

# The City as an Image-creation Machine: A Critical Analysis of Vancouver's Olympic Bid

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## ABSTRACT

The strategic mobilization of images, visual metaphors, and other forms of graphical rhetoric has always been central in place promotion. Images of place have assumed even greater importance, however, with the rise of locational tournaments of cities bidding for the “right” to host high-stakes transnational spectacles. In this paper, we adapt Harvey Molotch’s pioneering theory of the urban growth machine to illuminate the contemporary enterprise of city bids for the Olympic Games. Taking Vancouver’s successful bid for the 2010 Winter Games as a case study, we use a visual methodology framework to analyze the manifest (explicit, surface) and latent (implicit, subtle) visual narrative strategies used to craft a carefully considered representation of the city. Our analysis of the official Bid Questionnaire and the video presentation to the International Olympic Committee documents the sophisticated process by which a city is constructed to embody pristine urban nature, multicultural social harmony, and vibrant local cultures of sport in keeping with the spirit of Olympism. Whether imagined cities like this are effective is irrelevant: cities understand that half of their advertising budget is wasted (they just don’t know which half). The expanding symbolic economies of tourism, conventions, and hallmark events require that urban growth machines develop and operate a full suite of image creation machines, each attuned to the real and perceived desires of an elusive transnational audience in a perpetual movable feast of locational consumption.

## Introduction

MOST SOCIAL THEORISTS agree that the cultural turbulence of postindustrial society is driven in part by the growing influence of images and visual metaphors in marketing, communications, and nearly every other realm of social interaction. Individuals as well as public and private institutions of all types routinely mobilize images as symbolic capital and as strategically coded cultural representations designed to influence consumer behavior or to build brand awareness. Indeed, the axioms of consumer choice and brand loyalty have been applied ever more aggressively to social roles (such as students or voters) once understood to be outside the commercial realm. Yet the vast and interdisciplinary literature on media and cultural studies generally ignores the role of place and context (for a review and key texts in this literature, see Durham and Kellner 2001; for a prominent exception, see Warner and Vale 2001).

In this paper, we examine the distinctive processes involved in constructing an urban image for the quintessential postindustrial urban activity: hosting a high-profile hallmark event. We examine the production and dissemination of visual metaphors used to blend nationalist symbolism and competition as the City of Vancouver fought for the “right” to host the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. Vancouver, an especially successful competitor in the ongoing transnational sweepstakes to attract investments, tourists, and hallmark events, mobilized a wide range of resources in its (successful) bid to secure the 2010 Games (Figure 1). City images have become ever more important for localities seeking to package themselves as friendly, enjoyable, and cohesive communities woven together by locally enmeshed cultural and emotional ties. Places are invariably presented as world cities that are at once multicultural, diverse, and entertaining. Every city presents itself as a “city of neighborhoods.” The dilemma of competitive city imaging, of course, is that the webs of local ties used to promote a city as a distinctive host for the next hallmark event are being eroded by the accelerating mobility of an itinerant tourist and hallmark event industry that continues to fragment the global cultural attention span as it searches for the next exotic locale.



Figure 1. Yes! Vancouver, July 2, 2003. Writing in a promotional pamphlet distributed to thousands of people who came to see the live telecast of the decision by the International Olympic Committee, Jack Poole, the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Vancouver 2010 Bid Corporation, captured the essence of city imaging. Poole wrote, "Today, as Vancouver 2010's final presentation is made in Prague, Canadians should feel proud of the incredible teamwork, perseverance and passion that have already made our dream a reality...win or lose." When the transmission of the word "Vancouver!" reached Vancouver, the crowd erupted in cheers, fireworks exploded, and the video monitors shouted, "Yes!" (Photograph by Elvin Wyly.)

works to balance pragmatic economic and logistical demands with the imperative to build long-term "legacies" through a succession of ephemeral but high-profile images from various cities. Vancouver's Bid Corporation presented a compelling and successful narrative of visual metaphors and local images, securing the votes of IOC members and other privileged viewing audiences. In this paper, we pose a simple yet important question: *What is the "City" that was constructed by Vancouver's bid to host the 2010 Games?* To answer this question, we first consider the priorities and interests of the customer: we examine the calculated demands the IOC places on cities competing to host the Games. We then draw on theories of urban place promotion to define the scope of the market as well as

Vancouver's 2010 Olympic bid provides a valuable case study of many of these dilemmas. The official Bid Corporation functioned as the dynamic and innovative image producer, attempting to craft place-based symbols that would be strong enough to impress the International Olympic Committee (IOC), an evolving transnational enterprise that

its current conditions and context. Then we turn our attention to the images produced: we deconstruct the images, place them in context, and examine their manifest (explicit) and latent (implicit) work in generating particular emotional reactions from specific audiences. Our data include the main promotional materials published by the Bid Corporation, the Bid's official response to the IOC's "Bid Questionnaire," and the professionally produced video, *Our Home*. Ultimately, we suggest that the City constructed to host the 2010 Games was built through a selective and strategically drawn image of local community and culture designed to appeal to the presumed preferences of a tiny, elite transnational audience.

### **The International Olympic Committee: A Demanding Customer**

In 1892, Pierre de Coubertin began the revival that is now known as the modern Olympic movement, and over time the enterprise gave rise to a large, sophisticated International Olympic Committee (IOC) (Barney, Martyn, and Wenn 2002; Chalkley and Essex 1999). Now composed of 79 delegates from a dozen countries, the Committee remains the primary guardian of the Olympic movement and seeks to promote friendly international relations by staging competitive sporting events across the globe (IOC 2003). The IOC is committed to building a "peaceful and better world through the education of youth" (IOC 2003) and encouraging global friendship through fair sport competition. Nevertheless, the IOC is the primary guardian of the Olympic movement in its commercial as well as civic incarnation; as such the IOC evades the standard dichotomies of corporate/governmental and capitalist/nonprofit activity. Beginning in the late 1970s, the IOC was transformed by a growing recognition of the considerable profit potential associated with the Games as a recurring global media event. After 6 decades in which the IOC actively pursued host locations, the Committee began to see bids from rival cities, necessitating the development of evaluation criteria by which to judge candidate cities for both Summer and Winter Games (Barney, Martyn, and Wenn 2002, x).

Today, the Olympics are recognized as the world's largest pageant of athletic skill and competitive spirit (IOC 2003). And the competitive spirit is now central in the global sweepstakes by which

host cities are “awarded” the “right” to host the games. Applicant cities are required to provide the IOC with answers to a lengthy, standard questionnaire as part of an overall bid. Bid cities normally employ contract specialists to prepare their proposals, and in turn the IOC hires specialists to evaluate the host potential of each city. A city’s host potential is normally evaluated on the basis of technical considerations, political circumstances, and regional economic conditions (Barney, Martyn, and Wenn 2002; Chalkley and Essex 1999). Traditionally, the Committee has placed great emphasis on political stability to underscore the narratives of fair play, global friendship, mutual respect, and peace. Bid cities are not expected to be utopias, however, and some observers note that national and regional problems are sometimes considered in development-conscious weighting of a bid.

Local economic context also plays a role. A bid city must be able to accommodate the event, and it must also have sufficient resources to establish and maintain a positive “legacy.” Beyond ensuring that the needs of Olympic athletes are met, the IOC has emphasized an interest in supporting training programs, facilities, and other investments for future generations of Olympiads. Thus a bid to host the Games is enhanced when a city can demonstrate a substantial, long-term commitment in the years leading up to an event and several years afterward. This commitment is rarely a matter of purely local resources: investments are invariably carefully crafted blends of allocations, in-kind contributions, and implicit subsidies worked out between the public and private sectors at multiple scales, from the local to the regional, state/provincial, and federal level. Cities that play a prominent role in existing inter-scalar relations—and in transnational networks—thus exploit competitive advantages in the bidding process (Cochrane, Peck, and Tickell 1999).

Still, the IOC is deeply sensitive to the unfolding, virtual urban system created by the bidding and host selection process. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Pierre de Coubertin emphasized the important international spirit created by the modern Olympic movement as the Games rotated every 4 years to another of the “great cities” of the globe (Barney, Martyn, and Wenn 2002, 18). Even though the Games span a very short period (now running just over 2 weeks), they focus unparalleled worldwide attention on the host city. City elites

clearly recognize the enormous value of the “free advertising” provided by the Games, but in turn the IOC recognizes the value of the Olympic “product,” and the Committee is extremely careful to select cities that reflect (or can be made to symbolize) the fundamental ethics of Olympism (Chalkley and Essex 1999). Throughout the application process, the distinctive character of each city’s transnational connections in culture and sport are carefully scrutinized. Yet it is the final stage of the evaluation process that provides the clearest, most focused opportunity to mobilize images and associations for persuasion: each of three “candidate” cities makes a 1-hour presentation to the IOC board members. Bid committees arrive with compelling presentations (often the fruit of years of work and substantial payments to consultants and contractors) designed to establish powerful, visceral connections between a candidate city and the values of the international Olympic movement. To be sure, the IOC’s locational choices reflect a wide range of ongoing considerations, from the structural imperatives of infrastructure to the need to present legitimacy in “continental equity” by choosing locations beyond Europe and North America. Yet the IOC’s decisions cannot be divorced from the enormous global symbolic economy created by the Olympic movement and the associated movable feast of global media spectacle. Symbolism, imagery, and visual metaphors are central to the global cultural economy of hallmark events: they erode an already-precarious dichotomy between the “hard” logic of capital accumulation and the “soft” realm of signs, associations, and meanings. And as competition among potential host cities intensifies, these blurred dualities begin to shape the local construction of place as cities pursue alternative strategies to attract investment, interest, and attention.

### **The City as an Image-creation Machine**

Theoretical and empirical research in urban political economy has changed dramatically in the past 30 years, reflecting the broader turbulence in the experience of individual cities in confronting transnational networks, opportunities, and challenges. Yet certain foundational imperatives persist in only slightly modified form. Harvey Molotch’s (1976) landmark theorization of the city as a

growth machine, for instance, remains as fresh and relevant today as it was 3 decades ago:

...the political and economic essence of virtually any given locality...is *growth*.... the desire for growth provides the key operative motivation toward consensus for members of politically mobilized local elites, however split they might be on other issues (p. 310).

Molotch analyzed how the common desire for growth pervades nearly all local activities: beyond the cold logic of economics, the pursuit of growth shapes the political system as well as the work of locally dependent cultural organizations such as museums, foundations, media companies, and sports teams:

The athletic teams in particular are an extraordinary mechanism for instilling a spirit of civic jingoism regarding the “progress” of the locality. A stadium filled with thousands (joined by thousands more at home before the TV) screaming for Cleveland or Baltimore (or whatever) is a scene difficult to fashion otherwise. This enthusiasm can be drawn upon...in order to gain general acceptance for local growth-oriented programs (p. 315).

Thirty years after Molotch offered his rich metaphor, the growth machine survives—even in the face of two important contextual shifts. First, elites are far less likely to be dependent upon the fortunes of particular localities. Second, the specific strategies used by growth machines have changed with the decline of an old industrial economy premised on a national and regional system of production and mass consumption (Harvey 1989; Logan and Molotch 1987). But neither of these shifts has altered the essential, uniting function of an ideology of growth. For those elites who do depend on (or who can profit from) the competitive fortunes of a certain locality, the politics of the growth machine remain quite similar. Fewer growth machines engage in the smokestack-chasing wars of the 1960s and 1970s, to be sure; but many more now compete for the right mix of local spoils from the transnational web of commodity chains, streams of tourists and conventioners, advanced service industries, innovation clusters, and rapidly shifting niche consumption spectacles that have to *take place*, to settle down at least temporarily. Every growth machine endeavors to reach “up” into

the speedy transnational flows of wealthy residents, tourists, investors, and events, to pull them “down” into the locality that matters for a particular coalition. The goal of the growth machine remains the same, even as the expansion of tourism and consumption has given rise to what Terry Nichols Clark (2004) has dubbed “The City as an Entertainment Machine.”

Yet as the paths to growth have changed, so have the consequences. Places have been commodified in ever more competitive ways (Logan and Molotch, 1987). City governments, once ensuring the needs of collective consumption while regulating the worst excesses of capital, have evolved into entrepreneurial agents working *on behalf of capital* (Harvey 1989), blurring the boundaries between public and private and spawning innumerable quangos (quasi-non-governmental organizations) (Ward 1998; Cochrane, Peck, and Tickell 1999). As such, the postindustrial, neoliberal growth machine is far more reliant on the intangible, elusive determinants of choice. The comparatively simple competitive race to attract factories with economic incentives has given way to a more uncertain gamble. Don Mitchell (1997, p. 304, emphasis added) draws attention to the dilemmas:

...the ideology of globalization allows local officials, along with local business people and property owners, to argue that they have no choice but to prostrate themselves before the god Capital, offering not just tax and regulatory inducements, but also extravagant convention centers, downtown tourist amusements, up-market, gentrified restaurants and bar districts, and even occasional public investment in such amenities as museums, theaters, and concert halls.... When capital is seen to have no *need* for any particular place, then cities do what they can to make themselves so attractive that capital...will *want* to locate there.

As perceived *wants* begin to replace perceived *needs*, city imaging becomes ever more important (Warner and Vale 2001). Ward (1998, p. ix) emphasizes that “place is packaged and sold as a commodity,” as local cultural and social meanings are pulled out of context and “repackaged to create a more attractive place image” that ignores or suppresses any elements not deemed to be attractive. Growth machines devote more resources to develop place logos, slogans, targeted advertising campaigns, public relations strategies,

carefully leveraged subsidies, flagship development projects, ambitious architectural and urban design competitions, trade fairs, heritage events, and public art installations (Clark 2004; Ward 1998; Urry 2002).

Hallmark events such as the Olympic Games are now seen as an ideal mechanism by which a growth machine can brand, publicize, and promote a city on the global stage (Barney, Martyn, and Wenn 2002; Chalkley and Essex 1999; Cochrane, Peck, and Tickell 1996; Quilley 1999). Sports, and the culture of sport, have thus become key elements of growth machine politics. Indeed, the diverse range of sporting activities helps to inoculate a city against the dangers of homogenization that have long been recognized in the tourist sector, where “the practice of selling places may even generate sameness, blandness” (Kearns and Philo 1993, p. 21) as destinations try to distinguish their “s” attractions (sun, sand, sea, sex) (Urry 2002). The culture of sport helps cities to promote themselves simultaneously as distinctive and familiar, entertaining and safe, exotic and comfortable, pleasurable and wholesome.

Vancouver exemplifies many of these changes, and thus provides an ideal context in which to analyze the dynamics of Olympic image production. The place has long been regarded as a curious blend, a city built on natural resource extraction that now provides a laid-back environment for the enjoyment of a bucolic landscape of coastal mountains, forests, and city beaches. But the city has been ever more tightly woven into transnational networks of migration, investment, and tourism over the past generation, and the city elite have become aggressive and sophisticated in building international recognition.

## Methods

Our methodology draws on the interrogation of images and visual metaphors. In a new but influential treatise on *Visual Methodologies*, Gilian Rose (2001, p. 5) observes that

There’s an awful lot of hype around “the visual” these days. We’re often told that we now live in a world where knowledge as well as many forms of entertainment are visually constructed, and where what we see is as important, if not more so, than what we hear or read.

Rose develops an analytical framework that emphasizes five interrelated themes (Rose 2001, pp. 10–15). First, the approach recognizes that images are never inert: they *do* things, and they can also be sites of resistance and subversive activity. Second, the analyst must remain sensitive to the ways in which images present (or distort) social difference. Third, the approach emphasizes the contingency of meaning in an image: we cannot simply interpret an image on the basis of “how it looks,” because meanings depend critically on how different audiences perceive a particular image. Fourth, the analyst must work to consider the way individual images are embedded in a broader culture. Finally, the analyst must examine the potential of the audience as a site of resistance: planned responses by intended audiences are never guaranteed, and indeed the collective interpretation of individuals in an audience can actively redefine a particular message.

We follow Rose’s methodology to analyze the images used in Vancouver’s bid, while acknowledging that our interpretations are partial, contextual, and limited by the inevitable subjectivities of our own identities and social roles. Nevertheless, we suggest that a content analysis of the bid provides valuable insight into the City constructed as part of the competitive bid and presentation process. We begin with a manifest content analysis (an examination of the visible, surface content of the promotional materials used for the bid) before undertaking a latent content analysis of the technological, compositional, and social “modalities” through which a particular audience is *constituted* and *targeted*.

### *Manifest Content Analysis*

To begin to unravel the narrative created by Vancouver’s bid corporation, we undertook a manifest content analysis on the visible and surface content of the communication material created for the IOC. The questionnaire, part of the first stage application process, is composed of six sections varying in length, each containing three separate images at the top of the page. A weighted random sample was taken to best represent the image Vancouver was presenting through their publication. Essentially our raw data, the images (Table 1), were coded based on six major categories: nature, sports, people, culture, temporal, and symbols. Using these same

**Table I. Content Analysis for Bid Questionnaire.**

Each image was analyzed for each of six separate categories. Predominant themes were identified for each image within each category.

<b>Nature</b>	
Urban (parks, greenways, ect.)	15
Rural	5
Wilderness	8
In isolation	4
Animals	2

  

<b>Sports</b>	
Group (more than 2)	4
Individual	11
Women	4
Men	4
Victorious	
Everyday setting	2
Olympic setting	14

  

<b>People</b>	
Youth	2
Adults	13
Senior	
Women	8
Men	8
First Nations	
Visible Minorities	
Disabled	3

  

<b>Symbols</b>	
Totem Poles	
Native Art	1
Maple Leaf	
Canadian Leaf	
Canadian Flag	1
Olympic Rings	
Olympic Torch	
Landmarks	6
Mounties	

  

<b>Temporal</b>	
Night	5
Day	8
Sunrise/Sunset	6
Winter	24
Fall	
Spring	
Summer	4

  

<b>Culture</b>	
Theatre Arts	1
Fine Arts	
Music	
Carnivals/Festivals	4
Night life	
Shopping	

categories, we performed a similar manifest analysis of the video "Our Home," produced for the second stage in the candidate application process (Table 2). Together, these two communication products helped to constitute a particular transnational image of Vancouver, and played some role in the success of the city's bid.

### *Nature*

Natural elements figured prominently in a majority of the selected questionnaire images. Whether part of a broader natural backdrop or an urban green space, nature was represented as an integral feature of the city. In the video, nature was repeatedly summarized with images of the Pacific Ocean and the coastal mountains.

**Table 2. Content Analysis for the Bid Corporation’s Video, *Our Home*.**

We viewed the video multiple times and divided it into discrete scenes. Predominant images in each distinct scene were then used to categorize each segment.

<b>Nature</b>	
Urban (parks, etc.)	3
Rural	2
Wilderness	7
In isolation	1
Animals	3

<b>Sports</b>	
Group (more than two)	3
Individual	2
Women	1
Men	2
Victorious	
Everyday setting	7
Olympic setting	4

<b>People</b>	
Youth	7
Adults	3
Senior	1
Women	2
Men	2
First Nations	6
Visible Minorities	5
Disabled	3

<b>Symbols</b>	
Totem Poles	2
Native Art	1
Maple Leaf	2
Canadian Flag	1
Olympic Rings	
Olympic Torch	
Landmarks	2
Mounties	1

<b>Temporal</b>	
Night	4
Day	
Sunrise/Sunset	4
Winter/Fall	1
Spring/Summer	1

<b>Culture</b>	
Theatre Arts	3
Fine Arts	2
Music	1
Carnivals/Festivals	4
Night life	2
Shopping	1

Due to the unique composition of Vancouver’s dual location bid, we argue that nature was presented to the international audience as the necessary and emotional cognitive tie between Vancouver and Whistler (the two sport venue locations) and codified in the official bid motto, the “Sea to Sky Games.” Vancouver is the site of the first Winter Olympics to be simultaneously held beside the sea and framed by mountains. This scene creates a unique marketing platform centered on nature. In our discussion with a bid official (Anonymous, 2003), we found the impetus for this theme was not only built on the cognitive link between Canada and nature but was also designed to confront and embrace the bid’s Achille’s heel: the transportation dilemmas created by the Sea-to-Sky Highway. The only direct route between Vancouver and Whistler, the Sea-to-Sky

is a winding, scenic route where drivers are often tempted to proceed at modern freeway speeds. The Bid Corporation's imagery was specifically crafted for the IOC to emphasize the positive, distinctive aspects of the route—and to suppress its local connotations as a deadly corridor of head-on collisions. (One of the main Provincial contributions to the Bid involved an acceleration of a scheduled \$600 million upgrade of the highway.)

### *Sports*

An essential premise of the Olympic movement—in its ancient as well as modern incarnations—is that sport has the potential to serve as a unifying force among different peoples. This principle remains at the heart of all contemporary Olympic imagery, and unsurprisingly it also animates Vancouver's questionnaire and video. Questionnaire images emphasize individuals in Olympic settings, whereas the video presents sport images primarily through everyday group settings; the latter helps to frame the city as a naturally active city, a "sport-conscious" place that would be a natural fit as an Olympic host. It is also plausible that the video portrayal reflected the advancement of the bidding process. The first stage required convincing the IOC that Vancouver had the ability to host the Olympics, necessitating images of infrastructure and more traditional, formal sporting images. In the second stage of the bid process, the emphasis shifted to presenting Vancouver as an embodiment of the Olympic image and movement.

It is also worth considering differences in the types of sports shown and the speed at which they are presented. The everyday sporting images presented in the video are much slower paced than the competitive Olympic sports, allowing the audience to be drawn into the image and connect on a more personal emotional level. The image of a man jogging along a trail has the ability to be "placeless" and therefore permits the audience to personally identify with the image. The questionnaire images have a different effect. These images represent the fast-paced, world-class, "gold medal" capability of the city to provide for athletes and visitors. Often presented in quick clips, these images prohibit any personal connection other than a potential nationalist fervor or fanatic excitement for the intense formality of Olympic competition.

### *People*

Quantifying both the questionnaire and video images illuminates interesting patterns. One such pattern is the equal representation of women and men in both products. Most of the people shown are adults. However, in the video there is a focal shift to the youth of the city, perhaps responding to the IOC's increased emphasis on encouraging the involvement of young people in sport. Similarly, the questionnaire and video diverge in the portrayal of Vancouver's ethnic tapestry. While the questionnaire is dominated by images of Caucasian athletes and politicians, the video represents a somewhat more diverse city. In a sequence of multicultural images, the video promotes the sense that the city is "where the people of the world gather to live, work, and play." The video also includes images of ethnic landscapes that attract tourists to Little India and Chinatown.

### *Culture*

The images and symbols of First Nations cultures have long been mobilized as part of Canadian tourist-promotion strategies. Although recent years have brought some critical recognition of the distortions and commodifications in mainstream imagery, it remains valuable as a transnational avatar connecting culture, people, and place. First Nations cultures are routinely portrayed as one of Canada's distinctive cultural assets (ignoring the persistence of so many historically rooted inequities and dispossessions). Our conversation with a bid official made it clear that the Bid Corporation viewed local First Nations culture as a key means of setting Vancouver apart from the rival bids of Pyongchang and Salzburg. First Nations images figure more prominently in the video (our tabulations found 70 percent more references in the video than in the questionnaire). A series of representations of traditional dances, songs, and art throughout the video led to the final segment of the video where Squamish Chief Gibby, in his native tongue, welcomes the Olympics to Vancouver and Whistler.

The representation of fine arts and culture also changed somewhat as the city's bid progressed. At first, Canadian cultural images of fine arts were used only sparingly. Representations of festivals and fine arts were more prominent at the second stage, possibly reflective of the strong competition from Salzburg (which presented

its role as the home of Mozart and the setting for the “Sound of Music”). In response, Vancouver’s final video was laced with images of festivals and artistic activities, attempting to demonstrate the city’s ample supply of cultural capital.

### *Symbols*

The questionnaire repeatedly portrayed Vancouver’s most familiar landmarks. These landmarks are used as visual aids to connect the audience to the city and its recognizable landscape. The questionnaire also provided gentle mental reminders of the city, which appeared among an onslaught of generic Olympic sporting images. Within the video, fewer landmarks are provided as a result of a need for a more encompassing view of the city from a citizen’s perspective, rather than from a tourist’s. These locally important images sustain the IOC’s request for high public support for the city’s bid.

Yet another pattern emerges from the use of images in the video. The video uses several stereotypically Canadian images that do not necessarily belong with nor even closely represent the city of Vancouver. These images were confirmed to come from a selection of Canadian images used for a variety of Canadian tourism projects. The Bid Corporation’s narrative involved a synthesis of local images and national associations of the imagined Canadian nation-state, and Jack Poole (the Bid Corporation Chairman) repeatedly emphasized that the city’s bid was also a bid for the country of Canada.

### **Latent Content Analysis**

Our next step involved a latent analysis of the video *Our Home*, which was specifically produced for the IOC final bid presentation in Prague. We consider the video as a whole, and we follow the methodologies outlined by Rose (2001) to interpret its production, context, and “audiencing” mechanisms. We used the latent analysis method with the entire video because of the difficulties involved in isolating or sampling discrete images; moreover, we felt that tearing images out of context would be inappropriate and biased. We also had limited access to the video, and we were only able to view it in person at the offices of the Bid Corporation.

### *Contextual Notes*

On a November morning in 2003, we walked to the Bid Corporation's offices in downtown Vancouver. A majestic archway provides an entrance into a near-empty foyer in a restored building that is nestled between the heart of the office-banking district and the quaint, historic brick streets of tourist-infested Gastown. Six stories up, we padded across soft white carpets beneath a low, white-molded ceiling to a room with glass doors. The meeting room boasted a massive window framing the North Shore Mountains, Georgia Straight, and the sails of Canada Place (Vancouver's international conference centre). It was clear that even the location of the office itself symbolized the icons of place—the small batch of stereotypical images of Vancouver that could achieve the broadest possible recognition.

We were permitted to watch *Our Home* twice without supervision. Later, a bid official kindly explained some of the elements in the video and discussed the logic involved in two other accompanying video productions used in the bid. This was certainly *not* an interview: he was friendly but tactful, and he consistently dominated the conversation. We did not, therefore, set out to accomplish all that we had planned for our visit. Our content analysis forms were filled out to the best of our abilities; yet the film cut images quite frequently, complicating efforts to develop a comprehensive storyboard or to tabulate every distinct image. Notwithstanding these limitations, we were able to accumulate a great deal of information and insight into the construction, production, and dissemination of Vancouver's image.

### *Scene Progression*

Figure 2 describes the scene progression of the video. Although visual images are crucial, the presentation also mobilizes audio elements to shape the experience of the audience. The music and narrative help to ensure the continuity and smooth flow of the final product, easing the fast-paced progression of images. Alternating crescendo and softening of volume, shifting paces of musical elements, stylistic transitions, and background sounds help to condition viewer responses. At several points in the video, the sounds of wind,

waves, or seagulls are intermingled with unrelated images to amplify the “nature in the city” connotations of the bid. The video is marked by a consistent focus on vitality, action, and the use of dramatic representations of the city landscape to achieve a “characteristic mix of world city credentials, heritage, environment, high technology, sports, and lifestyle” (Ward 1998, p. 214).

**Figure 2. Scene Progression in *Our Home*.**

Blackout...“OUR HOME” fades in and out in wide capital letters.

Fade in...

Flying above the snow-covered North Shore Mountains at sunrise, zooming down the sparkling slopes and up into the sky over the Georgia Straight and into dazzling metropolitan Vancouver. *Calm serene chords light the background, a “natural” sound.*

A steady stream of quickly cut natural scenes that often include wildlife or children: girl in forest, lake, beaver in river, children playing in pastures, youth dancing on the beach, all intermingled with shots of the sea and the mountains.

Cuts to the downtown core: fast-forward video clip of traffic at night, vibrant city streets, main corridors, and humans in motion.

Cultural capital and nightlife: scenes of restaurants, clubs, theatre, dance, buildings, etc.

Flip to focus on ethnic diversity. *Upbeat music, “ethnic” sound, e.g., Pan flutes, drums...*

Cosmopolitan images: festivals; street parades; public performances.

Scenes of sport in everyday Vancouver life: walking around the sea wall, dragon boats...

Canadian pride and sport support: fans in regalia, excitement about sports.

Olympic scenes: Olympic sports, fast pace cuts, snow shots. *Loud slicing of ice...*

Shots of Canadian athletes and athletes from other countries.

Back to the city; kayakers in False Creek paddle by with city skyline in the background. *Bryan Adams at full force here, the climax of the song and the video, “Here I am! Wild and free...”*

*Original serene chords and “natural” background noise: birds, subtle rhythms. Squamish Chief Gibby’s welcome.*

Fade to black.

Bryan Adams crescendoes

### *Audiencing*

At the heart of visual communication is the practice of audiencing: the process “by which the visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or even rejected, by particular audiences watching in particular circumstances.” (Rose 2001, p. 25). We considered the circumstances involved in the production of *Our Home*, the conditions likely to have shaped its reception by IOC members. First, technological modalities help to frame an audience by producing and displaying images in and for particular environments (see Table 3). Produced for a high-profile decision for a high-profile hallmark event, *Our Home* was tailored in every way to present a carefully constructed image of Vancouver to a small, elite international audience. The information receded (in part due to intellectual property restrictions) soon after the official presentation. Second, compositional modalities—perspective, lighting, organization, and visual metaphors used in the composition of the actual visual representation—help to establish a coherent, effective narrative in order to facilitate the intended audience reaction (our analysis borrows heavily on the methods outlined by Monaco, 2000) (see Table 4). The production qualities, scale, and style of *Our Home* present a rich yet accessible construction of Vancouver: a constructed city fused from local, regional, and “generic” Canadian images that packs in a great deal of information while moving seamlessly between scenes to avoid overwhelming the viewer. Ultimately, *Our Home* achieved a remarkably successful audiencing practice, framed within the social context of a transnational media spectacle—but where the passive nature of most spectacle events was replaced by the serious, influential role of IOC members preparing to render their decision on the location of the 2010 Winter Games.

#### **Table 3. Analysis of Audiencing through Technological Modalities.**

1. *What kind of environments has this video been displayed in? How has this video been displayed?*

The video was shown to International Olympic Committee members on a large projection screen in Congress Hall in Prague at 11 a.m. It was the first of three bid presentations, each lasting approximately 1 hour. The “Our Home” movie was presented as one part of a series of three videos (“Our Plan” and “Our Dream”), and interspersed with presentations by Canadian Olympic athletes, a former

Canadian IOC member, and the Canadian Prime Minister of the time, Jean Chrétien.

Other venues of display are much less formal, without the specific intentions of the first viewing. The video was a one-time production with a single goal: to sell the constructed image of Vancouver to a small, elite international audience. The IOC presentation was broadcast to the Canadian television market, but since then the information is not widely available. The video was available on request for in-person viewing at the Bid Corporation's offices for scholarly purposes, and several Canadian media companies have short clips from the video.

### 2. *Who created the video?*

A local image production firm created the video. Most of the images come from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), or Tourism BC and Tourism Canada. A limited number of unique images were filmed locally specifically for the video, but a larger number of images had no connection to Vancouver or Whistler. An anonymous Bid official explained that the video was "trying to sell the idea of Canada, not just Vancouver and Whistler." Vancouver is symbolized in the video as a beautiful place that represents Canada's good and ethical reputation.

### 3. *Who has access to this production?*

Access is available only to the Vancouver bid officials and those who request permission. However, because Disney owns the rights to the Bryan Adams song used in the background (it was originally made for a Disney movie), the legal right to show the video expired shortly after the July, 2003, IOC decision. Therefore, technically no one has rightful access to view the video anymore. This consideration is no longer relevant, however, since the success of the bid now requires the creation of an entirely new set of brands and images to promote the 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Olympics.

### 4. *What were the ideal conditions of display?*

The video's ideal conditions are limited to the circumstances of the IOC presentation. Conditions of display involved a large theater, sophisticated sound systems, a clear viewing image, and an international audience of elite decisionmakers.

## **Table 4. Analysis of Audiencing through Compositional Modalities.**

### 1. *Production Quality.*

The film quality is very good, with excellent resolution within the limits of the VHS format. Images are clear and focused, with the exception of intentionally receding, indistinct background blurs. Colors are bright and crisp, predominantly shot in natural light (particularly morning and sunset). Images are framed in a letter-box style, where the edges of the frame are subtly blurred in order to convey a sensation of floating, as though the images have no rigid "grounding." The overall effect is a wholesome, silky feeling, as if the viewer is immersed in a vibrant color dream.

### 2. *Scale and Perspective.*

The scale of the frame often works in extremes. In the beginning, while describing Vancouver's setting the video shows large-scale, panoramic shots, often moving over large spaces of land from above. Overview shots are designed to encompass both sea and sky in order to amplify the official bid motto. "Sea to Sky" is visually conveyed as the action of looking up, to the beauty and infinity of the horizon, while showcasing the natural elements of Vancouver's setting. In the section about Vancouver's people the film makes extensive use of close-up face shots, crowd shots, and full-body images of people in action. Fast, sports-style shots dominate the Olympic section of the film.

### 3. *Style, Speed, and Camera.*

The image production team offered the Bid Corporation two stylistic options: a) an "edgy, American-style" version marked by quick, flashy images punctuated by sharp sound transitions and selective shaky camera angles, and b) a "traditional, natural" version marked by smooth movement and an emphasis on nature, culture, and a sense of connection "between body and soul." The Bid Corporation chose the latter, and the official's description of the "traditional" choice invites speculation that the Corporation intended to achieve a traditionally *Canadian* tone in the video. The screen is usually dominated by a single, coherent image, with transitions woven seamlessly from one scene quickly to the next. Despite the wide variety of sources for the raw images, the video enjoys a remarkably smooth sense of flow. Point of view is often at eye-level, on the plane of the horizon between sea to sky or aerial. Bird's-eye views are never used: there is always a horizon in sight.

## Conclusions

Within these pages is our plan for technical excellence. It offers unique value propositions for each major constituency in the Olympic Family. In its setting for the Sea to Sky Games, Vancouver and Whistler offer a compelling theatre for sport: a world-class stage that combines the oceanfront allure of Vancouver with the breathtaking alpine setting of Whistler. But the journey from Sea to Sky—from Vancouver to Whistler—is more than a ride through one of nature's most dramatic landscapes. It is a journey of the spirit, a journey that every Olympian who dreams of success understands. The Sea to Sky Games are about the endless possibilities of human endeavor and the unlimited reach of Olympic ideals (Vancouver Bid Corporation 2002, p. 3).

...a city full of immigrants seeking to enter one civil society, to earn one set of civil rights, for variegated reasons, is precisely not a "global" city; it brings the globe to the metropolis... (Spivak 2000, p. 21).

In this paper, we examined the mobilization of city images in Vancouver's bid to host the 2010 Olympic Games. Our analysis draws on the growing recognition that economic geography and urban geography are fast losing many of their old dichotomies: economics and culture are interwoven in fascinating new ways, and cultural-economic practices are themselves subverting other dualities of public/private, local/global, symbolic/material. Yet from the perspective of elites who have a stake in the fortunes of particular localities, the goal remains the same: Molotch's pioneering theorization of the city as a growth machine still captures the overriding shared interests. The acceleration in transnational tourist, consumption, and sporting economies has simply altered the medium through which city elites pursue their goals: in the process, the city becomes an image-production machine, with locally interested elites coming together in strategic coalitions to constitute symbolic cities for the next itinerant global spectacle. Constructed city images help local elites (and regional and national elites able to capitalize on the city's fortunes) reach "up" into fast-circulating transnational resource flows, and to pull a few of them "down" to the more constrained physical crucible of the city. Vancouver's bid for the 2010 Winter Olympics is only one among many North American experiences with this process in the past decade. But it provides an especially rich illustration of the dilemmas and ironies of the image-production machine. The Vancouver bid constructed a city of multiculturalism in order to present a unique, marketable product; but if the bid discourse is to be accepted, the world is already here in Vancouver. So what makes it distinct? As Spivak would have it, bringing the globe to the metropolis redefines the Canadian; but it does so in dynamic, sometimes contradictory ways that growth-machine elites would rather not appear in any officially sanctioned imagery. And the Vancouver bid's heavy reliance on an appeal to the city of nature exposed the irony faced by every destination that competes in the global space of flows of tourists, conventioners, and Olympiads: a global urban system of places highlighting their natural beauty and "sustainability" in order to lure legions of travelers who will be carried in comfort at high speed thanks to the ever-sustainable whine of jet engines. Meanwhile, many from the team of itinerant consultants and image-production specialists who helped Vancouver

prepare its successful 2010 bid stepped on airplanes shortly after the July 2, 2003, announcement, headed for London, New York, and the next round of candidate cities (Global News Wire 2003). The movable media feast continues.

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