

## Introduction to the 2012 Edition

Andy Miah & Beatriz Garcia

**The 2012 edition of Culture at the Olympics is our most rounded edition so far, publishing articles that draw on insights from previous Games and engaging in detail with the London 2012 cultural programme, from bid stage to the days immediately after the Olympic Games.**

Those who have followed us for some years will remember our 2005 edition, which was comprised of articles associated with the London 2012 Bid cultural preparations. These commentaries provide a useful reflection on the discussions taking place at the time about how the UK cultural and arts sector might engage with an event that many see as principally a set of sports competitions.

In particular, then Chair of Culture for the London 2012 bid Jude Kelly spoke of the need to 'try to make people change the way they think about the Games' (Kelly, 2005: 20) and of the need for the cultural programme to be a platform to 'keep this [Olympic] Movement *moving*' (ibid).

One of the challenges for London in bringing about this shift in awareness was that the people in positions of responsibility for culture changed over the course of the hosting process. For London 2012, Jude Kelly made way for a culture team led initially by Keith Khan, while later in the Olympiad a new 'London 2012 Festival' was created, the Artistic Director of which is Ruth Mackenzie.

These transitions within LOCOG are not unique to an organizing committee, which often finds that the political importance of culture encounters ebbs and flows of support over the Olympics, which can make it difficult to ensure that the often extremely ambitious cultural aspirations of a bid come to fruition. This is not to say that all bid proposals for Olympic cultural activity ought to be delivered. Indeed, these may be some of the few promises that ought to be subject to negotiation, as discussions about what culture means and matters to people change over time. Consider the London 2012 film commission 'The Odyssey' by Asif Kapadia, which explores the idea of London in a post-terrorism (2005) and post-riots (2011) context, two immense

impacts on London over the Olympiad. If the content of film commissions had been fixed at bid stage, they would most likely have little resonance with present times.

The London 2012 cultural offer has been innovative and extraordinary in a variety of ways, which our essays evidence. Its trajectory may lead future creative programmers at the Games to consider focusing less on the realization of specific grand projects and more on the values inherent to any specific Olympic cultural programme – not just Olympic values, but the values of the cultural policy of a nation. Indeed, considering the point of departure for an Olympic cultural programme from a *values* rather than *projects* perspective, may assist host cities in ensuring that their unique vision is rooted in local identity, while also facilitating greater continuity from bid stage to final delivery.

This volume begins with two articles that reflect on previous Games, which link readers to the London 2012 build-up, from local creative industry ambitions in Torino 2006 (Pappalardo & Westermann) to the fight for artistic freedoms during Vancouver 2010 (Adi). The third article, by Garcia, offers an overview of London 2012's cultural journey since the bid stage and highlights the aspects that could be considered most distinct and successful, thus

offering a potential blueprint to future Games.

Miah goes on to discuss specific aspects of London's cultural narrative. From a dissection of specially commissioned Olympic television comedy – comparing London's experience with Sydney 2000 – to the rise and rise of social media, and the distinct projection of both comedy and social media as unprecedented ingredients for the 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony.

As for all of our volumes, we will continue to add articles throughout the year, as new submissions come our way. Some of the articles are being finalized as we go to press and include such areas as the Torch Relay and a reflection on the cultural value and impact of the Look of the City programme. These articles will be available after the end of the Paralympic Games. We hope you will enjoy this volume and that it may serve to shed light on the many cultural dimensions of the Games, with London 2012 taking centre stage. These discussions should inform future host cities and cultural policy makers, while also offering insights that allow critical scholars to understand the challenges faced throughout a Games hosting process, when globalized operational imperatives must be balanced against specific local cultural ambitions as well as the historically rooted, but often overlooked, values of Olympism.