

Design and National Identity in the Olympic Games of Tokyo 1964, Beijing 2008 and Athens 2004.

By Jilly Traganou, PhD, Parsons The New School for Design

Olympic Games are processes of ‘national building’ through which nations become aware of their distinct identity values, but also opportunities to send new messages about their status to the rest of the world. This paper will start by describing graphic design of the Tokyo 1964 and Beijing 2008 Olympics as a means of visually articulating the investment of national content in the new modernized identities of Japan in 1964 and China in 2008, and thus counterbalancing their conformity to international rules. In its second part the paper will address the broader role of Olympic design as a means of promoting national culture within the framework of globalization, providing a brief example of Athens 2004 design.

Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games were presented in both national and international narratives as events that heralded Japan’s postwar (second) modernization process in an environment of peace and demilitarization. Through the Olympics the Japanese government sought to be accepted in an international community that had excluded them for eighteen years, as they recovered from their nationalist and militant fervor of the past, and emerged as an economic power. Tokyo 1964 displayed faith in technology, rationalization and consumer society, and the Games’ graphic design projects have been seen as emblematic of this era. Most of these projects were designed by important Japanese designers following the rules of modern design, and were granted international recognition.

The Beijing 2008 Games operate in an era in which China is undergoing a new modernization process that converges with the capitalist model of development. The Olympics are intended to highlight China’s change after thirty years of economic reforms, as well as its eagerness to overcome its past humiliation and losses due to what is seen as foreign hostility. As Susan Brownell has observed, Olympics ‘symbolically link economic modernization, Chinese nationalism, and Communist Party legitimacy into a

meaningful totality.’ Design is employed as a means of bringing to the fore China’s past glory and strength, becoming a vehicle for expressing the new synergy of nationalism and marketization within the framework of globalization and post-revolutionary discourse.

Athens 2004 welcomed the Olympics ‘back home’ and even though the Olympics did not coincide with any major political change, Greece used them as an opportunity to make major statements to the international community regarding its changed economical status. Together with the Olympics came a major infrastructural redevelopment that dramatically altered the geography of Attica, initiating land use and real estate changes that converted the previous rural area of Eastern Attica into suburbs.

Tokyo 1964 design has been regarded as emblematic of Japan’s post-war modernity, heralding a historic rupture with Japan’s postwar era. Contrary, the design of the Beijing Olympics has been regarded as a means of expressing China’s turn to history, being emblematic of the country’s regaining its past powerful world status. It seems that the two nations had a radically different approach to the use of their history in light of the demands of internationalization/globalization, In the following, I will claim that this contrast between the historic rupture that Japanese Olympic design declared to symbolize with the controversial epoch of Japanese imperialism, and the historic continuity that Chinese design is trying to establish with China’s past is only apparent. Japanese Olympic design from 1964 is both symbolically and formally a continuation and restatement of prewar tendencies, while the restoration of the historic past that Chinese Olympic design declares seems that cannot be achieved without a parallel historic rupture. In the end, the examination of some of the Athens 2004 design strategies will give us the opportunity to address the representation of the nation in the contemporary era of globalization, as it differs from the era of internationalism.

Graphic design for the Tokyo 1964 Olympic Games

Most graphic design enterprises of Tokyo 1964 were directed by the design critic Katsumi Masaru, who headed a team that consisted of several important designers, including Hara Hiromu, Kamekura Yusaku, Koono Tadashi and Tanaka Ikko. The team

saw the Olympics as an opportunity to establish a design language in Japan along the lines of Otto Neurath's concept of the isotype, a symbolic way of representing information via easily interpretable icons that work without written language. As stated by Katsumi, the group's main policy was to design the official mark and secure its consistent application, to apply the five colors of the Olympic rings to different design applications, to determine the template colors (supervised by Koono Takashi), to design the symbols of the various games and facilities (that came to be known as pictograms), and to ensure a uniformed approach to typography (supervised by Hara Hiromu). This was the first time that a 'total design' approach was used in the Olympics. It was facilitated by the 'design guide sheet,' that provided an overall set of principles which the designers had to follow, rather than proceed to random graphic applications. A major success of the team's work was that it was a truly collective effort. As Katsumi stated, 'the design is not done by 'star system', but by team work.'

Since 1959, Japanese graphic designers were eager to discover 'what graphic designers can do for the Olympics.' In a round-table discussion of that year titled 'Designers' public awareness' (Dezaina Shakai Ishiki), Kamekura Yusaku had noted the importance of communication design especially concerning foreign visitors circulation in Japan's public spaces, given the lack of understanding of most of them of the Japanese language: 'We have to create a way to communicate visually, and unify the railway, so that when you look at a symbol, you know where you are going. Town names might have to be converted into numerical system such as 100, 108...' As Japanese had not adopted the principles of the International Traffic Signs, introduced at United Nations Geneva conference in 1949 and accepted by most countries in Europe, the Olympics were thought of as an opportunity to work in that directions. It was along these lines, searching for universally understood visual languages, and embodying at the same time Baron de Coubertin's aspirations of universalism, that pictograms (ekotoba in Japanese, a word used prior to the design of pictograms) were for the first time designed for the Olympic Games. Katsumi thought of the pictogram as the greatest achievement of his work for the graphic design of the Tokyo 1964 Olympics, and presented the result to 'to the international society as a common cultural heritage.' Since the 1961 JAAC (Japan

Advertising Artists Club) exhibition 'a shift from commercial works to public service or welfare' and a broader dislike of the term commercial design, for the favor of terms such as visual design or visual communications were noticeable. One of the major contributions of the pictogram design in Japan was the change of the perception of symbol design (and especially of the design of logos of large corporations such as banks) from an entity that was previously seen as temporary to one of an everlasting utility.

The design of the 1964 pictograms was praised by international critics and designers. As British critique, Stanley Mason wrote in the Swiss magazine, *Graphis*: 'Symbol such as international traffic signs need to be easily understood, accepted by authorities and civil citizens, and be practical. This was achieved in 1964 at Tokyo Olympic Game. Few tourists understood Japanese. Other languages were not commonly used. Olympic committee took this problem seriously, and new designers lead by Masaru Katsumi designed game symbols and other signs. I hope that these symbols will be used in the next games so that they will be polished to be the perfect universal visual language.' Even though the process of improving these early pictograms continued until the Munich 1972 Games with the active involvement of designer Otl Aicher, the design of Toyo 1964 was soon after abandoned and new pictograms are being produced for every new Olympic Games since then, usually being related with local iconographic languages rather than with principles of international design.

A major concern of the Japanese designers team of the 1960s was to de-traditionalize Japanese visual languages by subscribing to the abstract, non-iconic principles of the modern movement, found to be also more appropriate for expressing the new corporate identities of postwar Japan. As designer Ohchi Hiroshi had stated, until the 1950s Japanese art works most appreciated by international circles were 'Mt Fuji, the geishas, pagodas, chrysanthemums' 'all a distorted picture of [Japan's] artistic output abroad.' For designers of the 60s, the new status of the country appeared encoded in signs, geometries, and abstract patterns, rather than in the exoticized or feminized metaphors of Japan that had contributed to its subordination to the West. This became especially obvious in three of the Olympic posters that carried no obvious references to Japanese identity, unlike earlier representations of a passive and feminized Japan. All posters were designed by

Kamekura Yusaku. Kamekura was a prominent figure in Japanese design, having studied at the Shin Kenchiku Kogei Gakuin, an institute of architecture and applied arts established in 1931 under the influence of Bauhaus, and being a promoter and influential member of postwar organizations such as Japan Advertising Artists Club (Nihon Senden Bijutsu Kai).

The second poster of Tokyo 1964, *The Start of Sprinters Dash*, carried a full-bleed photograph shot at the National Stadium, figuring athletes of the American Forces stationed at the Tachikawa Air Base as well as amateur Japanese athletes. As Maggie Kinsler-Saiki has remarked, 'had artificially blacking out the background been an option in 1964, the first Olympic poster to use a photograph might have been created with much less effort. In a stadium naturally darkened by nightfall, six runners in various events spent hours making staggered false starts toward a line at which a commercial photographer inexperienced in sports photography aimed a telephoto lens. He took 80 exposures at 1/1000th of a second. Only one had the power of an Olympic poster.' Design historian Maemura suggests that this was probably a cinematic technique used by Kamekura, having in mind the image of the six athletes running towards the Olympic symbol as if in a film sequence.

Kamekura also collaborated with the two photographers for the execution of the last two posters; the third, *A Butterfly-Swimmer*, carrying a photograph taken at the Tokyo Metropolitan Indoor Swimming Pool with Waseda University's swimmer Iwamoto Koji, and the fourth, *The Olympic Torch Runner*, figuring Juntendo University's athlete Tanaka. In both posters, the expression of technical achievement was paramount. Kamekura said for the second poster: 'For the swimming photograph, we had to build a camera stand in the water so the swimmer could approach at full speed. During the filming the photo director used a staff of ten persons. First we tried to get a photo of free-style swimming, but at such a fast shutter speed the water looked like ice and the swimmer like a cadaver. So then we tried the head-on symmetry of the butterfly stroke.' The fourth poster, which became the official poster of the 1964 Olympics, had a composition different from the previous. Kamekura described: 'In this official poster for the Tokyo Olympics I tried to suggest both the austerity of sports and the excitement of a festival. ... There were only a

few minutes late each afternoon when we could get the light conditions we wanted in order to show clearly both the torch and the runner's features, but after three days we finally got the shot we wanted. The lettering and mark were arranged in the form of a cross to give a religious atmosphere.'

Even though notions of Japaneseness are difficult to be deciphered in the photographic posters, this is not the case with the first poster that carries the Olympic mark. With it, it will become obvious that, despite declarations or attempts for the opposite, notions of locality and nationalism were not absent in the Tokyo Olympic design. Whether this was an internal demand for differentiation, an expression of local pride or a role that Japanese designers felt they had to satisfy as members of a nation in the periphery is a moot point. To be sure, the search of elements in a country's history that would be integrated with their distinct version of modernity beyond the apparent ahistoricism of orthodox modernism has been common to many countries. At the same time, the very belief that Japanese tradition carried formal affinities with the principles of modern design, were key to the history of modernism, after the travels of important figures such as Bruno Taut and Frank Lloyd Wright to Japan in the early 20th century. The success of the 1964 Olympics confirmed that you have to infiltrate the principles of international modernism through your national specificity, in order to be accepted as an equal member in the community of 'internationals.

Olympic emblem

An invited competition for the design of the Olympic emblem was announced in 1960 and the following six designers were called to participate in it: Inagaki Kooichiro (稲垣行一郎), Kamekura Yusaku, Kono Takashi, Nagai Kazumasa, Sugiura Koohei, Tanaka Ikko. After the submission of forty designs, on June 10th, one of Kamekura's proposals was chosen.

The entries to the mark competition were in no way uniformed; rather we can notice in them a variety of styles that range from modern to historicist, such as those by Tanaka Ikko and Kono Tadashi, the first with an entry strongly remindful of a Japanese crest

design, and the second with two entries, one carrying an icon of Mt. Fuji and the other a Japanese fan. Kamekura's winning design, which was probably the most modern design, was a bold symmetrical vertical composition that consisted of the five Olympic rings in their original colors, the phrase Tokyo 1964 in gold sans-serif typography, and most notably a large red circle in red. The emblem did not always appear in red. For the use in black-and-white television, it was specified that the sun would appear in gray, while the Olympic five rings and type would appear in black. The emblem had numerous applications, from the first poster to the diplomas, tickets, and medals of the Games.

Kamekura Yusaku designed the emblem in consultation with typographer Hara Hiromu. To be sure, Kamekura was a string advocate of modernism and internationalism. Kamekura has often commented on the impact that American products had on his conception of design and modernity, especially as he became familiar with them during the American Occupation: 'Many rectangular boxes were discarded on station platforms by American soldiers. They were the empty containers for combat rations, and they were decorated by some abstract designs in blue. ... I picked up some of them and took them home. Displaying them on shelves, I felt as though a fresh air of civilization and culture was suddenly filling my room. From the bottom of my heart I thought: this is civilization, this is design, this is the joy of living. I spoke of this experience at the International Design Conference held in New York in 1958, where I gave a speech as a guest lecturer.'

But besides his interest in capturing modernity and being in line with the high technological achievements of Japan in his era, Kamekura as well as Katsumi were also very passionate about the values inherent in Japan's graphic tradition. Kamekura had since the 1960's World Design Conference ('Sekai Design Kaigi') in Tokyo become famous in international design circles of his ideas on *katachi* (form), which was the title of his speech at that conference on May 12th, 1960. In his speech Kamekura stated that 'tradition is a burden for designers, but we can never deny our tradition. What we need to do is to deconstruct, and rebuilt our tradition.' Kamekura was especially interested in the design of crests (*mon* in Japanese). Kamekura saw the crest as 'a product of triangle and divider,' in other word he discerned in it a quality strongly in line with the principles of modernism. For Kamekura, crest design, having started as a military symbol of a clan in

the Medieval period and continued as a symbol of place and position in the Edo period, had to be re-evaluated in postwar Japan: 'There is a need for Japan's commercial artists to take a fresh look at the beauty of Japanese crests, at least in connection with their efforts to design trademarks with a Japanese flavor. This may well be the road to the creation of new and distinguished symbols, this time for the Japanese industry'...even though historically they are not used in connection with manufacturing activities and merchandises. In a discussion between Katsumi and Kamekura published in a major design magazine, both remarked that the development of the crest design was a product of collaborate work rather than of single designers, and also noted their use of easily identifiable patters such as coins for merchants, or ears of rice for farmers. Katsumi had always stressed the importance of family crests, which he considered as 'one of the most perfect visual language system in the world,' due to its simplicity and consistency. Kamekura worked upon the idea of crest design for several of his design projects including ones for non-Japanese corporations. The major principle that Kamekura derived from his studies of Japan's crest design is arguably the 'central image' composition that Herbert Bayer pointed out in his Foreword to one of Kamekura's monographs: 'he [Kamekura] rarely reverts to a design composition in the manner of 'dynamic symmetry' or of other non symmetrical arrangements. He knows the visual efficiency of *one* central image: it concentrates and draws upon itself the attention and interest of the passer-by, even from a distance. Type is usually of secondary importance but it is always placed focally, with clarity, in support of the image.' Principles of *katachi* (form), and *mon* (crest) design were utilized in the robust symmetrical composition of the Tokyo 1964 emblem.

But what exactly was the meaning of the red circle that was a part of the Olympic emblem? For some this was the icon of, literally, the sun; for others this was a direct reference to Japan's flag, the hi-no-maru. According to architectural critic Kawazoe Noboru, 'the poster is a fitting mark for an occasion involving sports in which it is the healthy body that counts more than the scheming mind. Its essential design, while symbolizing Japan, goes far beyond all national boundaries to have wide international appeal.' Kamekura emphasized issues of clarity, and saw the meaning of the red circle

contingent on the viewer's interpretation than his own intentions as the designer. He claimed that the red circle would not be perceived as the Japanese flag because of the emblem's vertical composition, and the proportions between the circle and the surrounding white space, which are different from those of the typically horizontal flag. Elsewhere, Kamekura wrote that even though he used the Japanese flag as an inspiration, he was much more taken by the red color which symbolized for him the excitement towards athletics. The Olympic organizers, however, expressed their satisfaction for this 'renewed appreciation of the Rising Sun's dynamic simplicity,' a re-appreciation that also applied to other controversial features associated with Japan's role in the wartime era.

But overlooking the connotation of the Japanese flag for the favor of formal modernist compositional aspects would be a partial only way of examining the function of the logo. In a naturalized manner, the direct or indirect reference to Japan's flag has significant political implications. Despite the fact that the 1964 Olympics were considered symbolic of Japan's postwar era of peace and demilitarization, many of the Olympic choices implied the opposite, establishing a continuity with the previous eras. In the recent years, numerous contemporary historians have commented on the artificiality of the division between Japan's pre-war and post-war eras. Similarly, Olympic studies scholars have explored analogies between prewar and postwar discourses and relations between the 1940 Tokyo canceled Games and the ones of 1964. Otomo Rio has suggested that Tokyo Olympics allowed Japanese audiences to 're-imagine Japan as a unified nation-state' but continued a discourse from the 1930's without being much removed from its militaristic scopes. Olympic studies historian Christian Tagsold in studying the Opening Ceremony of 1964 has concluded that classical symbols of Japanese nationalism, such as *hi-no-maruru* and national anthem, even though tainted by the Second World War, were revived and reinstalled, becoming acceptable both nationally and internationally. 'Perhaps it was in the ceremonies of the 1964 Olympics that the new popular sovereignty and the status of the emperor were most clearly displayed to the rest of the world,' as John Hall has commented on the Emperor's opening of the ceremony at a time that his status as the head of the state was in no way indisputable. Along the same lines, the official flower of the 1964 Olympics was chosen to be the Imperial flower chrysanthemum. Also,

according to Sandra Collins, 'even though these international sporting events were dedicated to peace, the Japanese militaristic past and present could not be escaped.' The Japanese Self-Defence force marked its presence, as its members carried the Olympic flag into the stadium, and its jet-planes formed the Olympic Circles in the sky as the emperor took leave of the royal box.

The contribution of design in naturalizing these processes is irrefutable. But this should not come as a surprise. Olympic designers Kamekura and Hara, influenced by modern design and especially Russian constructivism, had active roles in nationalist representations of wartime Japan. Hara was the art-director for the controversial propaganda magazines *Nippon* and *Front*, in which Kamekura worked in leading positions. These magazines, sponsored by private capital, but contributing to the nationalist goals of prewar Japan, used ultra modern languages and techniques, such as photomontage, propagating Japan's military and colonial power abroad. Also Hara had designed a poster for advertising the Tokyo 1940 Games abroad, carrying an abstract symbol of Mt. Fuji, which also figured prominently in the *kigen* poster, in a rather modern representation.

The trajectory of the designers during the two eras raises crucial questions about the ideological role of design and the limitations of formalist interpretations of design: Is it possible to have revolutionary languages with reactionary meanings? Are designers devoid of political responsibility? But beyond the intentionality of the designers, what becomes much more crucial for understanding the function of these projects is the overall context within which they operated. What type of meanings are embedded within the visual culture of the Olympics at the moment that it is being endorsed as national culture?

Even if the political ideals of 1960s Japan had changed, the idea of the state still seemed to coincide with that of the nation, as obvious in the dominance of the flag, while the images of athletes in motion conveyed similar with the past ideas of individual endurance in service to the collective good. But, as Otomo has suggested, 'as state power ... became inconspicuous in the postwar period, it became harder to imagine sources of oppression.'

It seems that the culture that was configured by the postwar Olympics, which became fused with the advertising of high-tech products and consumer goods, entailed the capacity to obscure ideology, shifting the public attention to material results.

Graphic Design for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games

44 years later, China becomes the third Asian nation that will host the Olympic Games, a choice that is presented as 'natural' given the universalizing agenda of the International Olympic Committee. How are relations between the local and the international encoded in the Beijing Olympic designs? The design of the 2008 Beijing Olympics emblem was selected after an international competition, in which 89% of the entries came from Greater China. An international committee composed of international designers and IOC members selected 14 final entries, and then with the participation of people representing various groups of contemporary China, the chosen design was the one submitted by Chinese company AICI. The winning entry is an image of an ancient Chinese seal that carries an inscription with a double meaning: in the iconic level it represents the figure of an athlete, while in the textual level it represents the Chinese character 'jing,' meaning city, the second character of the word Beijing. The figure is also reminiscent of the Chinese character 'wen' meaning culture, but this was not the intention of the designers.

As explained by Zhang Wu, AICI's CEO, this figure is comprised of a person with a serpentine body, a style used in ancient China to represent a hero. During the refinement process, the figure was given more sense of movement to resemble a 'dancing' man. Another critical aspect of the emblem was the decision to use calligraphy as specific to Chinese culture, and especially the Zhuan style which evolved during the Qin-Han dynasties (221 BC - 220 AD), a period known for the unification of China and its language. During the refinement stage, committee members were wary about the dual text-pictorial appearance of the '京' character, and thought it was incomplete as a word. Numerous Zhuan seal professional carvers researched the Jiaguwen (oracle-bone) Chinese characters and concluded that the '京' could not qualify as a character, but rather as a pictogram, used in a type of seal of the pre-Qin era, that has animals carved onto it, called the Xiaoxing.

For the logotype of the 'Beijing 2008' text, the committee considered various options ranging from computer set-type and brush-stroke written in a cursive way to over 300 children's handwriting; all of which were found to be incompatible. In the end, the designers at AICI suggested using Han clerical script which was approved by the Beijing Olympic committee as 'sufficiently conveying the greatness of Chinese culture.'

Similar to the logo design, the design of the torch was also the outcome of an international competition followed by a rigorous process of refinement and team-work. The competition was won by the multinational company Lenovo, a computer company, which has bases in China, Japan and the US. The torch design, being involved mainly through two-dimensional considerations rather than three-dimensional ones, evokes the shape of a traditional Chinese painting scroll, emphasizing the invention of paper by the Chinese in the 1st century AD, and focuses on the treatment of its surface. Its main two characteristics are the use of colors--deep red and bright silver--and its embossed pattern of auspicious clouds. This pattern, named 'leiwen' or in its later mutation 'xiangyun,' derives from the Chinese Bronze Age. Leiwen are stylized clouds rendered in the Chinese curlicue style, known as symbols of spirituality.

The use of Chinese historical motifs as a register of both cultural identity and past national glory is a recurring theme in post-Mao China. The use of history as a resource of iconography differentiates the Beijing design from that for the Tokyo Games, which sought of a syntactic rather than an iconic relation with history, through their development of 'mon' and 'katachi' principles rather than forms. Opening up Pandora's history box in contemporary China has revealed a rich palette of iconic references that are not only unique to China, but also reminders of Chinese culture's past supremacy in Asia. The nationalist climate of contemporary China is the backbone of such approach. As Ko Sunbing has put it, 'nationalism has become a means to strengthen the Communist Party's legitimacy and to provide people with a sense of purpose and meaning.' At the same time, the emphasis on China's early unification era is paramount, given the constant needs of unification of China as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural nation, with its recurring separatist movements.

Ancient Chinese iconography, rearticulated through the principles of contemporary design, also becomes an ideal vehicle for expressing the contemporary state-corporate culture of China, lending to it the strength of its past hegemonic role in the Eastern hemisphere. This referential framework also fully responds to the demands of the global audience that strives for the consumption of the 'other' through registers of difference that often fall to stereotypical iconographies.

It is an irony that this stress of China's historical background is paralleled by major processes of destruction of the physical and psychogeographical domain of everyday life. If in the case of Japan a deeper study of the Olympic design, indicates a silent continuity with the country's prewar nationalistic past, despite its pronouncement of change and renewal, the stress in China's history as enunciated by its graphic design does not herald continuity, but rather one more era of change. Even if this change aims to reclaim a distant historical epoch, it does not cease to bring with it a rupture with the most recent past, as evident by the destruction of hutong and traditional patterns of life, as well as the abandonment of cultural and artistic forms that were endorsed until recently by the Communist regime. As in the bid material, analyzed by Haugen, 'Chinese ancient history is represented as a legendary period that shows potential of greatness in the present Chinese nation.' The distant past is perceived 'as holding a promise of greatness' while 'the recent past as being a time of hardship.' 'The promise of the distant past is evoked in calls for a break with the underdevelopment of the recent past.' Thus, paradoxically, in order for the ancient glory to be reclaimed, a historical rupture has to be performed.

--

Contrary to Japanese designers who tried to articulate a modern, iconoclastic visual language that de-traditionalized Japanese visual culture, Chinese Olympic enterprises in postrevolutionary China do not hesitate to carry iconic references to ancient Chinese culture, utilizing motifs that besides their currency as commodities that denote ethnic difference in a global marketplace, declare in a metonymic manner China's re-emergence as a major world power. As much as they visually register the new constructive ideals of their reborn nations, these newly articulated graphic languages also obscure processes

that may be considered destructive or reactionary; their ideological role being precisely to neutralize these contradictions.

Mascot Design for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games

Athens 2004 did not reject Greece's relation with its ancient and prehistoric past. Without questioning the ideas of historic continuity from prehistory to contemporary times that have nourished modern Greeks, it rather attempted to visually re-articulate these resources, with the use of contemporary design and performance languages, in order to re-brand the nation's identity, and bring it in accordance to the standards of a contemporary lingua franca of design.

In what follows, I will mention one brief example, indicative of a branding strategy prominent in the contemporary era, to form/inform/transform the consumer, which is used by Athens 2004 as well as by Beijing 2008. This design, like the ones we observed in the case of Beijing, adhere to the global standards of corporate design, offering at the same time a controlled degree of particularism. Even though in an external level its design language may appear as generic or even dull, the excitement emerges through a secondary level of information, to be conveyed to the user, observer, or eventually consumer of the product by using a different, beyond the visual, level of communication.

The figures of the two mascots, Phevos and Athena, may not particularly Greek-looking to an untrained audience. Their names Phevos (alluding to the God of light) and Athena, (the goddess of wisdom, and protector of Athens) as well as the imprints of the Athens 2004 emblem on their clothes are the first, layers of Greekness. But what is Greek about the ways they look? According to their designers, their shape is based on a 8th c BC bell-shaped, Greek doll, 23 cm in height, clay-made, with a bird-like face and movable legs.

New York Times characterized the mascots as a 'pair of fanciful, brightly colored cartoon humanoids,' while for their Greek defenders they were cute, human-centered, easy to recognize due to their bright colors, and welcomed due to their educative character. The broader Greek audience however was very slow in accepting the two figures as Greek,

despite the designers' explanations. After revealed to the public in 2001, they were characterized as two ugly, anthropoid monsters, not just childish but infantile, that for some looked more like dinosaurs or genetically modified cucumbers than dolls. There were also some historical arguments against the mascots. Some found them blasphemous and abusive to the ancient Greek heritage, offensive to Greek people, unfaithful to their names, and even not appropriate archaic symbols, as the arts of the 8th c BC, are not as highly regarded as those of the Golden Age of 5th and 4th c BC. Some critics also complained that the two mascots are of non-Greek identity, as they were made in China, and looked more like the Simpsons than anything Greek. Despite the initial skepticism of the Greek audience, the mascots ended up making a 5 million Euro profit.

I would claim that the success of both Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 designs is based on a triple process: first they form, accepting contemporary visual languages that go beyond parochial representations of Greekness or Chineseness—in other words the language they use is a global design language; (2) they inform, providing a level of secondary information that enriches the aesthetic pleasure offered by the first formative level; and (3) they transform, providing the impression to the viewers that they are converted from sheer consumers to informed subjects, and thus they produce an internal change. In this way the physical realm of products to be consumed is connected with mediated spheres where information circulates, and thus in becoming parts of mediascapes, products reveal their capacity to interfere with the work of imagination. This meta-level of engagement with material and immaterial products that 'inform' and 'transform' the users is an important difference in the ways nations are being represented today in the globalized world. The design of the Olympic Games in the era of globalization is not simply representative of the effort to increase the prestige of the host-nation (as was the case with the Tokyo 1964) or represent its culture by resorting to what is already known and recognizable (as stereotypical or vernacular campaigns would do). The engagement with the nation through Olympic design, as with many 'new generation' products that we are surrounded with today, promises to hold the potential to transform the consuming subject, presenting the very act of consumption as a part of a broader scope. Without dissatisfying those who demand national content, or those who anticipate fluency in global design

languages, contemporary Olympic products, in their polysemic capacity satisfy the demands of a variety of audiences that are urged to have various levels of engagement with the host-nation.