

# Olympics/Uhlympics: Living in the Shadow of the Beast

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I heard the announcement that London was to host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games at just before one o'clock on Wednesday 6 July 2005. The site for these events, which was already earmarked for a massive new shopping centre and luxury housing development, is less than a ten-minute walk from my front door in Stratford. My girlfriend, Kay Hyatt, lives about a mile away from me, in a different borough, and the site is also within a short walk of her home.

Kay and I knew the announcement would have profound repercussions for the places that we have called home for the last 15 years. We have both travelled to other host cities, Munich, Montral and Lillehammer most notably, and have seen the effects of Olympic developments on those places. We understand that more recent forces of globalisation and nationalism are likely to add a sharper influence in how the Olympic-Industrial-Complex plays out in this part of East London, which is economically depressed and ethnically diverse. Here we have come to experience the Olympics as an oppressive force but also, it transpires, as a site for creative non-violent resistance concerning themes of embodiment and identity. I want to discuss how the forthcoming Olympics are affecting us as queer, fat, gendered people and I want to consider some of the themes of coercion and resistance that are becoming part of our everyday experience.

Sometimes the changes are barely apparent, the site is inaccessible to ordinary people apart from during rare and highly-mediated open days where photography and free roaming is forbidden and where events are heavily narrated by the Olympic Development Authority (ODA). The larger structures are now being built, but there are more subtle changes that would not be apparent without a critical approach to the proceedings. Through discussions, attendance at various official events, and blogging [<http://thelastplace.wordpress.com>] Kay and I have begun to amass disturbing narratives of corporate intervention and spin, coupled with barely a whisper of critical engagement within the surrounding communities. That is not to say that such engagement does not

occur, but that there is no significant independent organised community response that we know of. The opportunities to voice concerns about the developments are generally managed by the players who are invested in assuaging dissent.

Massey (1991) proposes that a feature of economic growth, including gentrification, is increasing inequality. She frames her arguments on the Docklands development in East London that occurred in the 1980s, not far from the current Olympics site. Massey asserts that the trickle-down effect promised by Docklands' developers is overstated. Docklands is an island development, its considerable economic activity does not benefit the communities located beyond its boundaries. She says: "There isn't a ladder of opportunity. This is a wall, a divide" (11), where local people 'benefit' by becoming underclass service providers to the privileged incomers. Nearly twenty years on, the learning from Docklands articulated by Massey has not been applied to the Olympics development. Where Massey believes that local resistance and local discourse will create possibilities for more egalitarian growth on the back of regeneration, I am not so hopeful.

The reason for my gloom is the lack of consistent resistance to the Olympics by local people, a lack of influence on 2012 rhetoric and discourse, and the very real possibility that the Olympics will decimate a place to which many people have personal connections without being called to account. Lenskyj's (2008) outstanding work on Olympics resistance documents a wealth of critical reactions to previous Olympics, some of which is framed, like Massey's work, within critical discourses around gentrification, anti-globalisation and concerns about how the Olympics manufactures consent and attempts to de-politicise sport. Given that there is a strong legacy of resistance to previous Olympics, and that the Olympic boroughs in London contain many organized and outspoken communities, why is there so little sustained local critical engagement and resistance to 2012?

This is not to say that there has been none. Nolondon2012.org offered a strong critique of the bid, but stopped activity in 2005 after the bid was successful. Poynter (2009) mentions Big Sunday, a well-attended public engagement event, but this was organized by Olympics developers and thus reflected their interests. He also mentions East London Communities Organisation (TELCO) and their success in establishing an ethical economic guarantee for 2012. But

TELCO is a national organization, their critical involvement with the Olympics is bounded by their pre-existing agenda for affordable housing, and as an organization that is dominated by religious groups. With this in mind, I am cautious about how welcoming they might be to queer people. There have been critical reports in some areas of the press, but a consistent body of diverse local opposition has not been sustained.

Poynter (2009) offers some clues as to why this might be so. Of Stratford in 2012 he says: "The area has become a laboratory" (132) where mega-events, such as the Olympics, are presumed to act as catalysts to social change through regeneration. However, the British government is unable to tally local regeneration needs with a national "commercial imperative to deliver a mega-event" (137), therefore the event is managed through governance. This refers to a public-private partnership where costs are shared between public bodies and private businesses. In neoliberal terms, this process removes substantial responsibility for project management from the state and enables the state to lean upon the market to determining a project's outcome. Many agencies are involved in this process, organizations are co-opted and individual local voices are inevitably drowned out, presuming they attempt to speak up at all.

It is the changes within this context that I would like to address in this essay. I have coined Uhlympics in this work, a term I use to criticise the ODA's policing of branded Olympic language, and to express my own deep ambivalence to the Games. To do this, I will outline my method, present a discussion and some concluding thoughts.

## **Method**

The pomp and spin of Olympic publicity materials, including glossy public consultation documents, contrasts intensely with the private conversations that Kay and I have been sharing about the Olympics, which are often characterised by fear, doubt, outrage and cheeky humour. With Kay's permission, I have elected to share one of these discussions via a method that reflects the conversational style of my girlfriend's and my private world. It references, too, the work by feminists in the early 1990s about women's communication styles and the private realms in which women's wider social themes are discussed. For example, Jennifer Coates (1996) asserts the validity, richness and linguistic complexity of women's informal

communication in recreating gender and relationships. I draw upon her work to support my own claim that there is substance to the conversation shared here between my girlfriend and I. The gendered divisions of public and private worlds are of concern to Jean Bethke Elshtain (1993), who argues for a reconsidering of women's private space, which I too wish to make in this piece. Susan Watkins and Angela Danzi (1995) show that areas of life categorised as private or feminine, characterised by informal communication styles, can have significant effect on social change. Their article shows how gossip networks in Italian and Jewish communities in the United States between 1920 and 1940 influenced women's reproductive decisions to have fewer children. Likewise, I regard the conversations Kay and I have about our public and private worlds to be part of a wider discourse of social change.

One of the ways that Kay and I communicate when we have very private, difficult and complicated things to share is through online Instant Messaging (IM) through our computers. We find the emotional distance in this form of communication helpful in establishing understanding, as well as the precision and clarity of language, and the ability to return to remarks that may have been overlooked. Taking turns to talk is an egalitarian process that requires us to listen and pay attention to each other, unlike common conversational styles, which we also experience, that feature dominant and subservient positions.

IM is a good format through which to discuss complicated thoughts and feelings about the Olympics. Thus I invited Kay to IM with me for 90 minutes to talk about the Uhlympics. We had both read the call for papers for this journal and used it as a basis to create an unstructured discussion. I showed Kay a late draft of this paper for her comments and corrections. We both enjoyed this process and see it as congruent with DIY culture, a form of collective expression with which we are familiar as zine-makers, bloggers, and people active in London's various DIY communities.

Michael Hurley (2007) makes the common methodological observation that research has political and personal dimensions and doesn't produce "innocent knowledge" (162). Using IM with my girlfriend to explore some of our thoughts and experiences of living in the shadow of the Uhlympics makes sense to me because it synthesises social constructionist, postmodernist, and feminist methodologies, together with elements of DIY culture. I have used it

here to produce knowledge that is far from "innocent" but which require the reader to add their own interpretation and reflect on their own ontologies and epistemologies. Indeed, I reject positivist assertions that facts lie dormant, waiting to be discovered by researchers. Instead this work is located in time and place, through identity, language, technology, relationship and dialogue; it is one possible bunch of narratives from an infinite number of potential and already existing narratives of the same events; it advocates subjectivity and rich description. Kay's and my sense of outsiderhood and feelings of disempowerment in this piece, or its almost conspiratorial tone as one reviewer remarked, illustrate the strength of autoethnography in expressing subjectivity. IM is used here in part because it is a method that is cheap, fast, convenient and readily available to us for the purposes of submitting an article to this journal. Where fat people in research are typically absented or abstracted as 'the obese,' (Cooper, 2009) or graphically presented in accounts as dehumanised and voiceless 'headless fatties' (Cooper, 2007), here Kay and I create space where we articulate our lives ourselves.

Moss (2001) considers autoethnography as a microscale intervention that places individuals within a context and offers "critically informed uses of the individual" (3). She explains that oppression and power are expressed through the ordinariness of life, in subtle micro-experiences, and that the autobiography of people who experience marginalization helps to make the invisible aspects of such oppression visible. In sharing our private discussion, Kay and I are seeking to express our own micro-accounts with the hope of developing a critically informed view of them.

Moss goes on to say that the thick description generated by autobiography draws on our own capacities to construct geographic knowledge (9) and helps "link who I am with the world around me" (10). I suspect that my own privilege enables me to feel that I have a right to present an autoethnography, but I am not claiming that my perspective is exclusive, and I seek to engage with people whose ways of seeing are different to my own.

### **Themes and discussion**

Below I offer the transcript from the IM session, which I have edited for spelling, clarity and conciseness.

## ***Who are we to be talking about this?***

I started the session with an appeal for reflexivity. As educated, minority white people in occupations that are high status compared to the majority of our neighbours, Kay and I could be regarded as part of the force of gentrification in East London, and our concerns about the Olympics dismissed as NIMBYism. This would be a crude way of categorising us which ignores my own fluctuating relationship to economic power as an ex- and still occasional welfare claimant, Kay's history in community care work, and our joint commitment to local people and places. Thus my status is complicated and the reasons we want to talk are nuanced.

Charlotte: Who are we to be talking about this? I think that being local is one reason we are qualified to speak, and being fat freaks and queers puts us in a good position to talk about the dominant cultures that try to marginalise us. I'd say our blog gives us a reason to speak. The man who is building a slum empire next door, cashing in on Olympic house prices, I think he gives me authority to speak. The neighbourhood businesses that are being replaced by estate agents too, the weird way everything is changing, and the people who keep asking me about how much my house is now worth, this all gives me fuel to speak on this stuff. I suppose, it's personal.

Kay: Yes, I agree. I also wanted to say that we are committed Stratford people. We choose to live and work here. We are stayers. I was thinking about that man on the official Olympic site tour saying that the legacy of the Games is that our area will become a place where people choose to live and stay. Well, we already did that, long before the Olympics, and in spite of it.

Charlotte: It's as though those magnanimous Olympic people have given us permission to live in our own area! And are destroying and re-making the area for us so generous of them! I want to say that I feel like an adult citizen, someone invested in my neighbourhood. 'My' place, as though it belongs to me. I don't think many people in E15 are like that. People here are very 'done to,' kind of beaten down. I think the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is supposed to be about regenerating neighbourhoods, but it's also about

colonising them. I don't think this neighbourhood needs or needed regenerating. It was fine as it was. I find the idea of regeneration patronising and problematic.

Kay: Yes absolutely. It was fine, better I think, as it was.

The changing demographic of the neighbourhood affects me in very personal ways; I experience noise stress from the hotel next door and the multiple occupants of the flat upstairs, both recent, profitable, conversions from single-occupancy households, and my neighbours are transient, continually moving on. But co-owning my flat means that rising rents are unlikely to push me out of Stratford, I have a place I can consider home and will get compensation if the place where I live is redeveloped. I benefit from rising house prices in theory, and though I do not want to move, I could if I wanted to; I have choices available to me that others do not.

My whiteness also grants me unearned privilege, perhaps an entitled sense that what I have to say about the Uhlympics is worth listening to even though I am likely to lack knowledge of related discourses in some of the local minority ethnic communities. Perhaps my insistence that there is little local resistance to the Uhlympics is false, that it is taking place in spaces that my habitus prevents me from supporting. My perspective is clearly limited and yet I feel that it is worth expressing, I know that my voice has value.

I appreciate that my critiques of the developments in the place where I live, and the available methods I use to articulate them, are unlikely to get me arrested or harassed by the police. Again, my privilege brings me choice and agency within the context of who I am to be speaking about this.

### ***Touting diversity/destroying diversity***

Our allegiance to Stratford and East London is not reflected in the rhetoric surrounding 2012. Despite being active in local affairs, people like Kay and I are entirely absent as targets for that rhetoric or as perceived community participants; the Olympics does not speak to us, even worse, it makes us invisible. We see ourselves through the Olympics as an awkward presence, unwanted guests at the party, and that our refusal to get on-message is as much of a threat as the graffiti on the blue site perimeter fence that is painted

over as soon as it appears. As Kay points out, we are the wrong kind of locals, in need of re-making by the Olympics as it decimates our neighbourhood.

Kay: I see things about our area's 'diversity' being such an asset to the games but even though we are members of a minority group, I don't feel like we are the right kind of diverse. We are local people, but I feel that we are not the right kind of local people who are supposed to be stakeholders in the Olympics. Not parents, but fatties and queers. We are outsiders who are right in the middle of it.

Charlotte: Are we not the right kind because we are not compliant with regards to the messages being put forward by the ODA and the IOC? Is it because we are critical voices?

Kay: Yes. And I don't really care about sport!

Charlotte: The awful truth! I don't really like it either, I hate competitiveness, or the patriotism that is so central to the Olympics.

Kay: Yes, the whole 'Team GB' medal table obsession that's grown in the past few years is a turn-off to me.

Charlotte: I find it grotesque.

Kay: I remembered that one of the touted reasons that London won over the other cities bidding was our area's great diversity and ethnic mix. But what I see happening, what the artists impressions of the legacy show is a whitening and gentrifying force. It's all chain stores and big business, big money. The diversity that was so precious is slipping away.

Charlotte: Can you give an example of local flavour that's disappearing?

Kay: I guess what is disappearing from Stratford is the small businesses. I'm really worried about the market. I hope it will be valued and survive but I can see it disappearing. Or old Stratford becoming a ghost town when the Stratford City mega-mall opens and shifts the centre of town.

Charlotte: The developers say it won't on the promotional literature I've seen, but then they would say that. I wonder what the developer's vision for it is, can you guess?

Kay: I don't know. Local opposition has destroyed the plan to replace Queen's Market in Upton Park (another local East End



neighbourhood) with an Asda supermarket, which would have been affiliated to Wal-Mart. But the market is still going to be redeveloped to make it 'a nicer place to shop' and I think it will mean that the current stallholders will face rent hikes. I bet there are planners at the council with fantasies of turning Stratford market into some kind of Borough Market experience.

Charlotte: Yes, turning it into a facsimile of what a market is imagined to be, instead of a workaday market it will be a gourmet yuppified tourist destination.

Kay: Yes. I was thinking that we are coming across as anti-change, but I am not anti- change at all. It's like what I have said before, at least this change is somewhat regulated as it's part of a big national project, but still the scrutiny is not enough. The unregulated stuff that ripples out from it, like opportunistic property developers, like the proliferation of estate agents and the arrival of Starbucks. This is too much.

Charlotte: That reminds me of the local businesses that are facing prosecution if they use any of the sacred Olympic words without permission, i.e. paying for it. Yet the main sponsors are global multinationals. It's disturbing that businesses and people with history and stake in the area are being elbowed out by the big guys.

Watson (2006) presents a series of accounts about another London street market and notices that painful race narratives are erased in the reports given by some of the respondents, particularly those of dominant ethnic groups. She argues that nostalgia can only present a partial narrative, and that an idealized imagined past prevents positive engagement with creating change in the present. Watson's claim has led me to wonder if Kay and I are presenting a nostalgic account in this piece. Whose accounts are being lost in my own presentation of 'facts'? Are we clinging to a nostalgic past, afraid of change? Perhaps the change that the Olympics are bringing might be more palatable to my girlfriend and I if we were not being bulldozed into it, literally. What concerns me is the startling lack of sustained community critique, that without such resistance there is no creative tension between the developers and the places under enforced development. I am bothered that there is no clear involvement of local people within this discourse, and thus little idea of the costs and benefits of the Olympics.

## ***Fear and intervention***

What surprised me in the IM session was noticing how fearful I am and that anxiety, as well as anger and dissent, is central to how I experience the impact of the Olympics where I live. My fear resonates through my gender and class identities, that is, although I am relatively secure as a co-owner of my home, my history as a working class woman suggests that stability is an illusion, that I am powerless, and that my security can be taken away from me very easily. Fear and paranoia are not part of the official 2012 publicity machine, but they are understandable effects of rapid monumental social change in a previously poor neighbourhood which is being channelled through ideology and spin.

Charlotte: I don't think it matters whether we're on-side or not, the Olympics will just do what they want to the place where we live. It makes me feel very helpless. A way I cope with this is to say 'Change is inevitable' but that doesn't seem right. It's like the wrong kind of change, it's imposed, commercialised, it's not democratic, it's about greed and patriotism. I think it's also a way in for things like civil-liberties-compromising anti-terrorism legislation, which is already seen as a problem in the East End, and heavy-handed policing and social control, which is also an existing problem. I often think of the perimeter fence that was described in the planning documents, enclosing a space that was previously open. I wonder how the area will be policed. I like to think that we will be obstructive and vocal embarrassments to the Olympics, when they come here, but I'm also doubtful that anything we could say or do would make a difference. I'm so surprised how little critical commentary there is. Or maybe there is, but it's suppressed. Look how paranoid I am! But it's not surprising really, with all the disinformation that's flying around.

Kay: Mmm. I think that the chief feeling is the one of being intervened on. That's not good English, but you know what I mean? It's like we've said about how Stratford, the people of Newham, didn't need an intervention. The landscape too, it didn't need it. Streets and buildings have been wiped away, pasted over, and the nature too, I wonder about the heron I used to see on the waterworks river.

Charlotte: I think related to this interfering (maybe that's the word you were looking for?) is a sense of puny anger. I feel lied to. The public consultations are lies. My letters don't get replies. It is crazy-making. I feel vulnerable, like my house could be taken from me or something, unlikely I know. It's hard to explain it.

Kay: Well, stuff already has been taken. The railwaymen's cottages, some of Stratford's oldest buildings, were demolished by a developer who wanted to build a tower block on the site; the hairdressers, owned by three local women that is now a national estate agent chain because their rent went up and they couldn't afford to keep the place on; and the Mayor's lies in the local press about the Beijing Olympic torch parade being 'a blazing success' even though we have him on camera on the day saying that it was a disaster and that he was enraged by the way that the IOC had treated Stratford. No wonder you feel vulnerable. I imagine your neighbour would love to get his hands on your flat to turn it into a more profitable venture.

### ***Fattylympics***

As a fat activist and Fat Studies scholar (see my work in Tomrley and Kaloski Naylor 2009, Solovay and Rothblum 2009, Monaghan, Aphramor, and Rich 2009, or my own book on the subject, Cooper 1998, for example), I am interested in the ways that fat can be used as a lens to interrogate the Olympics. I am grateful to Lenskyj (2008), who notes the use of anti-obesity rhetoric within Olympics discourse, her work helps legitimize Kay's and my accounts as fat people encountering Olympic hype.

In her discussion of the intersections between shame and sporting embodiment, Probyn (2000) examines the manner in which sporting bodies can bring shame to the nation. Building on her work, I would suggest that queer fat bodies such as Kay's and mine shame the nation because they undermine Olympic rhetoric of competitive lean athleticism, even amongst bodies that are ostensibly big as in the women's field events, for example, and heterocentrism. I acknowledge that other bodies face exclusion in the Olympics, for

example intersexed people, and people with learning disabilities in the Paralympics, but it is fatness that I wish to look at here.

Queerness itself is not an innate marker of outsiderhood with regard to Olympics-style events, as Waitt (2002) demonstrates in his work around the 2002 Sydney Gay Games. There were a variety of responses from local LGBT communities towards this event, some of Waitt's respondents were able to use the gay games to challenge their exclusion from wider cultural discourse, and others criticized the event's underlying ideology that included the social disciplining of unruly bodies. I am wary of conflating the Gay Games with the Olympics; there are many similarities, but they have clear differences of scale and cultural meaning. But the Fattylympics could certainly ally itself with such resistance, and this is intensified because of the intersection of fatness with queerness. Whilst there is no doubt that homophobia and the pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture impacts upon queer people (see Bernstein Sycamore 2008 for examples), fat people in the UK are subjected to systematic and explicit harassment through government programmes, a moral panic, healthist public agendas and related commercial interests.

In this excerpt, Kay and I talk about our fantasies for creating fat culture and community in the face of the intense fatphobia of the Olympics.

Charlotte: We are two radical fat people, can we talk about how the Olympics is being used to stir up fatphobia? Especially given the context that Newham is one of the most ethnically rich as well as one of the fattest and poorest boroughs in the country, and that we are in the midst of a moral panic around fatness known as the Global Obesity Epidemic?

Kay: There are so many myths about why the Olympics is a good thing for an area. Getting youth involved in sport and growing medal winners of the future is just one of them, I suppose.

Charlotte: And the reality of that is so bogus: bullying fat kids to lose weight, sport as a 'way out,' or rather

embourgeoisement, for working class ethnic minority kids. It's a kind of crowing superiority which is mixed with an anxiety that we're not good enough to win medals.

Kay: Think of the children! There is also the idea that having an Olympics will make fat kids active, because the assumption is that they are not, get them into sport, and get rid of the so-called obesogenic environment where they live. It's the idea that Olympic pride will cajole fat people into 'doing something about their problem' and stop 'letting themselves go.'

Charlotte: So the Olympics is a means through which we can find our real, thinner, authentic selves? I think those weight loss transformation fantasies are so false and pernicious.

Kay: Yes, that's what we are all hoping for, but you and I may be a lost cause. It's all about the idea that we are helpless lumps who need doing to, like the area needs doing to.

Charlotte: And we're a problem because we are not helpless lumps who need doing to at all, we don't want their 'help'.

Kay: What do you want to say about the Fattylympics?

Charlotte: I want to describe it. It's a fantasy we have about putting on an event, like a school sports day, with silly events and prizes for everyone, A have-a-go mentality where it doesn't matter who wins. I'd like it to be for the fatties, with events that we are good at, like gut-barging, Sumo, balancing, or rolling! No expertise required.

Kay: Yes, very short races, like the 10 metres! With gradated starting points based on the size of your belly so that no one has an unfair girth-based advantage of crossing the line first! I'd like it to be like that Big Moves dance workshop we did at NOLOSE (US fat queer conference), where the pleasure is all about joy in your body, being hott, being phat.

Charlotte: Hehe. I imagine being with a load of friends, riotous fatties, shy people finding themselves, sunshine, pop. It's utopian!

Kay: Yes, and we could make up games that anyone can do, where everyone wins!

Charlotte: Sigh. Sometimes I think the world isn't made for us.

Kay: So what! They can't chuck us off it!

Longhurst (2005), a geographer, notes that fat people endure physical discomfort in a built environment that frequently does not fit fat bodies, for example turnstiles, seating, cubicles. She calls for a proxemics (254) that interrogates how fat bodies fit, or do not fit, into spaces. I would suggest that it is likely the Olympics development, like many public spaces, will feature seating, turnstiles, and other aspects of the built environment, that are uncomfortable for fat people to navigate, especially those of us who are super-sized. To this I would add that such spaces are not only physically uncomfortable, they exclude people whose bodies do not fit, they offer a symbolic reprimand to transgressive fat bodies, and are psychologically uncomfortable. In contrast, a Fattylympics could assert the right of queer fat people to exist, and to express our embodiment, whilst critiquing the physical and psychological barriers presented to us by the Olympics through satire and mutual support.

### ***Making it our own***

As the Olympics tries to re-make Stratford and the people within it, so we are active in resisting and re-making the Olympics into a phenomenon that better suits us. Thus the Fattylympics is one means through which Kay and I are beginning to exercise agency and choice, and our blog is another. I hope that we might encounter others who are also critically engaged with the Olympics, I would love to be part of a community. The final excerpt from the IM session shows that although ambivalence, anger and fear are

central components of how we experience Uhlympics, there is also complexity, contradiction, humour and hope.

Charlotte: I was thinking about The Coronet being turned into an estate agent's. That's the pub where we had our first date in 1997. A place where two dykes could get together doesn't exist any more.

Kay: Yes, and there are no queer spaces planned for the Games or the legacy, surprise surprise, although the leaflets talk about faith-based spaces. Where will the visiting lady shotputters go?

Charlotte: Round to my house!

Kay: You!

Charlotte: If you were in charge, how would you organise things differently?

Kay: I would abdicate the Olympics, give it to Paris and go over for a day trip on the Eurostar.

Charlotte: Hahah! They can have it!

Kay: Seriously though. I'd love to see a small scale, community organised, DIY Olympics.

Charlotte: That would be sweet. Is there anything about the Olympics that you are looking forwards to?

Kay: Oh yes. I think I will love watching it unfold, the spectacle of it all. It is all very interesting, noticing things like we do. I'm kind of looking forward to seeing the last minute scrambles, the fudges, and the fuck ups too. Am I sick? Also synchro, diving, weightlifting.

Charlotte: I think this is part of the weirdness of the Olympics. I feel angry that it's here, furious about what the IOC does, but also excited about the changes. I feel lucky to have this insider perspective, it's like we get to see through the lies, to some extent. I think this is a good position to be in, for anyone, in the 21st century.

Kay: I hope to capitalise in some way with my East End chancer spirit!

Charlotte: How are you going to do that?

Kay: Olympic ring cupcakes for sale on the front drive? Or ring doughnuts!

Charlotte: You'll get arrested by the Olympic police! Trademark infraction!

Kay: That'd be fun too: 'Quick, eat the evidence!'

## **Conclusion**

The first thing that strangers say to me when I tell them that I live close to the 2012 Olympic site is: 'Are you going to rent out your home for the Games? I bet you could make a lot of money that way.' The expected answer is always 'Yes,' which stems from the assumption that the Olympics is worthless to me other than as a vehicle for generating cash deviously.

The fact that I find this somewhat intrusive question difficult to answer speaks to the ambivalence and complexity with which I view the Olympics, which is clearly articulated in the rich data of this autoethnography. It cannot be reduced to a good/bad or yes/no binary, which fits with the postmodern methodology used to develop this article. The Olympics forcibly redefines local people with private affairs as public citizens of the world, it coerces with an intrusive global agenda, but it also underestimates those citizens' agency. As I have shown in this essay, eradication and invisibility are deeply



disturbing Olympic effects, but the Games and its surrounding development offer amazing opportunities for fun, mischief and resistance, especially for those like myself who advocate DIY culture interventions. For Kay and I, and probably others too, although we do not yet know those people, and might not ever know them, they are platforms for subversive activism and critical interrogation, ways of re-imagining ourselves and our relationships to the places where we live.

### Acknowledgements

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