The Tokyo Olympics 2020 Sport Stadium Controversy: Exploring the Role of Star Architects and Global Brands

Tomoko Tamari

Goldsmiths, University of London   t.tamari@gold.ac.uk.

The Olympics is a contested site of sovereignty in terms of power balancing between the political (government), economic (global capitalism), cultural (iconic architects) entities and citizens. The paper focuses on iconic Olympic stadia designed by star architects in the era of global capitalism and explores the shifting and multifaceted identities of the iconic architects in global cultural industries.   Taking the 2020 Tokyo Olympic stadium as a case study, the paper unpacks the relationship between the material and symbolic infrastructure of iconic architecture, which involves political interests, economic capitals and site-specific memories. The paper argues that the Olympic stadium is an ideal site to examine the strategically constructed images and values of iconic architects and spectacular architecture, and that reveals the narrativisation and commodification of star architects and iconic buildings necessarily make themselves into 'a global brand'. In this context, the paper concludes that national grand architectural projects, such as the construction of Olympic sport stadia, cannot operate outside the regime of global and local politics, and beyond the logic of neoliberal transnational capitalism.

Keywords: Iconic architects, Olympics Sport Stadium, Global brand, Global capitalism

Introduction

It is generally accepted that the Olympics are an assemblage comprised of a human-made spectacle, national branding, and city planning at one and the same time. It is also a contested field of sovereignty in terms of the power balance between political (government), economic (global capitalism), cultural (iconic architects) entities and citizens. The paper particularly focuses on iconic architecture and architects in the context of Olympic culture in the era of global capitalism. The Olympic stadium could be seen as one of the most noticeable Olympic facilities, since it draws a good deal of attention as an iconic building designed by star architects. Taking the 2020 Tokyo Olympic stadium as a case study, the paper unpacks the relationship between the material and symbolical infrastructure of iconic architecture, which involves political interests, economic capitals and site-specific memories.

Rather than focusing on various critical issues: such as the massive budgets for a 'white elephants' Olympic stadia; analysing architecture designs; criticising the process of the design competition; or problematising related political issues in the Japanese architectural industry, all of which has already been extensively discussed, the paper investigates the socio-cultural implications of the iconic Olympic stadium designed by globally branded star architects. By doing so, the paper conceptualises 'branding' as an economic and cultural system, which works to incorporate 'a new set of symbolic values' into iconic buildings and star architects. Although the branding system institutes a new pragmatism for star architects, the immanent

nature of brand of 'iterability and seriality' makes brand a contingent entity that swings between exclusiveness and banality. The paper concludes with an examination of Kengo Kuma's architecture language of his 2020 Tokyo Olympics stadium design.

Architects in the era of the global capitalism

Today we find that iconic architecture not only provides representations of national identity and traditional narratives, but also becomes a contested political site involving state, global capitalists, iconic architects and citizens. The expanding field of global capitalism with its flow of financial power increases the political and economic influence of iconic architecture as '*a heteronomous practice*'[1]. This means that architectural practices become driven by multi-layered powerful agents and actors. Such a contested situation, therefore makes it difficult for established architects to maintain their autonomous freedom to design every detail of their buildings. Furthermore, they have to negotiate and adopt to a given local context, and at the same time cooperate with transnational economic and financial powers in the era of the global capitalism.

Hence, iconic architecture cannot be understood just as a nation-led-political device or architectural signature, but also as a site for the investment, promotion and legitimation of the social status of 'transnational urban elites'[2]. These are, what Sklair calls, the 'Transnational Capitalist Class'. Sklair explains that 'in the pre-global era, iconic architecture tended to be driven by the state and/or religion'[3], while in the era of capitalist globalization, the 'transnational capitalist class' has increasingly become the central power to 'define the times, places and audiences that make buildings, space and architecture iconic'[4]. In such circumstances, unlike many modernist giants, such as F. L. Wright or Le Corbusier, who could enjoy their relatively freedom to realize their innovative architecture design, contemporary architects have to engage in self-promotion to become favourable ones for the global financial power.

Branding iconic architects

If we accept the idea of 'the values of currency of the "famous" dominate architectural culture, and the production and *marketing* of architectural iconic buildings and signature architecture'[5](emphasis added) come to be a central factor in contemporary architectural production, then it is important for successful architects, to not only become star architects, but to make themselves into a powerful brand. As cultural theorist and architect, Daniel Libeskind, argues this provides an interesting social recognition of 'Starchitects': First, 'they are identifiable individuals', second, '(their buildings) are often associated with striking shapes or concepts' and third, 'they have a strong capacity for self-promotion'[6]. To further the

[1] McNeill, Donald. *The Global Architect Firms, Fame and Urban Form.* (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

[2] Those who 'tend not to associate themselves with any specific city or locale have no particular interest in urban social and political life' (Kaika 2011:975).

[3] Sklair, Leslie. Iconic Architecture and Capitalist Globalization (City 10(1): 21-47, 2006), 21.

[4] Ibid, 138.

[5] Larson, 1994: 470 cited in Horn, John. Architects, Stadia and Sport Spectacles: Notes on the Role of Architects in the Building of Sport Stadia and Making of World-Class Cities (*International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 46(2): 205-227, 2011), 208.

[6] See McNeill, Donald. *The Global Architect Firms, Fame and Urban Form.* (London: Routledge, 2009), 62.

analytical understanding of 'self-promotion', McNeill further discusses '(The Hollywood) star system' which become the major apparatus to create charismatic stars for the screens. He remarked on the similarities with the production of architectural celebrity in terms of its 'systematic, industrialized process of promoting individuals with a particular uniqueness or distinctiveness,'[7]. This suggests that iconic architects are socially constructed products. They strategically commodified themselves to become 'iconic brands'. In 1990s Frank Gehry and, his masterpiece Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and its 'Bilbao effect' can be seen as a classic example[8].

Zaha Hadid and a multifaceted identity

Hadid was also categorized as on the "A" list of name brand architects. She was the first female winner of the Pritzker Architecture Prize (2004) and was acknowledged as one of the 'World's Most Powerful Women' by *Forbes* and *TIME* magazine who included her in the '100 Most Influential People in the World'[9]. Her architecture has often been described as 'the utopian visions of Suprematism and Constructivisn into the promised land of actual building'[10]. Like Frank Gehry's works, her architecture stands for striking contemporary urban spectacles. As her architectural projects caught public imagination across the globe, her own presence becomes more visible to the public.

This is not only because increasing her appearance in the media, but also understood as a result of the prominence of art museums which started to involve in making connections between art and architecture. In this trend, like other starchitects, Hadid's architectural projects have been exhibited by many leading art museums and featured as a contemporary art form. Her company Zaha Hadid Architects's projects appeared at New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 2006, London's Design Museum in 2007 Saint Petersburg's State Hermitage Museum in 2015 and London's Serpentine Galleries in 2016[11]. Hence, her public recognition and identity become multifaceted: architect, designer, and artist. She extended her fields to art and design which is a significant part of cultural production, as her company, Zaha Hadid Architects proclaims '[w]e are in the business of cultural production'[12].

Zaha Hadid as a successful global brand

Being recognised as an avant-garde contemporary architect, she developed her hybrid talents to contribute to collaboration between architecture, art and commerce in the contemporary cultural industries. This is because her philosophy was based on a challenge to conventional concepts and ideas of architecture and to

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[7] Ibid, 64.

[8] An architecture critic Hal Foster, speaking about Frank Gehry in Sydney Pollack's film *Sketches of Frank Gehry*, "he's given his clients too much of what they want, a sublime space that overwhelms the viewer, a spectacular image that can circulate through the media and around the world as brand" (Rowan Moore). https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/oct/01/bilbao-effect-frank-gehry-guggenheim-global-craze (accessed 29 March 2018).

[9] http://www.zaha-hadid.com/people/zaha-hadid/ (Accessed 3 April 2018).

[10] Foster, Hal. *The Art-Architecture Complex* (New York: Verso, 2013), 85.

[11] http://www.zaha-hadid.com/people/zaha-hadid/ (accessed 3 April 2018).

[12] 'about us movies' in the official site of Zaha Hadid Architects http://www.zaha-hadid.com/videos (accessed 4 April 2018).

provide new 'design at all scales' from city planning, architecture, interior, artefact, even fashion in order to propose new ways of life[13]. But this could also be seen as an important marketing strategy of self-promotion to become a new global brand. The brand provides not only various types of products and design, more importantly it creates a set of meanings, new value and narratives to integrate into images of a product, a company or a person. Hence, as the manifesto of Zaha Hadid Architects ('[w]e are in the business of cultural production') indicates, it is significant for contemporary architects to create not just material, but also provide immaterial values, that is 'images' with 'a hermeneutic sensibility' [14] - creating a set of new ideas, meanings and sensibility in the cultural industries. This is formation process of the brand. This process can also be applied to Hadid herself and the way which she became a successful brand. She had to promote herself as a brand *producer* as well as 'as a *product* within a brand-name structure of cultural marketing' [15].

Zaha Hadid and the Tokyo Olympic stadium

In order to become an 'ideologically' constructed global brand[16], one of the most beneficial ways is to acquire a complex and ambitious grand architectural project, such as the Olympic stadium. Since it is one of the few occasions, in which architecture (therefore architects) become a matter of public interests. Particularly the issue of design of the Olympic stadium often draws a good deal of media attention. Zaha Hadid won the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Stadium competition. Her design was for an 80,000-seat and 75-meter height stadium. But the plan faced widespread criticism and intensive debate. It was oversize (8 times bigger than the Yoyogi National Stadium built in 1964). The budget (252bn yen (£1.3bn, $2bn) was also doubled the original plan. More importantly, the plan showed to little concern with the site-specific historical meanings of the memories of the Meiji Emperor. After viewing the revised stadium design, the budget was scaled down - 40% reduction in budget [from 300bn yen (1.8 bn pound) to 169bn yen (970m pounds)]. Yet, it still could not gain a satisfactory reaction from Japanese architects and the public.

One of the leading Japanese architects, Fumihiko Maki published his article on the design of the new national stadium and protested against the plan in *JIA Magazine* in 2013. This led to organizing symposiums and workshops which discussed the new national stadium; symposium, 'reconsidering the design of new national stadium in the site-specific historical context' with Fumihiko Maki et. al. in November 2013; public workshop 'let's learn about how the national stadium should be' with Mayumi Mori et. al. in January 2014; symposium, 'another possibility for the new national stadium' with Toyo Ito et. al. in May 2014; international symposium 'Aesthetics for the city and architecture: case of the new national stadium' with Fumihiko Maki et. al. in July 2014.

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[13] Zaha Hadid Architects, video clip in http://www.zaha-hadid.com/videos/#about-us (accessed 4 April 2018).

[14] Lash, Scott and Urry, John. *Economics Sings and Space* (London: Sage, 1994), 123.

[15] Frow, John. *Signature and Brand* in J. Collins (Ed.), High-Pop: Making Culture into Public Entertainment: 56-74, 2002, 63.

[16] See Ibid, 70-71.

Public voices in the new media

The criticism of Zaha Hadid's design for the Tokyo Olympic stadium was found in various public events and print media, but also in Internet dialogues. The dialogues are created by those who are concerned with the political conflicts of ideologies, interests from various competing groups. Such public platforms are the so-called 'blogsphere'[17]. An architectural critic, Takashi Moriyama started his blog 'about the debates of the new national stadium competition' in November 2013[18]; The custodians of the national stadium, Tokyo has started their blog in October, 2013[19]; a writer, broadcaster and neuroscientist, Kenichiro Mogi twitted to support Maki's proposal in June 2015[20]. There were also articles posted by not-well-known or unknown bloggers: such as 'Is the new national stadium Hadid's curse? Comparison of its cost with that of the other Olympics'[21]; 'Zaha Hadid "is it really true that the new national stadium will be constructed?"'[22]. In this movement, their negative narratives against Hadid's Olympic stadium design increasingly gained a good deal of the public attention. The collective and shared critical views of Hadid' architectural plan was gaining a strong influential impetus on the government decision process and it was cancelled in the end. This social phenomenon is what Cass Sunstein calls 'cybercascades'. He depicts '[w]ith respect to the Internet, the implication is that groups of like-minded people, engaged in discussion with one another, will end up thinking the same thing that they thought before – but in more extreme form' [23].

Even after the governmental formal cancellation had been made, Hadid's office announced their design's promotion video which obviously deliberately sought to appeal to Japanese citizens to legitimate the appropriateness of their design in August 2015. But it was too late to subvert negative public opinion and to establish proper legitimacy between Zaha Hadid Architects, the government, and citizens. Hence, we can see that the Olympic stadium is a space, which is produced by wider social-political contexts (e.g. star-architects, bureaucracy, and capitalism), but also a space mediated by public spaces, which can be re-constructed and influenced by the unprecedented degree of audience participation though broader dialogues between internet users.

The nature of brand

Yet the failure of Hadid's project cannot be understand without further considering the nature of brand, as discussed above. Frow emphasizes two aspects of brand identity. The first element is that brands have 'personalities'[24]. The personalization of brand can be found its evidence in the way in which many celebrities ('brand characters') endorsed products. Their 'personal imaginary significance' transfers to

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[17] Kang, Jaeho and Traganou, Jilly. The Beijing National Stadium as Media-space. (*Design and Culture)* 3(2): 145-163, 2011,155.

[18] https://ameblo.jp/mori-arch-econo/entry-11646600598.html accessed 28 June 2018.

[19] 2020-tokyo.sakura.ne.jp accessed 28 June 2018.

[20] https://twitter.com/kenichiromogi/status/615657064275161088 accessed 28 June 2018.

[21] https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2014/06/23/how-much-new-national-stadium_n_5520920.html accessed 28 June 2018.

[22] http://burusoku-vip.com/archives/1757469.html accessed 28 June 2018.

[23] http://www.woldww.net/classes/Information_Ethics/Sunstein_on_Group_Polarization_and_Cyber-Cascades.pdf

[24] Haigh 1998:8 cited in Frow, John. *Signature and Brand* (in J. Collins (Ed.), High-Pop: Making Culture into Public Entertainment: 56-74, 2002), 68.

commodities so as to create 'a semiotic surplus value' [25]. The second is that brands reveals symbolic value 'as a reflection of the buyer's self-image'[26]. This is a process of imaginary identification[27]. If we follow this logic, Hadid's super futuristic avant-garde Tokyo Olympic stadium could reflect an image of Japanese citizens themselves. This is because the Olympic stadium can play as a national symbol. It is designed to be an architectural icon so that the stadium is a showcase of Japan for the world (nation branding) as well as helping to create a positive self-image for Japanese citizens (self-esteem). Following this theory, it could be useful to explore representations of the stadium in the internet in order to illuminate associations between image of the stadium and people's self-esteem. There are many articles on the ways which the stadium could be likened to everyday 'objects': 'Could it become the Olympic stadium? *Cyclist helmet* shape of the new national studium' in 2012 November[28]; '*Go-kart, helmet, potty*? Alternative uses for Zaha Hadid's Olympic stadium' in July 2015[29]. All these negative complains can be understood as revealing the general unease with identifying the stadium as a national symbol in the public domain.

Figure 1   Zaha Hadid's revised design of the Tokyo Olympic Stadium

Interestingly, the words, 'shame and embarrassment' can be also often used to evaluate the stadium design in media text: Fumihiko Maki depicted '(the new stadium) will be sneered at and will be an *embarrassing* construction.'[30]: emeritus professor of Tokyo Institute of Technology, Sachihiko Harashina stated, '(the plan of the new national stadium) is *embarrassing*'[31]; a critic and anthropologist, Shinichi Nakazawa also mentioned ' (I) feel *embarrassed* with the new plan which ignored the history of Jingu resion' [32]. The Hadid's design image has been described using 'disgraceful' metaphors (helmet, go-cart, potty) and explained as 'something shameful or embarrassing' in statements.

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[25] Ibid, 66 .

[26] Kapfere 1992:2 cited in Ibid, 86.

[27] see Laplanche and Pontalis's 1973:210 cited in Ibid, 86.

[28] http://www.afpbb.com/articles/-/2912192?cx_position=9 accessed 28 June 2018.

[29] https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jul/17/go-kart-helmet-potty-alternative-uses-for-zaha-hadids-olympic-stadium accessed 28 June 2018.

[30] http://world-architects.blogspot.com/2014/10/nationalstadium-symposium.html accessed 28 June 2018.

[31] https://iwj.co.jp/wj/open/archives/255542 accessed 28 June 2018.

[32] https://logmi.jp/63841 accessed 28 June 2018.

It is argued that what is common to 'shame and embarrassment' [33] is that both are regarded as self-awareness and as revealing the painful states in which 'the individual believes she or he has failed to meet appropriate standards or conduct, and is seen to have done so in the eyes of others' [34]. At this point, we can see psychological reflections in usage of the words. This suggests that Japanese people felt 'shame', because Hadid's design failed to meet the appropriate goal. People are also 'embarrassed', because such failure has been seen by foreign countries. Such psychological reflections can be understood as threatening Japanese people's self-esteem. Hence the Hadid's new national stadium can be seen as a painful and unacceptable image of Japan. This suggests that the power of global architectural brands don't always succeed in changing conventional values and propose something 'different' and the desire to create new lifestyles in transformed urban landscapes. In other words, the Hadid's aesthetic icon which was explicitly designed for a distinctive moment in a city project, part of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, in order to create a new socially, culturally and politically meaningful form, did failed.

Banalization of global iconic architecture

The attempt to mobilize of new aesthetics can also cause a weakening in the power of a brand. For Kaika[35], contemporary architects have lost their ability to pursue totalizing design ideas and ideals, and started 'the repetition of successful architectural design forms across the world' [36]. The point Kaika made is that star architects repeatedly reproduce their successful design forms and apply 'the same design code to express a multiplicity of meanings in different social and geographical context' [37]. Hence, there are always contradictions between the global brand's transnational form and value, and the site-specific history, memory and meanings. The paradox of distinctiveness lead to 'unspectacular spectacles' [38] and the gap between the various narratives, imaginaries and themes of 'the spectacular global', and 'vernacular local' [39].

To turn to Hadid's Tokyo Olympic stadium plan, we can consider how far her 'signature architecture' could encapsulate various problematic issues. As a global brand, her Tokyo Stadium designed noticeably applied her signature form in using sweeping curvy streamlines and a computer graphic rendered dynamic shape. A similar form and design code can be easily found in her many other architectural projects[40], which lead

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[33] Crozier 2014:273. Crozier explains, 'shame' is caused by negative self-evaluation or failure to meet ideal self-goals, and 'embarrassment' involves a matter of social evaluation, rather than self-evaluation (Crozer 2014:270).
[34] W. Ray Crozier *Walter Raymond Crozier*
(2014) Differentiating Shame from Embarrassment, *emotion review* Vol6 (3): 273.
[35] Kaika, Maria, Autistic Architecture: the Fall of the Icon and the Rise of Serial Object of Architecture (Society and Space 29:968-922, 2011), 980.
[36] Ibid, 980.
[37] Ibid, in the figure caption 980.
[38] Horne, John. Architects, Stadia and Sport Spectacles: Notes on the Role of Architects in the Building of Sport Stadia and Making of World-Class Cities. (*International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 46(2): 205-227, 2011), 218.
[39] Ibid, 218.
[40] For examples, London Aquatic Centre and Al Wakrah Stadium (Scheduled inauguration: 2018)

to lose features of distinctiveness, and can therefore become 'unspectacular spectacles'. An oft found criticism of iconic buildings in general and Hadid's Olympic stadium in particular is that it can be seen as a product of the architect's over-self consciousness and is less concerned with the local context.

Figure 2   London Aquatic Centre designed by Zaha Hadid Architects
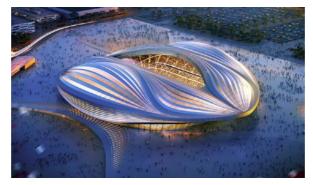

Figure 3   Al Wakrah Stadium designed by Zaha Hadid Architects

Furthermore, the more her signature can be found on various vernacular everyday objects; including furniture, handbags, shoes, fashion accessories, flower vases, and chandeliers, the more Hadid's brand exclusiveness and scarcity value became weakened.

Figure 4   Melissa + Zaha Hadid = Cool Plastic Footwear

Yet this can be the immanent nature of brands, since the process of the 'iterability and seriality' [41]of appearance in brands only enable a particular product or producer to make it/he/she become 'a brand'. In this sense, the broadly distributed Hadid's signature and image of branded products ('objects' as well as 'herself') were always already implied in the very nature of the brand – its powerful, but inherited contingency and ephemerality. Hence, the Tokyo Olympic stadium as one of the most powerful Hadid's signature products can be identified as the very existential archetypal case of the signature architecture, since it was the 'branded' stadium (therefore it can be 'exclusive'), but it has to be accessible to everyone (therefore it can be 'vernacular'). The stadium was promoted to blur the boundary between the value of 'brand' and that of mass-production. Therefore, Hadid's global brand was not able to sustain its symbolic matrix of brand power in the context of the construction of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic stadium.

Conclusion

As discussed so far, Hadid's Tokyo Olympic stadium plan and its trajectory was a good example to understand the shifting role and identity of iconic architects and 'branded' architecture in the era of global capitalism. The Olympic sport stadium as a contested juxtaposition of political power, economic interests and symbolic capital, the paper attempts to analyse branding as a concept, which helps to understand reciprocated hermeneutic relationship between material (architects and architecture) and immaterial (a set of new symbolic value and narratives). Branding architecture and creating star architects are a newly found pragmatism for surviving in competitive architectural industry. Narrativization and commodification of star architects and iconic buildings are necessitated to promote their higher public profile and making themselves as a global brand. Hadid was a star architect and the most manufactured icon. Her failure, however, suggests that the power of brand can be subject to contingency. Declining the power of brand can also be discussed in terms of its immanence nature. Brands reveal symbolic value 'as a reflection of the buyer's self-image'. In this logic, there was a discrepancy between the symbolic value of Hadid's architecture and the imaginaries of Japanese self-identity. Also, the repetitive design as artistic signature of iconic building can always generate contradiction: 'unspectacular spectacles' [42]. Furthermore, the wide diffusion of her signature in consumer goods leads to the weakening of the distinctiveness and exclusiveness of her brand image.

After Hadid's design was cancelled, a Japanese architect Kengo Kuma took over the Tokyo Olympic stadium project.[43] He is not seeking to create spectacular buildings, but to 'naturally merges with its cultural and environmental surroundings, proposing gentle, human scaled buildings --- constantly in search

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[41] Frow, John. *Signature and Brand* (in J. Collins (Ed.), High-Pop: Making Culture into Public Entertainment: 56-74, 2002), 71.

[42] Horn, John. Architects, Stadia and Sport Spectacles: Notes on the Role of Architects in the Building of Sport Stadia and Making of World-Class Cities. (*International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 46(2): 205-227, 2011), 218.

[43] There are many critical views about his victory, since Japanese construction industry has been dominated by a few giant construction companies who have capacity to complete mega architectural projects. The second competition required short construction time and cost-down. This only makes it possible to deploy design-built systems in which an architect and construction company work together as a team. Architects have to negotiate and compromise with strong construction companies which retain advanced architectural technologies and rich resources.

of new materials to replace concrete and steel, and seeks a new approach for architecture in a post-industrial society'.[44] Wood is his preferred material. Concrete and steel can be seen as a symbol of 20th century modernity, but he uses natural wood instead. For him, wood could be the best material to reunite people and nature by creating nearly-forgotten-natural aesthetic sensitivities. Kuma's challenge as an architect in 21th century contemporary society seems to subvert the logic of modernity which is seeking alternative idea of the mass production and banality of 'distinctiveness'. The Tokyo Olympic stadium should be a singular and original entity. However, it can be very hard to avoid to driven by the rationality of local politics and global capitalism. In hope, his architecture language for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic stadium should be accepted by sight-specific environments and could send to those outside Japan a national message about our legacy for the next generation. But this still leaves a question.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on Contributor
Dr. Tomoko Tamari is a lecturer in the Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship and member of the Centre for Urban and Community Research, Goldsmiths, University of London. She is managing editor of *Body & Society* (SAGE). She has recently published 'Metabolism: Utopian Urbanism and the Japanese Modern Architecture Movement' in *Theory Culture & Society,* (2016) Vol.31 (7-8). 'Body Image and Prosthetic Aesthetics' in *Body & Society* (2017) Vol.23 (1).

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Figure 1: Zaha Hadid's revised design of the Tokyo Olympic Stadium

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Figure 2 London Aquatic Centre designed by Zaha Hadid Architects

https://nickrileyarchitect.com/tag/the-aquatics-centre/ (accessed 29 July 2018).

Figure 3 Al Wakrah Stadium designed by Zaha Hadid Architects

http://www.stadiumguide.com/al-wakrah-stadium/ (accessed 29 June 2018).

Figure 4 Melissa + Zaha Hadid = Cool Plastic Footwear

https://design-milk.com/melissa-zaha-hadid-really-cool-plastic-footwear/ (accessed 29 June 2018).