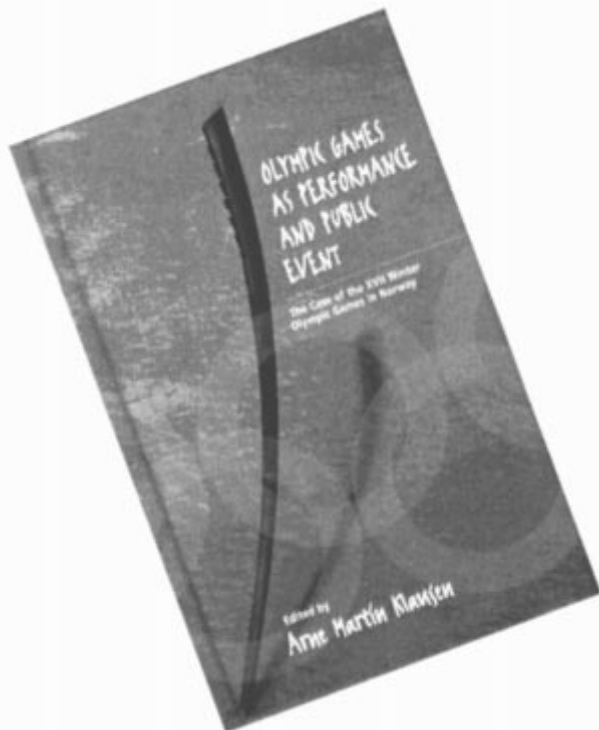


***Olympic Games as Performance and Public Event: The Case of the XVII Winter Olympic Games in Norway*** by Arne Martin Klausen, ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 230. Reviewed by Gordon MacDonald, The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada.



In recent years the Olympic Games have attracted the analysis of a growing number of scholars working in a variety of fields. Following the Games, their articles appear in scholarly journals offering, for example, the latest sociological, historical, economic, political, legal, cultural, or media studies interpretations of the events that unfolded. In many cases, the authors of these articles will have been physically no closer to the Games than their televisions, computers, newspapers, or journals. While this is not necessarily a short-coming to some of these studies, it can have a limiting effect on others -- indeed, one that is not always acknowledged.

For this reason alone, a book such as this is valuable. A collection of essays, its authors were a team of social anthropologists and research associates who, with one notable exception, studied the cultural aspects and implications of the Lillehammer Olympic Winter Games during a period beginning well prior to the Games and concluding up to a year after their completion. They attended planning meetings and activities prior to the Games, lived in Lillehammer during the Olympics and finished by observing post-Games activities and results. This process gave them access to

people and events simply not available to observers from afar. In turn, this access and the information gained thereby means that their conclusions are more forceful than had they been forced to remain more to the 'observer' side of the classic 'participant/observer' continuum. Credit should be given (and the editor does so) to Lillehammer Organizing Committee members for providing the means for this group of anthropologists to have the level of access that they did.

The book is divided into nine chapters, six of which deal with particular aspects of the Lillehammer Games. Two introductory chapters deal with more general themes. Surprisingly, given the title of the book, one chapter recounts the results of a study done at the Albertville Olympic Winter Games of 1992. Because the chapters deal with topics that are fairly diverse, I will deal with each of them individually in this review.

The book's editor, Arne Klausen, writes the first chapter, where he gives some background on the origins of the project, notes a few facts about the Lillehammer Games and their impact on Norway, provides a brief discussion of the authors' methodological and theoretical leanings and gives an overview of the contents of the book. Of most significance, he informs the reader that the predominant theoretical departure point of most of the authors is based upon Don Handelman's ideas about 'public events' as contained in his *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). A second major influence is found in John MacAloon's (ed.) *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues Press, 1984). Given these influences, the reader gains quickly an idea of the thrust of the material that will follow.

In fact, the second chapter is written by John MacAloon, himself no stranger to 'Olympic' anthropology studies (indeed, in the preface, Klausen refers to him as the Nestor of this genre). MacAloon writes of his (and others') experiences and challenges in observing the Olympics from an anthropological perspective, beginning with his visit to Montreal in 1976. MacAloon's comments show that he is clearly much in favour of the Norwegian team's efforts because they are, for the most part, the results of actual fieldwork, a technique of great importance to him. Indeed, on previous occasions MacAloon has issued calls for more fieldwork, calling it the 'ethnographic imperative' in Olympic research, and has been critical of scholars who have not done more of it before they publish their research.'

Klausen writes chapter three, focussing here upon the preparations for the Games and the conflicts that arose between organizers and certain sectors of Norwegian society. He argues that fundamental differences between a Norwegian society characterised by an egalitarian social structure and the commercial sponsoring system of 'modern olympism' meant that confrontation was inevitable. Fortunately for those not familiar with Norwegian society, Klausen writes a brief overview on the peculiarities of Norwegian society that have given rise to its egalitarian structure. I found this quite useful for not only does it provide context for his essay, it also serves as a primer on Norwegian society for those essays that follow. Klausen's descriptions of the conflicts make it clear that they were numerous, occasionally acrimonious, and included disputes with the IOC immediately prior to the Games.

Klausen also contributes the fifth chapter where he examines an argument that arose between the Norwegian organizers and the Greeks over the Olympic flame and

torch relay. The Norwegians planned, as in 1952 when they had last hosted the Winter Games, to light one flame in Morgedal, Norway, home of legendary 19<sup>th</sup> century skier Sondre Norheim -- and thus a site of no small importance. They also wanted to have a flame lit in Olympia which would arrive in Norway and be merged with the one from Morgedal. When the Greeks found out about the plan, they were not pleased because of the sacred connotations they attach to the Olympia flame. In short, it was *the* Olympic flame and could not be diluted or contaminated by being merged with another. This resulted in another round of negotiations with both sides vigorously defending the importance and cultural significance of their respective flames. (Incidentally, the flame from Olympia was eventually used, uncontaminated, to light the cauldron in the opening ceremonies.)

Chapters four and seven are written by Odd Are Berkaak. In the former he deals, to use the editor's phrase, "...with how the Olympic ideology is marked by exponentiality and how this is articulated in the rhetoric with hyperbole as the dominant trope" (p. 6). Actually, most of the chapter is an examination of how the Lillehammer organizers adopted this manner of thinking and, from thence, how it appeared in their literature and visual symbols. Berkaak's theme in this chapter will be familiar to anyone who has spent time studying the language used by the IOC and Olympic organizers to construct and describe all things 'Olympic.' That is, the Olympics and the activities connected with them purportedly go beyond the commonplace and everyday, breaking the limitations of local tradition to open up boundless possibilities, to be (over and over again) the 'best ever.' Berkaak argues further that, in the Norwegian case, the Olympian rhetoric of boundless possibilities was intertwined with organizers' desires for political development and the dismantling of barriers between Norway and the global marketplace.

In chapter seven, Berkaak turns to the construction of facilities and the issues which arise when they are proposed and constructed. In particular, he examines the construction of the alpine venue and the impact this had upon the area and its inhabitants. This was one of the two essays in the book which most captured my attention. Berkaak paints an interesting portrait of the interplay between the local inhabitants and the LOOC (Lillehammer Olympic Organizing Committee) as they created the Kvitfjell alpine course. He shows how the process of constructing the course and actually naming points upon it reflected competing desires to retain local and traditional aspects against that of making it globally accessible to outsiders. Yet, the process was not clearly a case of tradition vs. modernisation, for some of the local inhabitants supported much of the transition of the site from farm and woodland to a commercial alpine venue. Furthermore, Berkaak recounts how, after the Games, the local inhabitants began to adopt the facility as their own -- though it is designed to be globally accessible, it will eventually become, in some senses, local and traditional.

Olympic Games opening ceremonies are always cause for commentary from a variety of perspectives. Roel Puijk's essay interprets the Lillehammer opening ceremonies from planning to fruition. He suggests that images of Norway as interpreted in the international media differed from those of the Norwegian media. This does not seem to be a big surprise. However, the strength of the article lies in Puijk's extensive explanations of how, in part, these differences came about and what they mean. He recounts in detail the evolution of the plan for the opening ceremonies, making note of the competing interests who jockeyed to have their vision appear. He also explains

the distinctions between the broadcasts of the Norwegian hosts and the American television company (the latter had fifteen additional cameras and created its own, delayed, broadcast based on the Norwegian signal, whereas solely the Norwegian signal was used by most countries). Puijk bases the meaning of the different interpretations upon Handelman's model, arguing that the international interpretation of Norwegian culture was 'presentational' whereas that of the national was 're-presentational' or even 'modelling.' In short, the international media interpreted the traditional, typical 'Norwegianness' of the various aspects of the ceremony with little qualification. In contrast, for Norwegians, the ceremony 'represented' aspects of their culture and beliefs that were not necessarily meant to be taken literally. Indeed, for some, according to Puijk, the ceremony may even have 'modelled' what some aspects of their culture could become.

The final two chapters of the book focus primarily upon athletes and meanings of gender connected to the Olympic Games. In chapter eight, Ingrid Rudie presents three cases of women's experiences in sport and the Lillehammer Games. In doing so, she examines how contradictory principles of gender hierarchy and equality seem to coexist in sport. Cross-country skiing is her first case. Here she recounts some of this sport's history in Norway and shows how females began to participate competitively much more recently than males. Along the way they have had to overcome numerous social barriers connected to the sport in order to be accepted. Issues about the femininity of top athletes remain, however, and she shows how media perceptions of two of the Games' most successful skiers, Manuela di Centa and Ljubov Jegorova differed significantly. Second, in a classic battle for equality, Rudie examines the struggle of female downhill skiers, prior to the Games, to have their event moved to the site of the men's competition. Here she analyses press coverage of the battle and contrasts the opposing arguments - in the end the women won and the site was moved. Her final case examines figure skating which, in contrast to the downhill skiers, does not strive for gender equality, and, in fact, tends to exaggerate gender differences. Clearly, her choice of events is not coincidental for the reader is given examples of on-going challenges and confirmations of the gender gap as well as an example of a break-through. Finally, she goes beyond these analyses to speculate, in the context of her examples of gender construction, that the Olympic Games -- and the sports which compose them -- promote universality and homogeneity while encouraging simultaneously a "sense of cultural fragmentation" (p. 7).

Eduardo Archetti focusses on masculinity in the final chapter of the book. He argues that the 'maleness' displayed by athletes depends upon the context in which they find themselves. His chapter is the only one that does not deal with the Lillehammer Games. Rather, he conducted his fieldwork at the Albertville Olympic Winter Games in 1992. It seems rather peculiar to include his piece in this volume given its explicit focus on the Lillehammer Games. Nonetheless, it is an enjoyable piece and is the second of the two essays which I enjoyed the most. Archetti followed the exploits of two of the most successful athletes (both in terms of medal performances and in media attention) of the Games: Alberto Tomba and Vegard Ulvang. To do so, Archetti attended competitions and interviewed members of the adoring crowds who followed their athletic heroes. He also analysed media coverage of these athletes during the Games. What emerges are significant differences in the masculine attributes ascribed to these two sport heroes, some of which are complimentary to each other,

some of which are not. Archetti argues that these attributes are based, in part, upon what is important to the people of the countries the two athletes represent. However, the sport itself, the media, and Olympic ideals may also condition the type of masculinity displayed. These differences are important, Archetti argues, because they reveal a “cultural system for producing differences” (p. 214). This, as noted in some of the other papers, points to our ability, within the setting of the Olympic Games, (and perhaps sport more generally) to create both cultural homogeneity and fragmentation.

In sum, I do not believe, writing as a ‘non-anthropologist,’ that there are any radically new theoretical insights to be found in this book. The case studies, however, do provide additional evidence for ideas advanced by others in the areas of gender studies, interpretations of public events and spectacles, and the construction of public spaces. Indeed, they offer critiques of theoretical positions in some of these areas. (This probably comes out most clearly in Berkaak’s discussion of the Kvitfjell alpine venue and the process by which it was transformed.) Representatives of the ‘traditional’ and the ‘modern’ did not occupy mutually exclusive camps, resulting in a relationship much more complex than is often suggested by some theorists). As case studies, then, they do their job quite well in that they provide both resources for future theorizing as well as examples of fieldwork at a public, local/global event. Indeed, the global/local aspect of the Games is the most intriguing issue, and the book’s strongest point when taken as a whole is its contribution to our understanding of this global/local nexus. That is, a recurrent question for most of the authors is how to interpret and understand the complex interplay between the global and the local that surrounds the Olympic Games. No matter where they are staged, each host city invariably confronts the issue of appeasing an Olympic ideology that promotes homogeneity and universality, while trying to retain for itself a sense that these are its Games upon which it can impress its mark. Most of the essays in this volume confront this issue and add substantially to ongoing efforts to address it.

Finally, in a more pedestrian vein, the book has a solid index and each of the articles is end-noted and contains a list of references. Overall, the majority of articles are accessible to a general scholarly audience that may not be familiar with the literature and language of social anthropology. This means that the book easily can find a place in the libraries of sociologists, historians, and others outside the field of anthropology.

## Endnotes

1. In particular, MacAloon has taken umbrage at the research results of some scholars working in cultural studies whom, he claims, ‘content’ themselves with analyses of ‘postproduction public texts.’ See his “Humanism as Political Necessity? Reflections on the Pathos of Anthropological Science in Olympic Contexts,” *Quest*, Vol. 48, 1996, pp. 67-81. His comment on the ‘ethnographic imperative’ comes from the title of another article. “The Ethnographic Imperative in Comparative Olympic Research,” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2, June 1992, pp. 104-130.