

Performing internationalism: a discursive analysis of artists' outfits and their political communication during the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Summer Olympic Games (2000–2020)

Performando internacionalismo: uma análise discursiva dos trajes de artistas e suas comunicações políticas durante as Cerimônias de Abertura e Encerramento dos Jogos Olímpicos de Verão (2000–2020)

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ABSTRACT: The modern editions of the Olympic Games convey international values, with sports being considered a tool to negotiate geopolitical issues. Particularly, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies can be seen as solemn events with an important visual aspect. Based on a discursive perspective through the lens of Bendel Larcher, Kress and Heller, this paper analyzes the shapes and the colors of the sartorial items used by artists during the Opening and Closing Ceremonies from 2000 until 2020. It focuses on the artists invited to perform during the occasions, and on their role to communicate different messages concerning the international conjuncture.

KEYWORDS: Opening/Closing Ceremony; Discourse Analysis; Olympic Games; Sartorial Items; Internationalism.

RESUMO: As edições modernas dos Jogos Olímpicos abarcam valores internacionais, considerando esportes como uma ferramenta para negociar questões geopolíticas. Em particular, as Cerimônias de Abertura e Encerramento podem ser tidas como eventos solenes, de aspecto visual importante. Baseando-se numa perspectiva discursiva pela ótica de Bendel Larcher, Kress e Heller, este artigo analisa formatos e cores de itens de vestuário utilizados por artistas durante as Cerimônias de Abertura e Encerramento das edições de 2000 a 2020. O artigo tem como foco os artistas convidados para se apresentarem nessas ocasiões e seu papel de comunicarem diferentes mensagens acerca da conjuntura internacional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Cerimônias de Abertura/Encerramento; Análise do Discurso; Jogos Olímpicos; Vestuário; Internacionalismo.

INTRODUCTION

During the first edition of the Modern Olympic Games, in 1896, Pierre Frédy, the Baron of Coubertin, held a clear discourse about his motivations to (re)implement such a competition. The Baron, who was also the founder and first president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), stated that

in reviving this institution, twenty-five centuries old, we have wished you to become devotees of the *religion of Sport* in the same sense as it was conceived by your famous ancestors. In the present world, [...] Olympism may be a school of moral nobility and purity, as well as of physical endurance and energy, provided that you always keep your conception of honor and disinterestedness in sport on a level with your physical powers.¹

If the Baron's affirmation intends to enhance the ideals behind the initiative, stressing the role of tradition, fair play, and physical performance, modern sports would, from then on, also play an important role concerning geopolitics.² Throughout the 20th century, the Olympic Games would become one of the two global mega-events with major impacts concerning national visibility,³ international negotiations, and urban organizations, among other topics.⁴ Whereas many sources stressed the local negative effects of each edition of the Olympic Games, such as the evictions of local populations to build facilities for Rio 2016,⁵ the conception of a "planetary initiative" can also delay some positive consideration about the worldly context and how to deal with urgent, international matters.⁶

In this sense, the Games can be perceived as multi-layered events with different geopolitical meanings and impacts: they gather a particular sample of national and international authorities, be it politicians, athletes, and artists. They are therefore able to get the public's attention and can be seen as "as important as the United Nations".⁷ We can see the Olympic Ceremonies as a large moment of

¹ COUBERTIN *apud* OLIVEIRA. *Mega-events, city and power*, p. 20. Highlight by the author.

² CHARTIER. Avant-propos.

³ FURRER. *Sydney 2000: "Sharing the spirit?"*, p. 20.

⁴ The second mega-event would be the Soccer World Cup, organized by FIFA. See GRUNEAU; HORNE. *Mega-events and globalization: a critical introduction*.

⁵ CORDEIRO *et al.* Qual é o efeito econômico de ser sede olímpica?

⁶ BANCEL *et al.* *Une histoire mondiale de l'Olympisme (1896-2024)*.

⁷ N/A. *Histoire mondiale de l'olympisme*.

communication and acknowledgment of major international discussions, be it verbally or visually.⁸

The structure of the Olympic Games proposes a balance between continuity and episodic events.⁹ During each edition, we may expect an Opening Ceremony (when the Olympic fire will be lit), the competitions, and then an Ending Ceremony (when the Olympic fire will be put off and there will be the Handover of the Olympic flag to the host country of the next edition). A selection of actors will both resume Olympic values (cooperation, fair play, etc.) and enhance important global topics (environment, international negotiations, cultural exchanges).¹⁰ In this context, where sports meet the concept of “citoyenneté”,¹¹ the choice of which actors will perform and how they will dress is a significant component of the message brought by each edition of the Games. Indeed, the shapes and colors of the uniforms and chosen sartorial goods can also be interpreted as symbolic tools to communicate and develop different values, such as peace, union, and patriotism.¹²

Even if each edition is based on a repetitive structure (Opening-Games-Closing and Handover), during the Games, the idea of “nation” is treated as something that is not uniform and ethnically similar,¹³ but with different stories and outfit traditions, which may also change through the years.¹⁴ This paper aims to look deeper into the discourse of artists’ dress at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies between 2000 and 2021, and how they discuss three perspectives: the Olympic values, some international topics that are happening in parallel with the Games, and a “promotion of the national”, i.e., the enhancing of positive characteristics of a specific nation by its members.

Although politicians and representatives of private institutions are important agents during the Ceremonies, this paper focuses on the artists invited to perform during the Ceremonies. They usually consist of well-known references to the host country, such as singers, bands, dancers, etc. While the athletes often wear outfits with

⁸ ARNING. Soft power, ideology and symbolic manipulation in Summer Olympic Games opening ceremonies, p. 523-544. / HAYES; KARAMICHAS. *Olympic Games, Mega-Events and Civil Societies*.

⁹ The Olympic Museum. *The Modern Olympic Games*.

¹⁰ LATTIPONGPUN. The Origins of the Olympic Games’ Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

¹¹ HISTOIRE, SPORT ET CITOYENNETE.

¹² PEREZ; SOARES. Shapes and colours as symbols for international values.

¹³ ANDERSON. *Imagined communities*.

¹⁴ PEREZ; SOARES. Shapes and colours as symbols for international values.

national colors and/or symbols, especially during their parade, it is expected that formal actors wear suits or equivalents — frequently in sober tones of blue, black, or gray. The artists' dress is often more complex, mixing a visual exuberance to be seen on stage, national references to the host country, and other creative choices.

Our corpus includes twelve recorded videos¹⁵ of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the 2000-2020 Summer Games, available online at the official YouTube channel of the Olympic Games.¹⁶ Central moments of the footage were converted into screenshots, thus creating a second corpus of almost 600 images of the Ceremonies. From this corpus, we chose for the present paper 13 pictures of the following events: Sydney 2000 Opening and Closing Ceremonies, Athens 2004 Opening Ceremony, Beijing 2008 Opening Ceremony, London 2012 Closing Ceremony, Rio 2016 Opening Ceremony, and Tokyo 2020 Opening Ceremony. This choice is intended to highlight the paper's arguments without developing an overwhelming explanation.

The present article is organized into two parts. The first one presents six analytical categories to interpret outfits as a discourse, stressing the role of shape and color in communicating complex ideas [see notes 8 and 10]. These six analytical categories originated from the authors' previous research¹⁷ on sartorial items used at the Games' Ceremonies, based on the discursive perspective of Bendel Larcher, Kress and Heller. The second part of this paper brings the artists' performances at the Games' Ceremonies and their take on international matters, focusing on a discursive analysis of the sartorial items used by these artists. Therein, we present the context of international politics and the Olympic Games during the first 20 years of the 21st century, considering the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 in the US as a game-changer for internationalism and the role of global values in national contexts. Indeed, until the attack of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, in New York City, the Olympic Ceremonies had tried to keep on with Olympism, that is, to “inspire people toward a lifelong orientation to personal development and moral

¹⁵ The videos were considered in their full length, although we took prints of different outfits and scenes while watching them. These screenshots became the corpus for the present paper.

¹⁶ OLYMPICS YouTube Channel..

¹⁷ PEREZ; SOARES. Shapes and colours as symbols for international values.

excellence”.¹⁸ Indeed, Olympism can be understood as “[...] a social philosophy, which emphasizes the role of sport in world development, international understanding, peaceful co-existence, and social and moral education”.¹⁹ After this, we notice a switch to different representations of national values and issues, especially concerning developing nations. Considering this, the hegemony of the developed nations as a reference for what is good is reduced, enabling developing nations to communicate values from other perspectives. Finally, we focus on the category of the “promotion of the national” and link this concept to other perspectives such as multiculturalism and postcolonialism.

SIX ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES TO INTERPRET THE OUTFITS OF THE GAMES

As mentioned before, in our previous work on the symbolism of shapes and colors of sartorial items used at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Summer Olympic Games, we developed six analytical categories to interpret the outfits used by the actors starring in these ceremonies in the last two decades (Table 1).²⁰

These categories are not isolated features, which people should follow diligently. Each combination of shapes and colors of outfits or accessories should not be taken for granted; rather, they can be perceived as complex structures that intend to enhance ideas, intensify a relation with a specific public, and/or reinforce discursive premises. The actors mix these references, according to what they want to express, and how.²¹ In this sense, the articulations of these categories can be seen as a dynamic activity. Just as athletes often choose sober suits over the sportswear one would expect them to wear,²² spokespeople can lighten the tone of their message by bringing different accessories or changing the traditional color palette associated with a specific shape. Nonetheless, the case of the artists may differ from the others, since they tend to mix a greater proportion of fashion tendencies, promotion of the national (such as the colors of a flag), and lyrical outfits.

¹⁸ TEETZEL. *Olympism: The Evolution*, p. 107-117.

¹⁹ KELMENDI *et al.* *Olympism and role of Olympic Values in Sport*, p. 14.

²⁰ PEREZ; SOARES. *Shapes and colours as symbols for international values*.

²¹ GOFFMAN. *The presentation of self in everyday life*.

²² BREWARD. *The suit*.

Category	Main colors	Who (mainly) wears it?	Main message
Protocol colors or “politician outfit”	navy blue, gray, dark gray, black, beige	representatives of the different government and international organizations; athletes	discretion, standardization, credible official communications, public mentions, diplomacy, elegance, temperance, masculinity
The Western conception of “sportswear”	bright tones, often related to the nation’s flag	athletes during the parade	uniformity; sports as the major point of the event; laid back environment; youth and strength; athleisure
“Traditional” clothes of a nation	vary according to the national references/adaptations; can be related to the nation’s flag	athletes during the parade	recording the nation’s past and origin; cultural diversity
Promotion of the national	vary according to the national references/adaptations	artists during the beginning of the Opening Ceremony and the end of the Closing Ceremony	highlighting the nation’s history and its modern values and tendencies
The lyrical outfit	metallic tones; major presence of blue, white, silver	artists, mainly singers, during the musical part(s)	lyricism; reprise of the Greek ideal of contemplating all five senses in each event
Fashion tendencies	vary according to the moment	athletes, artists	linking each event to their chronological context; presence of a “fashion taste”

Table 1: Analytical categories proposed and developed by the authors to interpret outfits.

For the proposed analysis, we rely on Discourse Analysis, which is a vast scientific field with many approaches. In our case, discourse shall be understood as the social process of understanding how to interpret and organize the world.²³ Whereas Discourse Analysis tends to be associated with a rather language-based analysis, the field of Social Semiotics is interested in meaning, in all its forms. In this sense, “[...] meaning arises in social environments and in social interactions. That makes the social into the source, the origin and the generator of meaning”.²⁴ When it comes to analyzing visual representations, many categories can be considered, color being one of them. Therefore, “[...] colour is also used to convey interpersonal meaning: it allows us to realize ‘colour acts’, just as language permits ‘speech acts’. It can be and is used to do things to or for each other”.²⁵

The field of Social Semiotics, as developed by Kress, can and shall be understood from a discursive perspective,²⁶ Kress derives this concept from the systemic-functional model of Halliday, who

focuses on the relationship between the linguistic system and the social structure within a theory of ‘social semiotics’. The purpose of social semiotics is to study signifying practices in social and cultural contexts, to analyse human meaning-making as a social practice.²⁷

Halliday developed his theory in the seventies, when Discourse Analysis was still being shaped as the vast field we know today. Later, Kress (and Van Leeuwen in *Reading Images*) further developed Social Semiotics from the perspective of Discourse Analysis as a tool for analyzing multimodal corpora, like images and videos. In the present paper, we consider Social Semiotics as an inherent dimension of Discourse Analysis.

In this sense, Bendel Larcher²⁸ includes Kress’ multimodal analysis as part of Discourse Analysis in her manual *Linguistische Diskursanalyse: Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch*, considering various aspects of the analysis of images, such as colors.

²³ BENDEL LARCHER. *Linguistische Diskursanalyse*, p.16.

²⁴ KRESS. *Multimodality*, p. 54.

²⁵ KRESS: VAN LEEUWEN. *Reading Images*, p. 241.

²⁶ BENDEL LARCHER. *Linguistische Diskursanalyse*, p. 45.

²⁷ ANGERMULLER et al. *The Discourse Studies Reader*, p. 263.

²⁸ BENDEL LARCHER. *Linguistische Diskursanalyse*, p. 154.

Therefore, Bendel Larcher also considers Heller's theory of colors²⁹ as a tool for multimodal analysis from a discursive perspective. Through this model proposed by Heller, we can estimate the importance and the meanings of different colors, as perceived in Western societies.

Color	Meaning
Blue	unlimited, loyalty, longing, chill, masculine and spiritual virtues, royal, divine, peaceful
Red	love, hate, nobility, forbidden, life force, divine fire, matter, control, dynamism
Green	hope, nature, poison, health, youth
Orange	cheap, modernity, pleasure, fun, energy, shift, security, warning
Violet	power, vanity, immorality, extravagance, fashion, mystery, feminism, LGBT, decadence
Gray	mediocrity, boredom, sadness, unkindness, cruelty, old, past, poverty, inferior, illegal
Silver	fast, secondary, nobility, counterfeiting, modern, elegance
Yellow	sun, optimism, enlightenment, maturity, envy, selfishness, warning
Black	death, negative feelings, dirt, misfortune, meanness, elegance, individuality, illegality
White	perfection, light, divine, ideal, resurrection, purity, innocence, status, truth, peace, snow
Pink	feminine, sweet, childlike, weakness, romance, cozy, vanity
Brown	stupidity, laziness, unerotic, comfort, security, spoiled, poor, old-fashioned
Gold	luck, wealth, pride, infatuation, divine, happiness, splendor, festivity, fame, decor, alchemy, winner

Table 2: Colors and their meanings as seen in Western societies (based on Heller 2001; 2013).

The proposed analysis in this paper is thus conducted considering the color meanings and symbolism as organized by Heller. We believe that such analysis may

²⁹ HELLER. *Wie Farben wirken.* / HELLER. *A psicologia das cores.*

shed light on the power of the messages conveyed by artists at the Ceremonies. It is also important to reinforce that our analysis focuses mainly on the artists' outfits and their colors, shapes, and symbolism, although we may often explore other elements displayed on the "stage" to strengthen our argument. Considering this, we follow to the next part of this paper, where the context of the early 2000s is discussed, allowing us to understand how geopolitics and worldwide events influence the Games and the messages each edition brings to the public every four years.

THE ARTISTS' PERFORMANCES DURING THE GAMES' CEREMONIES AND THEIR TAKE ON INTERNATIONAL MATTERS

Due to the magnitude of the Games, seen as "[...] the quintessential instance of the globalization of sport",³⁰ the choice of a nation as a host of a future edition of the event happens with an anticipation of many years. Sydney was chosen as the host city of the 2000 edition, the "Games of the New Millennium", in 1993, after a competitive and expensive bidding procedure.³¹ Moreover, the previous edition of the Games, in Atlanta (USA), was severely criticized by the media, which stressed that the event had a poor organization and had become too commercial.³² In this sense, the political aspect of the Games and the strong impact it could have, both on national and international scales, was explicit. The use of the Olympiads as a platform to express political perspectives was not new:

The Olympics' high-profile has been employed by organizations to promote a particular ideology. Worldly covered mega-events provide dissenting voices with an opportunity to express their view and attract potentially violent protests and political demonstrations. They offer a platform for protests and grievances, as is illustrated by the Black Power salute in the 1968 Mexico Games. Several Olympic boycotts (Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984) point to the use of hallmark events by the governments to protest against other nations. But political protests have not always been peaceful, as the 1972 Olympic Village massacre of the Israeli team members proves. More recently, Atlanta suffered a bomb attack. [...] Hallmark events as a platform for community protest are also illustrated by the Aboriginal issues. Aboriginal groups have used mega-sporting events in the past to highlight the plight of their people.³³

³⁰ ROWE *et al.* *apud* FURRER. *Sydney 2000: "Sharing the spirit?"*, p. 62.

³¹ NEW SOUTH WALES Treasury *et al.* *The Economic Impact of Sydney Olympic Games*.

³² ZEBULON BAKER. *Whatwuzit?*

³³ FURRER. *Sydney 2000: "Sharing the spirit?"*, p. 21.

In this sense, the 2000 edition of the Games “[...] were staged in the middle of a historical phase of globalization which took off around 1990 and lasted until the global financial crisis in 2009”.³⁴ In September 2000, just before the beginning of the Games, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the Millennium Declaration, which intended “[...] to reaffirm our [the UN’s] faith in the Organization and its Charter as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world”.³⁵ The document discussed six major topics, from peace to poverty eradication and protection of the environment, through the development of human rights, democracy, governance, and the UN itself. In a symbolic convergence of these ideals, the North and South Korea teams competed separately but walked together during the Athletes’ parade. Timor-Leste, which had become independent very recently and did not have a flag, paraded with the Olympic flag.³⁶

If, at the time, the notion of crisis seemed somewhat under control, the turn of the century conjuncture included, among other international topics, discussions about “green games”³⁷ and the symbolism of a new era with more diversity and inclusion. The Olympic points resonated with the general turn-of-the-century international goals and expectations: a moment where it was allowed to be optimistic and hope for a better future. Contrary to politicians, representatives of private institutions, or athletes, the artists do not adopt a mainstream reference to their outfits — it can be a suit in sober tones or a sportswear uniform with national identification. Their connection to a political expression is also developed by the composition of a lyrical aspect, thus widening the possible color spectrum and the shapes of the outfits.

We can see a reflection of such topics by the choice of preparing a Festival of the Dreaming as the first of the four Olympic Arts Festival, in 1997. The Game’s Opening Ceremony resumed the ideals of dreaming and achieving: John Farham and

³⁴ WADE. The economic legacy of Sydney’s Olympics is still taking shape.

³⁵ UNITED NATIONS. United Nations Millennium Declaration.

³⁶ HAVELY. The Olympics: a very political game.

³⁷ CHALKLEY; ESSEX. Sydney 2000: the “Green Games”?, p. 299-307; BRIESE. Sustaining Sydney, p. 25-42.

Olivia Newton-John sang *Dare to Dream*, and one of the Ceremony's sections was called *Awakening*, thus stressing the role of action to make dreams come true.³⁸

The same Opening Ceremony included several Indigenous-themed segments (Figure 1), and Cathy Freeman, a Kuku Yalanji Australian who competed as a sprinter, was chosen to light the Olympic cauldron (Figure 2). Freeman would eventually win the 400m final, thus consolidating a general sensation of a victory for the nation, as well as the idea of diversity concerning the Indigenous population of the country. In these cases, the sartorial choice focuses either on traditional aesthetics from different Indigenous people or on regular sportswear, therefore proposing diversity by distancing themselves from national items such as the flag, country colors, or other symbols. Freeman wore a body-length overall in light colors, stressing her athletic figure. In this sense, although, during the Sydney ceremonies, Aboriginal people were present and wore traditional outfits (Figure 1), Freeman molded part of her identity as an athlete, a spokesperson of sports, more than dealing with other categories (Figure 2).



Figure 1 - Djakapurra Munyarryun, a Yolngu elder and songman, holds Nikki Webster by the hand during Sydney Opening Ceremony, in 2000. Footage from YouTube.

³⁸ Both events were directed by the same person: Rhoda Roberts AO. It is important to note that the Opening and Closing Ceremonies are usually commissioned to different artists from the host country. Therefore, even if this paper stresses the dialog of the events within a wider agenda, the point of view of the event is also authorial. See O'CONNOR. How the Sydney Olympics amplified First Nation voices on and off the track.

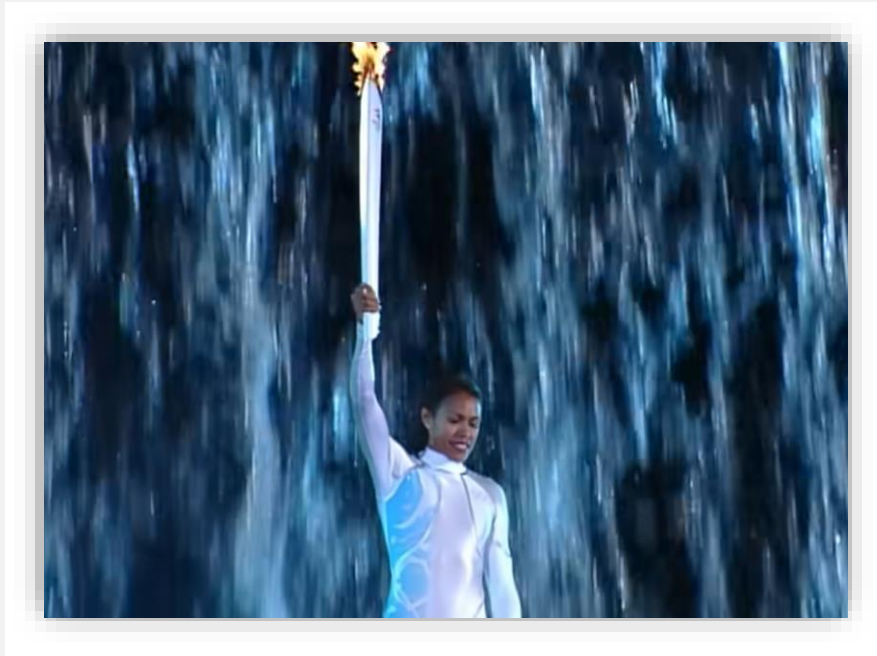


Figure 2.a - Cathy Freeman just before lighting the Olympic Cauldron.

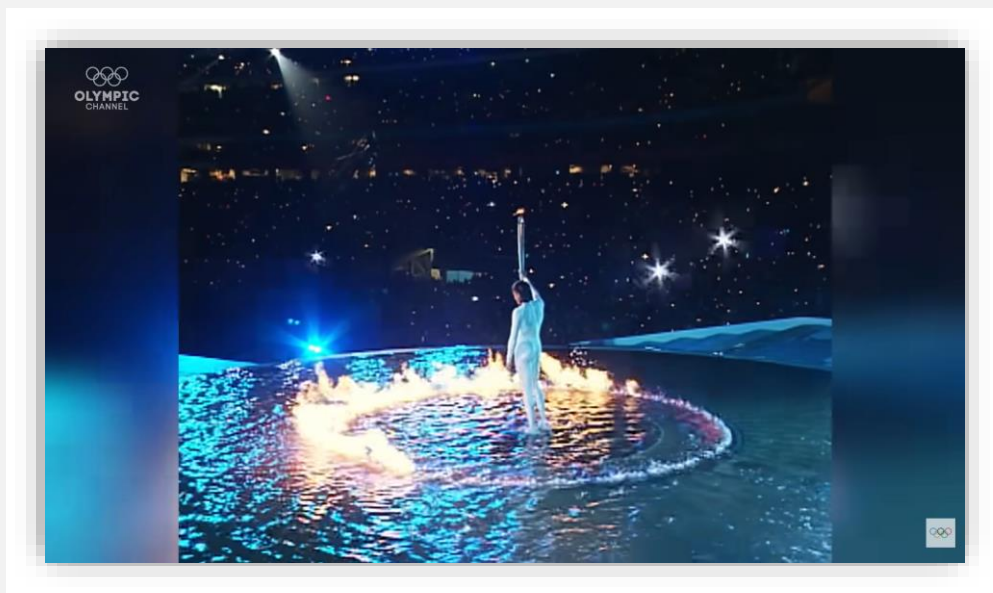


Figure 2.b - The lighting of the Olympic Cauldron. Footage from YouTube.

The general theme of diversity, inclusion, and tolerance was also present during Sydney's Closing Ceremony. The Australian duo Savage Garden released its second and final album, *Affirmation*, in 1999 and performed the homonymous song during the ceremony (Figure 3). Both artists are seen in jeans and black³⁹ shirts with short or no sleeves. If this outfit is, at the same time, neutral and characteristic of the

³⁹ BENDEL LARCHER. *Linguistische Diskursanalyse*, p. 154.

2000s fashion tendencies, the print on the singer's shirt is an Aboriginal flag, stressing the general message of national integration. In this sense, the song synthesized the idea of national and international affirmation towards the political agendas of representativity and cooperation. In an "era of glam, excess and pop superstars",⁴⁰ the dress, practical, neat and straightforward, translates a political optimism in front of the plural challenges of the New Millennium. It is also interesting to note that the black color works as a canvas to stress the importance of the aforementioned message. By wearing black, we can interpret that singer Darren Hayes chose to deliver an individual perspective concerning the Aboriginal cause but to a global public, in a context in which such diversity is already being discussed.

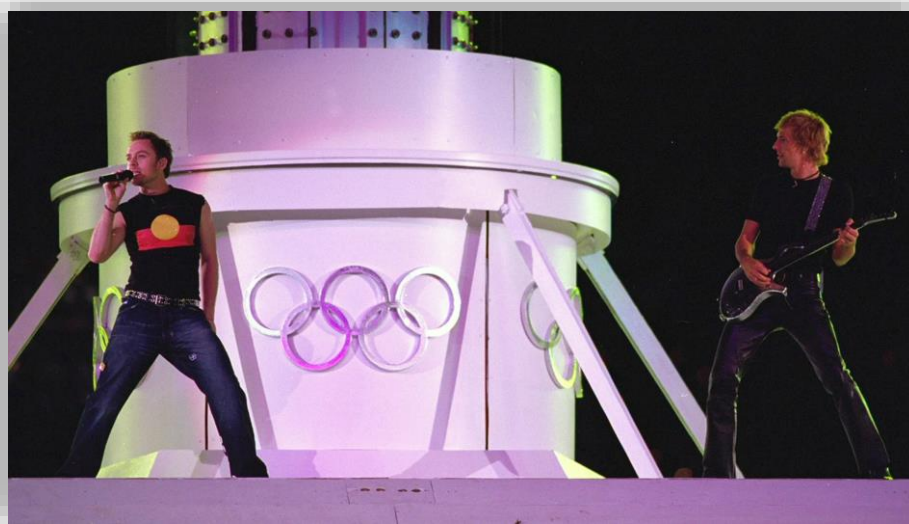


Figure 3 - Australian duo Savage Garden performing during Sydney's Closing Ceremony, 2000.⁴¹

However, this general scenario would be shattered by the events of September 11, 2001.⁴² And, in 2005, one day after London won as the host for the 2012 Games, "suicide bombers exploded four devices in central London during the rush hour, killing a total of 56 people and injuring more than 700".⁴³ Other severe attacks, such as the events at the Bataclan or the bombing near the Stade de France, in Paris, both

⁴⁰ COPSEY. Darren Hayes reflects on Savage Garden: "It was an era of glam, excess and super popstars".

⁴¹ FREEMAN. Director: Laurence Billiet. Australia, 2021.

⁴² TOOHEY; TAYLOR. *Mega Events, Fear, and Risk*, p. 451-469.

⁴³ KAVETSOS; SZYMANSKI. *Olympic Games, Terrorism and their Impact on the London and Paris Stock Exchanges*, p. 189-206.

in 2015, highlighted the fear of terrorism⁴⁴ and faceless enemies operating in a deconstructed chain. Besides the security issues, the 2008 financial crash interrupted the previous ideal of sustainable economic growth and wide social development, including the adoption of technology and improvement of the general quality of life.

The Games editions of Athens, Beijing, London, and Rio stress different points of an unstable period in sharp contrast with the pre-2001 expectations. It can be about the scope of the international challenges and the shattering of the ideal of a “peaceful internationalism”,⁴⁵ or about how to cope with it — especially at a national level. In 2004, the Athens Opening Ceremony was divided into two parts, *Allegory* and *Clepsydra*, which intended to present general choices of the meaning of life, and their modification throughout the decades, from the Ancient to the Modern Times. The choice of Athens also reinforces the idea of a new beginning and comeback to tradition; during the *Allegory*, the third part of the poem *Mythistorema*, by George Seferis,⁴⁶ was read aloud.

Seferis opens his poem with the epigraph “Remember the baths where you were murdered.” He also states: “I woke with this marble head in my hands;/ it exhausts my elbow and I don’t know where to put it down./ It was falling into the dream as I was coming out of the dream / so our life became one, and it will be very difficult for it to separate again”. This struggle between dream and reality, plus the alert concerning the murder site, seems well accurate for the broken expectations of the previous years and the “continuous crisis of modernity and globalization”.⁴⁷ Therefore,

[the closing ceremony] converted the stage of the stadium into a gigantic wheat field that was formed in the shape of a spiral maze. The production began with a mock Greek wedding, which became a platform for incorporating local celebrations from various regions of Greece. These festivities were followed by the Exodus concert, a live show by representatives of the contemporary folk music scene in Greece.[...] The two ceremonies should be seen as supplementary to each other. If the [...] Opening Ceremony attempted to capture the archetype of Greek civilization in an Apollonian manner, the closing ceremony aspired to evoke its Dionysian character, and it was more pluralistic in nature, encompassing the regional diversity of Greek culture. If in the opening ceremony we encounter a nation more than a people, the opposite is true for the closing one.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ SPAAIJ. *Terrorism and Security at the Olympics*, p. 451-468.

⁴⁵ KONSTANTAKI *et al.* *Themes and content of the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony*, p. 40-53.

⁴⁶ POETRY FOUNDATION. *Mythistorema* (by George Seferis).

⁴⁷ TOMLINSON. *Olympic spectacle*, p. 583-602.

⁴⁸ TRAGANOU. *National Narratives in the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games*, p. 236-251.



Figure 4.a - Singer Björk performs during the Athens Opening Ceremony in 2004.

Amidst the allegories and transformations between Ancient and Modern times, the singer Björk performed the song *Oceania* (Figure 4) while incarnating the sea. Not only did it refer to the continuous Odyssey that is human life on earth, but it also referred to the variation of tides and political cycles. Her dress, created by the Greek stylist Sophia Kokosalaki, reflected the waves and tones of the sea, therefore incarnating the allegory. During the singer's performance, a large piece of fabric connected to Björk's dress started to cover the heads of the athletes, who had gathered in the center of the stadium. After the end of the song, there was a projection of a world map on the fabric. The song states: "You show me continents / I see the islands / You count the centuries / I blink my eyes." The islands of individuals presented at the Ceremony are united by the dress fabric.



Figure 4.b - Singer Björk performs during the Athens Opening Ceremony in 2004.

This was a very explicit representation of the lyrical outfit, where the color symbolism was tainted in metallic tones, bringing nuances between political communication and fantasy.



Figure 4.c - Singer Björk performs during the Athens Opening Ceremony in 2004.

The allegory from the sea and its movement would be resumed in the next edition of the Games, in Beijing (2008), stressing the ideas of cooperation and brotherhood throughout the nations. The first segments of the Opening Ceremony resumed the *Analects* of Confucius,⁴⁹ first scrolling a question (“Isn’t it delightful to have friends coming from afar?”) and later a sentence (“All those within the four seas can be considered his brothers”).



Figure 5 - Drummers perform during the Beijing Opening Ceremony.

⁴⁹ SLINGERLAND. *Analects*.

Indeed, the main effects of this edition of the games were a result of a large and cooperative work from the hundreds of performers at the Ceremony. They often wore very similar clothing and had to execute precise moves to reach the final visual result (Figures 5 and 6).⁵⁰



Figure 6 - Performers chanting a quote from Confucius' Analects, translated as "All those within the four seas can be considered his brothers". Tim Hipps, U.S. Army, 2008.

Finally, the London and Rio editions of the games stressed the progressive modifications concerning nations and their identities, especially by dealing with multiculturalism and different postcolonial scenarios. If the union is necessary to allow a nation to exist, multicultural perspectives shed light on diversity and different storytelling, all under the same flag. In 2012, the Games were organized not by England, but by the entire United Kingdom, and some live artists (Duran Duran, Stereophonics, Snow Patrol, and Paolo Nutini) were chosen to represent the 4 countries — England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

In this case, the UK flag was particularly present as a symbol of union and cooperation between the host countries (Figure 7). While one of the Savage Garden's outfits was a black shirt with an Aboriginal symbol, Matthew Bellamy from MUSE wore, in London, a white shirt with the UK flag, under a shiny suit. As for the Spice Girls performance during the Closing Ceremony, the UK flag was used as a large back ribbon for Geri Halliwell's red dress.

⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the highly theatrical tone of the performance brought criticism for not discussing the actual situation of the country at the time. See KONSTANTAKI *et al.* Themes and content of the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony, p. 40-53.



Figure 7. a - Geri Halliwell from the Spice Girls performs with a UK flag as a ribbon for her dress, in the London Closing Ceremony, 2012.

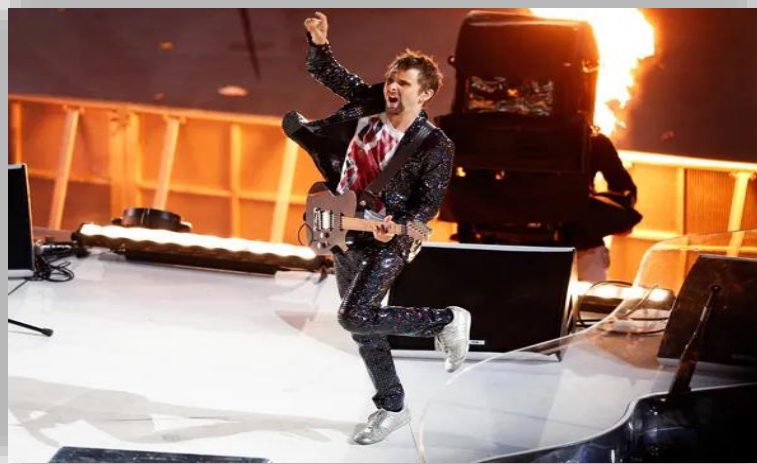


Figure 7.b) - Matthew Bellamy of MUSE performs wearing a shirt with the UK flag, during the London Closing Ceremony, 2012.

Rio's attempt to balance national history and union was also based on a choice of local artists and references. During a segment of Rio's Opening Ceremony, artists performed in a model of the Brazilian Congress, all dressed with the Brazilian flag (Figure 8). The highlights in shape and color as major visual elements stress a choice to enhance the role of the host nation and its internal approaches concerning

multiculturalism and development. It partially sets aside wider global topics — even if the Games are an example of a successful global product.

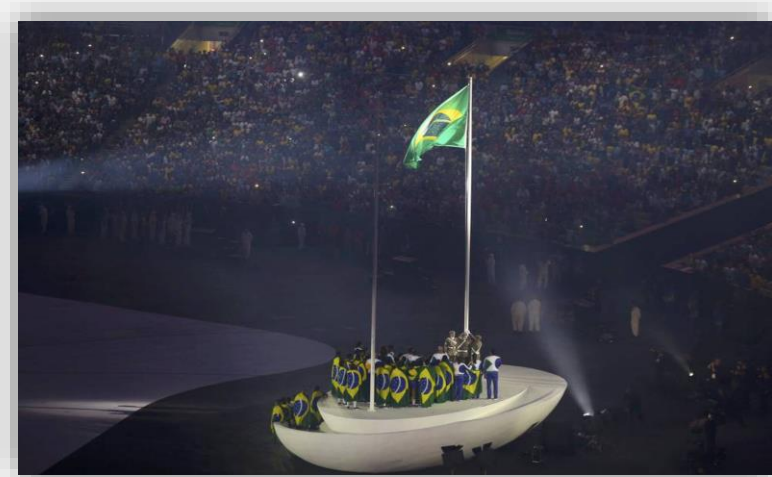


Fig. 8: Artists perform in a model of the Brazilian Congress during Rio's Opening Ceremony, 2016.⁵¹ Capa da revista *FuLiA/UFMG*, v. 9, n. 3, 2024.

The idea of a search for global harmony would have a comeback in the Tokyo 2020 edition, especially because of the COVID-19 pandemic — it was visible in the naming of some Ceremony segments, such as *Apart but not Alone*. Due to the global sanitary situation, there was serious consideration about canceling this edition of the Games, which finally was postponed to 2021. The Opening Ceremony happened in a stadium without any public, while the media acknowledged: “The ceremony is an effort to inspire people around the globe by celebrating the world's best athletes coming together, while also acknowledging the trouble and anxiety these Games have caused”.⁵² Especially, the idea of dreaming as a collective action is resumed: singers John Legend (representing the Americas), Keith Urban (Australia), Angélique Kidjo (Africa), Alejandro Sanz (Europe), and the Suginami Junior Chorus (Asia) were chosen to represent each continent involved in the Games and, together, performed John Lennon's song *Imagine* (Figure 9). It can be seen that the color white stands out as a privileged choice to represent peace as an international symbol. As Heller⁵³ points out, white stands for peace, divine, ideal, purity, etc. Therefore, it is often used in specific moments of the Ceremonies, such as the singing of the Olympic

⁵¹ N/A. As imagens da cerimônia de abertura da Olimpíada.

⁵² KENNEDY *et al.* Olympic Opening Ceremony Is A Delicate Mix Of Celebration and Solemnity.

⁵³ HELLER. *Wie Farben wirken*, p. 145. / HELLER. *A psicologia das cores*.

Anthem (usually by children as a means to reinforce the message of union). In the case of the *Imagine* performance, a wide projection of the globe was set in tones of white and blue,⁵⁴ not only reflecting the Earthly division between Ocean and Land but also stressing the spiritual union between people, everywhere, in a close tone to the UN's main mission.

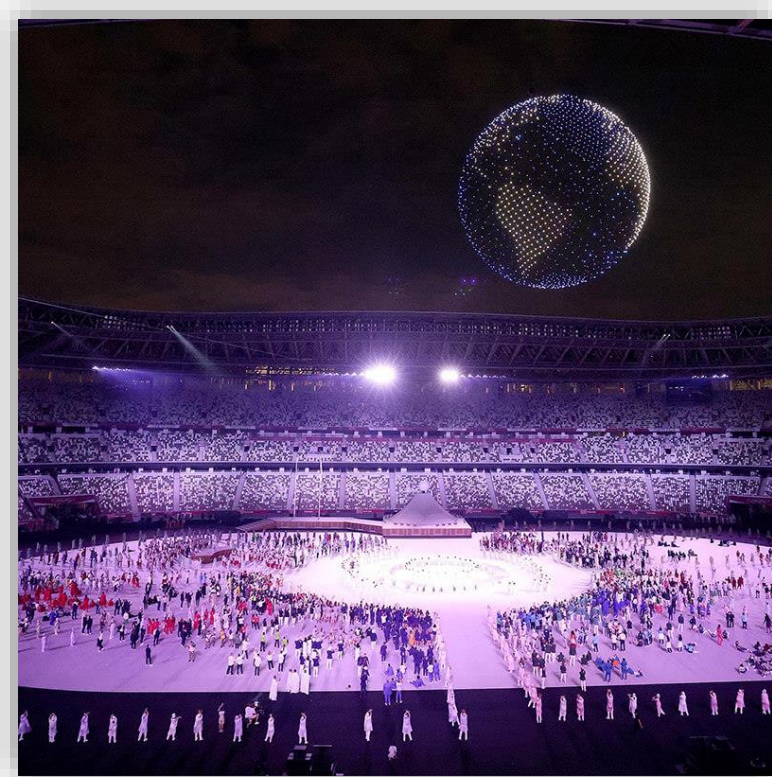


Figure 9 - Artists perform John Lennon's song *Imagine* while a projection of the Earth is shown on the sky, Tokyo Opening Ceremony, 2021.⁵⁵

Previous editions of the Olympic Games (particularly Atlanta, 1996) chose to perform *Imagine* during its ceremonies — a composition that can be seen as “more a hymn than a song”.⁵⁶ The reassembling of artists as representatives of continents and their union by performance stresses how, even in a changing international context, there is an intention to highlight global values.

⁵⁴ HELLER. *Wie Farben wirken*, p. 23. / HELLER. *A psicologia das cores*.

⁵⁵ JOHN LENNON. Drones light up the sky & artists sing ‘*Imagine*’ at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics Opening Ceremony.

⁵⁶ JOHN LENNON. Drones light up the sky & artists sing ‘*Imagine*’ at the Tokyo 2020 [...].

CONCLUSION

The Olympic Games are a complex initiative that demands cooperation between national and international levels. Some main actors of the Opening and Closing Ceremonies intend to represent these different contributions — the politicians and representatives of private institutions usually make speeches and watch the general performances of the athletes and the artists. We could expect the role of this last category to be lyrical more than anything else. That is, their narrative could not only offer entertainment but could also be an opportunity to enhance global values such as harmony, cooperation, general development, resilience, etc., in short, discuss Olympism. At the same time, they also play an important part when it comes to political positioning, and the symbolism of their visual aspect is relevant to this point.

Throughout the first two decades of the 21st century, internationalism has seen an increase in the struggle between global values and ideas and the development of different nations on a single planet. The search for a union among the people contrasts heavily with multicultural issues. This is noticeable through the adaptation of different outfits (especially the athletes') to create an authentic storytelling that might include different origins, different beliefs, and other perspectives that were previously considered minorities. The artistic choices during the performances highlight and reflect these issues. It does so by selecting a particular close to enhance visibility, by discussing the international challenges through lyrical solutions, or by stressing the host nation's victories and characteristics (usually by heavily using the country's flag as a symbol).

Therefore, the "promotion of the national" is one of the major categories used during the Games' Ceremonies between 2000 and 2020, sometimes coordinated with lyrical aspects (colors such as pink, yellow, purple, and metallic tones) and current fashion trends (artists performing with jeans). This articulation intends to highlight the artists' particular role — they are not formal representatives of any protocol — and their civilian perspective, by relating to regular people who follow fashion trends. Their outfits are also strongly related to the choice of songs and choreography, thus creating a general performing agenda to address specific

political issues, and bringing in the process a positive light concerning the nation that will host the next edition of the Games.

In this sense, we can observe a variation between the ideal of a global competition tied by cooperation (“We are the world, we are the children”, as sung by USA for Africa in 1985) and an interior discussion of each nation, concerning how to represent its diversity and its traditions. This approach is distant from the ideal of belonging to an elite league where the flag would be the main synthesis of history and the group members would follow mainly a Western referential. And different images of the artists can be negotiated, considering those two aspects — they are not necessarily conclusive, but change throughout the years and can deploy different negotiations, according to different contexts.

The 2024 Games, which happened in Paris, highlighted the environmental issues as a collective one. The Games’ organizing committee stated in early 2024 that “hosting the biggest event in the world is going to change our country. It’s inevitable. Paris 2024 wants sports values to become a key part of people’s lives and to prove that we can achieve excellence while also championing sustainability”,⁵⁷ Edition after edition, the idea of legacy and the revisiting of “human challenges” take new tones. The analysis of the Paris 2024 performances may be an important next step to check this agenda.

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⁵⁷ THE OLYMPIC GAMES OF PARIS 2024 Official Website.

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