

STAGING AN OLYMPIC MYTH: DEMOCRACY AND THE 2010  
VANCOUVER OLYMPICS

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## **Abstract**

My research examines how the discursive articulations of the Vancouver Olympics contributes to a spatial order, explored through a theoretical framework informed by Jacques Rancière's political philosophy. Rancière (1999) explores politics as an aesthetic, spatial exercise, radically framed through equality. An Olympics case study, employing this theoretical frame, invites an emancipatory method to fill in the gap of the post-political literature and critically assess my research question: what is the status of democracy in Vancouver during the Games bidding and preparations phase? Interviews with Olympic volunteers, protestors, a city councillor, and organizing committee members have articulated the Games and urban image through themes of inevitability of the Olympic event, via aestheticization of particular neoliberalized transit infrastructure. This thesis interrogates the politics of neoliberalization in Vancouver, how urban space is (re)produced undemocratically, and discursively investigates how common-sense statements about the city are constituted through non-violent means and lack a disciplinary command.

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## **Dedication**

To my family: my mother, father, sister, grandma, and dog, I cannot express how unwaveringly supportive you are. You have always believed in me and provoked deep ethical and philosophical questions informing my own worldview, impelling kindness, and reflection. You are caring, compassionate, and inspirational figures in my life. I seek to always share these altruistic traits. Exposing me to world travel and progressive causes from a very young age calcified how I sought to approach oppressions and inequalities, through radical politics. Labour geography serves as a smaller focus in my thesis, however, I forever want to express the emotional and material labour you all expended as I chipped away at this research project.

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## **Introduction: Vancouver, Politics, and its Discontents**

“The foundation of politics is not in fact more a matter of convention than of nature: it is the lack of foundation, the sheer contingency of any order. Politics exists simply because no social order is based on nature, no divine law regulates human society” (Rancière, 1999, p. 16).

“The Olympics had never been a left-right thing in Vancouver: It was all about the special interests, and these special interests could – and would – fly flags of the left or right at will” (Shaw, 2008, p. 32).

My research investigates the politics of the city of Vancouver, through a case-study of one of the most recognizable urban spectacular and singularly arresting events: the Olympics Games. The existing scholarship on radical politics and the Olympic event in Vancouver is a rich source of text, contextualizing the oppressive features of the Games on urban space. My thesis examines the ways the Olympic event is articulated by its producers, resistant and receptive Vancouverites, and politicians. These articulations reveal a certain politics of order to the city of Vancouver, where the Olympic Games became a natural, necessary, and inevitable aesthetic of the city. The Olympic Games purports to universalize a mythology of a mega-event ritual that promotes peace and human dignity as a “way of life” (IOC, 2025, p. 8), through an apolitical sports spectacle. I investigate what this apoliticism conceals, and the impact of the darker side of the Olympics. I first became interested in how critical human geography could interrogate the conditions of the mega-event that is the Olympics, one that institutes inequality, oppression, and injustices.

To radically approach this research project and investigate such inequalities through a method that centres equality, I rely on the critical theory of Jacques Rancière, “a veritable thinker of dissensus who is constantly undermining what is easily taken to be the solid footing of previous philosophic work in order to resist the consensual systems of discourse and action that

are in place” (Rockhill and Watts, 2009, p. 2). I am interested in the radicality of Rancière’s sentiments as a point of reference to investigate a case study of Vancouver’s Olympic urban politics. Rancière (1999, 2001) reflects on the practices of solidarity, emancipation, and equality operating as particular scenes that take place on a stage (dramaturgically), and the rehearsal of practices are always disparate since “every scene manifests a specific configuration of forces and objects and persons. This is a fundamental point about aesthetic experience: it is born of the particular (not the general) and is resistant to the general application of a concept. Hence there are no general concepts of solidarity, emancipation, or equality” (Panagia, 2018, p. 4). Therefore as Rancière (2016, p. 67) argues, “there are only scenes whose conditions are immanent to their being executed.” This brief elucidation of Rancière’s theoretical commitment, and my interest in politics as an aesthetic, allows for a context of what is at stake in Vancouver’s politics.

This introduction, as a first section, contextualizes Vancouver’s politics and the Olympics, outlining the research puzzle and research questions. The section also contextualizes my theoretical framework based off of Rancière’s political philosophy. Rancière’s (1999) aesthetic vision of politics provides a unique geographic and spatial method, examining what produces the conditions through which common-sense statements become naturalized, and depoliticized. This theoretical framework aids in examining the articulations of a (un)natural order of Vancouver. The section also defines my methods and methodology. This involves a critical discourse analysis and textual analysis, where I interviewed seven research participants through semi-structured interviews. This section concludes with the overview of this thesis.

### **Political Context of Vancouver: “Unmaking Indigenous Politics” to Re-Embourgeoisement**

The city of Vancouver is one of contrasts. It has a history of progressive urbanism, such as affordable housing experiments of the 1960s and 1970s, yet the Downtown Eastside contains

Canada's poorest postal code. Vancouver is situated on the existing settlements and hunting and fishing grounds of the Squamish, and Musqueam Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. These Indigenous communities have continued to inhabit these lands, for over five thousand years (Francis, 2021). Vancouver's settler colonial history was that as a marginal site of the empire; shipyards and dockyards were strategically built to protect the British trade linkages of primary and periphery colonies (Hutton, 2019). The development of this peripheral settlement to larger urban site shifted as Burrard Inlets sawmills, land speculators, salmon canneries opened, and "therefore as much in the interest of capital as of settlers to brush aside Native claims to land and ensure that land was accessible. Progress and development required as much" (Harris, 2002, p. 52). Wood and Rossiter (2022, p. 4) explain that "settler colonialism in BC has been an effort to unmake Indigenous polities and land use and to remake colonial territory".

The growth of Vancouver as an extension of the colonial state attempted to erase Indigenous polities, making the land accessible for 'progress'; yet in the Canadian nation-state, it was a marginal city. Hutton (2019) notes this was a distant city, isolated from financial hubs of Central Canada, at the terminus of the railway, severed by the Rocky Mountains. However, in the late nineteenth century, a "developmental rescaling within extended geographical circuits" (Hutton, 2019, p. 50) of Vancouver occurred, as resource companies that serviced, processed, and exported a staples economy of fish, minerals, and lumber made their base in Vancouver (Ley and Hutton, 1987). Vancouver developed from its position as a provincial "backwater", with an ill-developed manufacturing base and marginal finance location, often competing with other British Columbian cities such as Victoria, Kelowna, and Kamloops (Hutton, 2019), into the Canadian West Coast's banking, finance, and resource headquarters (the staples economy base for the provincial resource periphery) (Carpenter and Hutton, 2019). Up until the mid-late

twentieth century, this exploding staple economy as well as expanded immigration (marked by vicious anti-Asian hatred and discrimination) and capital (seaborne trade) from Pacific-Rim countries led Vancouver's growth (Carpenter and Hutton, 2019). However, during the early-to mid-1980s, the ruinous effects of the recession in Vancouver eroded the staples urban economy "weakening of the city's linkages with the provincial resource hinterland" (Hutton, 2004, p. 1962). Vancouver underwent a neoliberalizing of the state through a revanchist movement (Smith, 1996) of the 1980s, abandoning the social reproductive welfare role (Mitchell, 2004). Through this recession, Vancouver's economy restructured and adopted the tenets of globalization, as exemplified in the World's Fair mega-event of 1986, when a flood of Pacific-Rim capital injected into Vancouver (Hutton, 2004). The staging of Expo 86 was a neo-conservative ideological reaction to the social liberal ethics of 1970s Vancouver politics (Ley, 2004). Mitchell (2004, p. 42) describes the revanchist movement as a "re-embourgeoisement" of Vancouver, involving:

"First, massive state investment in land accumulation and real-estate development; second, the transformation of these sites in spectacles and festivals for the global elites; and third, the privatization, rezoning, and marketing of the property to offshore developers from Hong Kong. The gentrification, disentitlement, and social dislocation cause by the mega-development projects which followed was immediate and intense."

These conditions of a revanchist, neoliberalized governance of Vancouver set the stage for a different politics for the city, and reoriented priorities for urban redevelopment. What this means in the 1990s was an embrace of (neo)liberal values (Mitchell, 2004), prioritizing the high-rise condominium planning philosophy of Vancouverism (Carpenter and Hutton, 2009), a rush of capital from Asian-Pacific supplementing the decimated staples economy with "much of this capital flow has been transmitted to the residential sector" (Hutton, 2019, p. 54), and expanded post-industrial labour market expansion of service sector jobs (Hutton, 2019). This

neoliberalizing paradigm of Vancouver's capitalism is understood as a political geographic project of settler-colonial territorial claims, one that is insecure; a narrative that attempts to erase Indigenous sovereignty (Wood and Rossiter, 2022). My research looks to the turn of the millennium, when Vancouver chose to host the winter Olympic games, a sports mega-event.<sup>1</sup> The Olympics "spark Vancouver as a volatile node in the global-urban nexus... unsettled colonial past of Vancouver haunts the very notions of land and, crucially, of ownership (that bedrock of neoliberalism) through the land claims of First Nations" (Derksen, 2019, p. 43-44). The Olympics represent a revanchist, "re-embourgeoisement" moment (Mitchell, 2004, p. 42).

### **Research Puzzle: New Socio-Political Spatialization's Become Imagined**

The Vancouver 2010 Olympics was initially conceived of a tool to grow the city by attracting investment inward and enhancing Vancouver's global profile (Ley and Dobson, 2008), developed by major real-estate developers and municipal elites with government officials informally sanctioning the Olympic project (Hiller, 2012). The revanchist, "re-embourgeoisement" (Mitchell, 2004, p. 42) moment and the effects of neoliberalizing in Vancouver "saw the Olympics as a great opportunity to tackle some of these challenges, especially in terms of creating a stimulus for changing the urban economy from an industrial to a service based economy and as a powerful tool for creating a post-industrial image for the city" (Shoval, 2002, p, 584). Vancouver ultimately secured the bid, and the preparations for the games in this planning stage involved limited transparency, accountability, and attempted to sidestep controversy, boosted by a neoliberalized technocratic, managerial class (Black, 2017, Mitchell,

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<sup>1</sup> The term mega-event is used throughout this thesis. I borrow from Müller and Gogishvili's (2022, p. 33) sharp, comprehensive definition that "mega-events are ambulatory occasions of a fixed duration that attract a large number of visitors, have a large mediated reach, come with large costs and have large impacts on the built environment and the population".

2004, VanWynsberghe et al., 2013). However, during the two-week spectacle, from opening to closing ceremonies (February 12 to 28, 2010), anti-Olympic activists generated “legacies of the forms of cultural and political resistance (or the imagination of critique) [that] have agitated the smoother discursive surfaces of urban governmentality in Vancouver” (Shaw, 2019, p. 43). Protesters demonstrated effectively and mobilized against the neoliberalizing and draconian politics of the city, enacting radical politics for Vancouverites, such as a right to the city (Boykoff, 2014a, 2016; Derksen, 2019; Lenskyj, 2020, Shaw, 2008). Boykoff’s (2014a) study of the protests enacted during the two-week period of the 2010 games argues that a “moment of movements” (i.e., radical politics) was practiced, politicizing the city in a moment of depoliticized planning. Nonetheless, my interests in the politics of the Olympics aims to complicate this moment of movements. Dikeç and Swyngedouw (2017, p. 9) note: “[i]n contrast to celebratory accounts of insurgency and occupation as political in themselves, such events do not necessarily unfold according to an emancipatory sequence. In fact, the challenge is to move from outbursts of indignation to the slow process of sustained transformative strategies through which a new socio-political spatialization becomes imagined, practised and universalized”. This commentary carefully interrogates the difficulty of urbanized spaces becoming politicized, through a practice of reordering space (while not privileging a properly political or purist version of politics).

My investigation diverges from the more spectacular moments of politics during the Olympics, it surveys how and what discursive articulations are constituted as common-sense in Vancouver during the mega-event bidding and planning, through approaching politics as an aesthetic. The critical investigations of Pentifallo and VanWynsberghe (2014), Black, (2017), VanWynsberghe et. al, (2013), Scherer, (2011), and Suborg et al. (2008) are the few political

analyses of the Vancouver Olympics during the bid and preparation period. I am interested in the urban politics of Vancouver (and mega-event Olympism) during this bidding and preparations period, when the multi-year policy, planning, and image-promotion are devised. As Lauermann (2016, p. 217) notes, the bidding is considered the only moment for questioning the normative relevance of the Olympics, while the preparation stage is the “process by which decision-making about the city’s future mega-event is relegated to technical debates over how to manage or mitigate the impacts of the Games”. Examining the politics of the Olympic Games, informed by Rancière’s (1999) aesthetic approach of radical politics, and method of equality within this temporal and spatial context, prompts conversation of how the Games toyed with democracy. My research puzzle describes the contemporary critical scholarship on the Games, and research inquiry and gap to be examined. It highlights what is at stake, investigating the urban politics of the Olympics and Vancouver through the bidding and preparations.

### **Research Objectives**

My research investigates the articulations of common-sense themes, or what Rancière (1999) refers to as “sensible evidences” that the Vancouver Olympics employed to (possibly) produce a post-democratic event, using the idea of the police and consensus making. I examine discursive articulations of Vancouver, the bidding and planning of the games to explore an aesthetic of politics and the status of democracy. An investigation using Rancière’s method of equality supplements the lacking literature on the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. Dikeç’s (2007, p. 21) Rancièrian analysis of politics is a helpful to situate my research objectives, as I “look at the sensible evidences that were put into place”, examining the articulations of the Vancouver Olympics during the bid and preparation period, constituting a certain discourse.

My thesis asks two research questions: (1) What are the sensible evidences (Rancière, 1999, Dikeç, 2007) that social-spatially policed and ordered Vancouver's society? (2) What are the politics of Vancouver, according to these articulations of common-sense themes? And how are common sense themes of the Vancouver Olympics articulated as natural features of the city?

### **Rancière and The Manner of Propriety**

“Democracy is not a regime or a social way of life. It is the institution of politics itself, the system of forms of subjectification through which any order of distribution of bodies into functions corresponding to their “nature” and places corresponding to their functions is undermined, thrown back on its contingency” (Rancière, 1999, p. 101).

My research is concerned with understanding democracy as a critical, radical act and event, *where* emancipatory politics can be produced. The theoretical assumption framing my inquiry into the politics of Vancouver Olympics is based on a post-foundational definition of politics. This definition follows a “view that the political marks the antagonistic differences that cut through the social, signaling the absence of a principle on which a society, a political community or ‘a people’ can be founded” (Swyngedouw, 2011, p. 373). Situating politics as a series of antagonistic encounters is central to my research, recovering the agency of the radical political, through the absence of fixed political principles. The adoption of a post-foundational definition of politics evades the constraining limitations of deliberative democracy, as Dean (2009, p. 92) remarks “when democracy is justified by the very fact of justification, as it is in theories of deliberative democracy, the presence and absence of democracy overlap: our acknowledgement of failures justifies a failed democracy.” This approach of politics contextualizes Jacques Rancière's (1999, 2001) scholarship on the aesthetics of politics and social-spatial policing serving as the theoretical framework of my research.

My investigation relies on this critical and radical understanding of politics. This situates the technique by which I approach the urban space, Vancouver, and the Olympics within Vancouver. I approach politics as the production of a stage (a space), and the production of any space as rooted in a possibility of equality and emancipation. The tenets of poststructural thought are a valuable reference for critical human geography although my investigation is not strictly post-structural. Per Harrison (2006, p. 132), these tenets are “radical anti-essentialism... den[ying] any short cuts to simple truths and the construction of accounts which would seek to reduce the phenomena under investigation to either ahistorical or aspatial causes *or* [original italics] to simply the effect of context. In so doing, poststructuralism presents a relational and open movement of thought, one which is permanently under revision, undergoing ‘*trial by space*’ [emphasis added]. Harrison’s (2006) view provides a grounded understanding of the post structural critical human geographic method of inquiry. Following this relational understanding of thought, I employ Rancière’s theoretical frame to understand politics and spatiality as a method to understand discourse through the practice of equality.

Rancière (1999) envisions politics (interchangeably written as democracy) as a spatial exercise (Dikeç, 2007) and aesthetic practice (Blakey, 2021). Politics is a practice that interferes with how the social world is regulated; where equality is verified, subjectivity is enacted, and a state of citizenship is free of hierarchies (Rancière, 1999, 2001, 2006, 2010). Critically, politics infringes on the social-spatial ordering (and sensibilities) of society (Dikeç, 2002, Swyngedouw, 2018). Distribution (not repression) is the key concept Rancière (1999) examines to illustrate how everything is socially ordered, through a circulation of appearances. Crucially, these appearances and “aesthetic approach to politics... allows us to consider how social activity is

shaped by inherited, shared, ‘common-sense’ whilst avoiding ontological theorizing and narrowing political possibilities” (Blakey, 2021, p. 624).

Rancière’s (1999) methodology involves both an opposition between two key tenets he defines as the police and politics, and their intertwining. I investigate and apply Rancière’s (2009, p. 115) framework that “consensus mean[s] in fact the contrary of democracy and, by the same token, the erasure of politics itself. The opposition of politics and police [is] proposed as a tool for understanding the logic of this process”.

For Rancière (1999), the police are an order of governance that socio-spatially orders society distributing people into specific positions and creates hierarchies (Rancière, 1999, 2001). Swyngedouw (2018, p. 49), referencing Rancière (1999, 2001), notes “[t]he police confer the Platonic ideal of a fully ordered society in which everyone takes their places and performs the functions allocated to each place, while expelling forms of acting and places of being that are surplus or excess to the given situation.” The saturation and inclusion of everyone illustrates how Rancière is concerned with the ordering of society; everyone is included in specific positions that correspond to how they are hierarchically ordered. The police are facilitated by a concept described as the distribution (partition) of the sensible, a system of social rules that guide and institutes a set of rules, how society is policed. As stated by Dikeç (2007, p. 18), “the partition of the sensible, as a system of sensible evidences, arranges the perceptive givens of a situation – what is in or out, central or peripheral, audible or inaudible, visible or invisible.” This concerns a phenomenological examination of how we are governed by what is thinkable, visible, sayable, what makes sense, and what does not, or what Rancière would call ‘appearances’ (Davison and Iveson, 2015). Dikeç (2007, p. 19) elaborates that “[t]he police, therefore, is both a principle of distribution and an apparatus of administration, which relies on a symbolically constituted

organization of social space, an organization that becomes the basis for and for governance.”

This brief summary of the police outlines Rancière’s emphasis on distribution, allocating bodies to different positions and places in society, rather than active repression. The police confines social space and distributes people into specific places through the circulation of sensible appearances.

Politics, then, according to Rancière, is about disrupting this police order and its associated processes of distributing to verify equality and open up political subjectivity (Rancière, 1999, 2001). This disruption is written as dissensus or disagreement. Dikeç (2007, p. 17) succinctly summarizes this as “Rancière’s main political concern is to *resist the givenness of place*” [italics retained]. My research concerns this spatialization of politics. Firstly, Rancière (1999) illustrates disagreement (or dissensus) as a *wrong*. This is stated as “[p]olitics only exists through the bringing off of the equality of anyone and everyone in a vacuous freedom of a part of the community that deregulates any count of parts. The equality that is the nonpolitical condition of politics does not show up here for what it is: it only appears as the figure of wrong. Politics is always distorted by the refraction of equality in freedom” (Rancière, 1999, p. 61). Political subjectification is the emancipatory logic achieved through this politics, or democracy. For Rancière (1999, p. 99). “[d]emocracy is, in general, politics’ mode of subjectification if, by politics, we mean something other than the organization of community and the management of places, powers, and functions.” This means “democratic politics consists of those actions that reject existing identifications through a process of political subjectification that generates identities outside of the existing police order” (Davidson and Iveson, 2015, p. 548). Political subjectification directly breaks social-spatial ordering, and the assignment of places and people into specific positions.

Rancière's (1999) assertion of politics as a breaking of propriety (Panagia, 2018) (also describing democracy) illustrates his theoretical position as a geographic exercise, to problematize why and how we organize social phenomenon into what is commensurable as common, that certain places and people are naturally arranged. Crucially, disagreement is what acts on the police's social spatial ordering, disrupting the conditions and references that make certain common senses and appearances coherent. The idea of what is common, is important for Rancière (2004) and my thesis inquiry, investigating the natural, common-sense articulations of Vancouverites. On the radically political, i.e., seeing voices not just as noise (Dikeç, 2007), Rancière (2004, p. 5) notes:

“This is what “disagreement (*mésentente*)” [original italics] means. It cannot be deduced from the anthropological fact of language. Nothing can be deduced from some anthropological property common to humanity in general, because the “common” is always contested at the most immediate level: the fact of living in the same world, with the same senses (*sens*) [original italics], and the same powers of holding something in common. Deducing the existence of a common political world from the comprehension of language can never be natural when that world presupposes a quarrel over what is common. *Mésentente* – a term untranslatable into English – indicates this node in between two things. It means both “the fact of not hearing, of not understanding” and “quarrel, disagreement.” Combining both meanings yields only this: the fact of hearing and understanding language does not in itself produce any of the effects of an egalitarian community. Egalitarian effects occur only through a forcing, that is, the instituting of a quarrel that challenges the incorporated, perceptible evidence of an unequalitarian logic. This quarrel is politics.”

Therefore, the act of disrupting what is common, based on understanding and comprehension of a spoken command, is politics to Rancière. This is vital to understand the observations of my research inquiry, that the articulations of my research participants demonstrate their own comprehension and understanding of the Olympics.

The enactment of equality is vital to politics. Rancière (1999, p. 71) argues that “[i]f politics means anything, it is only on the basis of a perfectly peculiar capacity simply unimaginable

before the existence of the demos: the equal capacity to rule and be ruled. This illustrates that equality is Rancière's central tenet of politics. For Dikeç (2017, p. 674), Rancière's "[p]olitics is about challenging such limits, orderings and fixity by opening up spaces for the verification of equality. It is about transforming a given place into a space for the verification and enactment of equality". Crucially, equality is not just gained and upheld. Rather, "[t]he democratic political operation is not a demand for equality, but rather a demand premised on the equality of each with all" (Davidson and Iveson, 2015, p. 548). This is central to understand Rancière's concept of equality and politics. Therefore, by confusing the normative meaning of what we think is political, it is neither being the object or place of "where it is carried out, but solely its form, the form in which confirmation of equality is inscribed in the setting up of a dispute, of a community existing solely through being divided. Politics runs up against the police everywhere" (Rancière, 1999, p. 32). The police and politics in opposition to one another – is how Rancière reads the meaning of the political. This is essential for my reading of Vancouver's politics.

### **Post-democracy and consensus making**

Wilson and Swyngedouw (2014, p. 13) note "[f]or Rancière, post-democracy involves a specific configuration of three forms of the disavowal of politics, through which the police order seeks to neutralize the policy agency of the part of those who have no part." Post-democracy is a repudiation of politics and encompasses a tripartite formulation including: archi-politics (the containment of community as a whole, with the inability for leftover expression of politics), para-politics (a hierarchized version of politics), and politics subordinated to 'essence' (for example market-economy's) (Rancière, 1999, Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014). This post-democratic condition illustrates an inability for politics to break through the police. It describes features of politics that do not contain equality as political subjectification or citizenship free of

hierarchies. The appearance of politics and democracy has been evacuated. Wilson and Swyngedouw (2014, p. 13) elucidate that “[p]ost-democracy is a specific distribution of the sensible, which synthesizes these forms of disavowal under the banner of ‘consensus.’”

Rancière (1999, p. 102) argues that a “consensus is a certain regime of the perceptible: the regime in which the parties are presupposed as already given, their community established and the count of their speech identical to their linguistic performance.” Through this quote, Rancière conceptually illustrates that parties, communities, and individuals are contained by a consensus. Since the distribution of the sensible registers what is noise and what is speech (and what is visible, heard or not heard), a consensus overtly disavows politics since it encloses through inclusion (where “parties are presupposed as already given... count of their speech identical”). Therefore, what is profound about Rancière’s idea of consensus making is its ability to bypass the strategy and practise of politics. This is where equality, and political subjectification and the part with no part are disavowed. This is noted through Davidson and Iveson (2015, p. 549) that “[c]urrent forms of consensual democracy undermine the political character of democracy by refuting the existence of ‘a part of those who have no part’. Equality declarations that interrupt the existing ‘distribution’ are de-legitimized by the presumption that inclusion is always already institutionally guaranteed.”

Rancière’s (1999) theory of politics is an inventive method to analyze urban politics and the political, within my case study of Vancouver’s Olympics. Echoing Dikeç and Swyngedouw, (2017, p. 8). “[i]t is the precisely in the interstices between ‘the political’, which becomes visible in the interruptive unfolding and the production of a new spatiality on the one hand and ‘politics’ as the instituted order that allocates places and functions and distributes times and spaces on the

other, that the theatre of the ‘urban political’ poses itself as an urgent theoretical and practical issue.”

A theoretical framework informed by Rancière’s political philosophy situates politics as an axiomatic confirmation of equality, and inequalities of authority, as constituted through a police order. This framework provides a method to which I will investigate my thesis. The next section of this chapter describes the Rancièrian inspired method for how I approach my research.

### **Interrogating the Method of Politics**

This section covers the methods and how and why I approached my research puzzle, inquiry, and questions, and interviewing research subjects and text. To provide insights into the status of Vancouver’s urban politics in the bidding and preparations period of the Vancouver winter Olympics, I begin this section with statements on reflexivity and positionality. I then situate my investigation using Rancière’s method and practice of equality in a discourse analysis. A description of a critical discourse analysis and textual analysis follows. I outline the interviews and groups, goal of interviews, and documents that I reviewed. Finally, I examine my own personal reflections on notes from the field, fieldwork challenges, and interesting comments from research participants and interviewees.

### **Reflexivity and Care**

Through the course of this research, and especially during the fieldwork and interview process, I became aware of my own positionality and responsibility of fashioning a project and becoming implicated in knowledge production. Reflecting on the process of knowledge production as a white, male, junior researcher, who was born and raised in Toronto, and unfamiliar with Vancouver, my research question of assessing the politics of Vancouver provoked a sense of unease as someone who was both privileged, yet an outsider of the city. I

speculated how research participants first noticed my name (an Anglo-Saxon one) and gender in a recruitment email would inform their choice to be interviewed.

Drawing on interviews, I sought to balance both respect and care for all the participants who had taken time out of their working day to speak to me, while conducting interviews to institute agency with an emancipatory purpose. My research seeks to critically investigate the darker side of the Olympics, and its impact on Vancouver. I position myself as critical of the mythological, apolitical status of the Games, and the authors who dismiss the oppressive features of the Olympics. Reznikova's (2023) comment on reflexivity is a useful aid to reflect on each research participant's views of the Olympics. Reznikova (2023: p. 156) notes "to side with the *view of the oppressed* [original italics] can also be understood as a problematic form of depoliticization in which a reflection on 'the role of the researcher' (often routinized rhetorically, habitually and even institutionally) degenerates into a form of 'narcissistic reflexivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), an end in itself." My research therefore sought to reflect on the care of my participants, but also to critically take account of the dangers of depoliticized research. Reznikova's (2023) comment aids when introspectively understanding how I have varying degrees of empathy for each research participant group. The lived experience of protestors, as a research participant, offers a distinct viewpoint how mechanisms of oppression (Reznikova, 2023) are instituted in Olympic politics. I am investigating these oppressive structures, while avoiding romanticizing the identity of these protestors. Nonetheless, their unique epistemological frame permits assess into understanding the inequalities generated by the Olympic Games.

### **Conducting Interviews**

The primary source of data of my research was semi-structured interviews with seven research participants. The transcripts were analyzed using a discourse analysis. These

interviewees include: Olympic volunteers, protestors, a former Vancouver city councillor, and senior bid committee (Bid Corporation) and organizing committee officials (Vancouver Organizing Committee). Table 1 outlines the number of research participants interviewed.

Table 1: Research Participants

Interviewees	Pseudonyms	Quantity
Olympic volunteers	Rosa, Joseph	2
Olympic protestors	Chantal, Tommy	2
Former Vancouver city councillor	Emma	1
Senior bid committee (Bid Corporation) + Vancouver Organizing Committee officials	Alina, Angélique	2

My recruitment practice involved searching for the organizations and actors who played a role in the bidding and planning of the games and pitching them my thesis research. Each of these four research participant groups (described in Table 1) were recruited through different approaches. My method of recruitment included ‘cold calling’, to enlist interviewees.

Rosa and Joseph, the Olympic volunteers, were recruited through the help of friends and family friends in Vancouver. Once arriving in Vancouver, I attempted to ascertain if these Vancouverite friends knew of any members in their network who had volunteered during the preparations and two-week event. These friends posed my thesis research topic to their friends, asking if they would be interested in sharing their experiences. Two members in their network agreed to participate in interviews. Having Vancouverite friends and family friends significantly aided my recruitment practice.

The Olympic protestors Chantal and Tommy were recruited through cold calling and snowballing. Prior to flying into to Vancouver, I familiarized myself with some of the prominent anti-Olympic protest groups through academic literature, newspaper clippings, and online

protestors blogs. I searched for members, contacted them, and presented my research. One member agreed to be interviewed and recommended me to a co-protestor who belonged to the same protest group. The recommended co-protestor also agreed to be interviewed, after I posed my research to them.

Emma, a Vancouver city councillor, was recruited through cold calling. I first searched for city councillors who were present for the bidding, preparations, and two-week event. This retired city councillor was discovered by searching up their current employment and pitching my research topic to them. They agreed to be interviewed.

Finally, Alina and Angélique, senior bid and committee officials, were recruited through recommendations of a friend. Again, before flying into Vancouver, I familiarized myself with the senior actors and high-ranking planners involved in the bidding and planning, making some cold-calls to contact them. However, through a contact with a Vancouverite friend employed in the British Columbia tourism consulting industry, they supportively recommended me to a friend of theirs, a senior bid and organizing committee member. I presented my research to Alina, and they agreed to participate. Following this interview, Alina recommended me to their colleague, another member of the organizing committee. They also agreed to be interviewed.

However, recruitment of participants for interviews met with mixed success. Some participants did not want to be a part of the research. Declined interviews included a former mayor of Vancouver (elected during the preparations phase), former chief planner of the city, and chief editor of the Olympic bidding documents. They felt they didn't have something relevant to add to my research and chose to be excluded from the study. In email correspondence they outlined how their colleagues were more directly involved in the Olympic bidding and preparations,

redirecting me to contact them. The former mayor, chief planner and editor also briefly described their opinions on the planning and delivery of the Games.

Before each interview was scheduled, a letter of consent was emailed to each interviewee. The letter was explained during the interview, and the research participant was asked if they had any questions. Almost all the interviewees had no questions from me, except for a few questions about how their names would be anonymized. Written and verbal consent was granted by all interviewees. Interviews ranged from 35 to 110 minutes, determined by the time availability of participants. Audio-recording was given participants’ expressed consent. Each audio file recording of my semi-structured interviews was uploaded to Descript, digitally transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. I then proofread each generated Word file, listening alongside to the audio file to clean up any errors that the software missed. Table 2 outlines the method of recording each interview: on Zoom, phone calls, or in-person.

Table 2: Format of Interviews

Interviewee	Interview Method	Quantity
Alina – policy writer Emma – city councillor Chantal - protestor	Zoom	3
Angélique – policy writer Joseph – volunteer Tommy - protestor	Phone call	3
Rosa - volunteer	In person	1

Interview participants were asked a series of questions about how they imagined the Olympics, and their city. Questions were also adapted to each interviewee based on their role (a list of sample questions is viewable in the appendix of this thesis). The first interview participants included Olympic volunteers, who volunteered during the preparations, at sporting venues (spaces where Olympic events were held), and the opening and closing ceremonies. The

choice of these members for interviewing was to understand their own politics of the Olympic bidding and planning, as unpaid individuals who chose to voluntarily spend time working on the games.

A retired city councillor, who was present in Vancouver city council during the bid and preparations of the games (from 2002 to 2010) was also interviewed. The purpose of selecting a city councillor was their role as an overseer of the inception of the bid, observing the stakeholders of the bid and preparations of the games, the public perception and positive or negative impressions of the games. Their perspective is valuable to understand the politics of games from a member of electoral politics.

A senior bid committee (Bid Corporation) member and organizing committee officials (Vancouver Organizing Committee, hereafter VANOC) members were interviewed. These participants represent what Swyngedouw (2018) notes as the expert social administration, enlightened technocrats and liberal multiculturalists who are managers of the neoliberalized urban state. These participants were the lead authors and progenitors, who dictated and conceived of Vancouver's Olympic narrative. They promoted the Games to municipal, provincial and federal governments, establishing relationships with local Vancouver entrepreneurs. Interviewing these participants is invaluable to understand the language, and framing they used to convey the Olympic bid and preparations as necessities for the city, and again understand the politics.

Anti-Olympic opposition (protestors) members were the last people I interviewed. These members engaged in organized resistance and publicized the cost overruns and oppressive facets of the Games. This group was called NO GAMES. They attempted to prevent Vancouver from securing the bid, and following the Bid Society winning, they attempted to broadcast the

negative effects of the organizing committee. Interviewing these members is important to understand how organized resistance perceived the games, successes or failures they encountered, and political strategies.

I then unpacked the articulations and sensibilities of the Vancouver 2010 winter Olympics through a discourse analysis and critical textual analysis of interviews and policy text (Official bid file of Vancouver for the Olympic Winter Games in 2010, “The Bid Book”, 2002, Volumes 1, 2, 3), revealing the status of Vancouver’s politics.

Through design of my research methods, I maintain the practice of equality as an important source of inspiration for geographic, social science inquiry. I rely on the Pelletier’s (2009, p. 273) sharp examination of social science methods, while referencing Rancière, she examines the “aesthetics of knowledge as a practice of equality.” This is an important aid to how I approach discourse and the construction of discursive regimes. Pelletier (2009) argues Rancière’s theory of equality is a method of reframing what knowledge production should accomplish. The aim of knowledge production should be the ignorance of oppression, posing knowledge of equality as a challenge to inequality, thereby "deny[ing] the reality of inequality, one is in effect asserting and instantiating equality” (Pelletier, 2009, p. 273). Social science research should aim to avoid “to ‘know’ or verify inequality (or researching the perpetuation of domination), one can instead set out to ‘verify’ equality” (Pelletier, 2009, p. 273). If knowledge and ignorance are indistinguishable from one another, observing the conditions of oppression through social science research becomes reframed, always confirming equality (Pelletier, 2009). This emancipatory practice, relying on Rancière’s politics of aesthetics to make sense of knowledge production, is an inventive way of looking at methodology, and the process of

conducting of semi-structured interviews. I attempt to make sense of the meaning of my interview transcripts through Pelletier's (2009, p. 273) elucidation of verifying equality:

“It is about declassifying words, by re-ordering the way in which words take on meaning by virtue of the category/body to which they are assigned in the social order, such as the time and place of utterance, and the activity to which it is related. In other words, it is about reading/producing words against the guarantees, or modes of legitimation, offered by the social location of the speaker.”

Through this passage, Pelletier (2009) advances an important reflection in my geographic research, the act of verifying equality, through a method that centres equality. Investigating the inequalities of the Olympic mega-event through this inimitably radical framing of equality by Rancière through Pelletier (2009) aids discussion on how to read the discursive articulations of the research participants. The aim of my research investigation is to observe the trends and patterns from Olympic policy text and interview transcripts to observe what was discursively constituted as common sense and constructed as natural, in the pre-Olympics and of Vancouver. Observing “what is common to both the object and subject of research” (Pelletier, 2009, p. 273), and through an assessment of the politics of Vancouver during the bidding and preparations, I intend to present these shared articulations.

Borrowing from Rancière, Dikeç's (2007) spatial analysis of urban policy, urban politics and spatiality provide a guide to my discourse analysis. Adopting Dikeç's (2007, p. 20-21) method to investigate urban politics is “understood as a practice of articulation that involves *spatial ordering* through descriptive names, categorisations, definitions, designations, and mappings [and] ... identificatory distribution (naming, fixing in place, defining a proper place) [as] an essential component.” This is how I undertook an investigation, using an overarching Rancièrian frame of social spatial order, while relying on the method of discourse analysis to analyze the specific language that constitutes politics.

I then used a critical textual analysis of urban policy, created by the Vancouver Whistler Bid Corporation (BidCorp), a coalition of elite Vancouver entrepreneurs (Shaw, 2008). This analysis includes the bid materials of 2002. The texts and documents are entitled “The Sea to Sky Games, Official bid file of Vancouver for the Olympic Winter Games in 2010, (Candidature Files), “The Bid Book” (of 2002)”. It consists of three volumes of materials prepared to sell Vancouver as the 21st city of the Olympic Games. It contains detailed financial, social, and infrastructural guarantees and promises to be delivered by the host country and city, in a polished package delivered to the International Olympic Committee. The purpose of these policy documents was to examine the language the bid documents authors used to necessitate the games. I was looking at commonly used language such as sustainability, competitiveness, security (Davidson and Iveson, 2015), legacies (Short, 2018), or image (Graeff, 2020), that appears in bid documents.

The methodology I use to study the written and verbal texts of the “Bid Book” and transcripts from semi-structured interviews involves a discourse analysis. Two leading approaches used in discourse analysis research are Michel Foucault’s discourse inspired scholarship and Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis model (Slemon, 2025). I rely on the tenets of a discourse analysis from Foucault (1972, 1980) and Fairclough (1992) to examine meaning from the language of articulations. I interpret the articulations of research participants and policy (text) through Foucault’s (1972) conceptualization of a discourse. A discourse is a system of representation denoting how meaning in language is constituted, and how social rules and practices institute meaning (Hall, 1997). The utility of a discourse analysis unpacks how meaning in text is constructed through social practice, “not about whether things exist, but about where meaning comes from” (Hall, 1997, p. 30). This is relevant for my thesis research, as the

articulations of research participants form a text that is a discourse, representing a certain (un)natural way of behaving, and that the knowledge of conduct is produced through language (Ong et. al., 2024). Fairclough (2013) envisions a discourse model as an investigation of “how” dominant discourses become naturalized, through a discursive practice that investigates how texts are created, acknowledged, and understood to observe their effects. The "focus is on vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical devices” (Ong et. al., 2024, p. 5).

Power is an important feature of discourse analyses, as power demarcates what the dominant discourses of text are through a ‘central “truth” (Ong et. al., 2024, p. 4) while others become ignored. The concept of discursive power (Foucault, 1980) expresses this intersection of power and discourse. According to Slemon (2025, p. 4), "discursive power as a theoretical framework supports the making visible of what power obscures, and indeed, how power is served by the act of obscuring.”. Investigating what discourses are absent and unsaid through the discursive articulations of the interviewee’s transcripts is a vital component of my thesis. Nonetheless, the concept of power in my theoretical framework, as informed by Rancière’s (1999) aesthetic political philosophy, is problematized. As Rancière (1999, p. 32) observes, “Foucault has done magnificently, that the police order extends well beyond its specialized institutions and techniques, [however] it is equally important to say that nothing is political in itself merely because power relationships are at work in it.” This view problematizes the tenets of a discourse analysis, that power is at work everywhere. The concept of the distribution of the sensible is a re-orientation of Foucault’s explication on power and discursive regimes (Pelletier, 2009), “a phenomenological and aesthetic challenge of Rancière’s notion of the partition of the sensible is that such partitions at once establish the compositional nature of our subjectivities and our relation to an external arrangement of objects” (Panagia, 2009, p, 302). Borrowing the

principles of meaning in text from a discourse analysis and Rancière's distribution of the sensible helps guide my methodology, to examine the discursive politics of an oppressive Olympic event in Vancouver.

While conducting interviews, I found it fascinating that every participant group expressed overt respect for my background as a scholar, that I was somehow imbued with an expert knowledge of the Olympics – one that they did not possess. Volunteers expressed this most explicitly, that I was a “real” expert, while their lived experiences of the games (and preparations) sometimes were secondary to my own knowledge of the event.

Interestingly, at the beginning (or end) of each interview, all the research participants wanted to know what neighbourhood of Vancouver I grew up in. I answered I am a Torontonian, visiting and staying with old undergraduate friends (in the Fairview neighbourhood) for the summer to conduct research. As I described that I'm from Toronto, it must have shifted how the interviewee's themselves read me (especially since Torontonians speak to their city with a level of snobbery, I imagine Vancouverites profiled me). I am assuming they imagined, how could someone not from their city speak to a spectacular moment of Vancouver's history? I felt like I was an outsider, even though I actively extensively explored the downtown core of the city, and Olympic venues. I assembled a photo album, capturing the Olympic venues, sites of protest during the two-week event, Olympic signage, and travelled on infrastructures built in coordination with the Olympic planning. Visiting and living in Vancouver for the course of a summer (June to September 2023), I sought to familiarize myself with the urban rhythm of Vancouver; cycling, walking and mass transiting (by SkyTrain and bus) through the city's built and natural landscape.

It was intriguing that during and after each interview, interviewees described how well they remembered the Olympic mega-event and Vancouver politics. Memories of the bidding and preparations varied, as some research participants found it difficult to recall the bidding, preparations, and spectacle. In the interview with volunteer Rosa, she excitedly retrieves a merchandised drinking glass emblazoned with the five Olympic rings, connecting it to the Olympic preparations. Rosa (2023) interjects as I'm asking a question: "Have you noticed your cup! Esso started selling cups with the Olympic logo when you filled up and I was excited about that. So I guess the city got prepared for it maybe in smaller ways, also bigger ways downtown, so even that kind of reminded you of it. I hardly ever drink out of them. And I almost don't want to use them because I don't want to break them."

That Rosa deliberately showed this cup to impress me during the interview was an unexpected, curious event. Her excitement and care about preserving this corporate gas-station cup, while connecting it to preparations for the Games was an important reflection, as it framed the Olympic spirit as a deeper affect than I realized.

Every research participant (excluding the senior policy technocrats) expressed feelings of fear or discomfort in recalling memories of the Games in their testimony. Protestors most directly articulated this view. Before agreeing to the interview, Chantal wanted a list of sample questions that I would ask, which I gladly shared with her. Initially while interviewing these protest participants they appeared as reticent. However few minutes into interviewing, they felt more relaxed hearing questions that asked about their struggles during the event. I believe they were uncertain or fearful about how I would mis/represent their own words or ignore their lived experiences of oppression.

Interviewing bid society and organizing committee officials (elites) comparatively gave me more stress than interviewing other research participants. These senior policy officials were veteran corporate consultants and senior tourism executives, who had committed themselves to the planning and bidding of the games as a full-time job (10+ years of Olympic policy and planning). With these interviewees, I more deeply felt my own positionality as a junior researcher and first-year MA student. My initial fear of losing contact with these research participants and their possible disinterest in my study started with my research title, “Staging an Olympic Myth,” as I worried the negative tone of my thesis title would discourage them from joining my study. However, my fears eased, as these research participants never questioned or asked about the title, and voluntarily chose to participate to my study. These bid society and organizing committee officials had the capacity to ignore, seeing my thesis project as a non-threat, to participate in a study on Vancouver’s Olympic politics.

At the start of the interviews, I attempted to present myself as well-read of the Olympic bid process, with a keen familiarity of the senior managers of the bid and organizing committee. During the interviews, both elites (Alina and Angélique) emphasized their multi-year commitment to the Olympics. They were incredibly proud, explicitly stating they didn’t want to come across as arrogant executives, but rather spent their professional lives to deliver and manage a bid and preparations that represented the will of the Vancouverites. The reverence with how they were talking about the Olympics, felt like they were describing an organized religion or spiritual movement. McDowell’s (1992, p. 214) note on interviewing is a good reminder that since “we should recognize that interviewing is a game in which participants often are playing with a different set of rules. Both the scholar and the respondent construct a particular version of themselves in interviews which is then re-interpreted and re-presented in different ways”.

Through the interviews of elites, I was playing the role of a graduate student who knew the particularities of the Games. I imagine these elites were excited to have a researcher interested in their Olympic work, ask them about their former career.

The following chapter establishes my argument that the Olympics were an inevitable urban project destined to arrive in Vancouver. Research participants articulated common-sensical statements that the Games were necessary and delivered through promised transit infrastructure. Employing a theoretical framework guided by Rancière's destituent political philosophy, the discursive articulations of these research participants is investigated, illuminating the constitution of an (un)natural urban Olympic politics of Vancouver.

### **Overview of Thesis**

This thesis is broken into two main parts. In this introduction, I contextualize my theoretical framework based off of Rancière's political philosophy. Rancière's (1999) aesthetic vision of politics provides a unique geographic and spatial method, examining what produces the conditions through which common-sense statements become naturalized, and depoliticized. This theoretical framework aids in examining the articulations of a (un)natural order of Vancouver. I also define my methods and methodology. This involves a critical discourse analysis and textual analysis, where I interviewed seven research participants through semi-structured interviews. The first part of my thesis traces the critical scholarship of Vancouver's Olympics, urbanism and neoliberalism, and specific infrastructure legacies. I engage with a symbolic and material examination of Olympic urban politics. This discursive survey of critical Olympic literature traces how the Games both provide a social-spatial, temporal order to the effects of society oppression's (capitalism, precarious labour, etc.). However, it also re-constitutes cultural belonging and (re)produces urban space through an entrepreneurial reorientation. The city is

(un)naturally sold to fit growth imperatives, through neoliberalizing projects facilitated via infrastructure projects.

The second part proceeds to analyze policy and interviews with research participants. I proceed to answer the proposed research questions, commenting on the politics of the Vancouver Olympics, noting the discursive articulations of an inevitable and necessary Olympics. These constituted a common-sense theme of Vancouver's politics, as research participants spoke about infrastructure projects, through inevitability and acceptance of the games.

Finally, a conclusion explores a summary of my findings, and limitations as well as prospective further research.

## **1. Chapter One: Olympic Urban Politics: From French Philosophy to Global Mega-Event**

“First and foremost [the games are] accumulated cultural capital which political, commercial, social, and sports actors have been permitted to invest in their own local projects” (MacAloon, 2002, p. 271).

This chapter examines key academic literature of Olympic mega-events, Olympics transformation of urban spaces, contributions and gaps within scholarship on the 2010 Olympics, and Vancouver’s politics and urbanism. Academic literature on the Olympics is multidisciplinary, ranging from sports and tourism to philosophical inquiries into ideas of the spectacle and aesthetics of the event. The Olympic mega-event is a unique phenomenon that highlights the city and urban territories on the global stage. A wide swath of critical and radical academic sources is reviewed to illustrate the polemic development of Olympics.

This section critically traces the symbolic and material manifestations of Olympic urban politics, how the event serves as a form of social ordering and structure, a mitigative role against oppressions and crises of society. I examine how the Olympics discursively perform a mythic function of cultural belonging, an entrepreneurial project of fixing capital to urban space through re-imaging or selling the city, and a uniquely neoliberalizing project facilitated through infrastructure projects. This discursive examination of Olympic urban politics compliments my argument, as I present the (un)natural politics of an inevitable and necessary Olympics. A scholarly foundation based off this critical scholarship, responds to how depoliticization is constituted not through violent means, but articulated through a discourse of common-sensical statements.

In this section, I first trace Olympism as a depoliticized philosophy; a conservative social reform sports programme, originating in the aristocratic founder Pierre de Coubertin. The

mythology of sport explicated in this philosophy projects a pure, transcendent mystique, derived from de Coubertin's ideals of athleticism as radical panacea for the social ills of capitalism. The Olympic mega-event temporally and spatially orders life, as a consumption place-based fix. I then trace how the Olympics epistemically is an urban project of (re)producing city spaces. The contemporary Olympics are an industry redeveloping the city through a politics of intervention, centring a legacy or leveraging narrative. This is accomplished through a re-imaging, or 'selling-places' to make cities financially and competitively attractive through an identifiable place. The event generates a recognizable and identifiable vision of the city, projecting an attractive, idealized urban space that ignores the needs and actually existing conditions of the city.

I demonstrate how the Olympics manage crises of urban austerity, as a neoliberalizing tool to fix capital to city space. I then trace the processes of urban neoliberalization and define its politics as a mode of conduct, as subjectivity operates through a political rationality of free-market fundamentalism. This paradigm of capitalism functions only if the method of democratic rule is evacuated. The following section connects neoliberalization through public-private partnerships, examining transit infrastructure. Delivery of Vancouver's Skytrain and Sea to Sky through a public-private partnership governance regime was purported to be more 'efficiently' executed through the privatize sphere than public. In the final section, critical literature on the politics of the 2010 Vancouver Games is surveyed. The bidding and preparations are examined as a post-political phenomenon, tracing the existing scholarship through depoliticizing Indigeneity and employing social-sustainability policy language.

## **Olympism as Philosophy**

Lenskyj (2020) critically frames the International Olympic Committee and modern Olympic Games as a product of 19<sup>th</sup> century structures of patriarchy, imperialism, and racism. These structures of oppression reflect the beliefs of the founder of the modern Olympics, French aristocrat Pierre de Coubertin.

A brief review of de Coubertin is necessary to contextualize and situate the ontology on which the modern Olympic games and mega-events base their core morals in the Olympic Charter (International Olympic Committee, 2023). This contextualizes the politics of the Olympics, vital for my own research. Chatziefstathiou and Henry (2012) note de Coubertin's pursuit of a modern Olympics mirrored his personal philosophies of romanticizing the nationalism of France through male athleticism and pushing for conservative social reforms of France (i.e., idealizing the individual, removing the welfare of the state, and paying reverence to Catholic family values) via his privileged aristocratic background. Shaping the history of Olympism, de Coubertin developed his beliefs under a paradigm of European industrial capitalism and patriarchy, by marketing the Olympics as the answer to solidify a particular classed and cultural identity of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and by seeking to timelessly safeguard his legacy (Chatziefstathiou & Henry, 2012). De Coubertin's (1913, p. 154) own works clarify his beliefs, as he notes "[t]he tendency today is toward a total culture. It is not just democracy that is pushing in this direction, but especially the transformation of labour, the industrial character of the epoch, the almighty goddess Activity who already reigns uncontested." This apprehensive endorsement of democracy illuminates de Coubertin's ideology, while simultaneously he was repulsed with the intensifying popularity of revolutionary socialism, as it threatened (Hoberman, 2021) "l'enseignement supérieur" (De Coubertin, 1901, p. 268). Sport for

de Coubertin represented the antidote to the unbalanced, unhygienic social society of modernity, a calming physical therapy activity against the “universal neurosis” (Hoberman, 2021, p. 133).

Lenkyj (2020) notes, de Coubertin receives personality-cult like status and his ideals of sport as a social reform are enshrined into the Olympic agenda. Therefore, Chatziefstathiou and Henry (2012, p. 36) explicates that “Olympism as a philosophy of ‘universalism’ thus casts de Coubertin as both elitist and exclusionary and as a universalist promoting a cultural movement which has been able in some respects to transcend divisions in a world of increasingly fragmented identities”. This illustrates that the modern tenets of Olympism are borrowed from de Coubertin’s pursuit of “peaceful internationalism” through youth athleticism (Short, 2018), situated within a classed, patriarchal, and colonial universalism.

The International Olympic Committee coalesces these tenets of de Coubertin into an official charter, set out in seven codified principles. The second fundamental principle of Olympism in the Olympic charter illuminates de Coubertin’s idealism. According to the International Olympic Committee (2025, p. 8), “[t]he goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity”. This principle encapsulates de Coubertin’s project of social reform through sports, depoliticizing the context of its historical conservative origins through obsequious language. The mythology of sport explicated in the IOC’s Olympic philosophy projects a pure, transcendent mystique, derived from de Coubertin’s ideals of athleticism as radical panacea for the individual (Boykoff, 2016; Lenkyj, 2020). Building on these structures of oppression, Tzanelli (2018) introduces another analysis of the modern Olympics as always constructing an imagined future while evaluating de Coubertin’s idealism. Tzanelli (2018, p. 6) notes “the whole Olympic enterprise of knowledge has European

epistemological roots, which new systems of mobility (technology, professionalization of athleticism and migration, tourism, and hospitality) constantly challenge – a phenomenon transferred onto the mega-events’ double conception of time”. Reading temporality through a sociological lens, Tzanelli (2018) expounds the Olympic mega-events as a temporal dichotomy. Firstly, this temporality is based on ‘slow-movement’, idealising de Coubertin’s ethos as a traditional, and venerated heritage (Toohey and Veal, 2000), that nevertheless requires now the fast rhythms of globalization, and demands of capitalism (Tzanelli, 2018). Tzanelli (2018) further argues that this paradigmatic shift from fast to slow time denotes a liberal enlightenment ideal of the progress of humanity. Temporality and identity are also explored by one of the most prominent and seminal scholars of Olympic sociology, Maurice Roche, in his time-structure exploration of Olympic mega-events. Roche (2000) frames the Olympic mega-event as an escape to the cultural crises of late modernity. Roche (2000) argues that the shift of conditions of late modernity whereas the nation-state losing significance, flexibilization of labour (move from Fordism) and traditional gender roles shifting, and globalisation have confronted a model of identity and agency that pre-exists these conditions. The Olympic mega-event then culturally satisfies these crises of late-modernity, as it mitigates and contests the existential threats of late-modernity by offering resources and aid (Roche, 2000). Roche (2000, p. 222) incisively notes:

“Mega-events and sport culture provide people with enduring motivations and special opportunities to participate in collective projects which have the characteristics of, among other things, structuring social space and time, displaying the dramatic symbolic possibilities of organised and effective social action, and reaffirming the embodied agency of people as individual actors.”

This argument provides an interesting viewpoint to interpret the Olympics as facilitating a cultural role of resolving crises. However, could this interpretation of the Olympics as cultural salvation suffer from a Global North ontology, based in reading the restructuring of nation-state

scale on the West? Nonetheless, Roche's (2000) analysis fashions these critical inquiries involving temporality. Time, consequently, is a crucial theme to deconstruct the ontology of the Olympic mega-event, explored through critical Olympic scholars and sociologists.

Olympic scholarship has traced the historical development of mega-events. Based on political-economy and culture theory discourses, the Olympic mega-event has been theorized into two separate historical paradigms: from 1890s to 1960s, and from 1960s to present. The first paradigm of Olympic events follows the inception of the Olympic event to 1960s, an era of Keynesianism, nation-state building, nationalist tendencies. Through a sociological approach, Roche (2000) notes that the early development of Olympics in this era satisfied cultural and identity crises of early modernity. Roche (2000, p. 220) writes sports mega-events "played a part in providing special non-work opportunities which people could use to review the agency (or lack of it) represented by their work". An event contained within a city, as a consumption place-based solution, could displace the anxieties generated by oppressive conditions of industrialized labour. According to Roche (2000), major events also compelled citizens to encounter alterity, providing a spatial-temporal frame to evaluate the 'Other'. Roche's (2000) sociological analysis illustrates these international mega-events attempted to resolve or mitigate the anxieties of work and identity.

The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics marks a significant departure from the earlier period of modernity, as it was the first fully privatized, corporate-financed games with no federal, state, or municipal financial support. As Horne and Whannel (2016, p. 204) note, the juncture that organizes Olympic history into these temporalities (1890 to 1960 and 1960 to present) are the crises of Keynesian capitalism and subsequent debt crises, as "the politics of hosting the Olympics now revolved around boosters and skeptics involved in debates over the branding and

promotion of cities as ‘world class’ destinations, and the politics of environmental sustainability and legacy”. Horne and Whannel (2016) provide a useful narrative to assess the modern Olympic discourse, and how cities have responded to crises of capital, and capital accumulation. What follows is an analysis of urban neoliberalization, as the Olympics attempt provide a solution to the crises of the urban.

### **The Olympic Industry**

The impetus for securing Olympics served as a means to facilitate capital accumulation of city-regions and extends far into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Short, 2018). Many of the earliest Olympic events were promoted by elites, as a means to profiteer from real-estate entrepreneurialism. For example, the seventh Olympic Games in Antwerp is distinguished as the first time political and financial elites succeeded in privatizing the benefits to the city, while bearing financial deficits onto the public (Short, 2018). Roche (2000, p. 137) encapsulates “each Olympic event [as] a unique product of a unique configuration of power elites, always including the IOC in a dominant role, but also including the local Games organising committee, its national government sponsor and particular combinations of large multinational media and corporate sponsors.” The governance structure of Olympic mega-events is a top-down managed product, as the confluence of power-elites initiate the event and requires various scales of government to implement it. A brief description of power-elites is necessary to contextualize Roche’s (2000) commentary. Power-elites are the actors who instigate the Olympic bid. Taking a political-economic approach that actively ignores ongoing structures of oppression, Lenskyj (2000) names the subject of Olympic mega-event’s as the *Olympic Industry* [emphasis added]. She identifies four features of the Olympic Industry:

1. “The ‘ticking clock’ requires construction to be completed on time. Development applications, social and environmental impact studies, and community consultation must be fast-tracked or ignored in order to meet the Olympic timetable.
2. ‘The eyes of the world’ will be on the Olympic city/state/country, and the image circulated through global media must be flawless. Street sweeps and draconian bylaws that criminalise poverty are necessary to ensure that image by rendering poor and homeless people invisible.
3. Politicians will be able to leverage the system to fund infrastructure, housing and sporting facilities, that is, an Olympic legacy that all residents will enjoy for decades to come.
4. Intangible benefits will flow from the Olympics: patriotic fervour, civic pride, and once-in-a-lifetime opportunities = ‘priceless’.” (Lenkskyj, 2020, p. 8)

Building on the Olympic industry, Graeff (2020) notes sports mega events (specifically Olympic events) promote three core features to sell as an intended attractive feature. This is noted as image projection, economic outcomes, and legacy (Graeff, 2020). Breaking down this tripartite formulation of Olympic mega-events is necessary. Graeff (2020, p. 67) notes “[i]mage projection... relies on the argument that as a sport mega event host, the city or country will come to be ‘in the news’ all over the world and that this can be an advantage”. Short (2018) notes urban legacies justify rhetoric to legitimize bids and cover the exceptional costs. Olympic mega-events have also been illustrated in terms of boosterism events (Hall, 2006) and urban growth machines (Suborg et al., 2008).

Lenkskyj (2020) astutely formulates a critical discussion how these promises and promotion of the contemporary games exhibit routine outcomes. These routines include: 1) ignoring or limiting engagement with local citizens on Olympic development to meet deadlines, 2) criminalizing homelessness and poverty to upkeep a sanitized global media image of the Olympics city/state/country, and 3) leveraged economic capital from the games becomes a legacy to build infrastructure, and intangible benefits of civic pride and patriotism will flow. The ticking-timeclock, Lenkskyj (2020) notes, is also described as a catalyst effect by Lauermann

(2019), generating an event legacy or presenting a moment of event leveraging. Lauer mann (2019, p. 53) notes "two broad narratives are used to promote mega-events in urban politics". Firstly, a legacy narrative is the material and symbolic outcomes Olympic mega-event planners design that proceeds an event, initially thought of as accidental and outside of the normative agenda of the games (Lauer mann, 2019). Leveraging narratives are the second, purporting that planning for legacies should be unquestioned and an imperative (Lauer mann, 2019). For Lauer mann (2019, p. 53), "these narratives argue city stakeholders should strategically use the mega-event planning process as an institutional platform for pursuing related investments and programs." The urban politics of promoting Olympic mega-events is then about facilitating a narrative of intervention, of (re)producing urban spaces, through legacies or leveraging. What follows is the selling of the city and planning an urban image, a key part of Olympic urban politics.

### **Urban Image Making and Re-Imaging**

Neoliberalization and urban political economy (i.e., ongoing crises of urban austerity) in the context of Olympic mega-events emphasize the importance of selling the city. Hall and Hodges (1998, p. 97) remark on selling the urban (described as reimagining) and "selling places" as a method of securing needed capital for the city. Hall and Hodges (1998, p. 96) further note that selling places under an urban neoliberalized context is a new phenomenon, since the Games "implies not only trying to affect demand through the representation of cultural images, but it also implies the manipulation and management of the supply-side, e.g., those things which makes up a community's life, into a package which can be 'sold'." In Vancouver, selling a fabricated, idealized image for the Olympic Games positions the city as a competitive brand. Reimagining, or selling places, is an incisive theorizing of mega-events facilitating the role of

attracting and fixing capital to urban space. Hall and Hodges (1998, p. 96) also critically define image-making as not only effecting “how the external consumer sees places but also how those people who constitute place are able to participate in the making of their collective and individual identity and the structures which sell place.” A focus on the production of place, and how place might be imagined by Vancouverites through marketing of the Olympic Games aids in illustrating how the Olympics generate a certain fictitious version of the city. Through this commentary, commodifying the experience and spectacle of the city as a packable entity becomes paramount and that the newly packaged and fabricated identity of the city shifts how urban citizens (‘people who constitute place’) experience the city.

### **Urban Politics and Olympic Mega-Events, Olympic Bids and Preparations**

The Olympic Games are a unique spectacular event that ephemerally last for a mere two weeks yet take over a decade to plan and prepare. The bid and preparation phase are where an agenda, narrative, and identity is crafted by Olympic policy managers, and corporate and elite stakeholders. This section seeks to investigate the importance of this stage.

Lauermann (2016) incisively states that Olympic urban politics are rarely conceptualized on whether they are necessary for the city. Lauermann (2016) describes democratic displacement as a feature of Olympic urban politics through institutional and temporal displacement. Institutional displacement follows the trajectory of neoliberalized urban politics, where market-oriented governance is uncontested and the normative model to run the games (Lauermann, 2016). Temporal displacements are noted as “temporary interventions induce states of exception in urban politics. A state of exception implies that it is too late to contest the origins of that

exception: the fundamental political question as to whether a city should host the Olympics at all. The early stages of planning, especially the bidding process, are the origins of a state of exception” (Lauermann, 2016, p. 216).

### **Urban political economy under the Olympics**

The Olympic mega-event is generally seen as a massive profit-making machine for international and domestic investors, developers, media corporations, to name a few. Silk (2014, p. 51) notes “[h]osting SMEs [sports-mega events] has emerged as one of the most effective vehicles for the advancement of internally and externally identifiable places, the (re)-imaging and (re)organization of urban space, and the attraction of (mobile) capital and people in an intense competition between cities.” The Olympic mega-event therefore becomes a project for cities to make identifiable urban space spectacular and competitive. Through this statement, Silk (2014) also illuminates processes of neoliberalization acting on urban space. Discussing and critically defining neoliberalization and urbanism, through a geographically informed theoretical framework, is central to the research questions posed in this thesis project.

### **Defining Neoliberalism and Neoliberal Urbanism**

Pinson and Journal’s (2017) survey of scholarship on urban neoliberalism provides a rich overview of the disparate theoretical frameworks explaining neoliberalism. Briefly elucidating this through Pinson and Journal’s (2017) genealogy of the discourses of neoliberal urbanism is a worthy addition. Tracing neoliberal urbanism studies, discourses, and its genealogy allows for an analysis of the particularities of Vancouver neoliberalism under a case study of Olympic preparations and bidding.

Firstly, early discourses of neoliberal urbanism were argued using Pierre Bourdieu's (1998) critical theory, naming neoliberalism as a political outcome seeking to reintegrate the tenets of liberalism into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, rather than as an economic solution (Pinson and Journal, 2017). This Bourdieusan analysis of neoliberalism reintroduced the state at multiple scales as a unit of measure that proliferates and injects neoliberalism's punitive tendencies (Pinson and Journal, 2017). Additionally, urban scholars employing Bourdieu's theoretical framework have imagined neoliberalization as a market rationality.

In a separate discussion, Pinson and Journal (2017) outline how geographers have spoken about neoliberalization and urbanism, through a Marxist theoretical framework. Harvey (1989, 2005), Brenner and Theodore (2002), and Peck and Theodore (2019) also advance this point through their neo-Marxist understanding.

Finally, Pinson and Journal (2017) outline's how post-structurally neoliberalization and urbanism has been thought through application of the theories of Michel Foucault. Dean (2009) and Brown (2003, 2015) provide a unique definition using a Foucauldian theoretical framework to analyze neoliberalism. I borrow from both of these theoretical framings of neoliberalization. For the purpose of my research project and investigation of Vancouver, a short definition of neoliberalization as a paradigmatically shifted iteration and form of capitalism is vital. Two definitions provide an understanding of the complexities of mega-events mitigating crises of urbanity. Firstly, Dean (2009) defines neoliberalization as the totality of humanity framed through market relations and as a philosophy based off of purely money-making opportunities. According to Dean (2009, p. 51), "neoliberalism holds that human freedom is best achieved through the operation of markets. Freedom (rather than justice or equality) is the fundamental political value." Neoliberalism in this context establishes how humanity is ordered and must be

conducted in accordance with the morals and principles of economic reason. In Dean's definition of neoliberalism, equality is stripped of its political worth, with the empty signifier of freedom taking its place. Equality being replaced under neoliberalism is a crucial reflection, however, an incompatible principle in the context of my theoretical framework. Rancière's (1999) political philosophy outlines the practice of equality as core to politics. Brown (2019, p. 57) extends this definition of neoliberalism and a discursive investigation into neoliberalism's effects on politics and democracy:

“Neoliberalism thus aims at limiting and containing the political, detaching it from sovereignty, eliminating its democratic form, and starving its democratic energies. From its “post[-]ideological” aspirations and affirmation of technocracy to its economization and privatization of government activities, from its unbridled opposition to egalitarian “statism” to its attempted delegitimation and containment of democratic claims, from its aim to restrict the franchise to its aim to limit sharply certain kinds of statism, neoliberalism seeks to both constrict and de[-]democratize the political.”

In this definition, Brown (2019) explicitly elucidates neoliberalism as requiring a stripping of the political, while removing any semblance of democratic potential. This is key to understanding how neoliberalism operates. However, as Brown (2019, p. 62) further notes, “neoliberalism's attack on democracy is often less bold. It involves altering democracy's meanings, reducing it to a ‘method’ of setting rules, rather than a form of rule, curtailing its purview, or detaching it from governing. Throttling democracy was fundamental, not incidental, to the broader neoliberal program.” Therefore, in both these definitions, neoliberalism guarantees any subject freedom, as a method of social-spatial ordering, detached from democracy and any practice of equality.

Brown (2019) specifically illustrates the conflicts of a neo-Marxist and Foucauldian approach. The neo-Marxist view of neoliberalism examines the “institutions, policies, economic

relations, and the effects" as a paradigmatic shifted version of capitalism, as a fresh crisis prone and paradoxical political economy (Brown, 2019, p. 21). However, the neo-Marxist view ignores the "effects of neoliberalism as a form of governing political reason and subject production" (Brown, 2019, p. 21). Disparately, a Foucauldian frame examines neoliberalism through an investigation into how "state, society, and subjects" (Brown, 2019, p. 21) discursively set rules that govern conduct under a set of values where "governments, subjects, and subjectivities as transformed by neo-liberalism's refashioning of liberal reason" (Brown, 2019, p. 21). Capitalism in this iteration is not privileged as a universalism, rather analysis is on the arrangement of "forms of political rationality" (Brown, 2019, p. 21). The criticism of a Foucauldian definition of neoliberalism is that it pays less attention to the supremacy of mobile capital as something that circulates internationally (Brown, 2019).

### **Neoliberal Urbanism as a Process**

Referring back to Silk's (2014) text on hosting sports mega-events, the marketing of urban space as recognizable can be understood through the construction of an advertised utopian vision of the city (Kansens-Noor, 2016). This is an imagined version of the city serving to present a fictional vision of its political economy and culture that seeks to permanently fix an idealized urban space that ignores the actually existing conditions of the urban space (i.e., negative legacies of an Olympic mega-event) (Kansens-Noor, 2016). Secondly, injection of capital into urban space requires discussion.

Harvey's (1989) seminal text illustrates that North American and European post-industrial cities took on an entrepreneurial character in the early 1980s as a behaviour to mitigate the post-Fordian capital crises. The hosting of Olympic events is a form of "spectacular urban space" (Harvey, 2001, p. 92), that attract mobile capital in the competitive inter-urban market

(Harvey, 1989). This remains an ongoing condition of cities and denotes a rescaling of urban space (Brenner, 2004). Therefore, the Olympic mega-event facilitates a feature of the neoliberalized city. This denotes how sports mega-events have the unique feature of advertising place as a tool of marketing, spatially rearranging urban landscapes, and facilitating the mobility and fix of capital.

Harvey (2005) using a neo-Marxist framework defines neoliberalization serving two disparate functions. It is first “a utopian project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism” (Harvey, 2005, p. 19). Neoliberalization routinely fails to reorganize and solve capitalism’s crises of overaccumulation and profitability, however, the utopian idealism of neoliberalization is pursued at all costs (Harvey, 2005). Secondly, neoliberalization is defined “as a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites” (Harvey, 2005, p. 19).

Contradictorily, elevating the power of elites is a detriment to the principles of neoliberalism, defined in Harvey’s first function. This interpretation fits particularly well within the context of the Vancouver Olympics, as luxury real-estate developers, Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, and financial elites singularly initiated the bidding of the games at the turn of the millennia.

Central to Silk’s (2014) understanding of sports mega-events, Peck and Theodore (2019) analytically illustrate how neoliberalization is a process guided by restructuring, relies on transformative programmes, and therefore consistently has the challenge of reconstructing itself. Secondly, “the variegated character of programs and projects of neoliberalization, the uneven spatial development of which is constitutive and not a way station on a path to completeness, its reactionary face always being consumed (if not defined) by context-specific struggles, rollbacks, and flawed experiments inciting contribute to the ongoing processes of neoliberalization” (Peck

and Theodore, 2019, p. 246). This quote illustrates the incompleteness of neoliberalization, and how it varies by context and project at the local place-based scale. The Vancouver 2010 Olympics as discussed by Lauermann and Davidson (2013) builds on this universalizing versus local analysis of neoliberalization in the context of Olympic mega-events.

Lauermann and Davidson (2013) contextualize the Olympic mega-events using Rancière's politics as a symbolic critique of neoliberal ideology as a universalizing and particular feature. Lauermann and Davidson (2013, p. 1286) "argue for a critical politics that contests both particular projects and their work in universalizing exploitative capitalist logics" and for a "[n]uanced analysis of particular neoliberal projects is necessary for critiquing them, but so is an ability to articulate why they are problematic." This argument provides a nuanced, discursive unpacking and theorizing neoliberalism through case study of Olympic mega-events. However, discussion of the neoliberalization of urban space under Olympic mega-events is contested in Olympic scholarship. Boykoff (2014b, 2016) argues a political economic of the Olympic games requires a uniquely different typological analysis, differing from the neoliberal paradigm. He notes this as "celebration capitalism", a capitalist formation that in many ways slices against the neoliberal grain and more resembles "regulatory capitalism" marked by "state-led privatization" and "public-private hybridities" (Boykoff, 2016, p. 156). This specificity of calling the Olympics a particular mode of capitalism (outside of the neoliberal paradigm of capitalism) illustrates a differing epistemological framing of the games. Additionally, Boykoff (2020, p. 17) astutely notes that "the state plays a lopsided role in paying for and policing the five-ring spectacle, rather than turning over these bedrock responsibilities to private entities". This is a central facet of state directed capitalism, perhaps demonstrating a spatial fixing of capital to solve accumulation crises (Harvey 1981, 2001b). Boykoff (2014) argues this

celebration capitalism includes five facets: 1) operating in a state of exception, 2) reliance on public-private partnerships, 3) festive commercialism marketing the spectacle, 4) a profit boom in security business and necessary infrastructure to repress anti-Olympic dissent, and 5) mass media discourses to proliferate a pro-Olympic agenda. However, as productive this commentary is on the specificity of calling the Olympics a ‘celebration capitalist’ project (Boykoff, 2014b), it ignores the processes of neoliberalization on the urban space as suggested by Harvey’s (1989) entrepreneurial city discussion.

Boykoff’s (2014a, 2014b, 2016) discussion diverges from Lauermaun’s (2016) theorization of the Olympics. Lauermaun (2016) notes the Olympic restructure the city through two epistemologies. He shares with Boykoff (2014b, 2016) and Agamben’s (2005) state of exception, as there is a suspension of the constitutional democratic order of the city (Lauermaun, 2016). However, Lauermaun (2016) notes this as a distinct, separate theorizing of Olympic mega-events, not operating within a set of conditions (as noted under celebration capitalism). In the context of the 2010 Vancouver Games, the amendments made to Vancouver’s city charter during the preparation period in 2009, as a solution to mitigate Olympic village’s receivership demonstrate a noteworthy state of exception. Lauermaun’s (2016) second reading of the urban politics is the Olympics as a political economic affair and part of the paradigm of capitalism, where processes of neoliberalization are enacted on the city. I engage with Lauermaun’s (2016) theorizing of Olympic urban politics. Boykoff’s (2014a, 2014b, 2016) reading of public-private partnerships and Olympic urban neoliberalization requires problematization (Yang, 2024) for “his somewhat contentious uncoupling of PPPs from neoliberalism” (Andrews, 2019, p. 84). A more nuanced take is required to unpack the discursive processes of capital accumulation ongoing in Vancouver during the preparation period. Boykoff (2016) proposes the neoliberalism

argument of Olympic mega-events is not nuanced, since these events are rather a moment of ‘celebration capitalism’, I do not follow his line of thinking (following Yang (2024) and Andrews (2006, 2019) that mega-events are truly only a moment of ‘celebration capitalism’, since interviewees’ responses of Vancouver fit a more nuanced, subtle commentary on the Games. The centrality of these public-private partnerships in critical Olympic literature is examined through transit infrastructure in the next section.

### **Olympic Transit Infrastructure and Transportation Geography**

Transit infrastructural legacies are a recurring theme in the critical Vancouver Olympics literature and my findings. A brief literature review of transportation geography and Olympic transit infrastructure situates the context of politics of the Vancouver Olympics. Transportation geography is defined by a set of concepts and processes “including an emphasis on the materiality of transportation practices and infrastructure, their role in the urban process, and how policies shape them” (Prytherch and Cidell, 2015, p. 24). Critical transportation geography unsettles the dominant Western knowledge production of transport, challenging the epistemological frame through a critical turn (Pimentel Rivera, 2023). Infrastructures and mobility in transportation are investigated through “flow and circulation across multiple spatial and temporal scales” (Schwanen, 2016, p. 127). The Olympics frame transportation through a discourse of legacy and leveraging (Lauermaun, 2019), “suggest[ing] that Olympic-related investments will bring long-term benefits that serve the public interest of the host city” (Kassens-Noor, et. al, 2018, p. 14). Hall and Hodges (1998, p. 98) note the games primarily use is to compete in the tourism and promotional markets, however, hosting is manipulated to serve functions to “rejuvenate” or develop urban spaces through constructing infrastructure. These are designated urban areas positioned as desperately requiring renewal, by the municipal state, and

corporate actors (Hall and Hodges, 1998). In the case of the Vancouver Olympics, certain transportation projects were in the planning stages prior to the Games, however, delivering them became vital to securing the Games (Shaw, 2008). These projects included the rapid transit link Richmond-Airport-Vancouver (RAV) “Canada Line”, and Highway 99 Sea to Sky roadway extension between North Vancouver and Whistler. Both of these transit infrastructure projects employed a governance scheme of public-private partnerships (P3s). Siemiatycki (2013, p. 1254) describes P3s that “expand market forces, competition and the private sector role in facility design, construction, financing and operation” while instituting an uneven pattern of development. As noted earlier, Boykoff (2014b) describes P3s as a neoliberalizing tool, that the superior private sector delivers efficiency over an inferior public. The governance of these partnerships is inaccessible to the public (so it is managed by experts, elites, and specialists), while innocuous, fuzzy language masks the politics of powerful corporate partners delivering urban projects as a common good, and often becomes a dispossessive gentrifying device (Boykoff, 2014b). P3s paradoxically function as a device to fix capital to urban space yet ignore actually existing city needs as this “new urban entrepreneurship ultimately benefits specific and speculative ventures, not the whole of the population and territory” (dos Santos, 2020, p. 46).

The RAV line was first envisioned prior to the Olympics (Shaw, 2008), however hype of the Games publicity excited the public and private sector (as a potential profitable project), and expedited through the ticking time clock (Lenksyjk, 2020) reorienting the RAV line as an urban priority project over more necessary transport project (Siemiatycki, 2005). In the process of developing the RAV line for the Games, Siemiatycki (2005, p. 71) describes “the institutionalization of neoliberal ideology at all levels of government” as the federal and provincial had embraced the private sphere and P3s as more efficient to deliver transportation

infrastructure than the public bureaucracy (Levy, 1996). According to Siemiatycki (2005, p. 71), Vancouver's Olympic bidding and preparations "seems to have created a climate in which a private-public partnership could be endorsed as a progressive and legitimate remedy to the fiscal crisis facing Vancouver." This RAV line outlines a core facet of the neoliberalizing of Vancouver urban space, as the politics reveal an entrepreneurial role of the city (Harvey, 1989). Siemiatycki (2005, p. 69) describes this as efficiency, as the "private-sector involvement in the provision of public infrastructure, with an emphasis on greater public efficiency derived through competition, fits well with neoliberal ideology." Once the RAV was fully constructed via a P3 partnership, it did not provide the desirable outcomes of transit infrastructure for Vancouver (Siemiatycki, 2006). The "RAV line through a DBFO private-public partnership largely has failed to achieve the desired benefits of eliminating cost escalations during the planning process, delivering greater technological innovation, or improving procedural accountability" (Siemiatycki, 2006, p. 138).

The second transportation project is the Highway 99, Sea to Sky roadway expansion. The highway expansion project was planned prior to the Olympics, however the ticking-time clock of for Olympic completion accelerated a contentious new roadway route (Shaw, 2008). This roadway expansion was catalyzed by IOC officials demanding an expedited road to reach Whistler (Lenskyj, 2020), but principally as a booster real-estate project for the Eagleridge, (West Vancouver) and Whistler's Callaghan Valley neighbourhoods (Shaw, 2008). The Sea to Sky was implemented as a P3 partnership, similarly with the RAV Line, with the provincial and federal again adopting an entrepreneurial politics. Shaffer (2006, p. 6) notes "the Sea-to-Sky P3 is costly for taxpayers, as are P3s for most capital-intensive government infrastructure projects."

These two projects, the RAV Line and Sea to Sky highway expansion, proved vital to the delivery of the Games. I now trace the critical literature of the Vancouver Games.

### **Vancouver Olympics**

The 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games has been key in the redevelopment of Vancouver's urban space and the image of the city. A plethora of critical scholarship on the Vancouver Olympics has commented on the protest efforts during the two-week event. Penitfallo and Vanwynsberghe (2014) illustrate sustainability as a discourse embedded as a neoliberal urban policy acting as a mode of policing and consensus making. Penitfallo and Vanwynsberghe (2014, p. 76-77) firstly note "[t]he heavy indoctrination of sustainability in VANOC's (Vancouver Olympic Committee) bid and corporate materials insinuates that working toward such objectives is of universal interest. This assumption of a shared and unified interest in working toward sustainability is indicative... of a post-political condition"<sup>2</sup>. This explicit mention of sustainability marketed and advertised, and "objectives of universal interest" denotes a social-spatial ordering of society (Rancière, 1999, p. 28). Building on Dikeç's (2007) sensible evidences, this is an act of naming and instituting a distribution of the sensible. A sustainability discourse marketed during the preparations and bid process was instituted as a proper feature of the Games. Sustainability in policy language is one form of policing and underpinned by a consensus and is a post-democratic feature of the 2010 Vancouver winter Olympics. Social inclusion is another post-democratic feature.

VanWynsberghe et al. (2013) illustrate post-democratic features prevalent in Vancouver

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<sup>2</sup> According to Wilson and Swyngedouw (2014, p. 6) the post-political is "understood as a space of contestation and agonistic engagement – is increasingly colonised by politics – understood as technocratic mechanisms and consensual procedures that operate within an unquestioned framework of representative democracy, free market economics, and cosmopolitan liberalism".

Olympic Committee urban policy literature, illuminating a concept of benevolent neoliberalism known as ‘social inclusion’. For VanWynsberghe et al. (2013, p. 208), “social inclusion is a quasi-concept... highlighting its use as a neoliberal tactic for seeking consensus on the idea of broad-based engagement.” VanWynsberghe et al. (2013, p. 2082) also note [s]ocial inclusion implies the existence of a universal subject, whose needs are most effectively met by “a well-functioning community”. This quote illustrates the proper universal subject, assigning a social-spatial order. Applying Rancière’s idea of politics, a universalizing subject negates the ability to verify equality since everyone is contained within this policed order.

### *Marketing and advertising of multiculturalism in the Vancouver Olympics*

An analysis of marketing and advertising of multiculturalism during the Vancouver 2010 winter Olympics, Featherstone (2000, p. 108) notes “[c]ertain places may be enshrined with a particular emblematic status as national monuments and used to represent a form of symbolic bonding which overrides and embodies the various local affiliations people possess”. This bond illustrates the ability of a consensus through multicultural discourses injecting a pluralist agenda. Existing research on Vancouver’s 2010 winter Olympics outlines First Nations imagery as an advertised and marketed item. O’Bonsawin (2006) demonstrates how the iconic inukshuk dishonoured Inuit First Nations and symbolized the exclusion of all Indigenous peoples from the Games. Shaw (2008, p. 199-200) illustrates how “[h]aving an aboriginal or First Nations community handy works well in selling a city’s bid to the IOC... aboriginal people [are] cute... and marketable”. This statement demonstrates that the inclusion of First Nations can be fetishized for marketing and advertising gain to boost and promote the Games. Shaw (2008) notes the Vancouver games decisively co-opted representatives of the community to give up land for venues, and the bodies of Indigenous peoples during the opening ceremony could be

advertised to international television audiences. This fetishizing and promotion of indigeneity raise questions of how “strategies to materially and discursively re-image place are also suggestive of how race and racism are inextricably embedded in neoliberal projects” (Silk, 2014, p. 55). Adese (2012, p. 485) critically illustrates the marketing multiculturalism through colonial discourses and notes “[i]n this way, multiculturalism in the context of the games is perhaps best understood as functioning as a mode for “managing” Indigenous peoples and for pacifying Indigenous dissent”. This literature illustrates the co-opting of British Columbia’s First Nations imagery, symbolism, and aesthetics while driven through multicultural packaging facilitate the promotion of the Games. There is a lack of academic literature on how marketing and advertising of multiculturalism are a discourse of post-democracy and consensus in the Vancouver 2010 Olympics.

In this conceptual section, Olympic urban politics was surveyed to outline the theoretical tenets and philosophies that frame my findings and analysis. Olympic mega-events are foundationally grounded as a sacrosanct conservative myth, a process and vehicle for urban neoliberalization, an entrepreneurial project to sell the city, and re-image to appear as globally competitive. Through selling the city, a reorientation of belonging to the city is configured, as certain discursive appearances become common-sensical. A focus on the symbolic and material aids discussion on Olympic urban politics. This frame examines how depoliticization and a social order or structure that Olympic mega-events play, as a mitigative role against social oppressions, and crises of capitalism. In the following section, the politics of the Vancouver Olympics is examined, to highlight themes of inevitability, resignation and necessity as discursive articulations of social-spatial ordering.

## 2. Chapter Two: Inevitability as Common Sense: The Politics of the Vancouver Olympics

“There’s not much you can do after that because the bulldozers start. The money starts happening, you are not going to pull out of the Games after your contract is out. So you are not going to get them to stop.” (Chantal, 2023)

“Once we won, everything got pushed because we knew what happens is you accelerate initiatives. This is where the power of these Games comes in.” (Alina, 2023)

This section explores shared themes that arose during a policy analysis and interviews with research participants and the specific politics of Vancouver Olympics. In my analysis of interviews, I identified shared themes of *inevitability* and *resignation* expressed as in i) the games were destined to arrive, and there was overall acceptance of the event; ii) urban infrastructural projects are a discursive articulation of inevitability, as discussed by interviewees and described as one of the features facilitating these discourses of inevitability; and iii) the bidding and planning for the Games were spoken about in a negative, positive, and indifferent tones (emotionality).

To explore these themes and assess Vancouver’s urban politics during the bid and preparations phase of the 2010 Winter Games, I deployed a theoretical framework grounded in Rancière’s aesthetic political philosophy. Through the following section, this critical understanding of politics was examined in concert with the interview themes. A discursive investigation into the nuance of transcripts and policy documents text reveals similar how across all interviewees, they articulated common sensical ideas of Vancouver. What these shared articulations reveal of Vancouver’s politics is a common-sense logic, how the appearances (inevitability, necessity) constituted a spatial order of how the Olympics were seen as ‘natural.’

Fitzpatrick's (2018, p. 9) commentary contextualizes this view, as "Rancière's theorisation of the part of no part, the excess that has no part in the aesthetic police order, is a useful reference point for understanding the way that the mega-event is an intensified aesthetic regime where everything has its place". What is shared by the research participants is a logic that the Olympics become a regime that is depoliticized. My findings validate the findings of existing literature of the bidding and preparations as depoliticized as noted by Pentifallo and VanWynsberghe (2014), Black (2017), VanWynsberghe et. al (2013). This is an important verification of the politics of the games bid and preparations. This discussion and analysis section outlines these repeated articulations and comments on them.

### **Inevitability and Acceptance of the Olympic Mega Event**

Illustrated through the subsequent interview transcripts, inevitability of the Games appears as a consistent theme raised by research participants, especially when asked about the bid and preparation of the Olympics or more specifically about what happened to the city during this period. Through these discussions, infrastructure appears as a theme accompanying inevitability. Following a semi-structured interview methodology, I explored a discussion of infrastructure by asking questions such as: How was the city changing in terms of infrastructure? And what were the infrastructure projects during the bidding and preparations period? Various infrastructure projects (legacies) are mentioned throughout interviewee's responses when speaking about the inevitability of the games. These included the Highway 99 roadway widening (Sea to Sky extension), the RAV Canada Line (Skytrain extension from downtown to the airport), and expansion of the downtown Convention Centre. Also, inevitability and resignation are articulated through the operation of construction equipment (associated with images of infrastructural redevelopment).

## Acceptance of the event

“Negativity sort of died down. And maybe for obvious reasons, right?” (Rosa, 2023)

The first interview subjects include Olympic volunteers, who volunteered during the preparations, at sport venues (spaces where Olympic events were held), and the opening and closing ceremonies. Through the process of interview coding, acceptance of the event and inevitability of the Games were constant themes throughout interviews. Through conversations with Olympic volunteers Rosa (2023) and Joseph (2023), the linking of inevitability and acceptance by naturalizing the necessity of the Games through infrastructural projects became clear. Rosa (2023), an Olympic volunteer and public-school principal from North Vancouver, remembers specific images of their neighbourhood when Vancouver was bidding and preparing:

“Well, the first big thing that came to mind was the highway to Whistler. They expanded one section, past Horseshoe Bay or like around Horseshoe Bay and people were demonstrating actually and saying that they didn't want the wildlife to be disrupted. And of course, they had to blast and cut trees down there and I think similar downtown. I guess they had to build stadiums and people were afraid it costs too much, and why do we need it?”

Rosa's memory of bidding and planning the Games is centred around the politics of transit infrastructure in North Vancouver. In this passage, Rosa (2023) articulates and questions the redevelopment of the city to fit Olympic priorities. However, this negativity becomes displaced through a discourse of excitement and preparation for a global audience:

“Why do we have to have it? So I remember sort of this first, this sort of negativity about it a bit first. Actually, all this money, spending all this money, and we could spend it better, better otherwise, right, for other, like social housing or what have you. But there was also this, on the other hand, there was this excitement of, you know, welcoming the world” (Rosa, 2023).

Upon asking Rosa an open-ended question about how they remembered the Olympic games, they stated the legacy of a highway expansion (the Sea to Sky highway extension) and subsequent protests. The tone of this specific city project is spoken about in an uncertain and ambivalent way, while concurrently embracing the Olympics. The overall purpose of the Games and the cost-overruns are questioned (noting where funds could better be spent), while simultaneously being mesmerized by the spectacle of the Olympics. The focus on the highway (as an infrastructural legacy of the Games) and linking apprehension of the soaring costs while articulating a thrilling city suggests tension in Rosa's in imagining Vancouver preparing and bidding for the Games. Rosa's (2023) commentary imagining Vancouver through the "highway to Whistler" and connecting it to negativity and protests is further explored:

"I mean the negativity sort of died down. And maybe for obvious reasons, right? Like once you decide to go ahead with it, right? Like you can, but then once the road sort of started to be built. What are you going to like (blasted away or so), what are you going to demonstrate now for? Or, you know, you can? So that negativity went away slowly. I felt like slowly" (Rosa, 2023).

This response refers to the transition of Vancouver having secured the Games (post 2002-2003), and already begun preparations for the event in 2010. Themes of resignation and acceptance of the event are evident, in reference to the expansion of Highway 99 (Sea to Sky), and the presence of protests regarding Eagleridge Bluffs, a series of sensitive ecological habitats that were destroyed (Hernandez, 2020). These views are noteworthy as this sense of resignation perhaps coincides with the successful winning bid of the games. Rosa (2023) relays a sense of momentum moving forward and asking how could the games be stopped? The spectacle of their local landscape undergoing construction (highway construction and the use of explosives) makes

an impression on Rosa, while tying the start of road work as a sign that protest would no longer be tolerated.

Further in the conversation with Rosa, the Sea to Sky extension was again discussed.

Again, the legitimacy of infrastructural projects was questioned, as Rosa (2023) pointed to:

“The highway, definitely. Because I remember, demonstrations and first I didn't even know what they were talking about... and demonstrations being held and first I wasn't sure if we needed it either, right? Do we only need it for the Olympics, or do we need it actually for afterwards? I would say because I use it quite a bit because living on a North Shore and going there is quite beautiful. The drive is quite beautiful. The question is always, is it really absolutely necessary, right? I mean, it saves me maybe 15 minutes now, but is it worth, all that money that went into it? That's hard to know”.

Throughout my conversation with Rosa, inevitability of the Games was discussed through infrastructural projects that included the Sea to Sky highway, and sports stadia. Rosa's commentary also is apprehensive about the Olympics, questioning the games financially and the relevance of infrastructure post-event. Nevertheless, Rosa (2023) negotiates this apprehension by justifying the Games through welcomeness, imagery of initiated infrastructure, and serving as a beautiful transit corridor in their neighbourhood. Again, the tension of inevitability of Games, tied to infrastructure projects, appears during these conversations.

Articulating this dilemma of apprehension and questioning the event while declaring the inevitability of the Games invokes a discursive ordering. A specific piece of infrastructure becomes subsumed as a city feature that is sensible in the police order (Rancière, 1999).

Joseph (2023), also an Olympic volunteer, was asked about how they imagined the image of the city during the Olympics, the legacies, and during the bid and preparations period. Similar themes of inevitability of the Games are expressed, linked to infrastructure projects, and

internalizing the projects as a natural facet of the city. Similarly to Rosa, Joseph (2023) expresses both apprehension and inevitability at the games:

“I think it was like any good party. It was of the moment. The issues that had come up beforehand are still the issues Vancouver is struggling with.”

In this response, Joseph’s opinions on the Olympics are two-fold: a singular, festive event being somewhat unremarkable, contrasting nevertheless with an exceptional experience.

Secondly, the Games brought up a context of undesirable realities, as Vancouver has “issues” that existed prior to the event and existed following the games. Joseph (2023) then, engages in recalling the legacy infrastructures of the games:

“So, I don't know that we had any... there were a couple of good, funded projects, like we got the Canada Line train service. There was the rebuild of the Whistler Highway. There were a couple of things that really were wonderful, but very specific and I don't think they're thought of as Olympic projects anymore. I mean, they were trying very hard to get the train running in time. And it was very attached to the funding from the federal government. And it had to be up and running for the first of the new year, and it was, and the first rides on it were so fun, and you know, they just sort of opened the gates and just let everybody go on. It's just become part of the transportation system now. It's no longer thought of, Oh! [emphasis added] there's the Olympic train.”

Joseph commentary initially expresses a lack of favourable outcomes for Vancouver, while then correcting themselves and noting some beneficial material gains of the Games and concluding with Vancouver’s infrastructural landscape (as a result of the Games) now becoming a naturalized feature. The tone is positive and inspiring, attached to the promise of funding, and an enjoyable experience. Joseph also remembers the expediency of the Canada Line being built. Through this commentary, preparing for the Olympics becomes a source of rescue for Joseph, securing the games ultimately secures infrastructure. A ticking time clock and impending deadline (Lenskyj, 2020) becomes an advantageous feature of the Games, allowing Joseph to

experience the thrill of a first-time train trip! The Canada Line moreover is brought up in the context of bidding for the games:

“I remember Vancouver was in you know, the top tier of a place they were looking to use. And that's when I think they did things like, the activists were very articulate about. Their concerns and, I think the levels of government were also probably very clear about the benefits to a large population. And again, Canada Line, in terms of the train services, comes to mind. I mean, really, it's unimaginable a city now dealing without a train service to the airport.”

Finally, Joseph (2023) again reiterates Olympics and transit funding:

“Yeah, I mean, that [was] pretty clear that, that in order to get federal funding for the train line, you, we had to be the site for the Olympics.”

Joseph distinguishes the Olympics as an exceptional that makes infrastructure inevitable.

This interviewee is constructing what is considered common sense and sensible; a knowable and sayable feature of the Skytrain, that the Olympics creates a social-spatial ordering that denies equality, since the Olympics are part of a discourse that institutes hierarchies of what is considered natural or not. The positives that funding was secured from the federal government signals to Joseph the necessity of the games for Vancouver.

### **The Inevitability of the Games**

“The seeds were planted. Once we won the bid, those seeds turned into a flower” (Alina, 2023).

There was another view of the inevitability of the games, as echoed by senior Olympic Policy Officials bid committee members, (Vancouver Organizing Committee – VANOC members). Bid committee and VANOC members link the event to the construction of vital municipal infrastructure; thereby clearly articulating the games as a city building feature. Their themes of inevitability and acceptance are part of a grander process of *staging the city* as commented on by Alina (2023) and Angélique (2023), technocrats and organizers, echoing

policy texts. Emerging out of our conversation are multiple justifications for the Games operating as a natural, necessary city building feature that was assured and needed for Vancouver. A mixture of policy sources and interviewee transcripts are examined for this section. These texts include the 2002 candidature file or ‘Bid Book’, VANOC progress update Knowledge Report, and two semi-structured interviews with senior bid committee and VANOC policy managers.

### **Policy Texts**

The first source of policy text is the Candidature File or “Bid Book”. This three-volume package is the principal marketing document produced to ‘sell’ Vancouver to the International Olympic Committee. The Bid Book assembles a profile of the city, based off the bid committee’s discursive articulations of how Vancouver should be sold, to win the Olympic bid for host city status. It outlines a set of cultural, financial, and athletic guarantees that Vancouver, the provincial and federal governments must fulfill for the International Olympic Committee. The Bid Book also sells an image of Vancouver through marketing the natural beauty and multiculturalism of the city. Alina (2023), a bid committee member bolsters and illuminates this:

“we had beautiful [bid] materials done that depicted Canada, our venues, the Sea to Sky games, the topography, the geography, and the welcoming name. They were like storybooks, and they were packaged up in a wooden box of obviously wood from the region, with Aboriginal art engraved on those boxes.”

The Bid Book is a vital text to investigate the discursive articulations of how an image of the city was sold. This was composed and completed by bid committee members over 2 years (IOC, 2003). The Vancouver Bid Corporation (2002, p. 19) tangles and ties transit infrastructure to the Games, ensuring they are vital to the city:

“The provincial government has already announced its commitment to address the need for safety and capacity improvements to the Sea to Sky Highway regardless of the outcome of

the bid. These upgrades are to meet the long-term community needs and will help to facilitate the hosting of the 2010 Winter Games.

For many years, long before the 2010 bid, previous governments have identified major infrastructure initiatives important to this region, including the proposed Richmond-Airport-Downtown Vancouver transit link and the expansion of the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre.

While not required for the 2010 Games, a successful Vancouver Bid is likely to be a catalyst in advancing the funding and building of these and other needed projects.”

This policy text emphasizes that scales of government have promised to fulfill infrastructural requirements for an Olympics and provide a vague guarantee about the importance of the highway, noting “upgrades are to meet the long-term community needs” (Vancouver Bid Corporation, 2002, p. 19). Nowhere are “long-term community needs” (Vancouver Bid Corporation, 2002, p. 19) ever expounded or definitively explained. Next, the policy text illustrates it will “help facilitate the hosting of the 2010 Winter Games” (Vancouver Bid Corporation, 2002, p. 19). This demonstrates the fundamental feature this roadway services to deliver the Games. The SkyTrain extension and Convention Centre expansion are explicitly noted as “infrastructure initiatives important to this region” (Vancouver Bid Corporation, 2002, p. 19), having been proposed by previous governments. It is interesting a Bid Book would include other urban redevelopments as an advantageous method to sell Vancouver as the winning city for the Games. This confirms what Smith et al. (2024, p. 1) note that “the urban environment has moved to centre stage in that rather than merely staging the Games, organizers seem intent on ‘staging the city’”. Finally, the Bid Book describes the capital downloads that Vancouver would enjoy if it won the games, securing the “advancing the funding and building other needed projects” (Vancouver Bid Corporation, 2002, p. 19). Transit infrastructure is here linked and delivered through an Olympic event, where funding can be guaranteed and “long-term

community needs” (Vancouver Bid Corporation, 2002, p. 19) will be met. This specific text appears as expert testimony and infrastructure needed for Vancouver. A progress Knowledge Report of the Games outlines VANOCs (2010, p. 33) position that transit infrastructure necessarily boosted and secured the Olympics transportation plan:

“The Province of British Columbia was an equal partner in funding the venue construction program and, from the bid phase, was closely involved in almost all aspects of staging the Games. The Province designed and executed many programs that raised awareness and support for the Games throughout BC, including the Sea-to-Sky Highway improvement project — a project not planned specifically for the Games, but that was integral to Games-related transportation plans.

The Province of BC also spearheaded completion of the Canada Line (a new 19-kilometre rapid transit line connecting downtown Vancouver to Richmond and the Vancouver International Airport) with the Government of Canada and other partners. Though not a Games-specific project, the Canada Line was integral to the success of the Games transportation plan.”

The Sea to Sky highway extension and Canada Line are illuminated as projects crucial to delivery of a successful Games. This progress update report published a few months after the two-week spectacle of the Games contextualizes how within the preparations stage, transit infrastructure “raised awareness,” “supported,” and was “integral”. The highway and Skytrain are discursively articulated as necessities for Olympics in the city, removing politics to the infrastructure projects. This discourse of transit infrastructure tied to winning the Games is a theme shared in the scholarship on urban Olympic politics. Girginov (2018, p. 42-43) notes “the bid documents, and later with the actual Games strategy and legacy visions, host cities, governments and [Organizing Committee’s for Olympic Games] OCOGs make claims about how they are going to use the event to bring about a number of benefits for different constituencies.” The Bid Book and Knowledge Report articulate these claims, depoliticizing the Games through a discourse of (un)natural transit infrastructure projects.

In the next section, two interviewees share similar discourses of a necessary Games tied to infrastructure, as reflected in the Bid Book. Alina (2023), a former bid committee and senior VANOC member, is currently an unelected provincial sports organization official from downtown Vancouver. Alina (2023) first was asked what their role, the bid committee, and VANOC's was in the Vancouver Olympics:

“We had a vision. But until you're an organizing committee, you can't commit. But for the Canada Line, for the convention [centre], those are all primarily, seeds might have been planted, pre winning, but nothing secured because we didn't know we had the games.”

The politics of securing the bid for Alina appears as a vision, directly tying infrastructure to the Games through the symbolism of flowering seeds. Alina (2023) comments on the status of infrastructure in Vancouver:

“So that's where our premier Gordon Campbell went. He too was a visionary with John [Furlong]. And then once we won, everything, you know, got pushed because we knew what happens is you accelerate initiatives. This is where the power of these games comes in, Jacob. The Sea to Sky highway was on as a priority for 10 years pre us even bidding, but nothing was done and used to be called the sea to die highway because there were so many crashes.”

In this passage, the Olympics as a catalyst for urban redevelopment (Lenskyj, 2020) is explicitly referenced. Alina notes once the Games were secured, through a discursive articulation of constructing the Sea to Sky highway as a frightful transit infrastructure, Alina insinuates that the highway requires intervention, and the Games would facilitate construction to create a safe roadway. Again, the Games are noted how they powerfully, beneficially accelerate urban infrastructural priorities:

“And this is where the value of bidding to host events comes in in powerful ways. These initiatives that were on the books that needed to be done years ago, Games accelerate those. Canada Line, we would never have had the Canada Line without those games. The

convention centre, winning and hosting games, whatever it is, FIFA World Cup, Olympic Games, accelerates government priorities.”

The Olympics are illuminated as securing the Canada Line and Convention Centre.

However, Alina’s articulation of the Games as securing infrastructure projects and accelerating them depoliticizes these urban projects. Alina (2023) further notes that negativity of the Olympics’ facilitating infrastructure is outside of politics:

“It just completely accelerates those kinds of things. And that's where the power comes in. And that's where the uneducated is critical, saying, Oh, it costs too much money. But they don't take into consideration the legacies and the value.”

Firstly, Alina, a policy-writer illuminates how securing the games during the bid stage was a necessity, and that initiated infrastructure projects served as an incentive. The Canada Line (Richmond Airport RAV connector), the Convention Centre (Vancouver Convention Centre Expansion Project), and Sea to Sky highway (Highway 99 lane extension) are all specifically referenced as infrastructural projects. This is further illuminated when asked about whether the legacies and infrastructure described reiterating the metaphorical seeds blossoming into a flower, were enshrined in the bid. Alina (2023) stated:

“This plant, the seeds may be planted, and the seeds were planted like: an enhanced road to Whistler. Seeds might've been planted on the Canada Line, but they were only seeds. They were only seeds. That was our vision that (a line to the airport) but they were seeds. That's the key. They were seeds. And then, once we won [the bid], that turns a seed into a flower.”

The repetition and reiteration of planting seeds serves as a symbolic promise for the possibility of new infrastructure for Vancouver. Sprouting into a flower illustrates that by securing the bid for the city, these infrastructural possibilities (i.e., seeds) become a reality. This discourse of planting seeds and sprouting into a flower denotes an important insight from a

senior policy official on both the bid team and VANOC. Whether or not infrastructure developments were already underway (such as the Canada Line), interviewee Alina connects the possibility of them (planted seeds) by winning the bid, guaranteeing they will be flourished and be delivered under the auspices of the Olympics (sprouted flower). This signifies a certain natural inevitability of the Games. Therefore, how could anyone dare delaying the sprouting of a beautiful flower? Shaw's (2008) reporting on the purpose of the Sea to Sky extension illuminates such comments. As Shaw (2008, p. 134) notes:

“The IOC [International Olympic Committee] crew had taken the two-hour-plus drive between Vancouver and Whistler, shook their heads in shock and declared it much too long. Usually when the IOC doesn't like something, bid cities and their countries genuflect and scramble to obey. The Bid Corp and the government promised serious action, action that, as we will see, fit perfectly into existing plans for the highway, or, more precisely, for the land along the route. Once again, a real estate agenda was driving the bid.”

The IOC therefore designates and articulates a specific feature of Vancouver's urbanity as a priority for the Games. However, as Short (2018) comments, the International Olympic Committee does not fund or execute the legacy projects, it is reliant on the city, and host officials to facilitate the IOC's agenda. As a senior bid and organizing committee member, Alina designed the agenda and narrative to win the bid, working in concert with governmental authorities. Alina's commentary on sprouting seeds marries Olympics inevitability and infrastructural projects. Shaw (2008, p. 134) explicitly notes the relevance of this infrastructure, as “the idea of widening the Sea to Sky had surfaced from time to time, but in the past it was usually put on the backburner because some really awful roads elsewhere were in vastly greater need of attention. With the bid up and running, however, ‘fixing the Sea to Sky became *crucial* [original italics] to clinching the Games”. Inevitability of an Olympics emerges as a theme throughout research participants.

Alina's (2023) comments further point to McCann's (2013) commentary on the relevance of convincing Vancouverites of the benefits of the highway extension for urban growth (i.e. enabling the urban growth machine). As McCann (2013, p. 22) writes, "as growth machine theorists and others have long argued, one main audience of urban branding is the local population. The continuous pursuit of economic growth requires a general acceptance that growth is good for all, not merely for a small group of rentiers and their allies. Therefore, this idea must be continuously sold to locals since it is not self-evident." Consequently, then, Alina's senior bid official's commentary on the symbolism of blossoming "flowers (and seeds)" as a "vision" and as a matter to "educate" are relevant to the purpose of the Sea to Sky. Lenskyj (2020) illustrates this as a key feature of the Olympic industry, that Olympic legacies serve as an asset to the city and its citizens that everyone will appreciate. This asset is an empty promise - while officials use the legacy agenda to guarantee funding for infrastructure projects (Lenskyj, 2020). Smith et al. (2024, p. 490) further demonstrate how infrastructure is mobilized under the Olympics serving as a catalyst: "this catalytic effect is underpinned by several forces: the power of immovable deadlines, the involvement of multiple levels of government, intense media scrutiny, and the knowledge amongst private sector stakeholders that Olympic projects are 'too big to fail.'"

Alina also notes the specific infrastructure projects were already in place prior to the bidding (in 2002-2003) and preparations (2003-2009) by the provincial and municipal governments. Alina notes such infrastructure ventures as renovation and extension of the Vancouver Convention Centre, creation of a Skytrain (Vancouver's mass public transit) Canada Line route to the airport, and Sea to Sky highway extension. This is clarified through impassioned dialogue. Alina notes the Olympics operated as a successful delivery system to

construct much needed infrastructure, as she invokes fervent imagery of governmental neglect and highway crashes. The “sea to die” slogan is regularly referenced as a promotional and marketing material on the construction firms’ websites who built the extension noting “from highway of death to an easy drive... Vancouver recognized that a successful Olympics depended on making its Sea-to-Sky Highway faster and safer” (Mott Macdonald, 2024). Construction corporation WSP (2024) stated that “one of the most beautiful stretches of road in the world, this 100km highway was once known as the ‘highway of death.’” A highway marketed as dangerous and unsafe by Alina signifies that the Sea to Sky Highway 99 inevitably required construction, and the delivery of the Olympics could secure this construction.

The extension of Vancouver’s mass transit Skytrain Canada Line and Convention Centre is also an infrastructure feature Alina speaks about. In this example, the justification for the Olympics is directly tied as the only tool that would bring the possibility of new transit options. It is only inevitable that the Olympics delivered much needed transit.

Through Alina’s interview, bidding for the Olympics and scheduled infrastructure programs mutually reinforce one another. Alina presented infrastructure projects as stagnant illustrating this through the language of planting seeds and growing flowers (hinting at infrastructure and successfully delivering it), unsafe Vancouver roads, and the lack of transit as rationalisations for why the Games inevitably needed to arrive. Critical discussion on the purpose and costs of the Games has no place in Alina’s politics, as they are uneducated and do not understand the new city infrastructure that will be built.

Another senior Olympic official, Angélique (2023), an Olympic venue planning manager on the Vancouver Organizing Committee, discusses inevitability and infrastructure. This is noted through different infrastructural projects.

Angélique, an elite technocrat policy-writer illuminates the same themes of Alina, how securing the Games during the bid stage was a necessity, and that initiated infrastructure projects served as an incentive. Angélique's (2023) focuses on the advantages of impending deadlines to accelerate the construction of infrastructure as an Olympic legacy. Angélique was first asked about how they viewed the city and the Olympics. Angélique's (2023) initial response was speaking about infrastructures that needed to be redeveloped:

“Vancouver needed an expanded new convention center. That was being built. It's fantastic that you've got a deadline of games that you need that to have built different than the Canada Line that was being built. Vancouver's long been known to have some incredibly poor commute times. It needs an investment in mass transit.”

Angélique notes two infrastructures are explicitly needed for Vancouver, one an expanded Convention Centre (a common Olympic infrastructural piece), and the Canada Line. Contextualizing the city and terrible traffic, Angélique situates how as a senior manager of the organizing committee they know what is necessary for Vancouver. Angélique (2023) further discusses the Canada Line:

“The development of the Canada Line was in the works. But because we're hosting the Olympic games, we're going to tie it to, you know, that line being completed in advance of the games and its ridership, like 10-year ridership targeting, you know, like no time, it's way ahead of whatever, you know, those projections were when it was first envisioned.”

Angélique shares the same repeated and reiterated infrastructure and legacy discourse under the guide of the Olympics. Explicitly, a looming timeline is noted as a “fantastic” feature and “deadline to get it done”. Vancouver was described and “known to have incredibly poor commute times. It needs an investment in mass transit” (Angélique, 2023). Illustrated here is the pessimism of Vancouver's terrible traffic conditions, and demand that investment will mitigate

these effects. The Canada Line extension emerges as the solution to traffic ills, as the Olympics came to the rescue. This again demonstrates inevitability that securing the Games ultimately secures infrastructure:

“So you know those are things that have happened because of the Olympic Games, either gave it a deadline to get it done, or was a motivation for, be it public or a mixture of public and private partnership, to do some of these infrastructure developments” (Angélique, 2023)

Angélique’s focus is on the governance and delivery of infrastructure projects.

Articulating the use of public-private partnerships alongside an impending deadline of the Olympics, depoliticizes the governance and politics of financing, constructing, and delivering Vancouver’s infrastructure through P3s. Again, Angélique reiterates the statement about an impending deadline as an advantageous feature of the Games, distinguishing the Olympics as an exception that makes infrastructure inevitable. These articulations verify observations shared in urban Olympic politics literature. Lenskyj (2020, p. 8) reveals this as a common feature of the Olympic industry noting “the ‘ticking clock’ requires construction to be completed on time. Development applications, social and environmental impact studies, and community consultation must be fast-tracked or ignored in order to meet the Olympic timetable.” Short (2018, p. 37) explicitly notes “the Games start on a specific date with a global audience. The brute reality of such a severe deadline overcomes political resistances, bureaucratic logjams, and administrative inertia.”

### **Event Takeover**

Alina and Angélique’s commentaries illuminate that the Olympics necessitate Vancouver’s infrastructural projects, thereby naturalizing the Olympics and declaring it inevitable. The material legacies of infrastructure of the Games are symbolized through imagery of flowers and

positive legacies of the city. This is what Müller (2015) describes this as event takeover, a syndrome of Olympic bidding Alina and Angélique sell the games as a positive experience, directly invoking Short's (2018, p. 38) analysis that "the Olympic games do provide obvious economic benefits to the city as a whole because they accelerate projects already in the pipeline, force national and state urban expenditures and mobilize public spending that may remain blocked without the deadline of an opening ceremony to a global media audience." The infrastructural projects therefore provide an opportunity to facilitate the Games. Both Alina and Angélique emphasize the legacy of projects. Smith et al.'s (2024, p. 2) provide a context for this legacy as an "ideal, imaginary and grand urbanism tends to be envisaged, one that overrides the politics and inconvenient realities of actual places". The Sea to Sky highway extension at Eagle heights emphasizes this. It refers to the relevance of an urban growth machine and growth coalitions, as well as a neoliberalizing project. Logan and Molotch (1987), through their analysis of power, describe the agenda of cities as based on the manifestations of rentier-class urban elites seeking projects that will grow their profits. The Sea to Sky facilitates this, as Shaw (2008) previously describes, and Surborg et al. (2008, p. 351) illustrates "the strong presence, direct and indirect, of the real estate business on the board of the 2010 Bid Corporation suggests a strong interest of that sector in utilizing the Games for fostering property development". Leading Vancouver real-estate industry members have a part in directing the agenda of the bid, and city. Surborg et al. (2008) importantly notes this Olympic growth coalition contained real-estate domestic urban elites, but also importantly transnational urban elites (for example: the Hong Kong billionaire Li Ka-shing). Within the urban growth machine and growth coalition, there is an ongoing grander process of the transfer of transnational and international capital onto Vancouver. Urban entrepreneurialism is at work here. Harvey (1989) notes the managerialist

urban agenda during the Fordist political economy of North American cities has paradigmatically shifted, as the crises of capital accumulation of the 1970s have given way to running cities as businesses (somewhat deserting their previous adherence to supporting the social reproduction of the city). Therefore, understanding this urban growth machine under the Olympics, Peck (2014, p. 398) describes this entrepreneurialism as:

“Cities must act, and be seen to act, even if the aspirational reach continually exceeds the effective-grasp. The plateau has therefore become even more crowded. If the breathing up there is becoming noticeably more laboured, that is because cities have to hustle harder and run faster to stay still, and the hot air of marketing and promotion only goes so far in the face of the chill winds of corporate logic and fiscal rationality.”

Power elites of the bidding team determine the agenda of the city. Interestingly, former Vancouver festivals reveal similar themes (inevitability) that interviewees noted when asked about the bidding and preparations of the 2010 Games. Mitchell’s (2004) investigation of Vancouver’s urbanism through placemaking is relevant here, as she observes the crises of liberalism and neoliberalism through Expo ’86 and other festivals. Referencing festival ’91, a corporate spectacle celebrating Hong Kong and Vancouver’s mobility of capital connection, Mitchell (2004, p. 54) notes “the festival was presented as part of an ‘international festival,’ with a strong rhetoric of globalization as both inevitable and desirable, and cosmopolitanism as achievable only for those able to establish and maintain international linkages.” Through Alina and Angélique’s comments, infrastructure is discerned as a key feature to facilitate growth.

### **Searching for a plan? Or the search for a consensus of a plan?**

The planning of the Olympic mega-event as commented on by Alina and Angélique illustrates an imagination of how Vancouver needs to be planned to fit the Olympic narrative. Metzger et al.’s (2015, p. 14) commentary is relevant here: “whilst planning involves the search

for a spatial plan, the current and dominant approach to planning displaces the ‘search for a plan’ with the ‘search for *consensus* [original italics] on the plan. This is a subtle distinction but one that goes to the heart of the post-foundationalist political critique.” Metzger et al.’s (2015) comment illustrates the function of urban planning as one that forecloses the political, building on Rancière’s conception of a consensus. Policy architects such as Alina and Angélique dreamt up a vision of an Olympic Vancouver (urban), as a ‘search for consensus on the plan’ reliance on the consensual view. Alina emphasizes this through the benefits of a ‘ticking time clock’ (Lenskyj, 2020) as another ‘search for consensus on the plan.’ Alina (2023) explicitly states:

“It's fantastic that you've got a deadline of Games that you need that to have built different than the Canada Line that was being built. Vancouver's long been known to have some incredibly poor commute times. It needs an investment in mass transit.”

These two senior policy officials and members of the bid committee and VANOC illuminate what Dikeç (2007, p. 21) describes as “a particular regime of representation that consolidates a certain spatial order through such practices of articulation.” The discourse of imagining the Games as destined, while employing the language of transit infrastructure as illuminated by Alina and Angélique, “spatially designat[es] areas [of Vancouver] to be treated” (Dikeç, 2007, p. 21). The narrative of infrastructure as a necessity for Vancouver through the delivery of the Games constructs a spatial order and institutes what is made common sense.

In this section, the status of Vancouver’s politics in the context of planning the Games was discussed. Politics, examined through the discursive articulations of Alina and Angélique via a Rancièrian frame, did not diverge from the “contingency of order and away from perfect consensual solutionism” (Boano. 2023, p. 126). As articulated by Alina and Angélique, the ‘search for consensus on the plan’ (Metzger et. al., 2015, p. 14) is the optimal solution that Olympic policy architects espoused: “the seeds were planted like: an enhanced road to Whistler.

Seeds might've been planted on the Canada Line, but they were only seeds. They were only seeds. That was our vision that (that a line to the airport would be... They were seeds. And then, once we won [the bid], that turns a seed into a flower” (Alina, 2023). The search for a consensus is constructed in the language and nuance of Alina’s commentary, a grand narrative and universalism is required to facilitate the Olympics as a necessity for Vancouverites. The next section examines articulations of resignation and inevitability, a shared discursive theme of the Games, this time viewed from two anti-Olympic protestors.

### **Themes of resignation**

“There’s not much you can do, because the bulldozers start” (Chantal, 2023)

The following section outlines another theme of resignation and inevitability as commented by two protestors. These senior organizers facilitated an anti-Olympic movement called NO GAMES during the bidding, preparations period, and two-week event. The two members were friends within a small anti-Olympic group that sought to publicize the cost overruns, undemocratic redevelopment of Vancouver through the games, and as a celebration of corporatism.

These interviewees link the planning and bidding of the event as an undemocratic city building program. As Tommy (2023) notes the Games “started off not democratic a process,” thereby inevitability is linked to the construction of municipal infrastructure, articulating the Games as a feature of Vancouver’s (re)development. Themes of inevitability and acceptance are seen as part of a grander process of *staging the city*. Multiple justifications for the Games operating as a natural, necessary city building feature were mobilized as assured and needed for Vancouver.

Tommy, an anti-Olympic protestor, describes the inevitability and acceptance of the Games in reference to protesting. When Tommy (2023) was asked about organizing protests early in the bid and preparations of the Olympics, he instantly referenced the Olympic Organizing Committee, entirely shutting them out of any decision making or political involvement in the Games:

“VANOC chose the path of pretending we didn't exist, which from their perspective was probably the best. So they wouldn't respond to anything we did.”

Tommy illuminates there was zero engagement with the Vancouver Organizing Committee and that their group was rendered as an invisible actor and ignored. Next, Tommy (2023) notes the inevitability of the Games in the context of a resigned public and construction projects:

“The citizenry in general, I think as we said, kind of went back to sleep. It's coming, but we'll worry about it when it gets closer. When they were plowing down Eagleridge, people in North Vancouver and West Vancouver noticed.”

Tommy first articulates how he imagines Vancouverites public response to the Games, as they were destined to arrive. An active anti-Olympic organizer from 2002 until 2010, Tommy's view of the 'citizenry' is noteworthy. He would have a comprehensive understanding of how the public responded to his group's anti-Olympic politics -- being engaged, opposed, or indifferent to their message. Tommy (2023) then articulates a more engaged public during the protests of the Sea to Sky lane extension in Eagleridge Heights, West Vancouver. This discussion of the highway infrastructure is expanded upon as an inevitability:

“That hadn't [Sea to Sky highway extension] been in the original bid, even though it kind of was implicit, you know, you have to fix the highway to Whistler. When they started to build the Canada Line, there were benefits to the Canada Line. Sure, maybe you know, it

was brought in for the Olympics in spite of the fact that it may have been needed anyway” (Tommy, 2023).

Tommy notes acceptance of the event lies in an apathetic Vancouver citizenry, a resigned feeling when the organizing committee refusing to even imagine their presence during the preparations, and infrastructure improvements were inevitability (even under an Olympic event).

Chantal, another anti-Olympic protestor, describes the imagery of infrastructure construction when I asked about the politics of the Games. Chantal (2023) elucidates the uncontrollable force of the Olympics during the bidding and preparations, employing the symbolic language of bulldozers and trains tied to signed contracts:

“There’s not much you can do after that because the bulldozers start [in reference to the Sea to Sky]. The money starts happening, you are not going to pull out of the Games after your contract is out for at that time probably more than 5 billion dollars at that time of contracts and stuff signed. So you are not going to get them to stop.”

Chantal’s description of an industrial machine such as a bulldozer alongside the start of the Games illuminates how the event is imagined as an aggressive, unopposable project. This bulldozer is discussed in conjunction with financially bound contracts. Critically, Chantal (2023) notes signing contracts is outside of the scope of Olympic politics, as the contracts are uncontestable and once signed, they are sealed and untouchable. Chantal (2023) also mentions a train as another heavy industrial symbol of the Games:

“It’s like a train. It’s hard to get a train to stop and back up and come back to its original position, you know. Or a bulldozer, the bulldozers in, lands being dug up, and contracts have been signed, and more contracts are signed.”

Chantal describes the Games as a train, and the immobility of a speeding steamroller to suddenly reverse. The event is inevitable once it is full steam ahead. Again, a bulldozer is noted, with the city discursively under construction, once digging begins and contracts are signed.

Finally, Chantal (2023) under the inevitable conditions of the Games describes in a resigned tone, a practical outcome:

“So really all you can do at that point is basically, if you find something just to keep awareness of what the games actually do, and what their costs are and how they make it difficult for people for housing.”

Chantal (2023) points out that oppressive conditions, soaring financial burdens, and housing inequities exacerbated under the Games. The political agency of Chantal is messy. The Games are declared as inevitable, and only so many strategies can be pursued within a resigned politics.

Tommy and Chantal talk about inevitability through the symbolism of machinery. There is symbolism of construction equipment, the material (tangible) and visible Vancouver landscape being transformed, as bulldozers are in the ground. Infrastructure in this sense becomes mobilized under the Olympics serving as a catalyst and “springboard” to initiate “Olympic driven urban regeneration” and “bounce-back” from conditions of economic strife (Smith et al., 2024, p. 490). The tone of the Sea to Sky and Canada Line projects are of resignation, spoken about in an uncertain and ambivalent way, while concurrently agreeing that infrastructure will arrive, whether or not facilitated by the Olympics.

Shaw’s (2008) testimony as a protestor aids discussion on the inevitability of the Games as articulated by Tommy and Chantal. Firstly, Vancouver’s anti-Olympic organizers could not paradigmatically shift the public discourse, failing to pose the Games as an oppressive force prior to winning the bid (Shaw, 2008). Shaw (2008, p. 266) notes this forced a political question onto the protestors: “Can an opposition still win?”. In a resignation of politics, also shared by Tommy and Chantal, “locally, no; globally, yes. Locally, we had lost the battle to keep the Games from coming and were left fighting a rear guard action” (Shaw, 2008, p. 266). This anti-

Olympic opposition group articulates the inevitability of the Games, as the resistance efforts pre-bid could not successfully articulate a vision outside of the status quo. Tommy and Chantal also noted this. The Vancouver bid society securing and winning the bid in 2003 is a political ceding of resistance for anti-Olympic opposition as the "local" (perhaps the city or urban scale of resistance) fight was lost. Shaw (2008, p. 266) then shares similar articulations of the sensible of the Olympics and Vancouver, also shared by Tommy and Chantal:

“The projects that the Bid Corp really wanted were already on track. The money would soon be pulled from public coffers, the areas slated for destruction were just waiting for the chain saws and backhoes. Short of massive protests – and if we could have organized these at all, the time to do so was before the decision – we couldn’t stop the Olympic machine afterwards.”

The symbols and metaphors of “chain saws and backhoes” (Shaw, 2008, p. 266), are explicitly destructive construction equipment, in reference to the Olympic projects already initiated, monies expropriated and city land to be developed. This is the same imagery of active noxious construction machinery shared by Tommy and Chantal as a reference to unstoppable and inevitable programme of the Olympics. Emma, a city councillor, also expounds on the inevitability of Games in the context of electoral politics.

### **Seeking Approval**

“We were just voting machines” (Emma, 2023)

The final research participant and interviewee was Emma, a city councillor present during the bidding and preparations games. They observed and participated in the process of Vancouver planning for the Games. Emma (2023) was firmly against the Olympics, and they describe the Olympic project in explicit, explosive terms:

“A vehicle by which the state was able to justify the unjustifiable. That’s very significant sums of money primarily to businesses, to large businesses that made windfall and

wholly unjustifiable profits as a result of the Olympics, period. It also meant displacement of the poorest of the poor, sorry, many of the poorest, many, many of the poorest of the poor from their housing, period. It also meant a very dramatic and draconian curtailment, a free speech period, in and of itself a party for the rich and misery for the poor. We should always be striving, striving to afflict the comfortable and comfort. The afflictive period, the Olympics, does just the opposite. That's my answer."

The Games were described as a tool for corporate profiteering, further impoverishment of the poorest Vancouverites, curtailment of civil liberties, and opposite of what Vancouver should be striving for. This dramatic statement emphasizes Emma's discontent and disgust with the Games. When asked about conversations of bidding and preparations in city council, Emma (2023) notes:

"I came out very strongly against the Olympics. And the mayor publicly insulted me. I was quoted in the print newspaper."

Emma (2023) describes her position as anti-Olympics, however, she further clarifies the municipal politics of the city council:

"My party COPE [Coalition of Progressive Electors] totally split into two. And the majority of us, five, were nicknamed in the media No Classic. The other four were nicknamed No Lite. They kept losing votes at our membership meetings. When they left to make a new party, it was funded by Vancouver's largest developers and the gambling industry."

Emma describes the breakdown of her progressive party COPE in city council during preparations of the Olympics. This vote was on whether to accept the funding scheme of the RAV Skytrain Canada Line, structured through a public (intergovernmental financing) – private partnership model (Siemiatycki, 2005). In reference to this vote on the P3 partnership, Emma explains that the expectations of loyalty (to vote a certain way) was necessary and led to the

dissolution of COPE party. Initially, Emma (2023) framed the politics of the mayor, through an impassioned statement that the mayor had a certain corporatist ideological bent:

“As soon as the mayor finished his term, he was appointed to the board of one of the very largest gambling corporations. And a few years later, he was a billionaire.”

Emma then comments on the necessity of voting alongside the mayor during the P3 Skytrain financing vote. This is spoken about as common-sensical statement, to support a conservative project, as councillors must remain loyal and resign their own personal politics:

“The mayor imagined what he had defined as loyalty. Loyalty meant that the eight councillors, that were with this party at my point, there were nine of us, the mayor and eight councillors. The eight would always vote exactly the same way as the mayor. And we were just voting machines. We were not elected by the electorate to exercise our own analysis. Now he had already come up in support. Now we, being against, was considered by him to be disloyal. If people disagree with him, he could not take that” (Emma, 2023).

Emma notes the monied interests involved in municipal politics during the bidding, and loyalty that the mayor demanded from city councillors. Interestingly, Emma notes the mayor thought of her and colleagues (councillors) as “just voting machines, not elected by the electorate to exercise our own analysis”. This statement reveals Emma’s struggle to position herself as anti-Olympics, but also the assumed status-quo condition that all municipal councillors (regardless of political ideology) vote to support the Games and show their loyalty to the mayor. Siemiatycki (2005, p. 71) describes this fracturing of COPE: “thus in spite of their party’s ideological objections, in a decision that has fractured the COPE caucus and the party’s membership, the mayor and enough COPE councillors supported the RAV project as a public–private partnership to have it approved by Vancouver city council,” The brawling politics within the chambers of city council as commented by Emma is not a unique municipal event. However, Emma describing progressive councillors abandoning their progressive morals, and the necessity to vote

for the P3 partnership exemplifies an observance to embracing a neoliberalized politics of the city. Discursively, Emma's (2023) comment "we were just voting machines" articulates a common sense understanding of resignation, that she had no agency, rather "not elected by the electorate to exercise our own analysis".

### **Community or Commonality as Inequality: An Analysis of Vancouver Olympics Politics**

Recalling the initial research puzzle and main question about the status of Vancouver's politics and democracy during the bid and preparations phase of the Games, my analysis reveals themes of inevitability and acceptance emerging from policy texts and interviewees discussion associated mainly with infrastructure construction. The politics of the Vancouver Olympics shared by research participants validates the existing literature on urban politics of Olympic mega-events, as elucidated by critical Olympic scholars Horne and Whannel (2016). These include "reputational promotion" (image making), boycotts and protests, and the event as a neoliberalizing ritual (Horne and Whannel, 2016, p. 195).

The articulations of inevitability, acceptance, and resignation of the Games reveal a certain common sense. They construct what is natural and sensible. It is fascinating to observe the recurrent commentaries on infrastructure transit projects, as both material and symbolic objects. These are image making features of the city. The discourse of inevitability, resignation, and necessity of the event are cojoined with this commentary of infrastructure transit projects as a mutually reinforcing relationship. Policing, or the institution of a social-spatial order has occurred.

What this repeating theme of inevitability expounds is the Olympics becomes a depoliticized object and process. The Games no longer are spoken about as a debatable process

or object. These articulations, spoken about as natural feature of Vancouver, generate a specific sayable, thinkable, and understandable truth (Rancière, 1999), an appearance that circulates the Games as something shared, in-common, and as a community. As Rancière (1999) argues, it is the circulation of appearances that establish a social-spatial ordering; diverging from Althusser's (2006) law of interpellation, a policeman stopping you in the street: "Hey, you there!" (Rancière, 2001, p. 37). Rancière's (1999, 2001) method to investigate oppressions, is concerned with the societal conditions that produce a moment where a policeman says, "move along! There's nothing to see here!" The police says that there is nothing to see on a road, that there is nothing to do but to move along. It asserts that the space of circulating is nothing other than the space of circulation" (Rancière, 2001, p. 37). This section now explores the circulating common-sense themes of inevitability as framed through infrastructure.

Appearances of the Games as natural are what Shaw (2020, p. 86) notes as "Rancière, in fact, argues that command and coercion need not be legitimated by prior forms of oppression, but rather that the very form of *command or an order produces or institutes relations of inequality* [emphasis added] where they many not already be present." This analysis is situated through the method of equality (Pelletier, 2009; Rancière, 1999), as the interview transcript "should not be read as the expression of a sociological condition (e.g., the condition of being female in a patriarchal system), since all one will ever see is confirmation of inequality" (Pelletier, 2009, p. 273), rather investigating what is common in the production of discourse, as a discursive entity.

Recalling the justifications and specific language by research participants: "seeds and flowering", "shovels in the ground", "timelines are sped up", "it was necessary for a 21<sup>st</sup> century city", "the only way for federal funding to be secured," does not appear as a form of oppression.

However, these discursive articulations of the Olympics constitute a form of spatial order, revealing a politics of Vancouver for the research participants that the Olympics became a locked, natural feature of the city. This “institutes relations of inequality” (Shaw, 2020, p. 86), as Vancouver as a city is socially organized (Dikec, 2007) to fit only certain functions, foreclosing politics since egalitarian practices were not forced such as “the instituting of a quarrel that challenges the incorporated, perceptible evidence of an inegalitarian logic” (Rancière, 2004, p. 5).

The certain language and nuance how Vancouverites articulated the city during the Games confines social space and distributes people (anti-Olympic sentiment is rendered illegitimate as mentioned by Rosa, or their voices rendered as noise as described by Tommy and Chantal) into specific places through the circulation of sensible appearances (Rancière, 1999). This outlines a policing practice, emphasizing distributing and circulating appearances, that is not a repressive practice (all the research participants recalling the Games as a necessity through infrastructure does not necessarily constitute violent statements), but interviewees’ responses frame common-sense narratives of Vancouver and the Olympics, imagining an order to their city. Rancière (1999, p. 29) notes this as “policing is not so much the “disciplining” of bodies as a rule governing their appearing, a configuration of *occupations* [original italics] and the properties of the spaces where these occupations are distributed.” My interviewee’s conduct was configured through the Olympics policing, as they behaved according to a discursive space of appearances that constituted the Games as natural. Vancouver’s politics was social-spatially ordered (policed) through these themes of inevitability, infrastructure projects, and how research participants justified the Olympics. Infrastructure becomes a criteria and sensibility, it becomes a part of the stage and ordering – it becomes a means to assign. According to Rancière (1999), sensibilities

include what is assigned and where, positions, what is seen, heard and thinkable. Research participants engaging with infrastructural legacies as a method of speaking about the Olympic mega-event is the sensibility and appearance through which the Games become justified. In addition to infrastructural transit projects as a sensibility, they form the grammar and rules, by which an inevitability is articulated. These rules (the partition of the perceptible) institute a spatial ordering of how each research participant felt like they were expected to behave, and what it means about Vancouver's politics. Discursive articulations uncover how real policing has been done.

Research participants recalling the Games through these specific infrastructure constructions of the city (sentiments) situates how marketized features of their urban space became recognizable (Silk, 2014). As Kassens-Noor (2012) notes, transit infrastructure becomes a key legacy of urban redevelopment of Olympic cities, facilitated through the IOC or city governments. For Kassens-Noor (2012, p. 2), "influences were either imposed by the IOC via explicit and implicit requirements during the pre-Olympic preparation stages, or – equally important – by city governments driven by ambitious aspirations to win and stage the "best Games ever." These legacies become a sensibility, a means of constructing what is made common sense (a partition or distribution of the sensible) to stage the Games. The legacy and transit infrastructure in coordination become a depoliticizing tactic, the articulation of a necessary city-building feature that orders what becomes sayable.

Infrastructure becomes a feature of image-creation and "the projection of a flawless and consensual representation of the city, at once efficient, modern, disciplined, and visually appealing, also contributes to the crystallization of an urban vision that is both simplified and unproblematic" (Broudehoux, 2016, p. 123).

These transportation infrastructure projects as in the construction, delivery, and maintenance of Highway 99 (Sea to Sky Highway) and the construction and delivery of the airport to downtown Canada Line (Skytrain extension) function as an extension of processes of a specific governance logic. Interviewees all formulated what was considered common sense, the idea that specific transportation infrastructures -- not the typical stadium, or even Olympic village mega-event infrastructures of the Olympics but rather transportation infrastructure -- could only be guaranteed under the auspices of the Olympics. Discursively, this could be the institution of spatial ordering. Dikeç (2015) explicates Rancière's argument of the police order as spatial, since the order determines and configures how space is organized. Dikeç (2015, p. 91) crucially notes how Rancière illustrates that this is facilitated through "his point is that such orders work through what they present to the senses as self-evident facts. In other words, he is concerned about the worlds of sensible experience that such orders create, rather than the falsity or reality of what is presented to the senses." Such tropes of how Vancouver's infrastructural space were commented on include: "We NEED this" (in reference to the Skytrain extension), "I didn't know if it was really required" (in reference to the Sea to Sky highway extension), "A city looking forward" (the bid document advertising Vancouver), "blossoming into a flower" (in reference to the city opening up, if the bid was secured and only then would the highway be constructed).

An Olympic booster logic and urban image making are present in these articulations of the research participants. As noted in the literature review, the Olympic boosters were "those with privilege had the power to define what was important, the criteria for evaluating Olympic impact reflected their social class, race and gender interests." (Lenskyj, 2000, p. 97). That research participants articulated how the Games were necessitated through infrastructure pieces that the

boosters “defined what was important” reveals how citizens envisioned their city as interwoven with the bidding and planning of a gigantic event. The articulation of infrastructure additionally raises Lenskyj’s (2000, p. 97) argument “for citizens to support the noneconomic but equally important goal of urban image making.” The infrastructure image making satisfies a vision of the interviewees for Vancouver as “beautiful” (Rosa), “wonderful” (Joseph), “flowering” (Alina), “brought back to life” (Angélique), “implicit to fix the highway” (Tommy). The new infrastructure planned and developed during bid and preparation stages becomes a depoliticized object for research participants. Articulating these urban infrastructures, a fictional vision of its political economy and culture, seeks to permanently fix an idealized urban space that ignores the actually existing conditions of the urban space (Kansens-Noor, 2016).

The articulations of all research participants, employing certain metonyms (blossoming flowers, metaphors for construction) demonstrate the circulating (or distributed) senses that constitute the appearances of a necessary, inevitable event. Under the guise of these metonyms, infrastructure is consistently named as a vehicle to embrace the Games while certain a neoliberalized version of reality becomes hidden and depoliticized, namely public-private partnerships. The natural governance of P3s, effectively becomes the most appropriate means of regenerating the city.

My research findings verify and reassert Horne and Whannel’s (2016, p. 197) third trend of politics of the Olympic Games: “the development of *neo-liberalism as the common-sense* [original italics] context for the staging of the Olympic Games.” Additionally, my findings also authenticate and substantiate Mitchell’s (2004, p. 13) arguments about Vancouver as “literal sites in which the rhetoric of an inevitable and invincible neoliberal form of globalization is used to promote specific kinds of policies related to the production and dispensation of urban land.” The

RAV line project and Sea to Sky highway extension were repeatedly articulated by interviewees, the largest (at the time in Canada) and first provincial design-build-finance-operated style public-private partnerships (P3s) (Siemiatycki, 2006, Partnerships BC, 2005). All research participants included the RAV line and highway as sensible features of the Games, that was necessary or aided the city. The articulation of this infrastructure alongside an inevitable Games discursively embeds the material and symbolic production of these urban redevelopments, conjuring a spatial order. These particular infrastructures were constructed through a governance of design-build-finance-operated P3s, a central component of the processes of Olympic neoliberalization (Boykoff, 2014b, Horne and Whannel, 2016). Noted in the literature review, these projects implemented P3s through the guise of private sector “efficiency,” rather than public involvement (Siemiatycki, 2005). Naming the infrastructure becomes subsumed as a necessary, natural feature. As dos Santos (2020, p. 46) notes, “by using the fallacy of the private sector efficiency and the use of private resources for public investments, PPPs [or P3] are legitimated, while guiding a set of strategic actions of the State in the territorial and institutional dimension that privilege the private in face of the public, increasing or reinforcing social inequality.” Invoking infrastructure projects (the principal neoliberalizing feature of the Olympics) alongside a necessary, inevitable Games subsumes efficiency as unquestioned.

As Silk (2014, p. 58) notes, there is a sense of belonging, as the discursive representations of highways and skytrains, are connected to inevitability of an event: “SMEs (sports mega-events) under the rubric of neoliberalism, may well produce scrubbed (albeit ephemeral) spaces of consumption, gentrification and offer *unquestioned* [original italics] belonging.” The entrepreneurial neoliberalizing programmes of P3s instituted in the Olympic infrastructures of Vancouver mitigates the crises of urban austerity and profitability (Harvey, 1989). Therefore,

understanding this common-sensical feature of neoliberalism as depoliticized by the research participants, Brown's (2019) observation of politics, democracy, and neoliberalism, aids this explanation of "unquestioned belonging" (Silk, 2014, p. 58). As Brown (2019, p. 62) notes, "neoliberalism's attack on democracy is often less bold. It involves altering democracy's meanings, reducing it to a "method" of setting rules, rather than a form of rule, curtailing its purview, or detaching it from governing. Throttling democracy was fundamental, not incidental, to the broader neoliberal program." Brown (2019) explicitly elucidates neoliberalism as requiring a stripping of the political, while removing any semblance of democratic potential. Therefore, the implementation of neoliberalizing programmes in Vancouver through these P3s, alongside articulations of P3, produced infrastructure through an inevitable, necessary Games depoliticizes the politics of the production of urban space. This hollowing of the political "detaching it from sovereignty" (Brown, 2019, p. 57), and stripping democracy to a method configures what Rancière (1999) would note as a consensus. As noted earlier, a "consensus is a certain regime of the perceptible: the regime in which the parties are presupposed as already given, their community established and the count of their speech identical to their linguistic performance" (Rancière, 1999, p. 102). Research participants articulated the presupposition of infrastructure construction contained within a necessary Olympic spectacle, that the Games fast-tracked, catalyzed, and delivered funding for their city. The common-sense statements of an inevitable Olympics articulated through infrastructure produced and discursively naturalized and satisfied the particularities of Vancouver's neoliberalization, how "megaevents planning operates as an attempt to resolve core capitalist antagonisms across a variety of neoliberal governance projects" (Lauermann and Davidson, 2013, p. 1287). This analysis attempts to survey the urban Olympic politics, as interviewees articulated a spatial ordering.

What do the articulations of the Games as inevitable, as a common-sense feature of the city, then remark about the political subjectivity of Vancouverites? It substantiates Fitzpatrick's (2018, p. 8) claim that "in the presence of a mega-event, the political subjectivity of the resident of the host city is constructed through (and therefore situated by) the event." However, this thesis does not aim to present a foreclose of the political, based on research findings. I do not seek to label Vancouver as post-political, as that "risks treating depoliticization as the condition that has been realized rather a tendency that has taken hold. Worse still, the negative mobilization of the post-political concept could serve to further divide the arenas of critical theorization (as pure criticism) and political action" (Davidson and Iveson, 2015, p. 546). Rather, I aimed to present a particular finding, surveying and commenting on the Vancouver Olympic politics, as research participants articulated a tendency of depoliticization.

### **Ambivalence as an opening: the political potential?**

Through most interviewees' responses,<sup>3</sup> a feeling of ambivalence and apprehension accompanied their articulations of the infrastructure projects and inevitable Games. These include remarks like: "exorbitant housing prices... money better spent on different city projects... organizing committee pretending protestors did not exist... and a party for the rich." Criticism and ambivalence were attached to comments such as "the Games arrived" (a spatial ordering of the Games, that they were destined to arrive), show hope and desire that "these excluded spaces therefore contain political potential" (Davidson and Iveson, 2015, p. 550). The articulation of ambivalence and apprehension in Olympic legacies and transit infrastructure describes spatial unevenness in the discursive social-spatial ordering of Vancouver (through

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<sup>3</sup> Excluding the senior bid committee (Bid Corporation) and organizing committee officials (Vancouver Organizing Committee).

common-sense themes of an inevitable Games). That very presence of apprehension and ambivalence “challenges the incorporated, perceptible evidence of an inegalitarian logic” (Rancière, 2004, p. 5). This inegalitarian logic is the spatial ordering of a supposed “natural” politics of Vancouver. Declaring ambivalence and apprehension also unsettles the hierarchical nature of the spatial order (police), since research participants are subversively disobeying the ‘naturalism’ of the Olympic politics. In the same moment interviewees accept the Games as an inevitability, they disavow the presupposed conditions of the Games. This is a “challenge to the given distribution of the sensible” (Panagia, 2009, p. 302).

My analysis demonstrates that the political potential is present, however, it complicates whether this is emancipatory politics since “politics is a kind of *continuous recreation* [italics added] of its own space and time” (Rancière, 2024, p. 38). My goal was to explicate the messiness of the status of politics in Vancouver. This discursive commentary and analysis of ambivalence and apprehension, questions the distributing common-sense articulations of inevitability and urban infrastructure projects as depoliticized. Further study could investigate the politics of apprehension and ambivalence of research participants.

This section has presented the findings of Olympic policy, semi-structured interviews with Olympic volunteers, protestors, a former Vancouver city councillor, and senior bid committee (Bid Corporation) and organizing committee officials (Vancouver Organizing Committee). This discussion has commented on the spatial ordering of Vancouver, through the articulations of common-sense themes including inevitability, necessity and resignation framed alongside specific neoliberalized urban transportation infrastructure projects. These included the RAV Canada Line and Sea to Sky highway expansion. Through a Rancièrian analysis, a distribution of the sensible and certain aesthetic regime was instituted, where distributing senses (the themes of

an inevitable Games, necessary event, and resignation that the spectacle must go on) constructed a reality of Vancouver that became naturalized. Policing has occurred through this temporal moment (during the bidding and preparations phases) of the Olympics, as politics is done. The research participants framed common-sense themes of the city, depoliticizing the Olympics during the bidding and planning stages. Yet, through their articulations, the accompanying apprehension and ambivalence presented a moment of political potential, as it is outside of the circulating common-sensical themes of inevitability.

## Conclusion: A Sensible Vancouver

As I sit in my friend's car, after a day-hike we just completed in Garibaldi Provincial Park, I am enveloped in the beauty of a sunset over the coastal mountains of the Howe Sound, travelling down the Sea to Sky highway. We pass by the post-industrial mining settlement of Britannia Beach, now a luxury condo and McMansion community, a real-estate project developed in coordination with the Sea to Sky highway expansion. Once reaching West Vancouver, we pass a concrete jungle of on and off ramps. This is the former temperate forest habitat of Eagleridge Heights, and site of environmental and anti-colonial protest against the ecological destruction for the Sea to Sky lane expansion. This expanded highway is a high-speed route my friends and I regularly travelled during the summer I completed my fieldwork. Amongst my Vancouverite friends, they imagine the highway serving *just* as an arterial route, delivering them into the old growth forests surrounding Squamish and Whistler, where a playground of extreme mountain biking and multi-day backpacking await.

Through my research, I attempted to examine the conditions through which common-sense statements become naturalized, and depoliticized, such as how my friends expounded on an urban space such as the Sea to Sky. My research discursively investigates how the conditions of common-sense statements are produced through non-violent means and lack the disciplinary command. Rather, these common sensical statements are an appearance that becomes circulated as natural, constituting a spatial order. This Rancièrian method of a politics of aesthetics, unpacks a phantasmic moment of Vancouver's urban politics, how the Olympic Games came to town.

My research project aimed to explore the politics of Vancouver and the status of its democracy, during a particular, spectacularized event in Vancouver's history. The selected time period of bidding, winning the bid, and subsequent planning for the Games (up until the execution of the event) is investigated through interviews, and brief policy readings. In the first section, I outlined the research puzzle and what was at stake in this research project. This contextualized how I intended on examining and surveying the politics of the Games, diverging from conventional studies of Olympic politics, that focus on the spectacular two-week period. I described my research questions, intending to examine what was constituted as common sense of the Vancouver Olympics, what the *sensible evidences* that social-spatially policed and ordered Vancouver's society, and what the politics of Vancouver were according to these articulations of common-sense themes. My research attempted to investigate these research questions and analyze Vancouver's Olympic mega-event through a frame of politics as aesthetics.

This is an alternative or complement to the critical Olympics literature on politics, analyzing the Olympic Games as an emergency suspension of the city (Agamben's state of exception) or as purely a celebration of capitalism. It also diverges from sports mega-events theorized using a framework of the event as accumulated and spectacularized capital becoming image (Debord, 1983), as this risks of homogenizing the event and ignoring its local historical context and particularities (Woodward, 2012). I also attempt to sidestep the normative theorizing of staging an Olympic Games as purely a profiteering motivation, as this ignores other oppressive "social divisions such as those based on sex gender, ethnicity and race, and a top-down view of power which underestimates the myriad sites at which power and hence resistance can operate" (Woodward (2012, p. 157). Sidestepping this top-down view power, my thesis employs Rancière's (1999, 2001, 2004, 2006) politics as "always an aesthetic activity not

because there is a specific aesthetic to politics but because within any social arrangement there are words and images in combination and circulation” (Panagia, 2009, p. 302). Rancière’s imagination of an aesthetic version of politics, provides a unique spatial method of examining what produces (through a partition and dividing line) the conditions that articulate the (un)natural ordering of society. The Rancièrian method of politics is provocative and critical, yet an underutilized tool helpful for critical human geographers and critical Olympic scholars. In my theoretical framework, I outlined Rancière’s (1999) aim to revive radical, emancipatory politics, based on critical non-teleology. This is through an *a priori* (non-Kantian) criteria of equality (not a demand) that issues a disagreement (dissensus) to break from the social-spatial ordering of society (the police) and the laws that naturalize it (distribution or partition of the sensible) (Rancière, 1999, 2001). Political subjectivity is fought for, not through a liberal philosophy of the excluded becoming included (as that upkeeps the laws that designate who is heard, thought of, and can speak), but through the voiceless (part of those who have no part) shifting the dramaturgical appearance of their condition rendering them as noise (Rancière, 1999). Rancière’s method of emancipatory politics is useful for my critical human geography inquiry, since “political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination; it makes visible what had no business being seen” (Rancière, 1999, p. 30). Situating my research puzzle and questions within this theoretical framework, I defined my methods and methodology. Firstly I situated my positionality and made comments on reflexivity. Next, I outlined how a method and practice of equality would be employed, alongside a critical discourse analysis and textual analysis. I interviewed seven research participants and described how I completed the semi-structured interviews. Finally, I examined my own personal reflections

on notes from the field, the fieldwork challenges, and interesting comments from research participants and interviewees.

The first part of my thesis fashioned a comprehensive survey, examining the existing critical scholarship of the politics of the Olympics, neoliberalized urbanism, and the Vancouver Games. Examining urban growth imperatives, I reviewed the role of mega-events as a tool to (successfully and unsuccessfully) mitigate the accumulation crises of urban capitalism (austerity and profitability crises), within the specific paradigm of Vancouver's revanchist neoliberalization. Pertaining to my temporal frame of the bidding and preparations stage, I examined image making and re-imaging, of legacies and leveraging, how "image-construction efforts produce and reproduce inequality, consolidate exclusion and penalize the most vulnerable members of society, in ways that are increasingly brutal and heartless" (Broudehoux, 2017, p. 137). Additionally, I examined transportation geography and the infrastructure projects of public-private partnerships designed during the bid and preparations phase, key urban redevelopment projects and neoliberalization programmes of the Olympics.

The second part of my thesis focused on the findings and analysis of policy and interviews with research participants. This answered the research questions I proposed, as I commented on the politics of the Vancouver Olympics, that discursive articulations of an inevitable and necessary Olympics were constituted as common sense. These common sensical ideas (inevitability, necessity, resignation) are articulated as sensibilities of the Olympics. Inevitability and acceptance emerges married to the infrastructure of the Games. These articulations of transit infrastructure (the Sea to Sky highway and RAV line) fit into an extension of what Müller (2015, p. 10) describes as event takeover: "mega-event priorities often displace long-term urban development priorities. Instead of the event becoming an instrument for urban

development, urban development becomes the instrument for the event”. In this particular moment of bidding and preparations, infrastructure projects engrained with public-private partnerships prompts commentary on the neoliberalization of Vancouver, as they were articulated through a discourse of an inevitable event. Broudehoux (2017, p. 139) neatly syncretizes that the de-democratizing aspects of Olympic mega-events “play a palliative function... their great symbolic appeal provides the necessary context for local leaders to reclaim some of the ground that had been lost to welfare policies and democratization.” Articulating the neoliberalizing governance of Vancouver’s transit infrastructure under the Olympics as common sensical is a re-assertion of the primacy of the private sphere, the ‘efficient’ partner to deliver and facilitate infrastructure. The politics of deploying P3s for specific urban infrastructure projects speaks to Horne and Whannel’s (2016, p.139) comment that “mega-events are also used to exact retribution for a perceived loss of privilege and to regain control of certain urban territories.”

The common-sense themes produce a certain distribution of the sensible, as an aesthetic regime was instituted, where distributing senses (the themes of an inevitable Games, resigned tone, and necessary event) constructed a representation of the city that became naturalized and anesthetized as reality. However, this is not to imagine that just as these research participants expressed a certain naturalism of Olympic inevitability, as a foreclosure of potential politics. Commentaries of ambivalence and apprehension accompanied discussions of an inevitable Games, revealing a political potential. This discursive commentary and analysis of ambivalence and apprehension, questions the circulating common-sense sensibilities of inevitability and the depoliticization of neoliberalized transit infrastructure projects.

My thesis research has elucidated the inevitability of the Games. The articulation of infrastructural projects through the Olympics as an inevitable facet and feature of the city during the bidding and preparation prompts questions of the state of urban politics. Application of a theoretical framework using Jacques Rancière's aesthetic regime on Vancouver's Olympic politics in the bidding and preparations, fills in a missing research gap. An investigation of the link between inevitability of infrastructure projects, through a theoretical framework informed by Rancière's political philosophy critically analyses the 'status of equality.' The research gap I explored is the politics of Vancouver's neoliberalization during the Olympic event. My contribution has explored how processes of neoliberalization became discursively naturalized as common sensical. This thesis explicitly seeks to avoid articulating or prescribing a grand narrative or universalism of Vancouver politics. My focus explicitly is on the sensibilities and metonymies articulated to investigate the social-spatial ordering of Vancouver, therefore surveying the politics (and status of democracy) of the city in the bidding and preparation stage of the 2010 Olympic Games.

Using a Rancièrian frame of analysis of Vancouver's Olympic politics gives birth to an urban aesthetic method of investigation to critically survey politics, to not understand (Pelletier, 2009) but witness how urban spaces are designated with a certain common sensical status. It is to look at the conditions that codify modes of representation, into a spatial order. Reading Vancouver's Olympic politics, with Rancière's (1999) *partage* in mind, inevitability and ambivalence are both a shared and divided theme. Through a frame of Olympic urban politics, my investigation surveys Vancouver's context of neoliberalization. I illustrate how the discursive articulations fit into a pattern of neoliberalized variegations inflecting every facet of Vancouver's urban politics (Mitchell, 2004). Neoliberalization in my thesis of Vancouver's urban Olympic

politics is spatially constructed from down-up as nuanced commonsensical statements are at the micro-scale of the subject.

In future research, interviews with provincial politicians would be a vital addition to understand the bidding and planning of the Games. The provincial scale had a vital role delivering the Games, through financial resources, and dictating the development of the Sea to Sky Highway. Interviewing former transportation officials present during the bidding and preparations would be an invaluable aid to understand how they discursively would have articulated the Olympics for Vancouver, as a powerful actors who swayed the agenda of both the RAV Line and the Sea to Sky (Shaw, 2008).

Critical investigations that were outside of the scope of this research project, but nonetheless of vital importance to examining the politics of the Vancouver Olympics could contribute to critical sports scholarship, temporality of the mega-event, and Indigenous politics, among other topics. Looking at how sport becomes a depoliticizing tool to push a certain cultural, universalist narrative that actually ignores a gendered, classed and racialized frame of sport. As a form and process, temporality is a vital feature to understand how each research participant might have envisioned their city in the bidding and preparations of the event. This focus on temporality would yield unique discursive articulations, observations of the politics during the lead up to the bid (1999 to 2002), once the bid was secured (2003), and during preparations phase (2003 to 2010). It connects to the politics of a state of exception, what does time mean in the context of policing. Roche's (2000, p. 231) "time-structure" is a theorizing of mega-events social-spatially ordering life, that would open up examine discursive articulations of Olympic urban politics. Wood and Rossiter (2023), Shaw (2008), Adese (2012), and O'Bonsawin (2006) also provide a vital theoretical frame that could employ critical Indigenous

politics to survey how the attempted erasure narrative of Indigenous polities (Wood and Rossiter, 2023), and urban Olympic politics reveal a grander project of British Columbia as an unsettled, territory. The (unsuccessful) bidding of the 2030 Olympic Games as the world's first Indigenous-led Games by Squamish and Tseult Nations could discursively examine municipal, provincial and First Nations governance, and any opening of an emancipatory politics. Employing the rich political philosophical texts of Rancière to future inquiries into of temporality, sports, Indigeneity further opens up untapped investigations.

Finally, in future investigations, I would like to explore the implications of a theoretical framework that employs a psychoanalytically informed approach on Olympic urban politics. A theoretical framework using psychoanalysis has always interested me, to make sense of how oppressive social relations are socially ordered and produced through ideas such as desire and affect. Swyngedouw's (2018) notes on the spatialization of post-foundational politics through psychoanalysis, is a useful frame to re-investigate the articulations of an inevitable Olympics by the research participants. Re-examining the interviewees' common-sense themes (as symbolic formations), Swyngedouw's (2018, p. 43) psychoanalytic elucidation is relevant: "such symbolic formations fail inherently to suture fully the social order. A gap, a void, a lack, or excess always remains and resists order. This remainder or surplus (what Lacanians call the "Real") – in other words, that which cannot be symbolized by the existing interplay of political forces but whose uncanny presence is invariably disturbingly sensed – disrupts and destabilizes." Therefore, probing the Real, as a lack of symbolization in the context of my thesis, frees up discussion on the possibility of emancipatory politics. This is especially relevant when analyzing the potential of the political, through the ambivalence and apprehension of research participants. In a future illuminating study that could syncretize Swyngedouw's (2018, p. 43) psychoanalysis with

Rancière's (1999) aesthetic method of equality, emancipatory politics might be examined as "the political – as the return of the repressed – is the affirmation and affective appearance of the unsymbolized in the order of the police/politics and signals or expresses a disruption in the order of the sensible, the transformation of the aesthetic register." A fascinating potential study awaits that might examine the gap of post-foundational politics and psychoanalytically informed mega-events scholarship (Lauermann and Davidson, 2013).

I have endeavoured to trace the politics of Vancouver's Olympic moment, weaving Rancière's theoretical framing of policing, politics, and aesthetics as a spatiality. The contributions of my thesis "move[s] critical urban studies beyond negative critique ... begin[ning] with an identification of the moral legitimacy of democratic change via the articulation of an equality demand by those whose equality is denied in the sensible police order" (Davidson and Iveson, 2015, p. 556, 557). In critical Olympic and mega-event studies, the political philosophy of Rancière remains underutilized and underappreciated. Employing Rancière's scholarship and critical theorization attends to "questioning of who takes part in the 'aesthetic regime' imposed by the event ... because the subject is often limited to acting (and reacting) only within the discursive limits of the mega-event itself, rather than being understood as acting prior to, and beyond the events logics" (Fitzpatrick, 2018, p. 12). The contribution of my study, employing Rancière's theoretical frame of politics, contests and analyzes the particularities of Vancouver's neoliberalization as a paradigmatic feature of capitalism. Rancière's novel theoretical frame can inform the canon of critical Olympic studies to contest the Olympics oppressive and unequal politics, to "re-politicize the universal, to move towards a politics that confronts the capitalist Same in both its dynamic particularity and its homogenizing generality" (Lauermann and Davidson, 2013, p. 1286).

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## Appendix A.

Table three illustrates the nicknames I chose to keep interviewees anonymized. Each name (Rosa, Alina, etc.) was specifically selected to celebrate polemic figures I found had political significance. For example, Rosa is in reference to the activist Rosa Parks, the African American woman who instigated dissensus, asserting against that the conditions (rules) naturalizing her as an inferior black American individual, protested the spatial order of her position on a bus.

Table 3: Politicizing Pseudonyms

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Political significance
Rosa (Parks)	Disagreed with a racial hierarchy, forced to the back of a bus
Alina (Pienkowska)	Ship worker who protested the working conditions of the Gdansk shipyard in Poland
(Mary-Joseph) Angélique	African-Canadian slave blamed for the burning of Montreal in black historical geography of Canada
Emma (Goldman)	Militant anarchist organizer, seeking a revolution for working class peoples
Joseph (Jacotot)	French teacher who demonstrated an emancipatory teaching style
Tommy (Douglas)	Saskatchewan social-democratic politician, radically transformed Canada into a welfare state
Chantal (Ackerman)	Avant-garde French radical film director

## **Appendix B.**

### Sample Questions:

Pro-Olympic and anti-Olympic citizens – questions that will be asked are written below:

What do you remember about the bid for the games?

What do you remember about the preparation for the games once Vancouver had won the bid?

What do the games mean to you as a Canadian? As a Vancouverite, British Columbia?

What do the games do to transform the material landscape of the city?

What were your impressions of the redevelopment along False Creek?

What are your thoughts on the costs projected during the bid phase, relative to the success of the games?

City council member:

What does the Olympics mean to you as a city councillor? Please explain your role in the bid and preparations

How did you feel the games represented Canada?

How do you see the legacy of the bid and preparations in Vancouver?

What was Olympic engagement like? Do you find the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee (VANOC) engaged with local neighbourhoods/citizens?

How did the commitments of the Olympics change over the course of 2002-2010?

Bid Committee/VANOC members:

What are your thoughts on marketing and advertising of the games? What about marketing Canadian multiculturalism?

Did you notice a real-estate push in False Creek during the bid phase?

Where else in the city did you see changes that you attribute to the Olympics?

What features of VANOC's policy did you find most attractive to Vancouver's investor community? What features of VANOC's policy did you find least attractive?

Do you think the excitement of the Olympics invited in new global investors? How do you know what role the Olympics had?