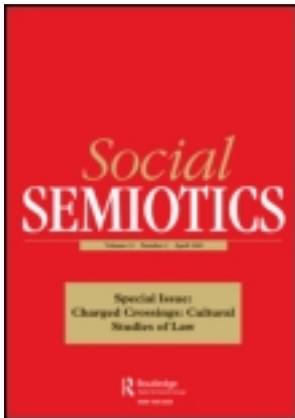


This article was downloaded by: [Chris Arning]

On: 05 September 2013, At: 07:36

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Social Semiotics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/csos20>

### Soft power, ideology and symbolic manipulation in Summer Olympic Games opening ceremonies: a semiotic analysis

Chris Arning<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Creative Semiotics Limited, London, UK

**To cite this article:** Chris Arning (2013) Soft power, ideology and symbolic manipulation in Summer Olympic Games opening ceremonies: a semiotic analysis, *Social Semiotics*, 23:4, 523-544, DOI: [10.1080/10350330.2013.799008](https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2013.799008)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2013.799008>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Soft power, ideology and symbolic manipulation in Summer Olympic Games opening ceremonies: a semiotic analysis

Chris Arning\*

*Creative Semiotics Limited, London, UK*

*(Received 6 March 2012; final version received 1 March 2013)*

This paper is a semiotic analysis of Summer Olympic Games Opening ceremonies as performative texts. Owing to massive media attention, these events have become eagerly awaited global spectacles. However, with such a wide audience, the challenge is to convey both an Olympic welcome and something truly unique about the host city and nation. This creates a communication challenge and some interesting questions in terms of symbolism. Research into the content of Olympic Games ceremonies reveals an exercise both in forging internal cohesion and in projecting soft power. Soft power is an increasingly valuable currency in a multipolar world and opening ceremonies are a prime soft power opportunity. The paper seeks to uncover the ways successive Olympics Games organising committees have sought to balance the competing communicational objectives of opening ceremonies through double coding. The author considers every ceremony from Moscow 1980 to London 2012 in this comparative semiotic analysis.

**Keywords:** Olympics; soft power; nation branding; codes; ideology

### Introduction

Both present audiences and Olympic tradition have come to expect a dramatic and evocative display of what the host city and nation most want to communicate about themselves. John MacAloon (1992)

This paper applies a semiotic perspective to the symbolic content of Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies. It is estimated that the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games draws an audience of around 4 billion viewers. It is one of the moments where we, as television viewers are invited to feel linked with others around the world in a truly global event. In such a context, it is no wonder that the event comes under close scrutiny. Olympic Games Ceremonies are eagerly critiqued by journalists and pundits giving their verdict on its scale and significance.

Logically it ought to be the province of semiotics to submit ceremonies to serious scrutiny. A short literature review shows a gap in the corpus. There is plenty of academic work on the Summer Olympics from sports science and cultural studies departments. John MacAloon has done solid anthropological work particularly by (1984 etc). There are works from the cultural studies perspective which look at television media consumption (Rivenburgh and Larson 1991). Also plentiful are studies that examine the impact of the Olympics on city branding (notably de Moragas et al. 1995), but no

---

\*Email: [chris@creativesemiotics.co.uk](mailto:chris@creativesemiotics.co.uk)

specific semiotic analysis of the ceremonies. Since making connections and spotting significant patterns between and across sign producing phenomena is a core semiotic technique, ceremonies would seem amenable to a semiotic perspective. There have been studies which contain passages of close analysis of the cultural programme; notably (Chen, Chwen Chwen 2012; Tiaganou 2009) (Housel 2007) and that go on to make interpretive leaps on the overall thematic narrative. These analysts, however, only examine discrete parts of the ceremony without encompassing the whole text and so fall short. They omit to make potentially illuminating comparisons based on consideration of previous or subsequent opening ceremonies. Nowhere is an explicitly semiotic framework deployed. The aim with this comparative analysis is not to comprehensively fill the gap – which would exceed this journal’s word limit. The modest aim is to merely identify some recurrent themes in the ceremony as a semiotic text. The focus will be on looking at a repertoire of themes used across the ceremonies. The overall thesis is that Olympic Games opening ceremonies help to project soft power and cement domestic cohesion through deployment of double-coded signing. It is hoped this rough but broad study will inspire and open up avenues for further research.<sup>1</sup>

### **Duality and ambiguity in communication: internationalism and nation branding**

The ceremonies are visually dramatic and necessarily employ abstract representations of the host setting within the Olympic stadium (e.g., creating a river out of flowing blue cloth). As in all interactions across cultures, however, there is an inherent challenge to understanding the cultural performances designed by the Olympic host. (Nancy K. Rivenburgh 2004:??)

The opening ceremony is a massive spectacle and a complex communicational and semiotic text. The audience is diverse, segmented and splintered in its preferences and expectations. The ceremony organisers need to strike some sort of balance between the imperatives of the International Olympic Committee to provide a non-partisan welcome to the athletes from the world’s nations and the desire on the part of the host city’s organising Committee, for its part, to showcase the host city in the most favourable light. The ceremony itself is a *mélange* of mandatory IOC protocols and an artistic programme. The official culmination of the event is the lighting of the Olympic torch, but prior to that there is the athlete’s parade and the discharging of various IOC mandates such as speeches by heads of state and other dignitaries, national anthems, unfurling flags and oath taking. The artistic programme is, however, what forms the idiosyncratic element of any given ceremony. This analysis will exclude the IOC sections, except when creative inflection of elements such as representation of the peace dove, the appearance of the Olympic rings, or the torch lighting seems germane.

Rivenburgh and Larson note that “the tension between Olympic internationalism and national intent is inherent in the Olympic Movement and a theme of scholarly attempts to understand the movement” (1991, 75). This is particularly crucial when one considers that for those outside of the stadium the ceremony is highly mediated. As sign processors, consumers of the event are at the mercy of broadcasters and commentators. Rivenburgh and Larson (1991) showed how the vagaries of shot selection can potentially frame interpretation of the ceremony. Rivenburgh (2004), shows how the significance of sections of the show can often be garbled by lazy or ill informed punditry and how the cultural foibles of commentators skew what viewers are shown and told about what they are shown. “MacAloon (1992) argues that: “the media have little appreciation for the popular festival embedded in the Olympic event

at the local, cultural level. This is compounded by the fact that media personnel covering the Games are most often sports journalists who may be uncomfortable with providing cultural or political commentary.” (cited in Rivenburgh 2004, 12). All this shows how fraught the clear transmission of a cultural programme can be and how the best intentions can be foiled. As we shall see, this has somewhat determined the repertoire of thematic content chosen. So, how can semiotics help us better understand how these ceremonies produce meaning?

### **Semiotic codes and metaphor in summer Olympics opening ceremonies**

Since Moscow 1980, the seminal modern day Opening Ceremony organisers have deployed an arsenal of semiotic and rhetorical tools in an attempt to impress and to mollify the various constituencies, to perform various ideological tasks. If we consider the ceremony as a text, what signs and sign systems and representational codes were called upon to do this? Like other communication categories with symbolic content, whether car advertising or music videos, the Olympic Opening Ceremonies have over time fallen into codes of communication. (See Appendix for full list of signs in the soft power context):

In semiotics, a “code” is a system of signs which incorporates relations and meanings. Like signs, codes can be more or less objective and correspondingly, less or more subjective . . . An expressive code is a subjective code with a weak, possibly implicit convention. Signs of an expressive code connote and call for participation . . . the message is subject to hermeneutics – interpretation through the mind of the addresser – rather than decoding. (Mollerup, 80)

There are two types of semiotic code that are used which pertain to Peirce’s division of signs into iconic and symbolic. Firstly there are iconic signs. Marcel Danesi writes of these, glossing Peirce:

Iconicity, is simulative semiosis. It is evidence that human understanding is guided initially by sensory perceptions and is thus sensitive to recurrent patterns of colour, shape, dimension, movement, sound, taste, and so on . . . throughout life, they remain functional subsystems of human communication that can always be utilized as more generic forms when linguistic interaction is impossible or limited. (Danesi 2004, 42)

These are perfectly suited for use of more a conative communicating function geared to a generic international audience. Secondly, there are the symbolic signs involving the pacts of meaning made, wittingly or unwittingly by a quorum of sign users within the rubric of a shared culture. Danesi defines symbol as “a sign that represents the referent through cultural convention” (2004, 181). These are the more emotive Jacobsonian signs that communicate amongst the host citizens.

As Peirce wrote, pure indexes, icons and symbols are rare in nature, most signs tend to be combinations of all three, and all symbols carry some iconic content. So it is, in opening ceremonies too. Dragon dances are colourful displays of mass orchestrations to the outside observer, but will have special cultural resonance for Koreans. Similarly, the delicacy of line in scroll painting can be appreciated all as a sign of aesthetic focus though Chinese hearts drilled in brush strokes from childhood particularly delight to the flair of the performance, may note paeans to famous calligraphers and trace the nuanced evolution of the “wa” harmony character. National dances in costume (as in Barcelona 1992; Moscow 1980) will be mere folkloric furniture for an

international audience but a source of pride for that sub culture. Cheerleaders and pick-up trucks were sources of pride for the Delta South in Atlanta 1996.

This is strikingly similar to what Umberto Eco and others have called “double coding”. Architectural critic Charles Jencks wrote about double coding as a defining attribute of post modernism along with eclecticism, parody, displacement and irony. “The combination of Modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects” (Jencks 1996, 14). But the coding division within the structure Olympics ceremonies is not between elites and the demotic, but between the global audience and the cognoscenti of host city citizens.

In the interests of brevity, this paper focuses on thematic codes that use iconic signs as they are particularly consistent. Since 1980 they have become strong visual proxies for meaning. They are simple and straightforward enough to be grasped instantly and effortlessly by a diverse international audience. These iconic signs would include the use of pristine white clad maidens for purity and innocence, floral motifs as signs of welcome, life, fertility and of auspicious fortune, mascots for humour and international flags for solidarity and warmth and so forth. The analysis breaks these down into six main categories for the purposes of analysis:

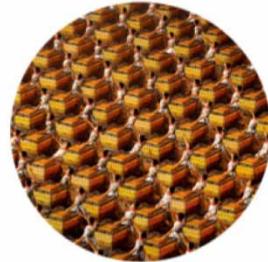
- Mass orchestration
- Technological prowess
- Symbolic ingenuity
- Aesthetic enchantment
- Whimsy and humour
- Musical grandeur



**Los Angeles 1984**



**Seoul 1988**



**Beijing 2008**



**Beijing 2008**



**Moscow 1980**



**Seoul 1988**

### ***Soft power via mass orchestration***

Moscow 1980, Seoul 1988 and Beijing 2008 were all examples of marshalling of massive numbers of people. Moscow 1980's ceremony set the precedent. It was a flaunting of Soviet military power with the added cultural capital of the Bolshoi ballet – which in the 1980s was a soft power trump card – and used gymnastic prowess and grace as a demonstration of Soviet might and skill. Moscow was the seminal Olympics that inaugurated the code of orchestration. It is likely that this was building upon the callisthenics of the Soviet tradition. Orlando Figes wrote in his chapter on Soviet ethics: “the ideal was expressed by the system known as ‘bio mechanics’ which was not unlike reflexology and rhythmic gymnastics . . . so that they could tell a story through the supple movements of their whole bodies . . .” (Figes 2002, 463). This very Soviet mechanisation through rhythmic regimentation was part of the Soviet ideal of voiding the nuance of human emotion, promoting robot like beings incorporated into proletarian units.

What is significant from the semiotic perspective about this is that the mass orchestration has much to do with the military drill and the military walk past. It is a display of military strength and a deterrent and the ability to deploy resources, despite the friendly engaging messaging. Passages of undulation – where dancers move in concert in a tight sine wave along a line or across a perimeter – is a particular version or sub-set of orchestration and has itself become a recurrent code. This was present in Moscow (1980), Seoul (1988), Sydney (2000) and Beijing (2008). What is interesting about undulation, which mirrors the Mexican wave happening in the audience is that it is about positive flow and harmony, and not just about power. This is an opposite metaphor for soft power, which often conceals hegemony under attraction.

What defined Beijing was the impeccable tightness of the choreography. The *Fou* drummers' sequence was the most impressive lockstep rhythm synchronisation ever seen. The drummers were not just in time, but they moved their bodies either side of the drums in lockstep. Indeed, tightness of choreography in mass orchestration was Beijing's trump card.

### ***Soft power via technological prowess***

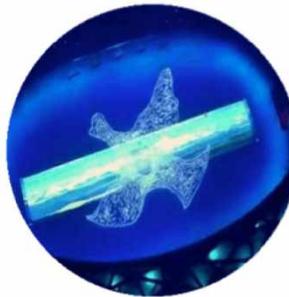
Host cities seek to connote progressive modernity through feats of technology. The use of technological display in Olympic Opening ceremonies returns technology to its original etymology. Heidegger writes on technology: “*Unlocking, transforming, storing, distributing, and switching about are ways of revealing [that dominate the age of technological modernity]*” (*QT*, 297–298). Given that the technology is always in the service of entertainment and fantasy, it is a clever way of smuggling in soft power messages in the guise of spectacle.

Moscow in 1980 defied gravity through a gymnastic floor show that ended in moving human sculpture. To underscore the sophistication of the Soviet powerbase Moscow 1980 also included a message from a Cosmonauts crew on a live feed from space, to the delight of the crowd. Los Angeles surprised the world by landing a jet pack in the middle of the stadium. Seoul followed this by creating the Olympic rings via a coordinated parachute team. Sydney employed wire assistance at a new level performing acrobatics a la Cirque du Soleil and used this to instigate a quantum leap in deployment of vertical scale from previous ceremonies.

Lighting has been a vital facet of technology projection since Barcelona held a ceremony set in the evening and every opening ceremony spectacle has been shrouded in dark shadow since 2000. This is so as to allow lighting and colour to have the maximum visual impact. In that ceremony, the light rods given to spectators created a light shimmering firefly effect. In Athens 2004, the use of a luminous javelin hurled slowly across the stadium by what appeared to be a holographic centaur. The rise of a sculpted Cycladic idol out of the serene calm of the lake was another example of this theme. The superimposition via laser lighting of geometric shapes followed this and the holographic evocation of the double helix worked well. Beijing 2008 was the first to use LED lights at the start of the ceremony – a number of dances used colours to represent both ancient and modernity. The prologue to the ceremony was a stunning walk through the old North South Imperial Axis towards the Bird's nest stadium.



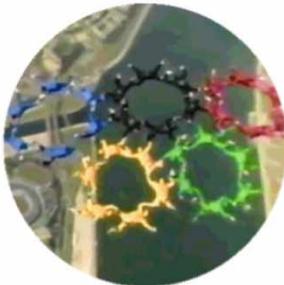
**Los Angeles 1984**



**Beijing 2008**



**Beijing 2008**



**Seoul 1988**



**London 2012**



**Athens 2004**

Lighting is a basic metaphor for hope, innocence and discovery of human knowledge as via the Prometheus myth in Greek mythology. This enables the host to portrays themselves as bringers of enlightenment and of *savoir-faire* through their brandishing of digital technology.

### ***Soft power via symbolic ingenuity***

One of the prime ways in which soft power is conveyed is through symbolic manipulation that conveys the cleverness of the organisers and their visual acuity. Displays and clever visual formations are a way for them to demonstrate their ingenuity and to entertain the audience.

Moscow in 1980 set the stage for this area by creating, a card stunt area, manipulated one would assume by highly trained, meticulously drilled volunteers brandishing cards to form mosaic patterns and giving a dialectical commentary on what was happening in the stadium. Los Angeles 1984 has marching bands form circles that merged into one another and then formed several different types of geometric shapes from lozenges to diagonal and orthogonal lines. There was a merger between the floral motif and that of the star badge. The culmination of these plastic peregrinations however was a tracing of a national map of the United States.



**Moscow 1980**



**Seoul 1988**



**Seoul 1988**



**Atlanta 1996**



**Beijing 2008**



**London 2012**

Seoul 1988 featured a modern dance presentation that started with dancers forming circles going through various shapes including Olympic rings before resolving themselves into the numerals of 88 and then into the word Welcome in both English and then in the Korean alphabet.

Barcelona 1992's human pyramids, *Els Castellers* was a good example of the double-coded syncretism involved in many moments of the Olympic opening ceremony. It was clever in soft power stakes because, whilst on the face of it representing the 12 EU countries, it was also part of Catalan folklore involving simultaneously metaphorical and more local symbolic codes.

The Olympic rings have the distinction of being the most recognised logo in the world as a result of a 1995 survey. The presentation of the rings has become a showpiece moment of ceremonies. There is always hushed expectation and suspense before the reveal moment.

Both Seoul 1988 and Barcelona 1992 had their performers forming their games logo through brandishing coloured fabrics. In Atlanta 1996, the games logo suddenly drained down a plughole and was hidden to reveal a phalanx of

cheerleaders. Sydney Olympics 2000 made an immediate statement by forming the Olympic rings before the ceremony had really even started, accompanying the fanfare creating the Olympic rings in a circle of galloping horses. In one of the more impressive moments in the Cycladic idol in the Athens opening ceremony was prized apart to reveal a kouros within (Taiganou 2009) which itself then dematerialised.

The Olympic rings are the most recognisable brand logo in the world. The rings therefore carry the kudos and imprimatur of IOC stewardship. This means that the reveal moment in a ceremony holds special prominence. The inventiveness with which they are introduced is an acid test for the symbolic nous and planning prowess of successive organising committees.

Neuroscientists have concluded that humans are hard wired to respond with pleasure to solving visual trickery, puns *trompe d'oeils* and other visual conundrums. Ceremonies are replete with visual pun moments that produce good will in beholders. (Ramchandran 2012).



**Barcelona 1992**



**Moscow 1980**



**Atlanta 1996**



**Seoul 1988**



**Athens 2004**



**Sydney 2000**

### *Soft power via aesthetic enchantment*

Opening ceremonies are designed to promote rapprochement and to neutralise negativity through the rhetoric of softness and empathy. Soft, mollifying signs such as balloons and floral motifs are ubiquitous. The Barcelona Olympic Games began with a *rama de flores* from the Rambla formed in multi colours and then had imaginative surrealist creations, cavorting during the Land of Passion section. The design of the costumes with soft, flowing materials conveys softness and the maritime theme of the

sea accentuate this. Seoul 1988 ceremony featured a flower dance for peace featuring women in long sleeves wielding large white cloths. In the opening sequence for the Atlanta 1996 Games, the various tribes were dressed in hooped costumes resembling the ringlets of the orchid. In the Southern Spirit section of the opera pageant, fireflies and butterflies filled the stadium with light, flowing “wing like” material.

Flowers played an important role in the Sydney Olympics 2000 Games opening ceremony. Indigenous flowers including *warratas*, desert peas, water lilies, *blue lenulfias*, swamp daisies and the eucalypt were represented and named in commentary. In the Beijing ceremony, the propitious clouds which are a key design motif of Chinese visual culture appeared implanted to embellish and soften the overall augustness of the display. Flowers, of course, may conceal ideological aims through their scent and embellishment. Ohtsuka Tierney writing on ideology and symbolism in the Imperial Japanese Army looked at how cherry blossoms became symbols of painful beauty and ephemeral life used to engender self sacrifice on the part of *tokkotai* (*kamikaze* pilots) – nothing so sinister is implied here, simply that flowers are easy defaults for neutralising potential threats and masking any unsavoury issues (Ohtsuka 2002).

In Seoul 1988, in a triumph of syncretism, Greek maidens/Korean nymphs held the stage for a larger part of the ceremony. Also, in the games, the swirling vortex of the Seoul 1988 logo, re-created using colourful handkerchiefs during the ceremony was a combination of softness and dynamism. In Atlanta 1996, the section of the show involving the triumph of the Southern spirits used the flowing silk to denote the charm of the Southern belle, presumably over the horror of the Civil War, which used the light silken material in Barcelona. Sydney 2000, in the Deep Sea Dreaming section brought to life the coral reef and aquatic life with vivid portrayals of animals, such as jellyfish and tropical fish to beguile a stunned audience with magical water scenes.

Barcelona 1992 set a new standard in aesthetic enchantment and is remembered for the ornateness of its costumes. Tellingly, Barcelona ignored bull fighting and overt displays of machismo. The most aggressive displays of Spanish passion were displayed by the fiercely stomping *sevillana* women perceptually proxies for Mediterranean identity, seen as a more passionate, therefore feminine, culture. This flamboyance would be copied in Atlanta 1996. Martial beauty has been employed as a tactic and soft power tool in beauty pageants, and the Olympics provide nations with a way of promoting soft power through the beauty of their citizens.

In addition to this there is the frequent use of light silk, the draping of light and diaphanous material. This was also an innovation started in Barcelona and used in Atlanta and Sydney, where it was reprised in order to cover the crowd in a dove, emphasising peace and softness.

### ***Soft power via whimsy***

Playful whimsy and the instantaneity and surprise with which spectators can be whisked out of awe and into a state of delight is itself part of the symbolic manipulation. Whimsy can be defined as “playful creation”. Moscow showed itself capable of rare whimsy not only in the use of children playing with hobby horses and dolls in a re-creation of the children’s nursery, but also with a phalanx of dancing bear mascots, riffing on dancing bears of popular imagination. Whimsy usually involves a sense of the unexpected, the self-effacing and beguiling charm.

Seoul followed a massive and aggressive taekwondo display with a little boy with a hoop, who was presumably deliberately designed to be incongruous in that setting. London followed the placidity of Green and Pleasant Isle with pandemonium. In Beijing the awe inspiring display of the *Fou* drummers and the firework footsteps making their way up the imperial axis in Beijing was followed by a firefly sequence and tranquil music. This is the same Hollywood technique that uses the “doomsday mega drone” to open up an audience, only to fill them with schmaltz.

**Seoul 1988****Moscow 1980****Sydney 2000****Athens 2004****London 2012****Seoul 1988**

Sydney 2000 was filled with moments of whimsy. In the opening section entitled *Deep Sea Dreaming*, a group of amateur looking scuba divers featured flipping their way comically across the stadium, and later on, a phalanx of suburban lawnmowers were used. Beijing 2008 which in general, lacked the whimsy of other ceremonies, allowed itself to relax in the reveal, when human pistons within the press type section emerged to salute and thank the audience. Athens 2004 seemed to almost entirely lack whimsy gripped in glassy and cryptic minimalism.

Mascots, which anyway are designed to welcome the world, have been a part of this. Some mascots are more memorable than others. It seems that Moscow's Misha the bear, *honi* from Seoul 1988 and from 1992 Barcelona have been seen to be particularly successful.

This is soft power in terms of nation branding because it is designed to demonstrate both a soft heart and the self-assurance and strength to be able to let the mask of power slip. Ai Wei Wei, dissident artist criticised Beijing for not having enough wit and whimsy in their ceremony.

### *Soft power via musical grandeur*

There are two ways that music promotes soft power – firstly, in the direct effect they have on the emotions of the spectator terms of emotional impulse. Music is one of the most powerful media with which to manipulate emotions and impact on interpretation, because neurologically it circumvents our ability to filter out or choose what we listen to (Arning and Gordon 2006). A rich tradition of film music theory (Altman 1987) has shown how this works in practice. Secondly, certain pieces of music have symbolic importance, through the connotative links and centrality in identity construction, which they may play amongst a particular listenership. For instance, two pieces of music, the John Williams Olympic Anthem and Beethoven's Ode to Joy have become associated with the Olympics. Philip Tagg (Tagg 1992) refers to musical fragments such as these as “genre synecdoches” that brings to mind a whole epoch of music. They are associated both with romanticism and late nineteenth century nationalism. The use of drum rolls and heraldic cornets are used in order to introduce heads of state and national anthems.

Musical grandeur is at its most basic and effective through the use of percussion and drums. Rhythm and deep percussive sound has a universal impact through a low frequency connect to our autonomic nervous system. Drumming has the effect of demanding attention and enveloping spectators in the sound. Philip Tagg in his pioneering work refers to these as “anaphones” as sonic metaphors that refer to paramusical meanings. In this case, power, suspense and forthcoming crescendo. Every Olympic ceremony has used drums extensively in a number of ways. Drum pulses accompanied the countdown to the Barcelona Olympic Games. Drums have been used en masse in Seoul 1988, Sydney 2000, and in Beijing 2008. The heartbeat of the runner in the nocturnal seascape of the Athens Olympics in 2004 segued into a long drumming sequence. The next sequence was characterised by timpani drums punctuating the sequence of footage projected onto the fragments of sculpture. The dancers surrounding the pool as the tree of life is raised are accompanied by martial drumming. The Atlanta 1996 Olympics began with the 5 Olympic tribes performing to a *mass* band percussion. The Arrival Section of the Sydney 2000 Games Ceremony had a tap dancing section eliciting crowd reaction and later featured a drum troupe accompanying. Beijing started with massed *Fou* drummers, which were a warning of the awesome power of orchestration to come later in the show, combined with traditional wood blocks and cymbals.

The use of musical grandeur is another example of iconic and symbolic signs being woven together seamlessly in a musical confection designed to seduce and stun foreign audiences, and to carry domestic audiences away in feelings of affinity and nostalgia for national sounds.

### **London 2012**

So what about London 2012 in the context of what has been gleaned from other ceremonies?

The London 2012 opening ceremony, as masterminded by Danny Boyle, was generally seen in the UK – with some notable exceptions, see Giles Coren (2012) article – hailed as brave, conceptually original, inventive and even moving. It had a mixed reception across the world press as eccentric and uniquely British but baffling

in parts. It is the contention here that this was principally because the ceremony was unusually heavy on symbolic signs resonating especially with a domestic audience. The UK was in a unique position since some of these signs are also popular culture exports such as Mr. Bean. Others were largely inscrutable and baffling for an international audience (some cult situation comedies broadcast in the BBC show section), and cryptic signs such as embedded sinuous shape of the Thames in the set:

This wasn't like Beijing, a ceremony that cost hundreds of millions of pounds aimed at showing that China was a superpower capable of drilling its people with military precision into a synchronised fist. It was a celebration of our genius, tolerance, humour, and we have given to the world . . . And it felt right because this spectacular opening ceremony possessed those two great British traits: self-deprecation and understatement. (Reade 2012, 2)

Chronological running order was syntagmatically jumbled and joyfully eclectic in composition. Commentator Ashley Mauritzen writes: “the transition from astro-turfed bucolic idyll to the dark towers of the industrial revolution, First World War soldiers, Sergeant Peppers and Pearly Queens, not to mention the NHS swing routine led many to label it “bonkers” but rarely without putting the word “wonderfully” immediately before it . . . others found it accessible. A few found fault in its irreverence” (Mauritzen 2012). The London Ceremony did innovate. It innovated through refusing altogether to compete in some categories entirely and excelling in others. If we apply the code areas as established above, we will however, see that seen in the context of previous ceremonies, we can disentangle the utterly novel from prudent adaptation.

### ***Mass orchestration***

An area where London flouted a hitherto hallowed code. The boldness and steam punk boldness of the pandemonium sequence did not always hide the tawdry choreography and poorly coordinated dancing. The fearful lack of symmetry was exacerbated by the miscellaneous dress code of many of the performers. Parts of the ceremony could be described as ramshackle. The Green and Pleasant land opening section was notable a higgledy-piggledy rural landscape with plots of different shapes and people meandering around. The organic nature of movement and verisimilitude flouted this code. Colour palette was drab and incoherent compared with other shows. The digital section centred around two young suitors notable for the abandon and informality with which the dancers executed dance sequences – typical of a drunken night out and a deliberate repudiation of tight choreography.

### ***Technological prowess***

The transition between shot sections of the show and the use of LED panels across the stadium was the main. In general, though you could not have a greater contrast between the LED countdown in Beijing and the sight of numbered balloons popping around the stadium, and one bath failing to pop. On the other hand, the installation of 637,191 lights allowed the Ceremony to become more of an immersive experience. The James Bond section draped the stadium with a digitally rendered Union Jack.

The prelude to the NHS section saw a giant electro cardiogram emblazoned across the stage. The show was distinguished by the interpolation of a digital screen in parts, which kicked off and chaptered the show and incorporated outside elements although the quality of the edit seemed shoddy in parts.

### *Symbolic ingenuity*

There were several moments of ingenuity in the show. One of these would be the start of the NHS tribute “second to the right and straight on till morning”. This began with a rendition of tubular bells featuring an ECG pulse of neon light making its ghostly way across the stadium. Another moment of ingenuity was the interpretation of the dove, which was interpreted by a swirling array of lit dancers by a team of caped cyclists. Clearly the two most memorable moments of the ceremony were the iron foundry forging of the Olympic ring joining its counterparts from the four corners of the stadium. This clever piecing together positioned the UK as not only catalysts of our industrialised world, but, by associations, progenitors of the Olympics. The Thomas Heatherwick cauldron was symbolically ingenious, because the 204 copper petals were initially splayed apart. The slow convergence to form the Olympic torch gave a special poignancy to the event and blended British design with a more inclusive ethos. Both these moments contained suspense, courted bewilderment but were resolved with élan.

### *Humour and whimsy*

London certainly took whimsy to another level with the Rowan Atkinson portion of the show reprising Eric Morecambe with Andre Previn in goofing around. The section with the Queen and James Bond, (Daniel Craig) spoof jumping out of a helicopter was similarly in line. On the BBC World Service Radio the day afterwards, it was commented on by a Russian commentator that, probably no other head of state would have made herself the accessory of the Olympic organisers as the Queen had done – it was seen as a function not only of Britain’s eccentricity and the informality but also the so called *sporting nature* of the country. The NHS section too with the nurses putting “sick” children to bed was a way of creating empathy.

### *Aesthetic enchantment*

This was another area where the code was underexploited. London promoted tenderness via the promotion of the National Health Service, where nurses were caregivers, the patients were cast as mewling infants and threats were warded off by the notional matriarch (Mary Poppinses as they descended to do battle with the forces of evil.) In fact this whole section was an eulogy to British children’s literature, as well as the health service. This cast Britain as a caring, compassionate place, with a human engaging face, JK Rowling. There were few parts of the ceremony focused on enchantment as such. The Emeli Sandé section and the tribute to the victims of 2005 tube bombing using amber lighting, the cobalt blue doves on bicycles and descending Mary Poppinses against the luminous blue of NHS beds were rare examples.

### ***Musical grandeur***

In London in 2012, music worked in both ways listed above. In the first instance, the Pandemonium section by the Underworld ceremony used rolling military style drums to convey the portentous nature of the industrial revolution. Arguably, it played a massive part in masking the rough and patchwork nature of some of the stage direction and choreography. It did mark the true start of the ceremony punctuated with the coming together of rings.

If music can help project soft power, then the opening ceremony in London references a back catalogue of British music from Elgar through Mike Oldfield through the Sex Pistols and Dizzee Rascal proving that British music is not only wondrous in its variety and that music acts as a metonym for the boisterous plurality of British democracy that can accommodate all sorts of genres even here, although the bass and underlying percussive strength were foremost.

### **The semiotic status of opening ceremonies: soft power parades, national pageants**

From the semiotic perspective, what will be argued here is that the opening ceremony can be viewed as reading a performative semiotic text that has at its heart, two ideological objectives. Firstly, the aim is to project soft power to advance trade and foreign policy goals. Roman Jakobson in *Linguistics and Poetics* (Jakobson 1960) wrote about each communicative act having a subtle bias. If we understand the host city organising committee to be the addresser and the global audience to be the addressee, then this is the CONATIVE function that Jakobson argued was focused on the intelligibility of the message. Secondly, embedded into each ceremony is an anchoring and galvanising function, that is, to forge a national narrative for the host country's citizens that will increase a sense of an "imagined community". This performs various ideological tasks, such as to quelling dissent and manufacturing consent. If we see the addresser here as expressing own self-image, then this is more closely related to the EMOTIVE function of Jakobson's scheme. Both are present in the double-coded ceremonies.

### ***External objective: "soft power" projection***

"It is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies" (Nye 2005) Soft power, coined by political theorist Joseph Nye, is now a very influential concept. Nye writes: "A country may attain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity – want to follow it" (2005, 5). This ability to influence through inducement rather than coercion is what is known as "soft power". Nye suggested that soft power could increasingly trump "hard power" or military might in a world increasingly globalised, interdependent and squeamish in the face of conflict. Soft power has permeated into discourse as a proxy for measuring the success of a country. In their special issue on soft power, *Monocle* magazine offers a ranking of nations that is based on a series of "soft power" criteria. These include desiderata such as the number of cultural missions, Nobel laureates and think tanks, number of UNESCO world heritage sites, universities in the global top 100, number

of foreign correspondents resident in that country etc. Soft power, hence relies on a serendipitous mix of influences from sports to the music industry; an aggregation of civil society. The Olympic Ceremony is unique as a cultural product with soft power impact underwritten and indirectly influenced by governments.

It is of course not just the ceremony that enables the projection of soft power. The Olympic logo, official mascots and all the design collateral and other paraphernalia of each Olympic city is designed to leave a strong imprint of meaning in the service of both city and nation branding.<sup>2</sup>

What this paper argues is that the ceremony is intended as the crystallisation and dramatisation of the nation's narrative as soft power – a cluster of signs and semiotic gambits condensed into a three hour show. The Berlin Olympics 1936 is often cited as an example of naked ideological display. The nominally pacific regimes holding the Summer Olympics since 1980 have used soft power surreptitiously to accomplish ideological objectives through signs.

When we discuss projection of soft power, we need to consider for whom, to what end, and in what diplomatic context. Each Opening ceremony has had an edifying historical background to take into account as we start to interpret the panoply of codes used. Correlating the skew on a spectrum between iconic or symbolic signs within the ceremony against the soft power context is rather fruitful. A faint pattern can be discerned between urgent soft power agendas and assiduous deployment of neutralising iconic signs. The 1980 Moscow ceremony can be read as an attempt to mollify the West and offer up the soft underbelly of the Soviet Union, whimsy, children's anthems and all. South Korea 1988 ceremony attempted to put the country on the map with a discourse of innocence and harmony at its heart. Barcelona 1992 used aesthetic prowess and a shrewd balance of Mediterranean, Spanish and Catalan to roll back stereotypes about backwards, previously autocratic Spain. The USA in LA 1984 had a brief to remind the world of American breeziness and fun and in Atlanta 1996 to promote the South and a more internationally minded country (with chequered results). Sydney 2000 was a coming out party for Australia, to project soft power with an almost blank canvas and with few negative stereotypes to neutralise, except perhaps genocide against aboriginal peoples, seemed to include as many symbolic and iconic elements. Athens 2004, though it also had a soft power agenda, Taiganou comments: "Europeanization was an obvious priority for the (Pasok) administration..." (2009, 82) the ceremony was steeped in symbolism and the ceremony fixated on a rich, historic and cultural heritage and not on soft signs. Beijing 2008 did a fine job of orchestrating the projection of soft iconic signs (under the rubric of "harmony") as we glean from (Chen, Colapinto, and Lao 2012): "From China's viewpoint, hosting the Olympics was a chance to showcase rapid economic development to the rest of the world, win respect and favour internationally and an opportunity to develop favourable media coverage worldwide".

### ***Internal objective: "auto-communication"***

The Olympic Games opening ceremony is also an "inside job" seeking to salve and heal internal wounds. Moscow 1980 was at pains to underscore the happy unity of the Soviet Union by showcasing local national dance. Both US ceremonies in 1984 and 1996 made a point of fully paying homage to the contribution of African-American culture through music and torch bearer recognition. The Barcelona 1992

Games notoriously involved a delicate balancing act between Catalonian promotional imperatives whilst assuaging its former Castilian nemesis. The 2000 Sydney ceremony was criticised for white washing history and seeking to portray a multiracial paradise. Athens in 2004 was chastised for including Roma people in the final section. London 2012's Danny Boyle was accused of delusional "socialism".

As Taiganou (2009) points, out, the Olympic movement was revived in the 1890s at the height of national power building which saw the zenith not only of Victoria's British Empire, but also the rise of Wilhelmine Germany and the United States. It should therefore, be no surprise that there is a sense in which opening ceremonies are national pageants that are designed to elicit greater loyalty on the part of the citizens of that nation. "Under certain circumstances, a coronation might be seen by participants and contemporaries as a symbolic reaffirmation of national greatness... the same ceremony might assume the characteristics of collective longing for past glories... the text and format it could be interpreted as a requiem for the country as a great power" (Taiganou 2009, 105). Hobsbawn and Ranger also note that in line with the increasing splendour and size of the spectacle, the emergence of mass media in the form of BBC broadcasts made these rituals, such as the Royal weddings and Christmas broadcasts, possible for mass participation too. A cynical observer might almost adopt this latest Cannadine verbatim as the putative subtitle for the London 2012 Olympic Games Ceremony.

As Tomlinson's (1996) analysis of Olympic ceremonies points out, these events provide spaces for ritual and performance of "new national and ethnic demands" (p. 588) in the face of uneven globalising processes.

To pursue this a little further, for Yuri Lotman, in *Universe of the Mind*, coded communication has different modalities. It is possible to view opening ceremonies as poetic texts, which are structured to work on I-I channel, to act as auto communication to the domestic audience and press. Lotman says "the addresser inwardly reconstructs his/her essence" (Lotman 1991, 29). Lotman writes: "In the process of auto-communication the actual person is reformed and this process is connected with a very wide range of cultural functions, range from the sense of individual existence... to self-discovery and auto-psychotherapy" (Lotman 1991, 29).

### Conclusions and discussion

This paper has looked at the main thematic clusters out of which organising committees have constructed their ceremonies as texts. Mass orchestration, symbolic ingenuity, aesthetic enchantment, musical grandeur, whimsy and humour and technological prowess have been the categories chosen. Within and through these categories host cities have deployed a plethora of iconic and symbolic signs so as to communicate to global and domestic viewers.

One of the main contentions of this paper is that Opening Ceremonies have become coveted opportunities to project a nation's soft power; however, this is nothing new. Cannadine (in Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) in his analysis of uses of pomp and pageantry and ritual in the British monarchy 1870–1953 looks at the efflorescence of ceremony and pomp in the late nineteenth century, as a reflection of the competitiveness of nations. "As international relations became increasingly tense, this added a further inducement to the "invention of tradition", as national rivalry was both expressed and sublimated in ceremonial competition". (Cannadine 1983,

133). It is possible to see modern opening ceremonies since 1980, as being driven firstly by the cold war, then by the development of a multipolar world, where soft power gains are at a premium.

Opening ceremonies enable countries to smuggle in and project soft power through the guise of Olympic stewardship. As Housel has written, this is made easier for hosts because: “the ‘claimed universalism’ of the Olympics ‘can be appropriated into a particular nationalist cause and merged with a set of national values’ such as ambition and hard work” (Housel 2007, 447). This syncretism has become a staple fact of globalised capitalism and occurs in branding and design, and is part of assiduous accommodations between homogenization and nationalism. But soft power is also something increasingly coveted by governments. The New Persuaders document published by the Institute for Government defines culture as one of the 5 criteria showing it as “When a country’s culture promotes universal values that other nations can readily identify with, it makes them naturally attractive to others. The reach of cultural output is important in building soft power” (McGlory 2011, 10). Up and coming nations such as Turkey, Korea, Brazil, India and Mexico are increasingly interested in flexing soft power muscles, and nations like Japan and Russia want to consolidate and build on what they have.

Can soft power achieve attitudinal shifts in how we see a nation? The recently released November 2012 soft survey compiled by Monocle magazine in conjunction with the Institute for Government bills itself, as measuring who has soft power and how to use it. The latest survey places the UK at number one and credits the recent London Olympics as capping this success, with the Opening Ceremony providing a symbolic focus for memories of the fortnight and thoughts about the UK: “the Britain that the country has become was best summed up in the opening ceremony... It managed to not only unite a nation that has often had trouble summing itself up, it was also a brilliant advert to the rest of the world” (Monocle 2012, 47).

Simon Anholt comments in his Economist article that nation branding is increasingly at a premium: “Countries, cities and regions that are lucky or virtuous enough to have acquired a positive reputation find that everything they or their citizens wish to do on the global stage is easier: their nation brand goes before them like a calling card, opening doors, creating trust, generating respect and raising the expectation of quality” (Anholt 2011, 35).

Would we feel so devastated about Japan were it not for our knowledge of rich pop culture, design and culinary heritage? In the 1960s, mythologization of the Sputnik programme by the Soviets made the regime more admirable in impressionable eyes, and somewhat offset the negativity generated by their aggression in Eastern Europe. Similarly, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games gave a fillip to the reputation of China as it exalted in and treated the world to a spellbinding showcase that mitigated outrage at issues like human rights abuses and Tibet. Writing of the National Brand Index, Anholt: “suggests that the more we know about a country, the more we are prepared to forgive its transgressions and admire its strengths and achievements.” (Anholt 2011, 40) This is as true of the internal audience, as well as an international audience.

Critical perspectives on nation branding suggest that we need to keep things in perspective. Anholt, writing on what he calls competitive identity, argues that cultural exchange (of which the opening ceremony is an example), is only one facet in many other factors such as foreign policy and exports that are often out of a country’s

s control and at the whim of public opinion. The national brand Index is remarkably stable; countries' index rarely fluctuate more than a single percentage point in any year. Even national scandals barely cause a ripple in their reputation.

### Final thoughts

So what we see is that no Olympic Ceremony has entirely dispensed with the code blueprint or been able to escape from precedents set by their forebears. Danny Boyle's London 2012 Ceremony was made possible, even when choosing to "zag", standing on shoulders of giants.

Moscow 1980 established a semiotic framework for opening ceremonies. The Barcelona 1992 ceremony established narrative competence and aesthetic enchantment as important elements. Sydney 2000 introduced self-effacing whimsy, a jump in deployment technological prowess and stage management. Formidable Beijing 2008 was the apotheosis of this incremental build up executing flawlessly and impressively with immaculate attention to detail without adding new codes as such. London 2012 was an impressive ceremony with moments of ingenuity, but even when creatively disruptive, ultimately built on foundations laid elsewhere.

Probably, the best that can be expected from the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics is that it leaves both domestic viewers with lapidary images that stick with them and become attached to that place. If the aim of national branding is to "ensure that their country maintains a stream of innovative and eye-catching . . . initiatives in every sector, which will keep it at the forefront of the world's attention and admiration" (Anholt 2011, 2) then the Opening ceremony is an effective forum. The analysis has attempted to show through close reading of opening ceremonies that they are delicately poised between internationalism and national promotion via the mediation of signs, codes and metaphors. Rio 2016 and Tokyo or Istanbul 2020 will be fresh occasions for us to see how intrepid new Olympic organising committees take on the legacy of previous ceremonies, and the extent to which these codes continue to form the substance of their planning.

### Notes

1. This paper is the result of viewing excerpts and in some cases the whole ceremony of 8 Olympics: namely Moscow (1980), Los Angeles (1984), Seoul (1988), Barcelona (1992), Atlanta (1996), Sydney (2000), Athens (2004), Beijing (2008). Of course London (2012), will also be included as the latest iteration in the sequence. Moscow was chosen as the first Olympics Opening Ceremony as it is widely regarded as putting on the first comprehensive cultural programme in an opening ceremony. Munich, Montreal and Mexico in comparison were perfunctory affairs that would not have yielded useful insights. Without counting on the full endorsement of the International Olympic Committee it was impossible to review each of the ceremonies in full. Good quality footage on these ceremonies, however was provided through a combination of uploaded YouTube excerpts and an unofficial site [www.olympicceremony.org](http://www.olympicceremony.org) which has videos of all ceremonies and was a valuable resource.
2. For modern Olympics, the scrutiny is even on the buildings themselves, with the purpose built design of the stadia itself containing metaphor and discourses about the city in question that are embedded into the shape. Calatrava's bow shaped stadium in Athens 2004 (Taigonou, 2009) was intended originally to convey dynamism and the European avant-garde and the stunning rattan like Bird's Nest in Beijing 2008 was to convey contemporary Chinese values.

### Note on contributor

Chris Arning is Founder Director of Creative Semiotics. Chris Arning holds degrees from UCL and the University of Warwick. He studied semiotics and communication with Professor Marcel Danesi in Toronto. He was head of semiotics at Flamingo Research. In his present role he has worked with corporations as such as VW, Lindt, and MTV. He is co-founder of Semiofest and founder of Semiotic Thinking Group. He is guest lecturer and runs a Masters course called Brands and Meaning at the University of Warwick.

### Note on music

Moscow 1980 was an interesting case. The musical director interpolated the sumptuous Russian symphonic tradition of Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich and hints of church bells in the Orthodox tradition with European composers with hints of Berlioz and Verdi and Beethoven's Ode to Joy, the unofficial European anthem – a real attempt at a musical entente cordiale. Similarly, in Barcelona, where, a more prototypical Spanish piece El Concierto de Aranjuez was played, with *El Cant Dels Ocells* by Catalonian Pau Casals.

Los Angeles in 1984 made music a central showcase of the ceremony more than ever before with a whole section of the artistic programme called Music of America in which Copland and Gershwin were premiered, and the latter's Rhapsody in Blue was accompanied by 84 grand pianos on which all the pianists impersonated George Gershwin. Atlanta 1996 carried on the musical theme commissioning a whole opera and drawing on the rich jazz, gospel and soul heritage of the South from Gershwin to Staples, such as Georgia on my Mind by Ray Charles.

In most ceremonies, the symphony orchestra of the city involved and employed alongside the musical impresario is brought out to underline the sophistication and the cultural capital of the city involved. In LA 1984, John Williams was the conductor. Barcelona had Monserrat and Placido Domingo though underlined the internationalism of the event by inviting Ryuichi Sakamoto to conduct. Invariably the local symphony orchestra will also accompany a singer of note.

### References

- Altman, R. 1987. *The American film musical*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Anholt, S. 2011. Branding nations and places. *The Economist*. <http://www.simonanholt.com/Publications/publications-other-articles.aspx>.
- Arning, C. and A. Gordon. 2006. *Sonic semiotics: The role of music in marketing communications*. Amsterdam: ESOMAR.
- Chen, C.C., C. Colapinto, and Q. Lao. 2012. 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony: Visual insights into China's soft power. *Olympics Special Issue 27*, no. 2: 188–95.
- Coren, G. 2012. Lark rise to Armageddon: The scary tale of a green and pleasant land. Opinion Column, in Opening Ceremony Review. *The Times Newspaper*, July 28.
- Cannadine, D. 1983. The context, performance and meaning of ritual: The British monarchy and the 'invention of tradition', c. 1820–1977. In *The invention of tradition*, ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, 101–64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, C.C., C. Colapinto, and Q. Luo. 2012. The 2008 Beijing olympics opening ceremony: Visual insights into China's soft power, *Visual Studies 27*, no. 2: 188–95.
- Danesi, M. 2004. *The quest for meaning: A guide to semiotic theory and practice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- de Moragas, M., N.K. Rivenburgh, and N. Garcia. 1995. Television and the construction of identity: Barcelona, Olympic host. In *The keys to success: The social, sporting, economic and*

- communications impact of Barcelona 92*, ed. M. deMoragas and M. Botella, 76–106. Barcelona: Servei de Publicacions de la UAB.
- Figes, O. 2002. *Natasha's dance: A cultural history of Russia*. London: Penguin Books.
- Hobsbawn, E. and T. Ranger, eds., 1983. *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Housel, T.H. 2007. Australian nationalism and globalization: Narratives of the nation in the 2000 Sydney Olympics' opening ceremony. *Critical Studies in Media Communications* 24, no. 5: 446–61.
- Jacobson, R. 1960. Linguistics and poetics. In *Style in language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok, 350–77. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jencks, C. 1996. *What is post-modernism?* London: Academy Editions.
- Lotman, Y. 2001. *The universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- MacAloon, J. 1992: Festival, ritual, and television. In *Olympic games, media, and cultural exchanges: The experience of the last four Summer Olympic Games*, ed. John J. MacAloon, 21–40. Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
- Mauritzen, A. 2012. Olympics 2012 opening ceremony: Is this for everybody? *Canvas 8 Online Magazine*, August 16.
- McGlory, J. 2011. The new persuaders II: A 2011 global ranking of soft power. [http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/The%20New%20PersuadersII\\_0.pdf](http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/The%20New%20PersuadersII_0.pdf).
- Mollerup, P. 1997. *Marks of excellence: The history and taxonomy of trademarks*. London: Phaidon.
- Monocle Magazine. 2012. Soft power index. January 2013. <http://monocle.com/film/affairs/soft-power-survey-2012/>
- Nye, J. 2005. *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Ohtsuka-Tierney, E. 2002. *Kamikaze, cherry blossoms and nationalisms: The militarization of aesthetics in Japanese history*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. [doi:10.7208/chicago/9780226620688.001.0001]
- Ramchandran, V.S. 2012. *The tell-tale brain: A neuroscientist's quest for what makes Ushuman*. London: W. A. Norton Publishing.
- Rivenburgh, K. 2004. The Olympic games, media, and the challenges of global image making. In *Proceedings of the 2004 Centre d'Estudis Olímpics (UAB) International Chair in Olympism (IOC-UAB)*. <http://olympicstudies.uab.es/lec/pdf/rivenburgh.pdf> (accessed October 14, 2012).
- Rivenburgh, K., and J. Larson. 1991. Comparative analysis of Australian, US and British telecasts of the Seoul Olympics opening ceremony. *Journal of Broadcasting and Digital Media* 35, no. 11: 75–94.
- Reade, B. 2012 Unpredictable and inventive as the British themselves, it was the People's Opening Ceremony. *Daily Mirror Opinion Column*. July 28.
- Tagg, P. 1992. *Introductory notes to music semiotics*. University of Liverpool. Unpublished paper. <http://www.tagg.org/xpdfs/semiotug.pdf>
- Tiaganou, J. 2009. National and post national dynamics in the olympics design: The case of Athens, 2004 olympics games. *Design Issues* 25, no. 3: 76–91.
- Tomlinson, A. 1996. Olympics spectacle: Opening ceremonies and some paradoxes of globalization. *Media, Culture and Society* 18: 583–602. <http://belate.wordpress.com/2010/07/12/heidegger-modern-technology/> <http://www.laaficion.com/noticias/111750-londres-impresiona-con-inauguraci-n>.
- Moscow 1980 – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZADbwGdlbA>
- Los Angeles 1984 – [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oy34eRuS\\_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oy34eRuS_I)
- Seoul 1988 – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDdrSKor-Qs>
- Barcelona 1992 – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aq2pLZvcw9g>
- Atlanta 1996 – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df9RDteaKEI>
- Sydney 2000 – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7oOFaLkuVc>
- Athens 2004 – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2atZjcBqs4>
- Beijing 2008 – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsDY1Ha83M8>

## Appendix. Soft power context and signs deployed

Host city	Soft power context	More iconic signs	More symbolic signs	Communicative thrust
Moscow 1980	Neutralise criticism of USSR and mollify Western bloc post Afghani invasion	Human vases display Children's floor show <i>Misha</i> the mascot bear	Hammer Sickle Emblem Regional folkloric dance Shostakovich symphony	Narrative of Mollification More Iconic
Los Angeles 1984	Make Americans feel good again after 70s lull; show US is still attractive	Jet pack man opener International flags 'Reach out' song finale	Revolutionary soldiers Frontier spirit wagons Gershwin grand pianos	Narrative of razzamatazz More Iconic
Seoul 1988	Non-aligned nation emphasising Korea progress and the hope of unification	Taekwondo demo Dragon dancing Korean Greek nymphs	Ship parade Dragon drumming Konori rope battle	Narrative of innocence More iconic
Barcelona 1992	Emphasise Catalan autonomy as well as conveying a democratic Spain	Floral ' <i>Hola</i> ' welcome Mediterranean myths Ryuichi Sakamoto	Spanish flamenco dance El Castellors formation Montserrat's 'Barcelona'	Narrative of enchantment More symbolic
Atlanta 1996	Celebrate a more welcoming, global minded US and show-off Southern states	Five Olympic tribes Greek shadow temple Dove puppets walk	Chevy pickup trucks Southern belle parade Baton twirl cheerleaders	Narrative of exuberance More symbolic
Sydney 2000	Millenium coming of age party for a relaxed and multicultural Australia	Deep Sea Dreaming Nature floral section 2000 Olympic band	Waltzing Matilda prelude Ernie Dingo impresario Settler culture allusions	Narrative of Celebration More symbolic
Athens 2004	Reclaim prestige of starting Olympics and image making EU's 'New Greece'	Double Helix hologram Aegean Sea thematic Little paper boat	Cryptic <i>cycliade</i> statue Mycean frieze parade Athenian statuettes	Narrative of heritage More symbolic

## Appendix (Continued)

Host city	Soft power context	More iconic signs	More symbolic signs	Communicative thrust
Beijing 2008	Declare the glory and dawning power of Middle Kingdom and promote harmony	Digital LED opening Flying Dove of peace Chinese lantern globe	Calligraphy, kanji demos Peking opera section Press drummers	Narrative of inscription More iconic
London 2012	Remind the world the UK is still great by focus on charm and creative legacy	James Bond and Queen Mr Bean Chariots Fire Olympic flame moment	Tempest literary allusion Historical procession NHS and BBC homage	Narrative of re-invention More symbolic