

Absence of the children: Philosophical interpretations of the opening ceremony of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games

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Abstract

Children's performances have been used often for the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. Recently, the snow children in the 1998 Nagano Games, the small girl Webster's reconciliation performance in the 2000 Sydney Games, and the child of fire in the 2002 Salt Lake Games are some good examples. These performances were not just utilized for the spectacle to celebrate the opening of the global mega-event. Moreover, it can be said that the message, created by the adult generation of organizers, could be sent to the audience and spectators worldwide as a subtle image of the innocence and pure existence of children. Were there the same kinds of messages in the 2004 Athens Games? What kind of meaning was represented in light of the Olympic philosophy that is Olympism by these existence of the children?

Although there were not so many children in the stadium, nine years old boy, Michalis PATSATZIS, played an important role in the opening ceremony of the 2004 Athens Games. This boy rode on the paper boat and was waving a small Greek national flag while smiling at the audience. However it was not easily possible for the spectators to distinguish his performance from the stands. In that sense, it is clear that his performance was designed to convey some messages to the television viewers. While borrowing a child's figure, although this scene can be interpreted as a kind of expression of the praises of Christianity and the Euro-centrism that emphasizes the Greeks as forerunners to, and philosophical origin of, the European and American civilizations, there were no media comments about it. It was a kind of ideological gimmick, which can represent such an adult intention not so frankly, but, rather, softly.

Besides the boy PATSATZIS, there were a few children who put on the carpenter trousers of five colors while holding sprigs of olive branches in their hands at the appearance of the Olympic flag, and boys and girls who joined the choir and sang the Olympic hymn in praise of the Olympics. These children were not so conspicuous and possibly there were not many spectators who noticed them from the stands. In this sense, it can be said that children were absent from the opening ceremony of the 2004 Athens Games as compared to other Games.

In this paper, the meaning of children's appearances in the opening ceremony of the 2004 Athens Games, the cause of the absence of the children, and the after-effects of the absence of children in the ceremony will be discussed from the philosophical hermeneutics and the Olympic philosophical standpoint that is Olympism.

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Sept. 16th, 2005

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Introduction : Children's performance in the Opening Ceremony of Olympic Games

Examples

- Snow children in the 1998 NAGANO
- Nicky Webster in the 2000 Sydney Games and the reconciliation performances
- Child of fire in the 2002 Salt Lake City and "Light the Fire within" performance
- Nine years old boy, Michalis PATSATZIS, standing in the paper boat in the 2004 Athens Games

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Quest for the philosophical meaning of the performance in 2004 Athens Games

Pre-judgment for the Children's performance

- The purpose of the children's performances were not just utilized for the spectacle to celebrate the opening of the global mega-event.
- The message, created by the adult generation of organizers, could be sent to the audience and spectators worldwide as a subtle image of the innocence and pure existence of children.
- Were there the same kinds of messages in the 2004 Athens Games?
- What kind of meaning was represented in light of the Olympic philosophy that is Olympism by these existences of the children?

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Children in the stadium in the 2004 Athens Games Opening Ceremony

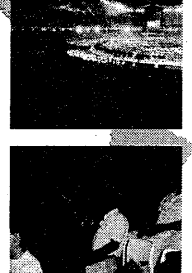
The reason why there were not so many children in the stadium.

- The opening ceremony was held at too late night time.
- The ticket price was too expensive.
- The fear for the terrorist attack
- Athens citizens were out of city as usual family vacation (as news paper reported).
- Others: the lack of concerns about the Olympic Games

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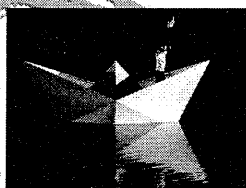
Children in the field in the 2004 Athens Games Opening Ceremony: Performance 1

- The nine years old boy, Michalis PATSATZIS, rode on the paper boat and was waving a small Greek national flag while smiling at the audience.
- However it was not easily possible for the spectators to distinguish his performance from the stands. In this sense, it is clear that his performance was designed to convey some messages to the TV viewers.

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Children in the field in the 2004 Athens Games Opening Ceremony :TV interpretations=Pre- judgments 1

- NHK TV in Japan: "This performance are showing the great philosophical origin of the European in ancient Greece."
- CBC TV in Canada: "For generations the paper boat has been a simple and enduring toy for children all over this country of Greece, representing the affinity all Greeks have with the sea." "The tiny scale of the boat, set in such a large expanse of water represents Greece, a small country, birthplace of huge ideas."

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Children in the field in the 2004 Athens Games Opening Ceremony: Program comments=Pre-judgments 2



Official Programme of the Opening Ceremony

- Thucydides: "Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighbouring states. Its administration favours the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy."
- Greek flag: The stripes represent the number of the syllables in the phrase: "Eleftheria i Thanatos" (Liberty or Death). The striped pattern was chosen because of its similarity with the wavy sea that surrounds the shores of Greece. The cross demonstrates respect and devotion to Christianity and the Orthodox Church.



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Children in the field in the 2004 Athens Games Opening Ceremony: Interpretation



- While borrowing a child's figure, this scene can be interpreted as a kind of expression of the praises of Christianity and the Euro-centrism that emphasizes the Greeks as forerunners to, and philosophical origin of, the European and American civilizations.
- There were no media comments about it.
- It was a kind of ideological gimmick, which can represent such an adult intention not so frankly, but, rather, softly.

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Children in the stadium in the 2004 Athens Games Opening Ceremony 2



- There were a few children who put on the carpenter trousers of five colors holding sprigs of olive branches in their hands at the appearance of the Olympic flag.
- Boys and girls wore the ancient Greek wear, joined the choir, and sang the Olympic hymn in praise of the Olympics.
- These children were not so conspicuous and possibly there were not many spectators who noticed them from the stands.
- It is clear that their performance were designed to convey some messages to the television viewers.



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Children in the Athens Games: In the town



- There were no children in the renowned public square, Syntagma and Omonia, in daytime.
- Though the performance stages were settled in the Omonia and the Pireus, the shows were planned in the midnight. This was one of causes of the difficulty of children appearance.
- Reason 1: there were no plan to show the art program and public viewing in the public squares as the 2000 Sydney Games.
- Reason 2: For the fear of terrorism
- Reason 3: The inefficiency of the Olympic education programs for the children.



• Stage in the Pireus
• No performance in daytime
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The reason of the absence of children: The lack of the "One School, One Country Program"



- Though it was continued to the 2002 Salt Lake City Games, "The One School, One Country" program, that was first conducted in the 1998 Nagano Games, was lack in the Athens Games.
- There were no children in the midtown, though it is not seem to have the welcome and festive programs.
- Though the Olympic Education was expanded to the EU countries in 2004, the opening ceremony and the art programs were not utilized as a kind of the Olympic education programs.



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The reason of the absence of children: The lack of the "philosophy for the children"



- Media in Japan: There were no comments about the commitments of children in Athens Games.
- No media commented about the boy, Michalis PATSATZIS in the opening ceremony.
- Media's disinterest in children: The lack of the philosophy about the Olympic Games for the children.
- After all, the Olympic Games seemed to be the mega-event, which is ruled by the logics of adult, politics and economics, or the logic of the medals at any cost.



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Examples of the Children's Rolls in the Olympic Opening Ceremonies(1)

- The 1998 Nagano Games: The snow children performed the themes of love and participation, peace and dreams.
- The 2000 Sydney Games: Nicky Webster performed the reconciliation with aborigine people and went through the Australian history, and played the important role for the performance of fairy tale show.
- The 2002 Salt Lake Games: The child of fire and the children with lantern performed the American dreams, sturdy pioneers, and American future hope.
- In 2004, there were no impressive children's performance except the boy Patsatzis.



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Examples of the Children's Rolls in the Olympic Opening Ceremonies (2)

- 1964 Tokyo: Boys and girls marching band
- 1972 Sapporo: About 500 little skaters holding colorful balloons
- 1980 Moscow: Mass games by little girls
- 1988 Seoul: A boy rolling the ring cosmologically
- 1994 Lillehammer: Children's performances
- 1996 Atlanta: Children's performances
- Especially, after the 1984 Los Angeles Games, children's performances took roles showing up the opening and closing ceremony, and transmitted the images ruled by the adults logics.



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Theory of child: pretext images and expected roles (1)



- 1. Child as metaphor: being as a little, weak, immature, no power, and innocent; or being as having new power to overturn the old one; new birth, rebirth
- 2. Child as glowing up: first stage of life; learning process of the appearance of their own country's commonality (language, custom, norms)
- 3. Child as experience: only one experience lived by the child; the unique world experience of fantasy, dream, adventure, explorer; the dynamic and broad world experience between the heaven (summum bonum world) and the underground (dark world)

(Gen Kida (Eds.) (1989) Concise dictionary of the 20 century thought. Sanseido)

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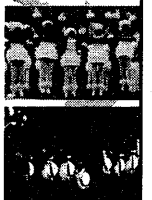
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Theory of child: pretext images and expected roles (2)



- 1. The views of child as a white paper (Tabula Rasa): eternal educability of child
- 2. Being as purity and innocent; holding divine nature, having the power to intuit the real vision (Wataru Hiromatsu (eds.) (1998) Dictionary of the philosophy and thought. Iwanami)
- The performance of the children in the opening ceremony being presupposed with TV media
- It can be interpreted that the oracle of the unconsciousness in the era can be represented borrowing the children's body.

(Masuko Honda (1995) Children in the images. Jinbun Shoin)



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Positive and negative aspects of the pretext images of children



- The pretext images of children as purity and innocent being by adult are positive one like dream, future, hope, and peace, so on.
- Children are bared the celebration of the festivity in the opening ceremony with pure joys and pleasures.
- Nevertheless, those pretexts as 'purity and innocence, no power, grow and progress' have possibility to conceal the negative aspects of the Olympic Games.
- For example, commercialism, politics, terrorism of the modern Olympic Games could be pushed away to the back ground by the positive pretext images of children
- It is necessary to take the being of children into account both positive and negative aspects of the Olympic Games.

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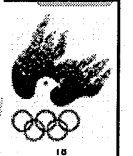
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Conclusion: The problems stemmed from the Absence of the children in the 2004 Athens Games



- Is it possible to reproduce the Olympic dreams, although these dreams are expected from adult stand point, in spite of the absence of the children in the 2004 Athens Games?
- Is it possible to succeed the ideas of the Olympism and Olympic movement without participation of children?
- Is it possible to develop the Olympic education to have the critical attitudes to the Olympic Games?
- Especially, from the stand point of the concept 'children as experience,' the absence of the children like the Athens Games is seemed to be big problem



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