

# Deconstructing Olympism

- Applying the mindset of Jacques Derrida on the notion of Olympism



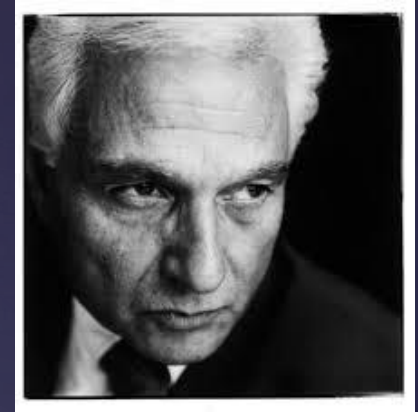
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**Play The Game – 26/10 -2015**

**Aarhus, Denmark**

# A few initial notes...



- A specific philosophical take on Olympism
  - No truth offered
- A rarely talked about aspect of the Olympic intellectual property → The production of Olympic knowledge
- No attempt of defining Olympism → "A philosophy of life" "Building a better world through sports" (olympic.org)
- No examples of empirical data – A research pitch

# Outline

- Key aspects for adopting this stand
- Research Problem
- How Derrida can help
- What is deconstruction?
- Final remarks

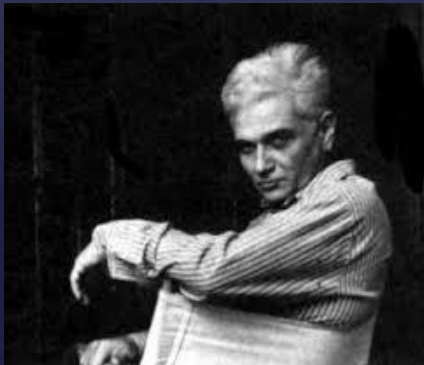
# Key aspects



- The presence of Olympism in Olympic research
  - → Pierre de Coubertin (historical attachment – how it should be)
- Competing views and a lack of coherence
  - “...a circular reasoning...” (Da Costa 2006)
- “The mission of the IOC is to promote Olympism throughout the world and to lead the Olympic Movement” (IOC Charter 2015, 18)

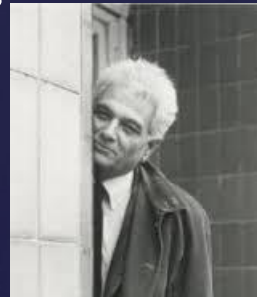
# Research Problem

- Olympic research seems to be strongly influenced by a contested notion which is driven and promoted by the organization behind what that very research, supposedly, is to reach objective conclusions regarding.



# Jacques Derrida & his mindset

- “Derrida’s major contribution has been his insistence that history is a metaphysical concept according to which *the meaning of history always amounts to the history of meaning*” (Young 2004: 100)
- According to Derrida, writing is what determines history.
- “From the first texts I published, I have attempted to systematize a deconstructive critique precisely against the authority of meaning...” (Derrida 1981: 49f).



# Jacques Derrida in "clarity"

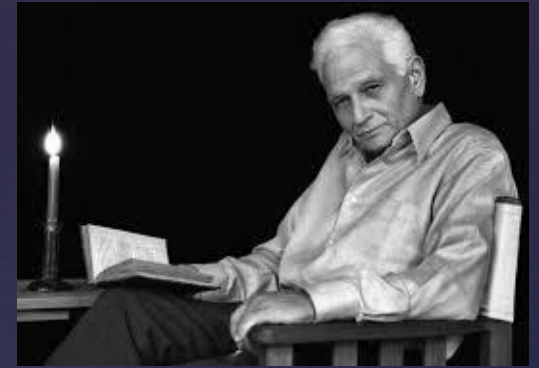
- a Derridean read on the history of Olympism means that it's meaning is dependent on the meaning that has been applied to it throughout history.
- Writing (Olympic research) is what determines history
- Who has the authority of meaning?

# But isn't Olympism being criticized?

- "One point should be made emphatically clear. Where there is criticism of the Olympic movement, it is intended to be constructive to assist the movement in the decades ahead and to help it move closer to the realization of its ideals." (Mangan 2010: 2659).
- Derrida questions the very idea of an ideal, a stable center.
- Being critical is not enough...



# Deconstruction



- Putting pressure on the meaning of Olympism
- “...seeks to undo both a given order of priorities and the very system of conceptual opposition that makes that order possible.” (Norris 2002:30f)
- “binary law of presence” – will collapse if put under pressure
- An implied hierarchy
- Upsetting the balance that creates the problem

# The authority of meaning

The screenshot displays the Olympic.org website's 'Olympic Studies Centre' page. The browser's address bar shows the URL 'http://www.olympic.org/olympic-st'. The page header includes the Olympic.org logo, navigation links (Home, Olympic Games, YOG, Sports, Athletes, Countries, Olympism, Photos, Videos, The IOC, News), and a search bar. The main content area features a large title 'THE OLYMPIC STUDIES CENTRE' with the subtitle 'Discover the official references and sources on Olympism'. Below this, there are several colored boxes representing different sections: 'QUICK REFERENCES' (purple), 'ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AND NETWORK' (orange), 'ONLINE RESEARCH TOOLS' (teal), 'OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS' (blue), and 'VISITS AND RESEARCH' (red). A video player titled 'ABOUT US' is also visible, showing a person lighting a torch. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows various application icons and the system clock indicating 17:46 on 2015-09-21.

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Home > The Olympic Studies Centre

## THE OLYMPIC STUDIES CENTRE

Discover the official references and sources on Olympism

**QUICK REFERENCES**  
Olympism at a glance

**ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AND NETWORK**  
Exploring Olympism in the university environment

**ONLINE RESEARCH TOOLS**  
Research into the Olympic phenomenon

**OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS**  
Access the key publications of the IOC and Organising Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs)

**ABOUT US**  
Introduction to the OSC News

**VISITS AND RESEARCH**

17:46  
2015-09-21

# Final remarks – the rethinking offered

- The production of Olympic knowledge (the Olympic Intellectual Property)
- Olympic research needs to “break free from its chains”
  - Dislocate Olympic Studies from Olympism
- Avoid the imbedded normativity (how it should be)
- If not we will continue to reconstruct Olympic knowledge and the knowledge production will persist.

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# Thank you for your attention

- All critique, comments or questions are welcome.

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# Possible objections

- Is it not logical that the IOC wants research to support their interests?
- Who else should if not the IOC?
- What is wrong with spreading a philosophy which promotes sound principles?
- A contradiction of normativity...
- When does a deconstruction end?
- So you are saying we should stop focusing on Olympism, yet your entire presentation is about Olympism...

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# A deconstructionist example

- *Olympism and nation-building from a cultural perspective* (Luo 2010)
- *Hutong* (Mongol era, 1200s) rebuilt to westernized showcase street during Beijing 2008
  - Represent Chinese Olympic Culture
- Critical, not towards Olympism
- Not coherent with de Coubertin's history-anchored ideals of a "common identity for humanity" – It was not Olympism



# A deconstructionist example

- The meaning of Olympism remains stable
- Writing determines history
- Putting pressure on the word usage
- Avoid anchoring Olympism in its historical connotations
- Olympism as a cause for rebuilding the hutong
- *Olympism in Action – Building a “Better” World Through Sport*