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London's Olympic waterscape: capturing transition

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The waterways of London are an essential component of the city, with the River Thames playing a prominent role in the heritage, history and identity of place. The upcoming 2012 Olympics are highlighting the Lea Valley waterways in east London as another important part of London's waterscape, expanding London's global presence as a 'water city'. As part of the Creative Campus Initiative, we undertook a project based on the broad themes of water, London and the Olympics that would give voice to the changes taking place. The result is *London's Olympic Waterscape*, a 20-minute film comprising both 'expert' interview material discussing broad themes and developments and an embodied record of our engagement with the Olympic area during a brief period in the construction process. The present article is about the journey we took through and around the east London 'Olympic' waterways as we attempted to capture this transitional moment on video.

Keywords: waterways; waterscape; east London; Olympics; 2012

Introduction

The waterways of London are political and historical substances that play a role in the everyday lived realities of residents and inspire international imaginings about what constitutes London as a global city. Writings by authors and poets such as Dickens, Blake and Eliot have contributed significantly to global perceptions of London as a 'water city'. The cultural heritage associated with these themes is being consciously expanded and marketed as part of the upcoming 2012 Olympics. The east London landscape, an area with a rich industrial history built around a series of braided waterways in the Lea Valley, is under immense (re)construction in preparation to host the main Olympic stadium, the athletes' village and other venues (see Figure 1).

The Lea Valley is a network of waterways flowing through the east of London, connecting with the Thames on its north side. The Olympic stadium is situated on an island among four waterways, and the main Olympic site links Newham and Tower Hamlets.¹ Historically, these waterways, including an extensive canal system, have played a major role in the industrialisation of the area, providing a route linking London's docklands to the rest of the country. Their close connection with trade and industry meant that they were in a constant state of change, falling into gradual disrepair as the Thames docks closed one by one. However, while the landscape fell

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Figure 1. Landscape in transition.
Credit: Michael Anton.

into dereliction, it was never vacant. Before the construction began on the chosen Olympic site, houseboats moored along the rivers, various residents both lived on and used the waterways, and many people passed through. While the area was not the empty ‘wasteland’ it is often portrayed as (Almarcegui 2009), it has remained for a long period one of the most socially and economically deprived areas of London.

The Olympics have brought change to this river network with mixed results: while the houseboats have been moved out and local businesses shuttered, the river’s locks have been refreshed, and though river access has been limited, barges have been brought back into use. The Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) hopes that in the long term, the Olympics will bring more people to these waterways. While the process of change is completely in character with the historical background of the area, the pace and scale of the operation makes it one of the most dramatic interventions in the history of the landscape. While it may be straightforward to decry the event as a harbinger of doom for the pre-Olympic heritage of the area, following Crouch and Parker (2003, p. 396), who write: ‘... heritage has been explicitly deployed for political ends in the UK’, we also recognise that heritage ‘has always been produced by people according to their contemporary concerns and experiences’ (Harvey 2001, p. 2). As a result of all the competing claims as to what constitutes (and what will constitute) east London, the identity of the area is as complicated and entangled as the topography. This substantial transitional period can be understood through the constructed narratives of the ‘Olympics legacy’; however, there is also, as our work uncovered, an opportunity to reflect on the other stories, past, present and future, that these waterways tell. The transitional moment we discuss took place during the building work for the 2012 London Olympics. While the structures and stadium were built, the land- and waterscape were barricaded and a legacy was planned. We explored and filmed the site in the winter of 2009 and the spring of 2010, while the site underwent physical and ideological transitions.

As Jones (2001) writes, large-scale international events (what he terms ‘mega-events’) are increasingly becoming an important way for nations to gain international credibility and, consequently, tourist revenue. Jones points out that many nations see mega-events, like the Olympics, as a shortcut toward global recognition. It must also be recognised, however, that event managers and state authorities attempt to control the image of the event to glamorise the potential economic windfalls and downplay potential pitfalls. It is often only in hindsight that the negative impact of such events is realised. Sports scholars see the 2012 Olympics event as building on a long history of British sporting tradition, adding to a ‘value of sports heritage for tourism’ (Wood 2005, p. 308). However, scholars such as Wood have also underplayed the local effects of the Olympics on east London.

The present article is a written reflection resulting from a collaborative film project that we, as doctoral students in the Geography Department at Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL), initiated. The film and the article fill a gap between ‘what was’ and ‘what will be’ the Olympic waterscapes of east London. They present a consideration of heritage in the form of a narrative that visually documents the transitional period found within a rapidly altering waterscape. The project was generated from a call for submissions by the Creative Campus Initiative (CCI), a scheme that joined 13 universities together in a venture aiming to ‘create and present high quality new artworks and cultural events inspired by the Olympic and Paralympic Games’. As representatives of RHUL, in proximity to the Olympics’ official rowing venue at Dorney Lake, Eton, we won a grant to produce a film traversing the broad themes of water, London and the Olympics. Our intent was to give voice to the changes taking place within the Lea Valley concerning archaeology, heritage, urban planning and cultural protests, as well as to provide an accessible platform for further dissemination of these issues. The result was *London’s Olympic Waterscape*, a 20-minute film, which was exhibited along with a selection of photographs, photobooks, postcards, DVDs and a website documenting our journey along the waterways. As the film is freely available for viewing online, we would strongly encourage readers to watch it in conjunction with this article.²

Filming and interviews took place between late 2009 and mid-2010, during Olympic construction when the main stadium was present but not complete. During the course of background research, we came to realise that the transitions occurring within east London’s waterscape were being largely overlooked by historians who wished to preserve the landscape before the change and often ignored by government officials who wished to market the ‘legacy’ of a transformed ‘wasteland’ area in the post-Olympic period. In the film, our interviewees, all experts in their fields, provided contextualisation for our own experiences in the landscape. We chose to interview people who would provide a range of historic perspectives: from the long reach of archaeology to contemporary east London politics. These voices included filmmaker William Raban’s refusal to be nostalgic about the Thames landscape; writer Iain Sinclair’s cynicism about the Olympic project; history lecturer Toby Butler’s measured optimism that benefits could come from the investment; Museum of London curator Alex Werner’s description of historic precedent; and archaeologist Nathalie Cohen’s cautious optimism for public access for the space. It was these ideas, often conflicted, around the Olympics, the historic significance of east London’s waterways and the impending legacy that acted as a backdrop for our journey through the Lea Valley.

The present article begins by looking at the ways that film and video can be used as critical geographic tools to capture landscapes in transition. Next we consider the context, legacy and history of the 2012 Olympics in east London. We then take a closer look at the waterways as a landscape and consider the ways in which we used video to record the specific handover (or takeover) taking place there. This includes an account of a filmic triathlon we undertook through and around the Olympic waterways, underscoring the successes and failures of our methods and our attempts to understand the place and landscape despite discouragement from some contingents of the Olympic security forces. Throughout, the article explores some of the ways that the heritage of the area is presented and contested. We end with a discussion on the future of the Olympic site, and with a question over whether the actual legacy of this dramatic geographic upheaval will meet the expectations of various stakeholders.

Film and video as a geographic tool

Anthropologists have long used film as a medium to record and interpret cultural activity (Pink 2007), and while anthropology's relationship to film has steadily bloomed over the last century, film and video as method from a geographic perspective have largely been underutilised (Garrett 2010). In proposing *London's Olympic Waterscape*, we were interested in teasing out the possibilities of film (or in this case digital video) as a method for exploring a landscape at a range of scales. Film has been noted for its usefulness in ethnographic work that gives particular attention to close detail, yet geographically researchers have previously been more interested in broader concepts relating to space, place, mobility and landscape. *London's Olympic Waterscape* was also an experiment in how video might be used as a tool to depict intangible notions such as the construction of national heritage in an academic framework.

The idea was to use the video camera to capture a particular moment of a landscape under radical transformation, capturing the construction of a national heritage moment. The moment that we chose to document was both an accident of circumstance, provoked by the time-frame for the project under the larger impetus of the CCI, and intentional, in our effort to record the aspects of the development process that many were overlooking. It was our goal neither to focus solely on the landscape before the 2012 construction began and the stories of what had been lost, nor propagate a prolonged discussion about what would come to be after the development is complete. We sought to inhabit, from the end of 2009 through to the following summer, a tenuous middle ground characterised by fragility.

As Crang and Tolia-Kelly (2010, p. 2316) point out, heritage sites are an 'occasion for doing and feeling, of connecting different sensations, representations, and thoughts'. Using video allowed us to be mobile within the landscape, but also to capture a mobile landscape and, in a sense, to depict heritage as narrative. The ceaselessly flowing waterways, the endless stream of traffic going in and out of the construction city, the incessant circular patrolling security apparatus and the (dis)located flora and fauna seemed always in motion (Figure 2), with the backdrop of bulldozers shoving around dirt and monotonous, endless beeping and grinding. The vertical growth of Olympic structures and symbols seemed ripped from Iain Sinclair's (2008) text when he described Hackney Wick as the place 'where everything disappears or is revised' (p. 29).



Figure 2. Wildlife in motion.
Credit: terri moreau.

Our efforts were also inspired by Edensor *et al.*'s (2008) photograph essay on the same site two years earlier, where the authors found '...the flotsam of yesterday [had] not been hastily cleared away, and obscure clues to past events [were] scattered across the land, hidden in river beds and buried in the earth' (p. 286). Depictions of the early stage of construction in Gill's (2007) photographs of the area showed the fresh fencing and pristine billboards sitting amidst swampy islands in the river, wildlife settling in to the new additions. We did not find the land depicted in these sets of photographs, but another; a landscape spiked with upheaval, something that seemed uncontainable in text or still snapshots. We sought to use video to share in the movement, the flow, the moments of encounter, non-encounter and unexpected wonder that came with going to this place and attempting to immerse ourselves in it. With video cameras trained on those multiple encounters – shot literally from the hip, the shoulder and the head – we captured a unique present.

We assumed that using video would allow us to realise our goal of interacting with the place just as it was, but as we learned, stories are never that simple. Harvey (2001) has pointed out that too often heritage is defined as something in the present and encourages us to see heritage as a process, a verb, that works across time. The adventures which make up the film are raw and confused, frustrated and hopeful, tightly wound, wet and visceral: the film reflects what we saw and how we engaged with place as well as our pain at trying to piece together a mass of occasionally bizarre and sometimes mundane footage. In other words, the (always) contested heritage process is embedded in the narrative of the film.

At the beginning of filming, we contacted Olympic officials to obtain access to shoot on the site. Although we had been assured there was no opportunity for us to film inside the fence, we noted other crews – for example some from the BBC – had been granted access. The compromise we reached with officials was access to a

balcony owned by the development project, overlooking the site. This official filming location, alongside a pattern of official observation areas and a tape of official footage given to us, began a ‘process of replication’, which Burch (2002, p. 10) describes as a significant stage in the construction of tourist heritage sites. The wide shots we filmed of the landscape were similar to those disseminated by news agencies and used in other films about the site, all of whom had shot footage from the same balcony. Restricting filming to specific sites provokes dissemination of homogenous footage, which can be identified as the manifestation of the penultimate stage of sacralisation: ‘mechanical reproduction of the sacred object’ (Burch 2002, p. 10). The visual tropes of the Olympics were already being shaped through a strict visual language, controlled by physical access to the site and distribution of carefully chosen materials.

To escape this process of shooting repetitive footage, we had little option but to film from outside the site. The power relations of making the film are, therefore, visible in every shot, as our cameras skirt around the exterior fence trying to find interesting angles that would reveal something novel. Filming from unexpected locations attracted the attention of security guards, who questioned our right to be in these public spaces. When we were offered the opportunity we were open about our role as student filmmakers, funded by the Olympics. Nevertheless security guards typically made no attempt to ascertain our intentions and simply asserted that we must ‘keep moving’.

Legacies

The notion of an ‘Olympic legacy’ cropped up frequently during our research and filming and became a particularly poignant trope within the initial interview process. This nebulous concept has been used to refer to an array of guarantees, policies and plans associated with the Games and the future of the area, summarised by the East London Research Institute, who state that: ‘[The] Olympic “legacy” offers bridges between two potentially divergent narratives setting the practical accountancy (and financial and political accountability) of city planning, against the “creative” accounting that underpins Olympic dreams and promises’ (MacRury and Poynter 2009, p. 5).

We focused on the ‘practical accountancy’ and ‘dreams and promises’ specifically directed at the Olympic waterways. During an interview, Environment Agency representative Rob McCarthy discussed the ecological benefits that a rejuvenated ‘blue ribbon network’ would bring to the area. Similarly, the Olympic Park Legacy Company described how ‘[t]he restored canals and rivers will help bring the landscape back to life, whilst also creating inspiring places to work and play – right on the water’ (Madelin n.d.). In another interview, Paralympic rower Helene Raynsford hoped that part of the legacy would be to inspire more people to get involved with aquatic sports taking place on London’s rivers. Historical geographer Toby Butler imagined a new form of public transportation in the form of ‘water taxis like you might see in Venice’. Iain Sinclair was more cynical of the idea, stating: ‘you can’t have a legacy until it’s happened; a legacy is not something that you can set up in advance’. Our filmic study of the heritage construction taking place in this area, heard through the voices of stakeholders, pundits and theorists, do not ignore future legacies, promises or the impacts of exclusion or marginalisation taking place while this national event ‘heritage’ is constructed, it is a record of both of these things situated in between those ideas.

Landscape in transition: inhabiting place, journeying through space

Although other areas in London and around the UK are being reshaped as part of the Olympics, the waterways around the main site offered the most dramatic example of a landscape in transition. In our work, we have understood that ‘landscapes cannot be objects simply understood, but instead exist as living, social processes with the ability to generate values through a community’s knowledge of the past’ and by taking the decision to examine a landscape undergoing transition we acknowledge that ‘[i]t is never complete and is perpetually under construction, and thus can never be satisfactorily relegated to just one past or another, or one present’ (Waterton 2005, p. 314).

To engage with this notion of ongoing processes of landscape, we undertook a number of activities in the Lea Valley: touring; walking; running; cycling; and kayaking. Throughout the process we came to agree that ‘landscape, its sites and its representations of history, is practiced; not only observed, read or understood’ (Crouch and Parker 2003, p. 399) and that in order to study a landscape we had to embed ourselves in, and engage with it, through all of our senses (Tolia-Kelly 2007). ‘In short, the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them’ (Ingold 1993, p. 156); for this reason we strove to inhabit place, journey through space, and document this wet land- and waterscape by all feasible means, despite our initial disappointment at limited ‘official access’.

The extra dimension of exploring a waterscape meant we paid special attention to water as a changeable medium, with the ability to transport us in both metaphorical and literal senses. Our journeys through this waterscape were not always direct, and just as the rivers have been re-routed over time, we found we were often blocked, detoured or forced out. How we moved through this transitional landscape altered how we were affected by the changes taking place around us. The next section aims to capture our experiences of travelling through and documenting the waterways of the ‘Olympic’ Lea Valley. Articulated in these journeys are many of the issues that have continued to be debated within and beyond the waterscape such as how to acknowledge a landscape’s histories and identities and the already existing heritage of a place. With this landscape specifically, we were interested in how to negotiate the tensions that existed between vigilantly restricted access during the pre-Olympic period and the utopic post-Olympic legacies for the Lea Valley. Our journey also raised questions about which groups of people might benefit from this intervention into the land- and waterscape.

Preparing for the journey

On two occasions we took guided tours through the area, with the Environmental Agency and the Inland Waterways Association. These tours, the former official and the latter unofficial, allowed access to the fringes of the park and the towpath that skirts the park without harassment or impediment. The appearance of the tours provided a type of overt camouflage: even with two video cameras, one still camera, a visible clipboard and a guide, we did not raise the Olympic alarms, whereas filming unaccompanied did. In the course of these tours, like filming under the rubric of Olympic officials, we experienced a repetition in narratives; certain places were obviously designed to appeal to the pre-established stories now embedded in the landscape. Recurrent motifs included that of the Forman’s fish smokery, a business

originally threatened by the redevelopment, but after negotiation relocated to new premises. Their story has become something of a meme in several projects representing the benevolence of redevelopment, perhaps a condition of their relocation (see www.formansfishisland.com). While the Forman story enticed us, we still desired to move beyond the repetitive stories of redevelopment.

When we began filming the site without a guide, numerous Olympic security personnel stopped our progress and demanded identification. This occurred while walking the towpaths adjacent to the site which are public, pedestrian traffic corridors, not on the site itself. Despite our insistence that we had a right to film in a public space, the presence of the camera obviously upset security and they remained adamant that we should cease filming and ‘move along’. It became clear after a number of encounters that these requests were empty threats. After initially being surprised to find the area rather empty of human activity (as promised by the Olympic authorities – a *terrain vague*), we began to suspect that these authoritarian tactics, however hollow, had hounded people away from the perimeter. These experiences made us question how appropriate these strategies are for policing public areas. While particular Olympic pathways are designed specifically for the tourist gaze with viewing platforms and information boards, the public towpaths at a short distance from the site are, without explanation, seemingly not meant to provide the same voyeuristic function for those holding cameras. So after weeks of being told to ‘keep moving’, we began to do just that – by undertaking our planned Olympic triathlon around the park.

The journey

Our triathlon consisted of running, cycling and kayaking in the area of Olympic construction. One member of our team ran the perimeter of the site; a 13-mile route filmed via a head mounted video camera (head-cam) that took in all of the accessible waterways surrounding the site (Brown *et al.* 2008). This isolated trip captures the runner’s stare as they gaze intently at the river close to them, recording the precarious divide between the land and the water, inviting the viewer vicariously to live the runner’s own isolated interactions with the divided terrain: pounding the slippery soil on the banks of the waterway.

The pathways that run alongside the canals and rivers of the Lea Valley have long been used by cycling commuters; so, when we set ourselves the challenge of cycling around the Olympic Park, this seemed one of our easiest tasks. As with all the ‘triathlon events’, we used the head-cam to record our experiences from a first person perspective. The initial part of the journey was easy, flowing alongside the river, taking in the scenery and catching glimpses of the Olympic stadium through the chain link fence. The problems began when we tried to circle round, ending up in an alleyway of wooden board where officials cheerfully told us we were not allowed through and must turn back. On being shown out, we tried a different tack. Leaving the river we headed to the road, only to find ourselves heading the wrong way up a dual carriage-way, with the stadium looming to our right through the rain, as grey as the landscape, totally inaccessible. In this moment the contrast between the mythology of the Olympic legacy and the reality of the development was most strongly brought home to us when we spied, within the site, behind electric fences and CCTV cameras, a billboard depicting a canal boat on a sunny day, thoughtfully suggesting that we should ‘relax’, and reminding us our plight was temporary (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The Olympic legacy.
Credit: Michael Anton.

It seemed crucial to have footage from within the waterways, so kayaking was the final leg of our journey. The kayak was bulky on land, but in water it transformed into an elegant form of conveyance. We launched the kayak on what we thought was the outside of a floating barrier separating us from the Olympic site. The spiked yellow barrier and signs saying ‘no entry’ (see Figure 1) gave the impression that just one side was closed to the public. However, soon after putting the kayak in the water, a boat with Olympic security appeared. Inadvertently, they were blocked by their own water barriers and could not approach us. Eventually, while filming kayak shots from a road bridge, security personnel were able to approach one team member and demanded removal of the kayak.

While this altercation followed the street pattern, the kayak followed the bends of the water away from the guards’ paths. The kayak’s positioning meant sitting low in the water and looking up at the reinforced banks of the channel. The width of the waterway suddenly felt more important, and peering over the edge of the vessel, the water seemed deeper than from land. The kayak passed close to the ducks and waterweeds we had filmed from a distance and the paddles’ swish sent down drops of water onto us as they swung through the air and churned through the water.

We came across numerous red placards informing of the watery domain of the Olympic development and it was not long before we came to another floating yellow barrier. We turned back towards the road. The team removed the kayak and headed to another waterway nearer the Olympic park. Again a patrol boat attempted to reach the kayak. The team members quickly removed the kayak from one canal and placed it into a parallel waterway where the security boat could not reach. Although we continued to be monitored and intimidated, this time security did not ask us to leave. Our previous experiences with security illustrated how unwilling



Figure 4. The panopticon, taken from the official balcony.
Credit: *terri moreau*.

they were to allow our cameras to film so close to the site. However, we felt the shots from the waterways were integral to a film about them, so on this occasion we decided to at least avoid, and mostly ignore, the security personnel. This was a difficult decision, as it put us in a somewhat oppositional position to the Olympic authorities funding us, and once again highlighted the impact that our presence as researchers had.

We faced complex issues as we tried to dig beyond the compromised offerings that satisfied local news crews describing site updates. The walkways, viewing cafe and Olympic flats framed the landscape for audiences, as these scripted spaces of observation established parameters for our shots (Figure 4). Baudrillard (1994, p. 20) describes the televisual panopticon as: ‘if not a system of confinement, at least a system of mapping. More subtly, but always externally, playing on the opposition of seeing and being seen, even if the panoptic focal point may be blind’. Like the centre of the panopticon, the stadium radiated a gaze of control and security, situating film crews in spaces of surveillance, mapping its surroundings into areas which were and were not accessible.

Journey’s end

Community reactions to this heightened state of security and control over space had clearly inspired small pockets of resistance: shocking pink graffiti on the sky-blue hoarding surrounding the site commented on the site’s transition and closure and was regularly erased by workers (*moreau and Alderman 2011*). The unofficial placement of furniture along the Olympic towpaths served as entertaining view-points for those who wished to sit and watch the landscape morphing. The culmination of our experiences left us wondering, echoing some of our interviewees,

whether the 2012 ‘legacies’ are for the local people who lost (and are losing) access to these places or for the appeasement of a more global audience of shareholders in the interest of national heritage and international ‘legacy’.

While following the path of the waterways around the site, we had hoped to have more spontaneous interviews with local people using the area, but we found it vacant. As we moved around the construction site we found evidence of un-spoken voices: graffiti, security cameras, barricades, homemade signs and massive billboards. These communiqués provided a palpable sense of voiced non-presences within the city and we filmed populations that subtly made their marks around the periphery of the site (Figure 5). Despite this visible absence, our filming was always accompanied by the waterways’ wildlife: egrets, coots, moorhens and mallards, who greatly outnumbered the human population and who continued to nest on the



Figure 5. Material remnants and absent voices.
Credit: terri moreau.

waters. The waterways were a heterotopic habitat, an alternative ecology where the wildlife remained long after the human river residents moved out.

We kept a democratic ethic in arranging and editing the interviews, meaning that the finished film included some surprising and eclectic stories – including that of a man who once made a living fishing for and selling to pet shops a particular rare worm found in the river. As we watched the footage we began to realise that as filmmakers we were now a part of the story of this place and, as Iain Sinclair pointed out when we interviewed him, that we were, therefore, ‘part of the problem’. Like our interaction with security, there was no possibility of uninvolved observation. Thus, this project is clearly a social engagement in the production of London’s Olympic Waterscape, a developing heritage narrative, at the time of a transitional landscape.

The Lea Valley, the home of the London 2012 Olympics, is an area which has been characterised by its waterways since the ice age but which also has a long political history of land reclamation – in the change from raw wetlands to different systems of water supply for the movement of people, goods and waste – a continuous re-making of place. Eventually, it seems, this activity will all cease; buildings will be knocked down, soil cleansed and structures removed or re-purposed. In some places, these changes are retrograde – for instance, the daily movement of building materials for the Olympic site lead to the re-opening of an old lock and thus a rejuvenation of one of the canal systems. Whether the financial investment in these changes will be maintained after the Olympics have passed remains to be seen. Whether that corporate investment will trickle down into the community, as promised by the ‘legacy’, also remains in question. Thus, the complexity of the Olympic legacy, often in contrast to the clear imperatives outlined by the ODA, begins to come into focus.

Conclusion

It is our hope that the present article, in context with the rest of the discussions in this special issue, furthers engagement with the issues expressed by our interviewees, and encountered in our embodied interaction with the Olympic development in the midst of the frenzied construction. Filming the site illustrated a distinct, if temporary, loss of public access and provoked a resistance to alternative readings that we did not anticipate. Throughout the Lea Valley it remains true that shops and artists’ warehouses were forced to relocate or close, boats were moved to other waterways, people were bought out, channels were dredged, soil excavated and landscaping undertaken: for many, a way of life has disappeared forever. However, for many this has been seen as the price to pay to overcome the entrenched poverty of a long-neglected area of London. Following the thoughts of Bender (1993, p. 3), it is clear that the heritage of landscape is ‘never inert, people engage with it, re-work it, appropriate it and contest it. It is part of the way identities are created and disputed, whether individual, group or nation state’. The relay of these developments is filtered as much as possible by the ODA through access to the site; though with the eyes of the world on the stadium, local and national media organisations are quick to point out any potential problems.

Despite all of the discussion around the lasting legacy of the event taking place, as we put this article together, the future of the site remained undecided. Throughout our project, the stadium’s future use was always uncertain, and a few days

before the article was submitted a decision was finally reached. Two London football teams, Tottenham Hotspur and West Ham United, composed proposals for the stadium, each envisioning their own radical remaking of the area. The rejected Tottenham bid suggested the stadium (so iconic in our experience) would be levelled, while West Ham argued that some could be salvaged. Football fans' debates again illustrated the power of place, as fans complained about moving stadiums and leaving their old postcodes, suggesting that the themes of displacement, marginalisation, identity, anticipated legacy and sport will continue to inform the re-making of this place long after the current debate dissolves.

Whatever the outcome of this particular mega-event, we feel that we successfully used film to record a 'heritage of the present', a place and time that already is almost unrecognizable since the time of filming. By the audio/visual benefits of film, we were able to highlight the ongoing-ness of the place in a way that both celebrates those exciting changes and gives voice to those local geographies that will be forever changed. We believe this project offers an interesting new avenue for heritage scholars to think about the ways film can be used to record images of the present and spark discussions about the pasts and futures of heritage landscapes that will exist, in audio/visual record, for years to come.

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Notes

1. A map of the area can be found at: www.london2012.com/olympic-stadium
2. The film can be viewed at: <http://vimeo.com/12349415>

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