showing the hardships, humiliations, and punishments endured by Tibetan 'serfs' during the first half of the twentieth century; the second room, by contrast, was filled with colour photos of free Tibetans enjoying the fruits of Chinese prosperity and modern technological innovation.

Ontological questions of the human and of how, in our current advanced technological age, the blurring and collapsing of the body/machine divide might help us renegotiate relations between self and other were explored in much more nuanced and complex ways in a groundbreaking show of international new media art curated by Zhang Ga at Beijing's National Art Museum of China. Called *Synthetic Times*, and playing off BOCOG's dedicated themes of 'Hi-Tech Olympics' and 'People's Olympics', the show placed multi-media works by Chinese artists like Du Zhenjun, Xu Zhongmin, Xu Bing, Wu Juehui, and Miao Xiaochun alongside challenging and frequently interactive sound, video, digital, robotic, and computer installations, projections, sculptures, and immersive environments created by such international art world

luminaries as Stelarc, Christoph Hildebrand, Edwin van der Heide, Anthony McCall, Jean-Michel Bruyère, and Mariana Rondon. Works were grouped according to four organising themes: 'Beyond Body' explored technological extensions of the physical body, testing the limits of subjectivity through bio-mediation; 'Emotive Digital' examined the ways in which machines and related electronic devices are becoming responsive creatures; 'Recombinant Reality' sought to break down old Cartesian dualisms through mixed, virtual, and acoustic environments; and, finally, 'Here, There and Everywhere' focused on how the Internet, especially, functions as a kind of 'planetary membrane'.

In this last category, I was especially gripped by Canadian artist David Rokeby's 'surveillance installation', *Taken*. A split-screen dual projection, Rokeby's piece uses infrared video cameras to capture and record in real time the movements of gallery goers; these are then projected onto the orange, right-hand side of the screen in overlapping twenty-second loops, a computer-generated, panoptical emplotment of all human activity in the room that is at once synchronous and sequential, as in the manner of most closed-circuit television monitors. Every now and then white boxes frame the heads of individual visitors; when this happens, the blue, left-hand side of the screen displays the faces of those singled out in close-up, adding randomly generated text to suggest their possible states of mind while under observation ('nervous', 'carried away', 'hungry', 'complicit'). These close-ups are in turn arranged as black and white thumbnails of the last 200 visitors to the room, and displayed at regular intervals, a taxonomy of our own self-monitoring. And if, as curator Zhang claims in her introduction to the catalogue accompanying the show, a 'new taxonomy' of the human needs to be written, then surely what Rokeby's work suggests is that – again to quote Zhang – 'the role of art is to ensure that the deliberation takes place not behind closed doors but in the recombinant arena of open space'.[75] As Zhang's choice of sporting metaphor implies, the Olympics have provided an impetus to initiate such a dialogue in China at the same time as they have given the state an excuse to increase security and surveillance, including conscripting local citizens as part of reconstituted, Mao-era neighbourhood committees. At the very least, this groundbreaking show – the first of its kind at China's premiere art institution – has gone a distance toward banishing the ghosts of social realism that have long dominated this particular cultural arena.

75 Zhang Ga, 'Synthetic times', in Fan Di'an and Zhang Ga (eds), *Synthetic Times: Media Art China 2008* (Beijing and Cambridge, MA: National Art Museum of China and MIT Press, 2008), p. 28.

Indeed, the Olympics have arguably allowed the Chinese state to cotton on at last to what the rest of the world has long known: contemporary Chinese art, especially photo-, video-, performance- and conceptual-based work, is a very hot commodity. Beyond the evidence of recent biennales, what especially bore this out for me was a local survey of contemporary Chinese photography that opened at the University of British Columbia's Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery (more on this important local art venue below) in January 2009 as part of the international offerings of Vancouver 2010's second Cultural Olympiad. *Action Camera: Beijing Performance Photography* traced the relationship between performance art and photography in China as both emerged from the underground scene in Beijing's East Village in the 1990s. That relationship, as the large-scale, professionally illuminated, and formally composed C-prints in the show attest, has little to do with documenting for historical posterity the officially discouraged and temporally ephemeral live public performances and body art actions of East Village pioneers like Ma Liuming, Rong Rong, Zhang Huan, and Xing Danwen. Rather, these and other artists are using the medium of the camera itself to stage agitprop performances of individual self-expression and collective national consciousness as highly choreographed, repeatable, and overdetermined with paradoxical meaning as any Photoshopped and digitally manipulated images released by the Chinese state in the lead up to the Olympics (and, significantly, many of the images in the show, including ones by Hong Hao and Li Wei, do in fact use Photoshop to achieve their performative effects). As curator Keith Wallace suggests in his catalogue to the show, this places a special onus on audiences in terms of negotiating between a locally distinctive and culturally specific versus globally assimilative and formally partial comprehension of the work.[76] For example, do we read Ai's contribution to the show, his 1995 triptych *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn*, as a logical extension of the Duchampian questioning of the cultural value of art via the ready-made, or as an iconoclastic comment on Ai's part about the relative national worth bestowed by China on an historical past that predates the Cultural Revolution?

Of course, Beijing's legendary East Village has long since been superseded by the far more commercialised 798 Art District, a series of galleries and studios occupying various abandoned munitions factories in the Dashanzi area of Chaoyang that were built by East Germany (following Bauhaus-inspired designs) in the 1950s and 1960s. As Chinese artists started gaining increasing international acclaim in the early part

76 Keith Wallace, *Action-Camera: Beijing Performance Photography* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2009), p. 68.

of this century, 798 attracted its own attention from dealers and tourists alike, with commercial galleries and amenities like restaurants, cafés, and shops popping up at an accelerated rate, thereby increasing rents and gradually squeezing out artists' studios. Indeed, during my visit what was formally a mass of unsigned roads and muddy pathways had been turned into a newly paved, freshly landscaped, and accommodatingly mapped Olympic destination, its appropriation as 'corroborative evidence' of Beijing's vibrancy and creativity signalled via its referencing on an official Olympic poster.[77] Not surprisingly, I soon discovered from Amy and D'Arcy that one consequence of 798's anointment as a 'Central Art District' along the lines of the Central Business District just to the south, was that the real cutting-edge work was now being made and shown in Caochangdi, even further to the northeast, and presided over by Ai's own China Art Archives and Warehouse.

As artist Hong Hao put it to me quite bluntly when I interviewed him in Beijing, the relationship between the Olympics and the contemporary Chinese art scene is one of differing market incentives, with the spotlight thrown by the lead-up to the Summer Games helping to fuel the international appetite for challenging conceptual work, and the Chinese government responding by flooding the domestic market with a lot of mass-produced, Olympic-themed representational painting, much of it referencing the Bird's Nest, or other recognisable symbols of Beijing's economic renaissance.[78] And yet, as the example of Ai has demonstrated, not all Chinese cultural producers have been willing to have their work conscripted as part of Beijing's official national brand. Stressing that he was hired by Herzog and de Meuron, and not the Chinese government, Ai, in making his public denouncement of the Beijing Games as a whole, also criticised those artists who would 'shamelessly [abuse] their profession' and neglect their moral responsibilities by agreeing to collaborate with such a regime.[79]

Singled out for special derision by Ai in his comments were his former Beijing Film Academy classmate, Zhang Yimou, and Stephen Spielberg, who at the time were still set to collaborate on the staging of the Beijing Games' opening and closing ceremonies. Very soon after Ai's public outburst, Spielberg withdrew his consultancy services, citing

77 Jeroen de Kloet, Gladys Pak Lei Chong, and Wei Liu, 'The Beijing Olympics and the art of nation-state maintenance', *China Aktuell* 2 (2008): p. 15.

78 Personal interview with Hong Hao, Beijing (15 June 2008). Ironically, Hong then proceeded to tell me how he had agreed to have a painting based on a photo of the Bird's Nest, and completed by his assistants, appear in an Olympics-themed exhibit in Germany.

79 Watts, 'Olympic artist'.

concerns over Darfur and China's support of the Sudanese government. For his part, Zhang – whose family, like Ai's, suffered under Mao, and whose early films ran afoul of Chinese government censors – shrugged off both Ai's criticisms and Spielberg's withdrawal, reiterating that he had 'no interest in politics' and that he took the Olympics assignment because he 'wanted to do something for the Chinese people'.[80] While I do not have the space to comment extensively on the elaborate spectacles that Zhang eventually produced to bracket China's Olympic coming-out party, I do want to note that they, too, preserved the aesthetic mix of international modernism and national tradition that I have suggested has characterised Beijing's entire performance of Olympics-related national branding. That mix was first of all incarnated in Zhang himself as impresario, with the historical subject matter of his most famous films (including *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Du*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Hero*, and *House of Flying Daggers*) standing comfortably alongside his reputation among international critics for his sumptuous cinematography and bold use of colour. Zhang then sought to extend this local/global aesthetic by wooing expat Chinese artists who have achieved recognition in the West to collaborate on key aspects of direction and design (such as visual artist Jennifer Wen Ma and choreographer Shen Wei), or else, like concert pianist Lang Lang, to participate as featured performers. In so doing, Zhang ensured that his tasked exploration of the ancient foundations of Chinese philosophy, aesthetics, and ingenuity would be presented in a suitably modern, culturally accessible, and visually cohesive manner.

The most watched portion of any Games, and routinely among the highest rated television events in broadcast history, Olympic opening ceremonies have, dramaturgically speaking, always been about striking a balance between competing performance styles – and scales: monumentality and intimacy (2,008 Ko drummers and 3,000 Confucian dancers versus a little singing girl); tradition and innovation (a parade of nations according to the Chinese alphabet versus Li Ning's spectacular aerial lighting of the Olympic flame); high art and kitsch (usually encompassed within one multi-octave singer, in this case Sarah Brightman); the real and the simulacral (again, that little singing girl, or those digitised fireworks footprints). Balancing, as well, at times complementary, at times competing, messages and symbols of local/regional, national, and supranational specificity, Olympic opening ceremonies have also typically sought at once to performatively reproduce and particularise a narrative

80 Quoted in David Barboza, 'Gritty renegade now directs China's close-up', *New York Times* (7 August 2008), www.nytimes.com/2008/08/08/sports/olympics/08guru.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1# (accessed August 2008).

of historical progress by 'mixing visions of a simple, untainted and yet retrievable past with the impact of new and sometimes alien forces, in an optimistic blend for the future'.[81] In Zhang's case, this meant excising completely any reference to the past sixty years of Communist rule – and especially the isolationist leadership of Mao – in favour of showcasing four inventions from Chinese antiquity – gunpowder, paper, printing, and the compass – that served to remind Western audiences of the country's global historical contributions and current technological and economic aspirations. And if some audience members nevertheless detected in the military precision with which these choreographed displays of historical pageantry were executed (by members of the artistic ranks of the PLA, no less) traces of the old strong-arm tactics and message management of the CCP, consider the memo from the Canadian federal government that was made public, following an access-to-information request, two days before the Beijing closing ceremonies; in it, the ruling Conservative Party, through the Department of Heritage, commits to investing '$20-million toward the opening ceremony of the [2010] Olympic Winter Games in order to ensure that the event adequately reflects the priorities of the Government and helps to achieve its domestic and international branding goals'.[82]

What those goals are remain unclear. Nevertheless, in terms of Vancouver's performance of culture in the lead-up to the 2010 opening ceremonies, organisers have faced a branding challenge at least as performatively complex as Beijing's attempts to balance modernity and tradition. Specifically, as has bedevilled so many public displays of Canadian culture outside Quebec in the years since Confederation, the question becomes how to represent iconographically a 'national' culture when no such singular entity is said to exist – beyond, that is, a 'mosaic' of many, or 'multi-', cultures, or an amalgam of various regional/natural references. The solution has, historically, *not* been to invent, holus-bolus, cultural pageantry on the order of the United States' Hollywood razzmatazz, but rather to appropriate, where possible, the traditions and symbols of Canada's Indigenous peoples. So it continues with the 2010 Winter Olympics. Despite Premier Gordon Campbell's reported displeasure at what he saw as the kitschy and clichéd display of 'hackneyed' regional stereotypes during an eight-minute segment promoting the 2010 Games at the closing ceremony of the Turin Olympics[83] (including

81 Tomlinson, 'Olympic spectacle', p. 592.

82 Quoted in Robert Matas, 'Ottawa aims to put its stamp on 2010 Games', *Globe and Mail* (22 August 2008), p. A1.

83 Miro Cernetig and Kevin Griffin, 'Premier cringes at Games ceremony that presented icy image of Canada', *Victoria Times-Colonist* (1 April 2006), p. A4.

a tableau of ice-fishing that was almost as bad as London 2012 organisers trotting out the double-decker bus, the brollies, and Beckham at the Beijing closing ceremonies), VANOC has, since that time, continued to promulgate – and profit from – the connections between Vancouver's location on the West Coast and the area's rich Aboriginal heritage.

To be sure, that area tends to be rather expansive and free-floating, and, consequently, the associated cultural references somewhat of a hodge-podge. Thus we have as the Vancouver Games' official logo an *inukshuk* named 'Ilanaaq' (Inuktitut for 'friend'), based on the traditional stone sculptures of Canada's northern Inuit peoples. More geographically appropriate, if not entirely materialisable, are the three mythical creatures derived from local Coast Salish legend that VANOC is using as its official Olympic mascots: Miga is a sea bear, part Orca whale and part Kermode or Spirit bear; Quatchi is a sasquatch, especially popular in Haida storytelling traditions; and Sumi is a guardian spirit who has thunderbird wings, an Orca hat, and black bear legs. In partnership with the Ministry of Transport, signage along the Sea-to-Sky Highway connecting West Vancouver to Whistler is also being redesigned to incorporate First Nations art and culture, and to emphasise the links between landscape, history, and memory. Finally, in the summer of 2008 a public art program was launched to commission specially created artworks by First Nations artists that will be permanently installed in all fifteen Olympic and Paralympic venues.[84]

For the most part, the Four Host First Nations (FHFN) participating in the Vancouver/Whistler Games – Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh – have been cooperating in this process of cultural appropriation, seeing in it a chance, in the words of FHFN Executive Director and CEO Tewanee Joseph, to create and launch a new Aboriginal brand on the international stage.[85] So far their marketing campaign has demonstrated a solid mastery of web-promotion and product placement, using Facebook and YouTube to get their message out, and their own website (www.fourhostfirstnations.com) to offer free mobile ringtones and computer wallpaper, as well as pricier merchandise like T-shirts, hats, and luggage. The advance marketing is mostly designed to ensure that international visitors to the Vancouver Olympics stop by the 20,000-square foot FHFN 2010 Aboriginal Trade Pavilion that will occupy the southeast corner of the downtown Queen Elizabeth Theatre Plaza, and that will also serve as a 'stage to showcase Aboriginal

84 'Aboriginal participation', *Vancouver 2010*, www.vancouver2010.com/en/Sustainability/AboriginalParticipation (accessed July 2008).

85 See Derrick Penner, 'Creating a first nations buzz', *Vancouver Sun* (28 July 2008), p. B3.

Peoples and . . . culture to the estimated three billion television and internet viewers that will tune in to the Games at one time or another'.[86] Originally designed as a temporary structure, talks are currently underway with the City of Vancouver, as part of their Creative City visioning process, to determine whether the Pavilion might become a permanent feature of the post-Games cultural precinct that is being planned for the area (including a new home for the Vancouver Art Gallery and a long-discussed Coal Harbour Performing Arts Complex).[87]

A brand-new showcase for First Nations culture has already opened in Whistler. A short walk from the heart of Whistler Village, and across the street from the Fairmont Chateau, the three-storey, 30,400-square-foot Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre is strategically located to attract the thousands of international tourists who visit the resort town each year, and especially the crowds that will descend in even greater numbers during the 2010 Olympics. For an adult admission fee of $18, visitors are led by a docent on a tour of various indoor and outdoor exhibits devoted to both communities' cultural, linguistic, artistic, and ecological histories, including displays of ceremonial regalia, carvings, weavings, and drums, and replicas of their traditional communal dwellings, the wooden Squamish longhouse and the earthen Lil'wat istken. At the end of the tour, visitors are led to the gift shop, where, as the Centre's official website notes, they can purchase and '[t]ake home a piece of BC aboriginal culture'.[88] That culture's brand – at once standing in for the entire province – is historically and economically tied to nature, and so the souvenirs for sale include wooden carvings, cedar baskets, wool blankets and other weavings, and gold and silver jewellery.

The literal trading being done under the cultural banner of the First Nations brand was also very much on display in British Columbia's Olympic Pavilion in Beijing. Opened is the spring of 2008, and scheduled to welcome visitors through the duration of the Beijing Games, the Pavilion copped a prime location, just southeast of Tiananmen, and connected to Beijing's vast Exhibition Hall. However, this didn't necessarily translate into crowds of Chinese visitors pouring in following their obeisances at Mao's mausoleum. The morning I toured the Pavilion, the docents (mostly Chinese students who were going to school in BC) outnumbered the

86 Quoted from the description of the pavilion contained on the FHFN website; see Four Host First Nations Society, 'The Pavilion', www.fourhostfirstnations.com/pavilion.html (accessed July 2008).

87 *Ibid.*; see, as well, City of Vancouver, 'The creative city initiative', http://vancouver.ca/creativecity/ (accessed July 2008).

88 'BC aboriginal culture – gifts of two nations', Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre, www.slcc.ca/gift-shop (accessed July 2008).

paying customers, and they were sorely disappointed upon discovering I was actually from Vancouver. Apparently I already knew everything they were about to tell me. In truth, there was much about the Olympic marketing of my city and province in Beijing that surprised me, starting with the live Chinese Mountie wandering from room to room. Those rooms were arranged according to the five Chinese elements – metal, wood, water, fire, and earth – and after one took in the abundant Aboriginal iconography and got one's head around some of the more bizarre transnational cultural correspondences (especially fire symbolising the 'passion of the Canadian people'), one discovered that the real story being told here was about strengthening economic ties with China. Thus, the accompanying text and images, as with much 2010 Olympic promotional materials (see my second epigraph, above), emphasised BC's strategic position as 'Canada's Pacific gateway', detailed the thriving transportation and trade routes between Asia and the province, played up Vancouver's bustling container ports, and highlighted the region's abundant natural resources, including precious minerals like jade. An interactive video about Vancouver featured buttons to press called 'live', 'work', 'play', and 'invest', promoting the city as a lifestyle city and tourist destination, but also focusing on various real-estate and economic development projects, and touting hi-tech and video gaming as particular growth industries.

While the official mission of the FHFN Secretariat is to ensure that First Nations' 'languages, traditions, protocols and cultures are meaningfully acknowledged, respected, and represented in the planning, staging and hosting of the Games',[89] Joseph has likewise acknowledged that 'Our participation in the Olympic Games is really an economic exercise'.[90] However, there is by no means unanimity among BC's Aboriginal communities about the benefits of such participation, and at times internal divisions have threatened to spill over into violence. Indeed, Joseph, was himself charged with mischief and uttering threats against Donald Joe Mathias, an outspoken critic of the Squamish Nation's participation in the Olympics, after a dustup in April 2007 on North Vancouver's Capilano Reserve.[91] The Native Warrior Society (NWS) also maintains a website called No Olympics on Stolen Native Land (www.no2010.com), in which it openly calls for an escalating series of violent actions in advance of Vancouver's opening ceremonies. Members of NWS also claimed responsibility for what has so far proved to be the most daring

89 Four Host First Nations Society, 'Sharing our culture and stories with the world', www.fourhostfirstnations.com/index.html (accessed July 2008).

90 Quoted in Penner, 'Creating', p. B3.

91 He was subsequently acquitted of all charges; see Bethany Lindsay, 'Olympic exec not guilty in threat case', *North Shore News* (17 August 2008), p. 1.

and theatrical protest to the Games, namely the stealing of the Olympic flag flying outside Vancouver's City Hall on the night of 6 March 2007. Three days later a photo ran in the local media showing three balaclava-clad members of NWS standing in front of the distinctive rings of the white Olympic flag, fists raised, and holding aloft the equally distinctive red and gold flag of central Canada's Mohawk Warrior Society, as well as a photo of Harriet Nahanee. A seventy-one-year-old Nuu-cha-nulth elder, Nahanee was sentenced to fourteen days in jail in January 2007 for taking part in a 2006 protest against the destruction of West Vancouver's Eagleridge Bluffs as part of the Olympics-mandated expansion of the Sea-to-Sky Highway to Whistler. Ill with pneumonia at the time of her sentencing, Nahanee spent nine days in Surrey's notorious Pre-Trial Centre, primarily used as a men's prison, before being released to St Paul's Hospital, where it was discovered she was also suffering from lung cancer. She died less than a month later, with many outraged Native and environmental activists claiming that her unnecessary imprisonment contributed to her rapid decline. In a statement accompanying the photo, the NWS expressed solidarity with the 'courageous stand' of the 'elder-warrior' Nahanee and vowed to continue fighting 'the destruction caused by the 2010 Olympic Games'.[92] In this regard, it is the clearly visible Mohawk flag in the foreground rather than the fragment of the Olympic flag displayed in the background that is meant to give VANOC and FHFN members, along with all BC residents generally, pause. For it necessarily evokes memories of the violent uprisings in Oka, Quebec, in the summer of 1990, when plans to expand a golf course onto a burial ground and sacred grove of pine trees claimed by the Native community of Kanesatake prompted an armed stand-off that lasted seventy-eight days.

Local photo-conceptualist Alex Morrison appropriated and restaged this already iconic NWS image for one of his contributions to a recent exhibition of young Vancouver artists, also held at UBC's Belkin Art Gallery, from January to April 2008 (see figure 7). Called *Exponential Future*, the show attempts, according to Belkin Director and co-curator Scott Watson, 'to take the measure' of the local visual arts scene – and its global interfaces. It does so partly by thematising the work of cultural memory, investigating 'the relationship between works of art and historical consciousness in a time of general amnesia', and examining how '[w]e live amongst the ruins of imagined futures from the recent past'.[93] Certainly this would seem to apply to the process

92 See Suzanne Fournier, 'Native warriors admit to flag theft', *Vancouver Province* (9 March 2007), p. A6.

93 Scott Watson, 'Exponential future', in Julie Bevan, Juan A. Gaitán, and Scott Watson (eds), *Exponential Future* (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2008), p. 6.

7 Alex Morrison, *Friday March 9th 2007* (C-print, 71" × 84", 2008)

of calculated cultural theft by which Morrison has fashioned his own image. Showcased alone on the back wall of the Belkin's main exhibition room, the enlarged and (literally) reframed photograph asks the viewer to consider, much like the metonymy of flags and the mise-en-abŷme of Nahanee's brandished portrait in the original NWS image, the relationship between figure and ground – in this case, the literal ground on which the gallery stands. I refer to the fact that UBC is located on what, historically, is unceded Musqueam land and, more proximately, to the fact that at the time of the *Exponential Future* show Musqueam band leaders were just in the process of finalising a deal with the provincial government that would grant them title to approximately seventy-nine hectares of land surrounding UBC. This land includes the exclusive University Golf Club, which in 2005 the BC Court of Appeal declared had been improperly sold to UBC, and which the mostly white residents of the adjacent University Endowment Lands, in a fitting reversal of the Oka situation, feared the Musqueam would immediately want to develop.[94]

94 In fact, the deal prevents the Musqueam from developing the golf course until 2083 at the earliest. For a full account of the treaty particulars, and related local fallout, see Jack Keating, 'Musqueam members ratify treaty', *Vancouver Province* (12 March 2008), p. A7.

And lest we think that Morrison, in this artistic regifting, is exempt from the cultural economy of biting the hand that feeds, consider one more fact that relates to figure and ground: the show in which his work appears was, like the *Beijing Performance Photography* show that opened in the same venue almost exactly a year later, the recipient of financial support from VANOC as part of its Cultural Olympiad programme. To be sure, Vancouver Olympic organisers might in this case be forgiven for failing to scrutinise their cultural brand more closely; pushed back from original plans to launch in 2006, the inaugural 2008 Cultural Olympiad was late getting its submission, adjudication, and funding processes off the ground, and, as a result, decided to hand out grants to various artistic and cultural events that were already scheduled to coincide with the Olympiad's planned February–March timeframe. The one dedicated event organisers did manage to coordinate was a special 'countdown concert' headlined by Canadian indie darling Feist, who got her start as a performer on the world stage when, at age twelve, she appeared as one of 1,000 young dancers in the opening ceremonies of the 1988 Calgary Winter Games. Apparently this experience provided the inspiration for her ubiquitous *1234* video, which we have another cultural brand – Apple – to thank for searing indelibly upon our brains.[95]

Showcasing human rights: global mediations

There can be no doubt that Vancouver's hosting of the Olympics in 2010 has played a large role in motivating the BC government to revive the modern treaty process and settle as many outstanding land claims as possible with First Nations before the start of the Games.[96] Ditto the impetus for Prime Minister Harper's recent apology to Canadian Aboriginal peoples for the legacy of residential school abuse, and the even more recent push by provincial and territorial leaders to revisit the Kelowna Accord and kickstart talks begun there about tackling Native poverty.[97] Like Sydney in 2000, the one place Canada is most

95 Kerry Gold, 'Feist shines on the Olympic stage', *Globe and Mail* (14 February 2008), p. R7.

96 Unlike most of the rest of Canada, colonial administrators in nineteenth-century BC did not bother negotiating land title treaties with resident First Nations communities. The Nisga'a Treaty, signed into law in 2000, became the first modern treaty negotiated in BC, and established the basic template for most that have followed, including a one-time cash settlement, a form of self-government, and limited sovereignty over traditional lands and resource industries (such as fishing and forestry).

97 Doug Ward, 'A national call for healing; Harper takes step to atone for a "sad chapter in our history"', *Vancouver Sun* (12 June 2008), p. A4; and Sean Gordon, 'Revive Kelowna accord, leaders urge', *Toronto Star* (17 July 2008), p. A15.

vulnerable to being shamed on the world stage is in its treatment of First Nations peoples. Thus when VANOC CEO John Furlong and Canadian IOC member Dick Pound vocally denounced the protests that greeted China's international torch relay, claiming politics had no place in the Olympics,[98] it was hard not to think that they were being somewhat disingenuous, worrying instead about the negative publicity should similar protests occur in Vancouver in 2010. For, indeed, this is precisely what happened during the last Olympic torch relay run through Canada in the lead-up to the 1988 Calgary Winter Games. At that time, the Lubicon First Nation in Alberta, upset at relay sponsor Petro-Canada's oil mining on their traditional lands, organised protests at key points along the route.[99]

Despite protestations to the contrary by the IOC, and whatever its Charter might say,[100] the Olympic Games have always been political, at times violently so: witness Munich in 1972, or Atlanta in 1996. Even Pierre de Coubertin's spearheading of their revival was directly related to France's military humiliation during the Franco-Prussian War, and his belief that greater attention to athleticism would reinvigorate his country. Since that time, the Olympics have been cancelled by war three times – in 1916, 1940, and 1944 – with the countries held responsible for those events (Germany, Japan, and Italy) subsequently banned from competition until deemed suitably rehabilitated by the IOC. The IOC also banned Apartheid South Africa from competition between 1960 and 1988, and when New Zealand's rugby team made the mistake of touring the country in 1976, more than thirty African nations stayed away from the Summer Games in Montreal. Indeed, the era of rolling Olympic boycotts that peaked with the last gasps of Cold War posturing that tarnished Moscow in 1980 and Los Angeles in 1984 actually began not in Berlin in 1936 (where a proposed boycott over Nazi Germany's racial policies was averted at the last minute, largely due to the subterfuge of American Olympic Committee head Avery Brundage), but in Melbourne in 1956, which was beset by three separate protests: Egypt, Iraq, and Lebanon withdrew after Israel invaded Egypt; Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands after the Soviets invaded Hungary; and China after the IOC formally recognised Taiwan.[101]

98 See, for example, the comments made by Furlong in Gary Mason, 'Another sickening sight for the man planning Vancouver's version', *Globe and Mail* (8 April 2008), pp. A1 and A11.

99 'Olympic boycott worked, Lubicon say', *Montreal Gazette* (29 February 1988), p. A8.

100 According to the Charter, one of the roles of the IOC is 'to oppose any political or commercial abuse of sport and athletes'. See *Olympic Charter* (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 2007), p. 15.

101 For a comprehensive survey of the 'primacy of politics in the Olympic movement', from de Coubertin's militarism to a discussion of the dilemma of the 'two Chinas', see Christopher R. Hill, *Olympic Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), especially pp. 31–55.

The question of the 'two Chinas' was hardly resolved at the Beijing Games; the Chinese Taipei Olympic Team marched in under their specially designed flag as they have done at every Olympics since 1984. There was no repeat of Sydney in 2000, when North and South Korea marched together for the first time, despite what some in both the CCP and IOC might have hoped. Nevertheless, the Korean analogy was one IOC President Jacques Rogge clung to for a long time, repeatedly defending the decision to award China Olympic hosting duties for 2008 by citing the 1988 Summer Games in Seoul as an example of how the Olympic movement can help speed up democratic reforms in developing nations with dubious human rights records. A military dictatorship when awarded the Games in 1981, South Korea had by 1987 rewritten its constitution and held its first free elections, bowing to internal pro-democracy demonstrations rather than face the possibility of losing the Olympics.[102] However, as Russia's invasion of Georgia on the eve of the opening ceremonies reminded many, the more appropriate analogy for Beijing in terms of politics and human rights might be Moscow in 1980. There is also the precedent of Mexico City in 1968, when just ten days before the opening ceremonies the army opened fire on students protesting Olympic over-spending, killing hundreds, and where open political displays by athletes (i.e., the Black Power salutes of Tommie Smith and John Carlos) were swiftly punished or suppressed.[103]

In this final section, my aim is not to single out China for special condemnation in sacrificing individual human rights – including those of public expression and assembly – to the supra-political stage managing of Beijing's collective Olympic optics. As noted Olympics critic Helen Jefferson Lenskyj usefully reminds us, the IOC, 'an autonomous, non-elected body', abets host cities' curtailment of basic civic rights by insisting that organisers play by their tightly controlled rules, including a guarantee that there will be no public protests in or adjacent to Olympic

102 For an analysis of the 'applicability of the lessons of Seoul to Beijing', see David R. Black and Shona Bezanson, 'The Olympic Games, human rights and democratisation: lessons from Seoul and implications for Beijing', *Third World Quarterly* 25:7 (2004), pp. 1245–61. As late as April 2008, in chiding torch relay protestors for hectoring China about its human rights record, Rogge was still clinging to South Korea as a shining example of the processes of democratisation wrought by the Olympics that might yet be emulated in Beijing; see Roger Blitz and Richard McGregor, 'Olympics chief warns west', *Financial Times* (26–7 April 2008), p. 1.

103 On the legacy of the Mexico City Games, see Claire and Keith Brewster, 'Mexico City 1968: sombreros and skyscrapers,' in Tomlinson and Young (eds), *National Identity and Global Sports Events*, pp. 99–116.

venues, or any behaviour that might be considered an affront to Olympic values (and valuation). Thus, Vancouver's Safe Streets Act, brought into effect in 2004, mimics similar anti-panhandling legislation passed in advance of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and the 2000 Sydney Olympics.[104] Notwithstanding these built-in Olympic inducements toward authoritarianism, neither do I want to dismiss or diminish the severity of the abuses sanctioned by Chinese authorities and BOCOG officials, nor the degree to which those abuses increased following the arrest and detention of dissident Hu Jia in December 2007, escalated still more with the eruption of violent protests in Tibet in March 2008 and the rise of Uyghur separatist violence in Xinjiang, and continued even after the Games were over, especially for Lu Xiaobo and other signatories of the China 08 Democratic Manifesto. All of this has been well-documented by various respected organisations, including Amnesty International, which published a series of 'Countdown' reports on the Internet in the lead-up to the Games detailing the erosion of multiple freedoms, including of the press. To this end, when Amnesty's last report was released just a week before the start of the Beijing Games, international reporters already stationed in Beijing were unable to access it, despite Rogge's assurances only two weeks before that there would be no media censorship during the Olympics, and that the foreign press would be able to cover stories freely and fully while in China.[105] Rather, I want to suggest all too briefly by way of conclusion that Beijing's attempts to control not just the message of its Olympics ('One World, One Dream'), but also their mediation (via, among other electronic channels, the World Wide Web), returns us to the special applicability of the showcase genre in highlighting a fundamental asymmetry at the heart of local and global practices of place. That is, as noted China and Pacific Rim scholar Arif Dirlik has commented, in terms of the fostering of 'place-based consciousness', the spatially abstracted routes of globalisation are often pitted against the concrete locations and historical roots of everyday social and political activity.[106]

104 Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, *Olympic Industry Resistance: Challenging Olympic Power and Propaganda* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), p. 23. As section 51.3 of the *Olympic Charter* proclaims, 'No kind of demonstration or political or religious propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues, or other areas' (p. 98).

105 Amnesty International, 'People's Republic of China: the Olympics countdown – broken promises', www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/089/2008/en/8249b304-5724-11dd-90eb-ff4596860802/asa170892008eng.pdf (accessed July 2008); and Andrew Jacobs, 'China to limit web access during Olympic Games', *New York Times* (31 July 2008), p. A1.

106 Arif Dirlik, 'Place-based imagination: globalism and the politics of place', in Roxann Prazniak and Arif Dirlik (eds), *Place and Politics in an Age of Globalisation* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), p. 15.

Thus, China's swift and brutal suppression of the protests in Tibet, for example, was read by most Western media – and certainly CNN – as evidence of China's failure to integrate itself successfully and fully within a global development narrative of capitalist modernity, where universal human rights necessarily follow upon economic prosperity. However, the subsequent protests against the torch relay in London, Paris, and San Francisco, among other international locales, were seen within China – and not just by the state-run news agency Xinhua – as further evidence of the West's ongoing marginalisation and isolation of the country. One can only imagine what might have happened had the torch visited Vancouver, which is home to many of the key organisers behind the pro-Tibet demonstrations on the Great Wall and in Greece, as well as the second-largest Chinese community in North America, which held several local counter-demonstrations in support of the Beijing Games in the spring of 2008.[107] As my colleague Zhao Yuezhi has recently put it, were China ever in fact to lift the 'great firewall' it has erected around the Internet, foreign web browsers might be quite shocked by what they read, with many popular – and populist – blogs trading in a nationalist discourse far more jingoistic and muscularly anti-Western than that promoted by the CCP,[108] and playing to an impatient and expectant generation of only children coming of age with no memory of Tiananmen, let alone the Cultural Revolution. Some of these referential paradoxes were underscored for me as a result of an informal email survey I conducted in June of 2008, asking Chinese students studying at my university to compare Beijing's hosting of the Summer Olympics with what – if anything – they had taken note of regarding Vancouver's preparations for the 2010 Winter Games. One young woman's response was particularly illuminating, framing the politics – and performance – of place at work in the two Olympic cities not simply in terms of differences in national temperament, or 'philosophy', but also, implicitly, in terms of a critique of neo-liberalism's abstract prioritisation of individual human rights at the expense of context-specific, or 'place-based', considerations of new models of collectivisation, even post-Maoist ones that have resulted in the (apparently willing) resettlement of her own family. I quote at length from her remarks:

107 See Miro Cernetig, 'Vancouver has a pivotal role in the Tibet debate', *Vancouver Sun* (19 April 2008), p. D4; and 'Chinese Canadians in Vancouver rally to support Beijing Olympics', *China Economic Net* (27 April 2008), http://en.ce.cn/National/Politics/200804/27/t20080427_15292385.shtml (accessed May 2008).

108 Zhao Yuezhi, 'Fanning the flame: the media and the communication of official and popular national discourse', Centre for Chinese Research Workshop, *Staging the Beijing Olympics: Visions, Tensions, and Dreams*, University of British Columbia, 12 May 2008.

> Like millions of Chinese people in my generation, I have been waiting for the Beijing Olympic Games since I was 13 years old. Finally, I can see my home city shine on the world stage this summer. It's a feeling much more complicated than happiness or excitement. It is a feeling most Canadians will never be able to understand. It is more about . . . national pride and glory than having fun. It is about sacrificing individual freedom for the greater good of the country . . . I am sure you know all about the new Olympic venues being built in Beijing. But you might not know that tens of thousand[s] of citizens had to move away to make the land available for the venues. My family happened to be one of them and we were honored to do so, although we had to lose some money due to the resettlement . . . The difference between the Chinese philosophy and the Canadian philosophy is what the general public considers to be more valuable: individual freedom or . . . national pride. If half of the Beijing residents think they would not sacrifice their own interests for the country's most important event, the government would have more than ten million people blocking its way to success. In China, people who fight for individual rights might gain more property and glamour, but people who sacrifice their rights for the country gain more respect. It is a fresh image for me to see how Canadian people see their Vancouver Olympics . . . I saw people protesting against the Olympics on Commercial Drive, [saying] that it's a businessmen's money-making event . . . Athletes have to advertise through sponsors to get their funding. When I ask Canadian people how they feel about winning the right to hold the [W]inter Olympics, many of them don't even care.[109]

What lessons might such a complexly articulated statement hold for Vancouver, where, as this student suggests, we take for granted our right to protest as well as our right to disinterestedness? And how might thinking critically about both the real differences *and* the complex lines of historical connection in local audiences' responses to globally mediated sports spectacles like the Olympics in turn foster a particular politics of place that resists the universalist narratives of development (athletic, economic, social) championed by supra-national institutions like the IOC? Three rights challenges related to the 2010 Olympics offer one possible way to begin answering these questions by exposing the performative exclusions embodied within the very category of the human that such narratives are meant to uphold.

The first is a United Nations complaint filed against the federal government of Canada, the BC provincial government, and the City of Vancouver by three community-based NGOs working in the DTES – the Impact of the Olympics on Community Coalition, Pivot Legal Society, and the Carnegie Community Action Project – who built on the original

109 Personal email (6 June 2008).

research conducted by two University of British Columbia graduate students in Political Science, Michael Powar and Gayle Stewart. The petition states that all three levels of government are in violation of section 11.1 of the International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (of which Canada is a signatory), which states that 'Parties to the Covenant recognise the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions'. Citing a litany of broken promises 'made to the low-income community about social sustainability during the bid process surrounding the 2010 Games', the claimants allege that the governments have failed in their responsibilities to provide adequate affordable and habitable housing to the neediest residents of Vancouver; that the homelessness crisis in the city has been exacerbated by development projects related to the Olympics (resulting in an alarming conversion of SROs); and that as the homeless population in the city is disproportionately represented by some of the most marginalised members of Canadian society, including people of Aboriginal ancestry, those with substance abuse problems, and the mentally disabled, this constitutes a systemic practice of discrimination.[110]

The second challenge also concerns Vancouver's 'street homeless' population; submitted to the BC Human Rights Tribunal in July 2008 by Pivot Legal Society, United Native Nations, and the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users, it alleges that the Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association, together with Geoff Plant, in his role as Vancouver's Project Civil City Commissioner, have engaged in a targeted campaign of harassment against this population via their coordination of the Downtown Ambassadors, a roving 'public safety' force meant to combat 'street disorder' that is directly modelled on a similar 'hospitality force' put in place in Atlanta in advance of the 1996 Olympics. Contracted through a private security firm, the Ambassadors are Vancouver's more menacing version of Beijing's etiquette police, patrolling a ninety-block area radiating out from the DTES, on the lookout for 'suspicious' individuals, including those sitting or sleeping on sidewalks, binning in alleyway dumpsters, engaging in public drug use or alcohol consumption, panhandling, or otherwise failing to conform 'to the behaviour desired by businesses in the area'.[111]

110 IOCC, Pivot Legal Society, and CCAP, *No Place Like Home: Human Rights Council 1503 Procedure* (12 April 2008), pp. 8 and 4, http://noplacelikehomevancouver.org/pdfs/noplacelikehome.pdf (accessed May 2008).

111 Pivot Legal Society, United Native Nations, and VANDU, 'Submissions of the complainants', BC Human Rights Tribunal (17 July 2008), p. 6.

The complaint states that the Ambassadors' attempts to 'modify' this behaviour – mostly by forcing targeted individuals to move – is a clear violation of the right to equal public access and that, again because of the social constitution of the targeted population, '[t]he grounds of discrimination include race, colour, ancestry, and physical and mental disability'.[112]

These first two challenges highlight some of the social groups left behind when host cities harness their particular urban aspirations to abstracted messages of Olympic inspiration: if human bodies can be engineered – via equipment vested or drugs ingested – to go 'faster, higher, stronger', then why can't the places those bodies reside? This question was in part what informed my experience of local artist Althea Thauberger's September 2008 site-specific performance event *Carrall Street*, in which she threw a one-night live art spotlight (quite literally) on a contact zone in the city that runs a scant six blocks – from the red-brick buildings of historic Gastown, through the strewn hypodermics of Pigeon Park, to the gleaming real-estate offices of Concord Pacific on the north side of False Creek – but that in that distance maps a fraught and polarising social history relating to the ethics of livability and the politics of development in Vancouver. Thauberger is known for performance-based video and photographic works in which she collaborates closely with different social communities (Canadian soldiers and tree planters, US military wives, linguistic minorities in Northern Italy, conscientious objectors in Germany) to explore the dynamics of group consciousness and state control. For *Carrall Street*, Thauberger worked with community groups with varied interests in the area (housed and unhoused DTES residents, local service organisations, artists and theatre directors, politicians and city planners); together, they created both scripted and improvised scenes of social interaction in which the roles of performer and spectator, local denizen and curious passer-by would deliberately blur on a stretch of streetscape cordoned off and brightly illuminated like a film set. For me, the piece's plainly visible fictional scaffolding, and the highly telegraphed orchestration of its 'scenes' (I was 'interviewed' by two very manic 'real estate agents') threw into relief the different performance publics (between business owners and low-income residents, artists and activists, tourists and addicts, security guards and the street homeless) that are daily negotiated at a very local street level. In the process, Thauberger brought out in ways often obscured by abstract policy discussions relating to the proposed revitalisation of the area, the historical connections between

112 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

this particular street's past (as a tavern-lined, working-class byway connecting Vancouver's old port to Chinatown), present (as a thoroughfare traversed on one end by visiting tourists and local hipsters negotiating both the tack and trend of Gastown, and, on the other, by the homeless, addicted, and mentally ill citizens of the DTES), and future (as a showcase street targeted for a controversial clean-up and beautification in advance of the Olympics). Whether Carrall Street's latest incarnation as a high-profile 'Greenway Project' is designed to stimulate the economy of the area, as officials contend, or simply to provide more pleasant direct access from Gastown to the downtown portion of Vancouver's famed pedestrian seawall for Olympic tourists and the affluent new residents that will hopefully follow in their wake, is open to debate. But along with the restoration of Pigeon Park's concrete surface, the painting over of graffiti on adjacent walls, and the installation of new benches and tables, the erection of high-powered street lamps is probably a clue as to who is winning the contest between social engineering and the protection of civil liberties.

Of course, the winners and losers that accompany such contests are a reminder that the history of the Olympics mirrors the history of capitalist modernity, from their humble branch plant origins as an amateur sideshow at World Expositions (themselves glorified trading shows) to their steady growth as a powerful global industry run by professional elites, fuelled by broadcast revenues and corporate sponsorships, and riven by bribery scandals and competitive fraud. Even the poor return of medals that is routinely cited (as it was again in Beijing) as evidence of Canada's *lack* of serious investment in its sports industries is part of this same developmental narrative. Yet as the final rights challenge suggests, such fundamental institutional inequities are actually built into the very fabric of an *athletic* movement based on the cohesion of body and world that has for most of its history done its best to ignore over half of the bodies in the world, not to mention the various *social* and *political* movements they have spawned. I refer to the fact that VANOC was forced to defend itself against a high-profile, but ultimately unsuccessful, lawsuit filed in BC Supreme Court by a coalition of international women ski jumpers arguing that the IOC's decision to exclude their event from the 2010 Olympics despite intense lobbying efforts constitutes sex discrimination.[113]

Whither sport. Despite its Charter's principled avowal that 'the practice of sport is a human right' (and notwithstanding the noble

113 See Rod Mickleburgh, 'Female ski jumpers to sue VANOC for inclusion', *Globe and Mail* (21 May 2008), pp. S1 and S3.

efforts of former and current Olympians involved in the Right to Play aid organisation),[114] the Olympic Movement remains deeply entrenched within binaries of human difference. Sex and gender are chief among them (as hormone testing and controversies surrounding trans athletes routinely attest), but exclusionary divisions and categories based on race, class, sexuality, age, religion, physical mobility, and geography are just as persistent. Indeed, one of the main arguments in awarding Beijing the 2008 Olympics – that the world's most populous nation should have the right to host the world's premiere sporting event – seems slightly specious when one considers that most of the sports showcased at that event were invented by white European men at the height of colonialism. In the corporatised, bureaucratised, politicised spectacle of place promotion that is the Olympics, final medal tallies belie not just the unspoken story of 'performance enhancement', but also a long history of the global south, or the communist east, having to beat the West at its own game.

Whether art. In May 2008 Ai was back in Sydney for the first international retrospective of his work, also curated by Charles Merewether as a joint exhibition between the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation and the Campbelltown Arts Centre, and meant to overlap with the 2008 Sydney Biennale. The show featured the world premiere of the video *Fairytale*, a three-hour documentary following from concept to realisation Ai's invited contribution of the same name to Documenta 12, the major survey of international art held every five years in Kassel, the small German town that was home to the Brothers Grimm when they collected and published their own famous tales. In Ai's piece we see the process behind his invitation and facilitation of the journey of 1,001 Chinese citizens to Kassel in the summer of 2007, where in groups of 200 over successive one-week periods, participants, having first been extensively interviewed on everything from their definition of a fairytale to whether or not art can change the world, lived and ate communally, toured the city and the Documenta shows in matching uniforms, and came together at the end of each day for various group demonstrations orchestrated by Ai. As in Thauberger's piece, participants acted both

114 *Olympic Charter*, p. 11. Right to Play began as a fundraising and athlete ambassadorial program at the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Games; today it is an international humanitarian organisation headquartered in Toronto that uses sports programmes to improve the health and quality of life of children in disadvantaged and war-torn regions around the world. See 'History of right to play', http://rtpca.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=rtp_History (accessed August 2008). Ironically, at this writing the organisation has been banned from advertising, as at past Olympics, at Vancouver's Athletes' Village owing to a promotional deal it recently signed with Mitsubishi, a rival of key Olympic sponsor GM; see Gary Mason, 'IOC sinks to new low by severing ties with charity', *Globe and Mail* (22 January 2009), p. S1.

as spectators and performers, conventional 'tourists' and exhibitionary 'specimens', the resulting spectacle designed at once as an experiment in cross-cultural exchange through art and as a more pointed local intervention into the West's fantasies of the history of collectivisation and social interaction in China. *Fairytale*, like Ai's *World Map*, thus reads as an interesting comment on a showcase event like the Olympics. The dream of global cosmopolitanism is always a game where the competing national and transnational stakes and scales of what it means to be human – and to be part of an audience to humanity – play out in local acts of display and concealment, celebration and protest, formation and fragmentation, competition and cooperation.