

title: preserving ephemera: reclaiming critiques of the 2010 Olympics
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project description

The purpose of this proposed project is to document and preserve grassroots, marginalized criticisms (anarchist, aboriginal, women's and environmental) that circulated before, during, and after the 2010 Olympic Games. These criticisms address controversial issues surrounding the Vancouver Olympics including: cultural appropriation, surveillance, abusive policing, environmental degradation, and failure to provide promised low-income housing [6].

background

Pro-Olympic rhetoric predominated mainstream media coverage in Canada throughout 2010. Interested parties can easily find primary source material documenting the events from this pro-Olympic perspective (e.g., through public library databases or media website archives). However, obtaining primary source material from a critical standpoint is a much more difficult endeavor. Either there is little substantial documentation (many critiques were made through grassroots tactical action such as temporary signage, graffiti, in person protests, property damage) or coverage of the critiques was mediated by outside parties and made unintelligible and "neutralized" for the consuming public [4].

The 2010 Olympics led to a re-colonization of the city of Vancouver by the hegemonic powers of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Vancouver Olympic Committee (VANOC). In an effort to create an illusion of the host city as safe, clean, apolitical, and tranquilly multi-cultural, homeless individuals were shipped out of the city [2]; police provocateurs were embedded into peaceful protest actions to legitimize barring further protests [8]; high tech security resources from the United States were brought into Canada to surveil the public [5]; cultural property of indigenous groups was co-opted to create Olympic paraphernalia [1,11]; and Olympic critics (and their colleagues, students, and family) were harassed to keep quiet by police [9].

The powerful criticisms of the IOC and VANOC, often made by local, grassroots organizations through signage, peaceful protests, and graffiti, are an important part of Vancouver's Olympic heritage. How did these criticisms disrupt the "romance and courting" of the city at the time [3]? Gord Hill, who founded no2010 (no2010.com), asserts that, "...the anti-Olympic movement has forced [the Vancouver Olympic Committee] off the streets, to the point where it no longer holds large, public ceremonies. Anytime the organizing committee does have events, it requires a large policing operation to secure it" [6].

Although it can be argued that critical voices influenced the behavior of Olympic power wielders in 2010, the voices are increasingly marginalized as time passes. Even during the Olympics, criticisms were demonized by the media and

resulted in anti-Olympic paranoia (i.e., “you say protest we say party”, “build resumes not tents”). Voices that rose up to protest issues directly related to the games were quickly silenced or simply ignored by the media. Further marginalization becomes likely when the information in question is ephemeral, undocumented or lost in the entropy that threatens the historical material of many grassroots organizations.

project goals

In respectful collaboration with Vancouver based grassroots organizations, the four primary goals of this project are:

- Conceptualize an information system to house evidence of critiques of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games using participatory design methods. Evidence may take the form of physical materials, recorded interviews, and/or digital copies of related artifacts.
- Interrogate the assumptions of building said information system.
- Develop a process to find and document primary evidence of criticisms of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games (e.g., posters, videos, writing, oral history, speeches, images, etc.)
- Establish a working group to continue design and development of the information system and to sustain the project after the CHI 2011 workshop is complete.

potential grassroots organization collaborators¹

- Gallery Gachet
- Purple Thistle Centre
- Kootney School of Writing (KSW)
- Video In Video Out (VIVO)
- Artspeak
- Centre A
- Audain Gallery
- W2 Community Art Media Society
- subMedia
- Vancouver Co-operative Radio

engaging the questions

Before excitedly leaping into the design of any information system, particularly one that interrogates mainstream rhetoric, participants need to reflect on whether or not an information system is appropriate for this particular context. What are potential benefits and harms to those whose information products may become a part of the project (e.g., legal prosecution or other types of government harassment)? Other questions project participants might engage include: 1) Who are the power wielders in making decisions concerning the information system; 2) Who decides what information goes into the system; 3)

¹ Note some of these organizations accepted Cultural Olympiad monies, others did not.

Who is able to edit information once it is entered; 4) Who is able to access the information; 5) Should/can some information be protected (e.g., kept from law enforcement); and 6) How will intellectual property issues be handled when an author or authors can not be identified? Answers to these questions will form the information policies that guide the project's continued development.

conclusion

Finding and preserving marginalized criticisms are one link to developing our understanding and appreciation for the diverse voices came together to protest the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver. In turn, these voices can help nurture and sustain others in their attempts to shed a more accurate light on the rhetoric that surrounds the multi-national, billion-dollar corporation formally called the International Olympic Committee [7,10]. This project will create a space for alternative perspectives to be heard, and will enable and empower others to join, interact, and extend the conversation.

references

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author bios

Danielle LaFrance was born and raised in Vancouver Canada. She attended Simon Fraser University, completing her Major in Women's Studies and Humanities i008. She is currently completing a Masters in Library, Archive and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia. In 2009, she participated in the Summer Literary Seminar in Vilnius, Lithuania led by Erin Moure. Her poetry and reviews have been featured in *House of Tilt*, *West Coast Line*, *The Capilano Review*, *Inter/tidal*, *Matrix*, and *The Montreal Review of Books*. Her first book, *SPECIES BRANDING*, is forthcoming (CUE 2011).

Lisa P. Nathan is an assistant professor at the University of British Columbia (UBC), located in the vibrant city of Vancouver, Canada. Lisa has the honor of serving as coordinator for the First Nations Concentration at UBC's School of Library, Archival and Information Studies. She is particularly interested in the interactions and tensions that develop between community values and information practices when communities incorporate new information systems.