This is a peer-reviewed, author's accepted manuscript of the following book chapter: Miyake, E. (2023). (En)forcing the Tokyo 2020 Olympics: Japan and racialized digital disengagement. In *Digital Disengagement: COVID-19, Digital Justice and the Politics of Refusal* Bristol University Press.

# Chapter 1: En/forcing the Tokyo 2020 Olympics: The Racialisation of Digital Engagement and Digital Solutionism

**Esperanza Miyake**

**Abstract**

This chapter problematises the racialisation of digital engagement and digital solutionism, and how they reinforce dominant ideologies of power, race and digitality. I examine how Tokyo Olympics 2020 was promoted and ultimately realised during a global pandemic, despite mass protests and the tremendous human and financial costs incurred by Japan. I offer the double notion of both forcing and *en*forcing digitality. In the context of Tokyo 2020, not only was opt-out not a viable option, but one that actively carried a financial penalty, thus making compliance necessary. As such, I critique how the forcing and enforcing of Tokyo 2020 was grounded upon geopolitical inequalities of engagement and disengagement. In the process, I explore the naturalisation of digital, social and economic dis/engagement as situated within a pandemic time-space which brought together the need for material labour, digital productivity and consumption. Ultimately, I argue that Tokyo 2020 represents a moment where digitality – presented as the 'safe', revolutionary solution – was weaponised, commodified and exploited by both the International Olympic Committee and Japan, as interrelated and mutually complicit forms of racialised digital engagement, both serving their own 'project' of economic, political and socio-cultural dominance.

**Key words**: Olympics, racialisation, social engagement, economic engagement, inequality

## Introduction

On Tuesday 24 March, 2020, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced that both its president, Thomas Bach, and Japanese PM of the time, Shinzo Abe, had reached an agreement to postpone the Tokyo 2020 Olympics by a year, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The statement presented the decision as one made between the IOC and Japan, for the 'good' of the people: "Human lives take precedence", "'We agreed that the safety, security of the athletes and spectators are paramount'" (IOC, 2020). A year later, with COVID-19 cases rising in Japan – which had to declare a state of emergency weeks before the Olympics – and despite calls from the medical community and the majority of the population to cancel, the Olympics nonetheless went ahead. Athletes competed in audience-free stadia and the promised boom of the tourism industry and Japanese economy never occurred. Furthermore, there was little to no option for Japan to refuse: Japan was legally and contractually obliged to make the Olympics happen, or else, they faced great financial loss/heavy fines. Global broadcasters, corporate sponsors and spectators around the world watching from the comforts of their screens, had everything to gain. Japan though, was still burdened with the reality of having to deliver the Olympics for global consumption, despite the great associated financial losses, and risking the health and wellbeing of its citizens in the middle of a global pandemic.

The only way in which the Tokyo 2021 Olympics was able to happen at all was largely due to Japan's digital infrastructure. Tokyo 2021 Olympics marks some of the most alarming – and as we will see, problematically racialised – ways in which the digital was consequently offered as a perfect 'solution' to the 'problem' of hosting a global event during the pandemic. In his work on technological solutionism, Morosov (2013) discusses the propensity for solutionists to recast complex social situations through quick technological 'fixes', arguing such 'solutions' lead to

"unexpected consequences that could eventually cause more damage than the problems they seek to address" (Morosov, 2013:5). In the case of Tokyo 2020, happening right in the middle of a global pandemic, the idea of 'damage' is one that gains even greater significance as these are related not just to economy, but to human life, rights and welfare. The digitalisation of Tokyo 2020 might have 'saved' the Olympics, might have 'solved' the problem of a potential cancellation but *who* benefited from this form of digital solutionism (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022)? Those safely at home with an internet connection being entertained? Broadcasting corporations which made millions from broadcasting rights? Bach and the IOC who ensured the continuation of a sporting legacy and their own authority intact through promised delivery?

Furthermore, what about the *material* consequences? In Tokyo, $15.4 billion (if not more) went into providing a digital experience globally (Pesek/Forbes, 2021), yet local and national businesses suffered financially from the lack of tourism (for example, Japan Airlines lost $2.6bn during the pandemic, Shibata/NikkeiAsia, 2021). Similarly, the journalists and athletes on ground had challenging experiences physically and emotionally navigating the event (Majumbar, 2021; Taku and Arai, 2020), and COVID-19 cases rose due to the influx of Olympics-related travellers and the struggle to contain the virus at such a large-scale event, despite the measures and protocols in place (Cox, 2021; McCurry, 2021a). Such material consequences seem to have been overlooked, conveniently blamed on COVID-19 as the culprit, rather than the enforced digital solutionism as the direct cause. After all, it is not COVID-19 that enforced the Tokyo 2020 Olympics: it is here that digital solutionism becomes yet another material means of reinforcing social, economic and political inequalities.

This chapter begins at this disjoint between digital and material, arguing how this gap points toward the racialisation of digital engagement in ways that reinforce and maintain dominant ideologies of power, race and digitality. In the process, I explore the double notion of both forcing and *en*forcing digitality – one which moves away from the idea of the neo-liberal agent responsible for their own digital dis/engagement – where digital engagement becomes a means of maintaining inequality through the marginalisation of Other, stabilising and naturalising the uneven power structures facilitated by digitality. Here, I am particularly interested in unpicking how such processes of digital engagement intersect with issues relating to social and economic engagement, especially within the context of the pandemic where such connections have been delineated through shifting practices in everyday life (e.g. social-distancing, online economy boom). Ultimately, I argue that the Tokyo Olympics 2020 represents a form of *racialised* digital engagement and digital solutionism, one where digitality is both weaponised and commodified as a means to consolidate political, socio-cultural and economic power, hidden under the convenient guise of pandemic 'safety' and 'wellbeing'.

## Pandemic digitalities: digital, social and economic engagement

There is a growing body of work – increasingly referred to as Disconnection Studies – which considers the complex tensions between individual and/or collective relationships with digitality (Portwood-Stacer, 2013; Karppi 2014; Kaun and Schwartzenegger 2014; Light 2014; Light and Cassidy 2014; Hesselberth 2018; Jorge, 2019), ones that impact upon questions of agency, identity, surveillance, justice to digital economies and labour (van Dijck, 2013; Fuchs 2014, 2015; Zuboff, 2019). In my past work (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022), I have critiqued the naturalisation of the social with the digital. Increasingly, the very idea of the 'digital' – and by extension, 'the internet' – seems to have become entangled with the 'social', largely because of the proliferation of social media across all areas of life: 'Western' society is increasingly moving towards being 'social media ready', part of an overall process of platformisation (Helmond 2015; van Dijck et al. 2018). As such, this social mediatisation – an intersectional sibling of globalisation, mediatisation, platformisation – has increasingly become the sole means of understanding 'social engagement', always measured through the metricisation of social relationships through its quantitative analyses (from number of followers, likes, re-posts, replies and so on). Furthermore, because digital economy increasingly

relies on the conflation of social media, social engagement and digitality – think of the gig economy, targeted advertising, data mining – the idea of 'digital engagement' is not only about social engagement but also, about engagement with wider structures of digital capitalism: hence, the digital becoming an increasingly compulsory form of governmentality that regulates sociality, economy, citizenship and identity. We are thus now at a point where we do not quite know how to conceptualise and/or practice social engagement without the digital, and similarly, profit without digital/social engagement.

Within this context, Tokyo 2020 presents us with a case which complicates such machinations, simultaneously reinforcing but also destabilisating the naturalised link between digital, social and economic engagement. Hailed and promoted by the IOC as one of the most innovative and globally connected Olympic Games, Tokyo 2020 is a prime example where the digital presented the financial and practical 'solution' – masquerading as global engagement and connectivity – to the pesky little problem of holding a mass event during global, life-endangering pandemic: "Fans to enjoy innovative digital experiences for Tokyo 2020" (IOC, 2021a); "Unprecedented broadcast coverage and digital innovation to connect fans around the world to the magic of Tokyo 2020" (IOC, 2021b). Tech and ICT stakeholders were equally enamoured by the digital productivity of Tokyo 2020, where technology 'saved the day': "Tokyo Olympics: The most connected Games ever" (ITC, 2021); "Tokyo 2020 Olympics inspires hi-tech advancements" (GlobalData, 2021); "Game changer: The first Olympic games in the cloud" (Zhang/MIT Technology Review, 2021). Such media discourse reveal how the digital has further embedded itself into the concept and practice of social engagement (i.e. 'fans to enjoy', 'connect fans around the word', 'most connected').

However, paradoxically and ironically, Tokyo 2020 was a largely people-less affair where athletes competed in audience-free stadia, and where the little in-person social engagement there was, was highly regulated in accordance to COVID-19 restrictions. Unlike social media and online engagement which is *expected* to be virtual, the Olympics Games – like most sporting events – have traditionally been associated with emotive, 'live', in-person audiences cheering, where the quality of the experience is based on material co-presence, co-participation and co-production of emotion, identity and spectatorship: to a point where the digital is even perceived as a hindrance to this material engagement (Hutchins, 2016) . What is interesting is that Tokyo 2020 was a moment where popular media discourses acknowledged the absence of this crucial material-social disengagement, but somehow, presented the digital (solution) as compensating for this by the digital-social/economic engagement in terms of viewing figures and social media innovation (it was the first Olympics to hold a TikTok account): a typical comment, 'Tokyo 2020 played out in empty arenas but bound eight billion people together" (The Guardian, 2021). In other words, in the eyes of media and tech corporations (and of course the IOC), Tokyo 2020 was an example of digital triumph over pandemic adversity: a digital solutionist approach to social and economic engagement, never mind the material dangers of the quickly spreading COVID-19. This kind of pandemic capitalism exacerbated inequalities through the uneven distribution of safety and labour across the material and digital divide, all the whilst presenting economic profit to those who could keep the pandemic digitally at bay:

> In contrast to the safer-from-home digital workers who inhabit the virtual and largely asynchronous temporalities of the web, 'essentiality' is bound to the 'real time' of deliveries, services and frontline work that take place in the synchronous and inhabited geographies with close proximity to infection. The pandemic exacerbates the ongoing crisis of capitalism by parcelling out who must suffer in real time and who lives in virtual time (Chan, 2020: 13.5).

The stubborn blindness to and disconnect between the digital and material reality of Tokyo 2020 is deeply concerning, and one that is founded upon financial and political gain over human life and the welfare of a nation. In discussing the inequalities played out through the shifting configurations of

time, space, digitality and labour during the pandemic, Chan (2020) discusses the idea of 'distal temporalities', where productivity, opportunity and capitalist time reinforces inequalities in the techno-caste system (2020: 13.2). Indeed, whilst the digital and virtual space was seen as the contact-less, immaterial and thus 'safe' solution to the problem of a usually materially saturated global sporting event, the question of 'safe' depends on one's geopolitical orientation: safe for whom? Safe for the 'safer-from-home' spectators and the decision-makers consuming the digital product? Safe for those having to risk their lives physically in Tokyo, just to produce the digital product for mass consumption? Tokyo 2020 thus marks a moment where material productivity and digital consumption were situated on unequal terms amidst a pandemic 'techno-caste' system that was waged on profit and politics.

But what is perhaps the most concerning issue here is the *forcing and enforcing* of digital engagement. Disconnection Studies on the whole explores largely 'Western' individual and/or collective technopractices of resistance against the digital which are conscious in some way; whether it is leaving social media, going on digital detoxes, engaging in hacktivism/algorithmic jamming, most forms of digital disengagement and refusal come from a privileged position rooted within neo-liberal, capitalist structures that provide the very concept and reality of agency, the exercising of 'choice' and (self)responsibility. My previous work (Kuntsman and Miyake, 2022) critiqued this configuration, highlighting the unequal distribution of temporal, digital, spatial and economic capital, arguing ultimately how the elastic continuum of digital disengagement meant that while some may enjoy digital detoxes and phone-free holidays, for others the spaces and opportunities of opt-out were fast shrinking.

However, Tokyo 2020 presents us with something even more sinister: here, it is not just the shrinking space of opt-out as previously postulated, but also, an active penalty for opting out, imposed through a legal and financial obligation that does not seem to take the extraordinary pandemic circumstances into account. Even during one of the worst global pandemics in recent history, Tokyo 2020 was not allowed to be cancelled, and indirectly, was forced to commit to the solution of digital engagement; in itself, enforced by the threat of legal fines that would be incurred from the IOC and related Olympic broadcasters and sponsors (McCurry, 2021b). The digital 'solution' offered *and* the penalty of 'opt-out', in effect, put Tokyo in checkmate. Here, digital disengagement becomes not just a 'choice'/non-option – similar to the situation of platform labourers relying on the gig economy where digital disengagement is not really a choice as it leads to financial loss and increased risk in wellbeing/health – but also, a non-option marked by the threat of an active, material, disciplinary punishment, internationally visible. There is no choice, not even a 'choice', only the punishment of choice.

The question of financially imposing a fine for opting out is incredibly alarming as it moves beyond questions of self-discipline and a lack of agency, but into violent impositions of forced labour, risk to life and exacerbations of inequality: this is not compulsory digitality, it is forced and enforced digitality. Tokyo 2020 thus represents the weaponisation of digital as both a solutionist facilitator to economic and political gains by those in power *and* as a truncheon of civil, political, legal and financial obedience despite the high risk to human life. There is an increasing body of work which explores the weaponisation of the digital and digital technologies as a way of gaining political, social and economic power whilst oppressing the Other (O'Neil, 2017; Noble, 2018; Benjamin, 2019; Eubanks, 2019). Tokyo 2020 marks a moment where the oppression lies not so much in the digital weapon, but in its forced use by profit-driven corporations and the IOC as an international institution – a globally enforced digitality and productivity, to serve all those who were power-, money- and entertainment- hungry. Digitality was thus exchangeable political, economic and cultural currency in the unequal international transaction between global politics, global sports and global media together.

## The Racialisation of Digital Engagement and Digital Solutionism

In the previous section, I critiqued the ways in which the digital 'solution' of producing Tokyo 2020 was one that was not only forced and enforced, but also, one which was grounded upon geopolitical, disjunctive inequalities of engagement and disengagement. I discussed the configuration and naturalisation of digital, social and economic dis/engagement as situated within a pandemic time-space which brought together the need for material labour, digital productivity and consumption. In this final section, I want to take a closer look at how such a process was one that was simultaneously enabled by and reinforced existing digital (self)orientalist ideologies (Miyake 2022) surrounding Japan as an East Asian country. How can we understand digital solutionism in the context of (self)orientalist and capitalist ideologies? How is digital engagement and digital solutionism racialised?

Morley and Robins (1995) wrote their seminal piece on techno-Orientalism about a time when Japan represented a threat – 'the Japan panic' – and its technological dominance over the West. For the authors, the simultaneous exoticisation and fear towards the Other can be understood through the 'West's' relationship towards (Japanese) technological innovation, production and dominance; technology represents an ideological, economic and socio-cultural destabilisation and decentralisation of Western power. Referring to Said's (1978) theories on Orientalism, the authors argue that 'The "Orient" exists because the West needs it; because it brings the project of the West into focus' (Morley and Robins, 1995: 155). The Other's technology represents a potential threat to this project. Thinking through such issues in the context of technological supremacy -- as being simultaneously economic, cultural and political -- for Morley and Robins (1995), the concept of techno-Orientalism is thus formed at the ideological crux of techno-myth, and economic-political materiality of Japanese technologies that represent futurity and innovation on the one hand, whilst also representing the West's technological emasculation that leads to its cultural, political and economic defeat.

Morley and Robins's 'techno-orientalism' relies on the *materiality* of technology, the material conditions which enable the production of its ideological practices that give raise to racism and technological raciality. For example, there would be no 'Japan-bashing' without the material technologies embodying socio-cultural values which lead to the practice of physically bashing material commodities. Since the 1990s though – certainly in the era of Tokyo 2020 – there has been a significant shift from a techno-centricism to digi-centricism. This shift has in many ways invisibilised the inequalities that arise from the *materialities* involved in the production of digitality (Qiu, 2016); as we have seen earlier, Tokyo 2021 is a perfect example where digitalisation was hailed as innovation and the 'solution' during the global pandemic, but invisiblised the risks and dangers associated with the local materialiaties of its digital production.

Discussing platform and racial capitalism in the context of digital infrastructures, economies and societies, McMillan Cottom (2020) explores the idea of 'predatory inclusion', defined as 'the logic, organization, and technique of including marginalized consumer-citizens into ostensibly democratizing mobility schemes on extractive terms (2020: 443)'. As we have seen from the official IOC and news media discourse earlier, the Tokyo Olympics were rigorously promoted as using digital technologies and platforms as a means to open up unprecedented 'accessibility' and 'inclusion' for all. Here, digitality – and engagement with it – is aligned with democracy, equality and racial parity. Conveniently, there is already a wealth of recent digital-Orientalist discourses that naturalise the relationship between 'the digital', 'smart' and 'AI' as something Japan can 'do' so easily (Miyake, 2022). Japan does it again! Japan is 'Westernised'!

Yet, ultimately, such co-optation was part of a racialised political economy that benefited only those countries that had the digital infrastrcutures, rights and streaming services to broadcast the Olympics, and the media and broadcasting corporations themselves. In fact, even within the global 'North'/the 'West' where digital infrastructures are 'most advanced', digital engagement – and thus 'access' – was not a given, and had to be bought, a classed process which further

naturalises the relationship between digital engagement and financial engagement (and thus indirectly, social engagement). For example, in Britain, the BBC did not have the full rights to broadcast the Olympics, outbid by US broadcasting company Discovery who won the European rights and placed most events behind a paywall (Waterson/Guardian, 2021). Similarly, in Japan itself, public broadcaster NHK won the rights to televise Tokyo 2020, but this was as a joint venture with six other private broadcasters (Nippon Television, TV Asahi, Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) Television, Fuji Television, TV Tokyo, and J:COM TV) who made content available only to subscribers (Chandra, 2021). In both cases, where is the 'equality' and 'accessibility' in digital engagement?

Similarly, as well as the financial benefits gained by mega corporations like Discovery, forcing the Tokyo Olympics at all literal and figurative costs was also ideologically empowering the IOC, as an 'organisation that has been instrumental in garnering support for a form of international cooperation clothed in the resuscitation of the Olympic idea' (Chappelet and Kübler-Mabbott, 2008: xiii). In this context, the IOC thus represents a 'project' that capitalises on and promotes global engagement – through economic, political and digital engagement – whilst obsfucating racial inequality. Digital engagement provides the perfect screen that hides the racialised economy of difference, whilst also providing the front that promises political, cultural and social engagement.

Indeed, weeks before the eventual Olympics unfolded in July 2021, Bach referred to Japanese citizens as 'Chinese people'. Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which provoked violent attacks against East and Southeast Asians worldwide that led to significant East and Southeast Asian anti-racist activism, such a 'gaffe' (a term many news media outlets used) is extraordinary. Yet, as with many politicians and people in power before him, the news story died down, and Bach remained unscathed, ultimately waving flags, handing out medals and bouquets during the ensuing Olympic ceremonies in Tokyo. Despite the Olympics and the IOC being supposedly apolitical, neutral, standing for 'global values' (just think of Rule 50, which imposes a ban and heavy consequences for any athletes displaying any allegiance towards a political movement), such moments reveal the asymmetries in power that are underscored by contradiction – we oppose racism but ban any reference challenging it; we will punish athletes standing against racism but will not punish our own members who displayed racist behaviour – ultimately marginalising and disadvantaging the Other. Is this the 'Olympic idea'?

It is tempting of course to simply equate the IOC as the Dominant Master of Ceremonies, and Japan as the submissive host, where the obvious alignment of racial difference and inequality can be assigned to the IOC/Bach (White) and Japan/Abe (Other) in their respective binary oppositionalities. But to take a Foucauldian approach here, power is not something that is exclusively 'held' and 'exercised' by the IOC. Japan's – or perhaps originally, Abe's – own position and decision to even engage with the IOC and Olympic socio-politics and economics was part its broader strategic plan to reform Japan's constitution (Klein, 2020). We must not forget that it was also originally PM Abe's determination to strengthen Japan's position within the global political and financial landscape – part of his 'Abeconomics' policies – that led to Tokyo becoming the Olympics host city: 'showing off' the nation's digital and smart capabailities (Waldenberger, 2020) was a central part of this plan, inevitably linking the digital with political, socio-cultural and economic global engagement. The Tokyo Metropolitan government had estimated the Games would give a ¥32tn boost to the national economy (Lewis and Murad/Financial Times, 2020), something that would work in conjunction with its strategic self-exploitation of soft power: who can forget Abe dressed up as Super Mario at Rio 2016 Olympics?

Furthermore, although by the time the Olympics eventually occurred Abe had stepped down as PM due to health reasons (Yoshihide Suga took his place in 2020), leading up to the event, Abe was still very vocal in his championing of the Olympics as the right course of action for Japan, despite mass protests across the country. Discussing the anti-Olympics movement in Japan, Ganseforth (2020) explores how the Olympics in many ways brought together those who were marginalised and/or otherwise fighting for their rights: from the exploitation of workers on the construction sites (Olympic sites); homeless people and those living in public housing being dislocated from the

Olympic vicinity as a result of privatisation of public spaces. The anti-Olympics movement were also concerned about the increased securitisation and surveillance – marking further restrictions of civil liberties – under the pretext deploying anti-terrorist strategies at the Olympics (Ganseforth, 2020: 112). Needless to say, this is a classic case where digital engagement is paraded as the safe solution for 'the good of society' whilst operationalising infrastructures that not only exacerbate inequalities but insultingly rely on the oppression of the marginalised. Although there was media coverage of such national dissent, on the whole, there was what Manzenreiter (2020) describes as the Japanese media's 'manufacturing of national consent' right from the early stages of Japan's bid in 2016 (2020: 10).

As a retort to anti-Olympics sentiment arising in Japan in 2021, Abe indirectly suggested that those opposing the Olympics are, in effect, opposing Japan and its own financial-cultural project for internationalisation: "People who have been criticized by some as anti-Japan because of their historical perceptions and other views are now strongly opposing staging the Olympics" (Tadokoro/Mainichi, 2021). Although this may not necessarily be considered 'racist' as one might Bach's Chinese/Japanese 'gaffe', nonetheless, such statements point towards the racialisation of engagement, in this case, emerging from Japan's own nationalist project: a complicit engagement with political, economic and socio-cultural power as facilitated by the digital ('we found the solution to accumulate political, economic and socio-cultural capital!); not just as a means to facilitate the Olympics (digitalisation), but also, as a commodity itself which 'shows off' Japanese innovation to consumer. Digital engagement for Japan and the Olympics was thus part of its own self-Orientalising discourse (Miller 1982; Iwabuchi, 1994; Moeran, 1996; Miyake 2022), where the naturalisation of 'digital' and 'Japan' was encouraged, all the whilst serving the practical purpose of materialising the Olympics 'safely' during the pandemic.

In this context, digital engagement thus becomes a mechanism of governmentality that enforces Japanese discipline, obedience and subservience – not just towards the IOC or the Olympics – *but to Japan* as a nation. Within such a configuration, opting out of digitality suddenly becomes not just a politics of resistance against questions such as mass surveillance and the digital rights, but also becomes embroiled with questions of national identity, if not (anti-)nationalism. In turn, such a process becomes part of a process of a self-racialisation of Japanese-ness through digital engagement and digital solutionism: both serve as a means and product to materialise and self-perpetuate the myth of 'Japan', ultimately requiring the othering and silencing – the 'manufacturing of consent' – of those material Japanese Others who oppose digital engagement.

## Conclusion

By focussing on the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, this chapter explored the ways in which the racialisation of digital engagement and digital solutionism reinforce and maintain dominant discourses of power, race and digitality. Exploring the simultaneous divorcing and obfuscating of the materialities from the digitalisation involved in realising the Olympics, I firstly explored the very concept of enforcing digitality – one which moves away from the idea of the neo-liberal agent responsible for their own digital dis/engagement – where digital engagement becomes a means of maintaining inequality through the marginalisation of Other, whilst also propagating the capitalist-driven political global economy. I critiqued the forcing and enforcing of Tokyo 2020 Olympics was grounded upon geopolitical, disjunctive inequalities of engagement and disengagement. Here, I discussed the configuration and naturalisation of digital, social and economic dis/engagement as situated within a pandemic time-space which brought together the need for material labour, digital productivity and consumption. As such, I argued that digital engagement inevitably intersects with political, social and economic engagement, and how this was ultimately weaponised, commodified and exploited by both the IOC and Japan, as interrelated and mutually complicit forms of racialised digital solutionism, both serving their own 'project' of economic, political and socio-cultural dominance.

It seems fitting to end this chapter by acknowledging the shocking assassination of Abe in 2022. Bach and the IOC of course led tributes, lowering the Olympic flag at half-mast at the House in Lausanne for three days following the news (IOC, 2022). Words like 'partnership' and 'friendship' are used in the official statements released by the IOC at the time. Upon first glance, such words can be dismissed as mere official rhetoric. Yet it also points to the fact that the racialisation of digital engagement and digital solutionism of Tokyo 2020 Olympics should be contextualised within Orientalist ideologies: part of *both* the IOC/the 'West's project to embody and incorporate the Other through its technologies and digitalities, a form of digi-Orientalism; *and* part of Japan's self-Orientalist digital strategies and ideologies that intersect at the politics and economics of national identity and nationalism. In this sense, the inequality rests not so much between Japan and the IOC, but between Japan/IOC and the silent Others who were either co-opted and digitally (en)forced to engage, or did not have the means to engage politically, economically or socially despite their obedient digital engagement.

## References


Benjamin R (2019) *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press

Bull A (2021) Tokyo 2020 played out in empty arenas but bound eight billion people together. *The Guardian*. 8 Aug 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/aug/08/tokyo-2020-played-out-in-empty-arenas-but-bound-eight-billion-people-together [accessed 16 Feb 2022]

Chan N (2020) Pandemic temporalities: Distal futurity in the digital Capitalocene. *Journal of Environmental Media*, 1 (Supplement) pp. 13.1-13.8

Chandra C (2021) How to Watch the Tokyo 2020 Olympics from Home. *Tokyo Weekender*. 21 July 2021. https://www.tokyoweekender.com/2021/07/how-to-watch-the-tokyo-2020-olympics [Accessed 10 July 2022].

Chappelet JL and Kübler-Mabbott B (2008) *International Olympic Committee and the Olympic System (IOC): The Governance of World Sport*. London and New York: Routledge

Cox CM (2021) Counting cases, counting medals: containing the Olympic contagion during the Tokyo Games. In D. Jackson, A. Bernstein, M. Butterworth, Y. Cho, D. Sarver Coombs, M. Devlin, C. Onwumechili (eds), *Olympic and Paralympic Analysis 2020: Mega events, media, and the politics of sport Early reflections from leading academics*. CSC&M; Bournemouth University; ICA Sports Communication Special Interest Group and AMCR MCSS.

Eubanks V (2019) *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*. New York: Picador

Fuchs C (2015) *Culture and Economy in the Age of Social Media*. London and New York: Routledge

————(2014) *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*. London and New York: Routledge

Ganseforth S (2020) The difference between zero and one: Voices from the Tokyo anti-Olympic movements. In B Holthus, I Gagné, W Manzenreiter and F Waldenberger (eds.) *Japan Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*. London and New York: Routledge. pp.110-115

GlobalData (2021) *Tokyo 2020 Olympics inspires hi-tech advancements*. 13 Aug 2021. https://www.globaldata.com/tokyo-2020-olympics-inspires-hi-tech-advancements-says-globaldata/ [accessed 16 Feb 2022]

Helmond A (2015) The Platformization of the Web: Making Web Data Platform Ready. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2)

Hesselberth P (2018) Discourses on Disconnectivity and the Right to Disconnect. *New Media & Society*, 20 (5): 1994–2010

Hutchins B (2016) 'We don't need no stinking smartphones!' Live stadium sports events, mediatization, and the non-use of mobile media. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(3): 420–436

International Olympic Games Committee (2022) *IOC mourns the death of former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo*. 8 Jul 2022 https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-mourns-the-death-of-former-japanese-prime-minister-abe-shinzo [accessed July 30 2022]

———(2021a) *Fans to enjoy innovative digital experiences for Tokyo 2020*. 21 July 2021 https://olympics.com/ioc/news/fans-to-enjoy-innovative-digital-experiences-for-tokyo-2020. [accessed 16 Feb 2022]

———(2021b) *Unprecedented broadcast coverage and digital innovation to connect fans around the world to the magic of Tokyo 2020.* 9 July 2021 https://olympics.com/ioc/news/unprecedented-broadcast-coverage-and-digital-innovation-to-connect-fans-around-the-world-to-the-magic-of-tokyo-2020 [accessed 16 February 2022]

———(2020) *Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games postponed to 2021*. International Olympic Committee. https://olympics.com/en/news/tokyo-olympic-games-postponed-ioc [accessed 11 February 2022]

Jorge A (2019) Social Media, Interrupted: Users Recounting Temporary Disconnection on Instagram. *Social Media + Society*, 5(4)

Karppi T (2014) *Disconnect. Me: User Engagement and Facebook*. Turku: Turun yliopisto.

Kaun A and Schwarzenegger C (2014) 'No Media, Less Life?' Online Disconnection in Mediatized Worlds. *First Monday*, 19 (11). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i11.5497

Klein A (2020) Political Games. In B Holthus, I Gagné, W Manzenreiter and F Waldenberger (eds.) *Japan Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*. London and New York: Routledge. Pp.13-17

Kuntsman A and Miyake E (2022) *Paradoxes of Digital Disengagement: In Search of the Opt-out button.* London: Westminster University Press

————(2019) The paradox and continuum of digital disengagement: denaturalising digital sociality and technological connectivity. *Media, Culture & Society,* 41(6): 901-913

Kyodo (2021) JAL reports first net loss since 2012 relisting as pandemic bites. *The Japan Times*. May 7 2021. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/05/07/business/corporate-business/jal-business-year-losses/ [accessed: 15 Feb 2022]

Lewis L and Murad A (2020) *Japan: how coronavirus crushed Abe's Olympics dream*. Financial Times. https://www.ft.com/content/c343aa5e-702a-11ea-9bca-bf503995cd6f [accessed: 15 Feb 2022]

Light B (2014) *Disconnecting with Social Networking Sites*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Light B and Cassidy E (2014) Strategies for the Suspension and Prevention of Connection: Rendering Disconnection as Socioeconomic Lubricant with Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 16 (7): 1169–84.

Majumdar B (2021) How Covid changed sport – a case study of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. *Sport in Society*. DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2021.1975963

Manzenreiter W (2020) Olympics and the Media In B Holthus, I Gagné, W Manzenreiter and F Waldenberger (eds.) *Japan Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*. London and New York: Routledge. pp. 8-11

McCurry J (2021a) Pride and anxiety mingle in Japan as Olympic medal tally and Covid cases rise. *The Observer*. 8 Aug 2021 https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/aug/08/pride-and-anxiety-mingle-in-japan-as-olympic-medal-tally-and-covid-cases-rise [accessed 15 Feb 2022]

———(2021b) 'Claims could run into billions': the interests at stake if Olympics in Japan were cancelled. *The Guardian*. 10 Jun 2021 https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jun/10/claims-could-run-into-billions-the-interests-at-stake-if-olympics-in-japan-were-cancelled [accessed July 2022]

McMillan Cottom T (2020) Where Platform Capitalism and Racial Capitalism Meet: The Sociology of Race and Racism in the Digital Society. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(4): 441–449

Miyake E (2022) I'm a Virtual Girl from Tokyo: Virtual Influencers, digital-Orientalism and the (Im)materiality of Race and Gender. *Journal of Consumer Culture.*

Miller RA (1982) *Japan's Modern Myth: The Language and Beyond*. New York: Weather Hill

Moeran B (1996) The Orient Strikes Back: Advertising and Imagining Japan. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 13(3): 77-112

Morosov E (2013) *To Save Everything, Click Here: the folly of technological solutionism*. New York: Public Affairs

Morley D and Robins K (1995) *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries*. London: Routledge

Noble SU (2018) *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press.

O'Neil C (2017) *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy*. UK, USA, Ireland, Australia, India, New Zealand, South Africa: Penguin Books

Pesek W (2021) *Tokyo Olympics Shows Why Japan Wins Gold For Bad Economy*. Forbes. 27 July, 2021. https://www.forbes.com/sites/williampesek/2021/07/27/tokyo-olympics-shows-why-japan-wins-gold-for-bad-economy/?sh=2bf4d3274efe [accessed 15 Feb 2022)

Phillips A (2020) 'Coronavirus given the face of an East Asian person': Parliament debates racism during pandemic. *Sky News.* 13 Oct 2020. https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-given-the-face-of-an-east-asian-person-parliament-debates-racism-during-pandemic-12102897 [accessed 20 Feb 2022]

Poll S (2021) Tokyo Olympics: The most connected Games ever. *International Telecommunication Union*. 10 Aug 2021. https://www.itu.int/hub/2021/08/tokyo-olympics-the-most-connected-games-ever/ [accessed 16 Feb 2022]

Portwood-Stacer L (2013) Media Refusal and Conspicuous NonConsumption: The Performative and Political Dimensions of Facebook Abstention. *New Media & Society,* 15 (7): 1041–57.

Qiu JL (2016) *Goodbye iSlave: A Manifesto for Digital Abolition*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Shibata N (2021) Amid pandemic, JAL posts biggest loss of $2.6bn since relisting. *Nikkei Asia*. 7 May 2021. https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Transportation/Amid-pandemic-JAL-posts-biggest-loss-of-2.6bn-since-relisting [accessed 12 May 2022]

Taku K and Arai H (2020) Impact of COVID-19 on Athletes and Coaches, and Their Values in Japan: Repercussions of Postponing the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 25(8): 623-630

Todokoro R (2021) Ex-PM Abe says 'anti-Japan' people are strongly opposing Tokyo Olympics. *The Mainichi*. https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20210703/p2a/00m/0na/009000c [accessed 10 June 2022]

van Dijck J (2013) *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

van Dijck J, Poell T and de Waal M (2018) *The Platform Society*. Oxford: Oxford Academic

Waldenberger F (2020) The Olympic and Paralympic Games as a technology showcase. In B Holthus, I Gagné, W Manzenreiter and F Waldenberger (eds.) *Japan Through the Lens of the Tokyo Olympics*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 136

Waterson J (2021) BBC Olympics coverage misses events after loss of TV rights. *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/jul/25/bbc-olympics-coverage-misses-events-after-selling-tv-rights? [accessed 10 June 2022]

Zhang J (2021) Game changer: The first Olympic games in the cloud. *MIT Technology Review*. 8 September, 2021. https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/09/08/1035178/game-changer-the-first-olympic-games-in-the-cloud/ [accessed 16 Feb 2021]

Zuboff S (2019) *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for the Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London: Profile Books.