

## Revisiting the Discourses of Art, Beauty and Sport from the 1906 Consultative Conference for the Arts, Literature and Sports

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### Introduction and Historical Preamble

This paper was motivated by two factors: my desire to better understand the Modern Olympic Movement in relation to other cultural movements of the same period; and, to examine the content of Baron Pierre de Coubertin's claim that 'Olympism is, in part, an aesthetic idea'.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this project attempts to draw together ideas about the nature of culture and the nature of beauty and art within the context of sport history.

In his autobiography, *Olympic Memoirs* (1932), Coubertin explained that the union of art and sport at the Olympic Games, had been delayed until 1906 because of administrative problems associated with the first three Olympiads.<sup>2</sup> He insisted that the idea of fostering a union between art and sport had been part of the original scheme for the revival of the Olympic Games in modern times. Although not acknowledging the advantages of hindsight, Coubertin stated that during the first Olympic Games in Athens (1896), "the solemnity of this first contact of contemporary youth with Pericles's rebuilt stadium prevented the search for new artistic and literary works inspired by the idea of sport."<sup>3</sup> On the occasion of the 1900 Games in Paris, he claimed that "the Universal Exposition wallowed in a veritable plethora of new forms and ideas, far too abundant for there to be any point in trying to include an effort so detailed and of such a special nature (as the inclusion of art at the Olympic Games)."<sup>4</sup> The confusion surrounding the transfer of the 1904 Olympic Games from Chicago to St. Louis resulted, once again, in a delay in developing the artistic and intellectual character of Olympism.<sup>5</sup> Anxiety over the prolonged omission of this important element of

modern Olympism, led him to take a more aggressive approach to rectifying the situation. In the spring of 1906, Pierre de Coubertin took a definitive step towards introducing the arts to the Olympic Games and thus initiating the second phase of his Olympic Revival.<sup>6</sup> With relatively little advertising or advance notice for IOC members, he initiated a plan to host a Consultative Conference for the Arts, Literature and Sports in May 1906.<sup>7</sup> The invitation to the Conference proposed a dual objective: (1) to study, in what form, the arts and literature could participate in the celebration of the modern Olympiads; and (2) how, in general, the arts and literature could benefit and ennoble the practice of sports.<sup>8</sup>

According to written histories on the Modern Olympic Movement, the most enduring product of the Consultative Conference was the Olympic Fine Arts Competitions.<sup>9</sup> This, however, is not the focus of this paper. The Fine Art Competitions have a relatively uninteresting history in spite of the importance sport historians have placed on them as the 'cultural component' of the Olympic Games.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, my own assessment of archival and literature sources indicate that the Olympic Fine Arts Competitions were, in fact, only a minor topic of discussion among the Conference delegates in 1906. The focus of my analysis is the actual discourse generated by the Conference and the forgotten themes expressed within this discourse.<sup>11</sup> In all, this research and analysis demonstrates that the Consultative Conference for the Arts, Literature and Sport provided an occasion for a moderately diverse assembly of individuals<sup>12</sup> to express their opinions on the aesthetical relationship between sport and art and art and the Olympic Games. Analysis of several essays presented at the Conference and reproduced in the *Revue Olympique* throughout 1906, reveals that aesthetical concepts were, for the most part, not introduced to construct a new artistic conceptualization of sport. Instead, the aesthetic discourse that Coubertin nurtured and the conference delegates embellished focused on the spectacle that envelopes sport. I argue that the Consultative Conference for the Arts, Literature and Sport, regardless of its enduring success or failure at uniting the arts with sport at the Olympic Games, at a very minimum signified a cultural bond between the Modern Olympic Movement and other cultural movements. This bond was consolidated by a number of shared

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ideas about art and beauty that transcended different cultural practices. Two of the most prominent themes were the aesthetic nature of the athletic body in motion and the possibility of integrating sporting activities with more traditional genres of performative culture to create a new type of popular open air spectacle.

### Conference Resolutions

Formally, the Conference delegates adopted seven resolutions.<sup>13</sup> In summary, they agreed that actions ought to be taken to enhance the artistic and aesthetic presentation of sport festivals. Four, of the seven, resolutions related specifically to the promotion and embellishment of sport festivals. In the area of architecture, the delegates unanimously adopted the principle that modern gymnasia should accommodate all sports. Endorsement of five Olympic Art Competitions was presented briefly among the Conference's results along with some rudimentary guidelines intended to govern the competitions. The delegates also recommended that during the interval leading up to the inaugural Olympic Art Competitions, the IOC ought to try encouraging other large sporting events (annual sport festivals, automobile shows, horse races, regattas, championships, etc.) to incorporate **some** appropriate artistic and literary manifestations in their programs.<sup>14</sup> The results of the Conference, as expressed in *the Revue Olympique* and the unpublished transcripts, included the delegates' pledge of support for Coubertin's ambitious "Bartholdi Monument." Two of the formal recommendations related to the conceptualization and possible construction of the sculptural monument intended to commemorate the "Renaissance physique" of the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Immediately following the Conference, Coubertin wrote a letter to important universities, federations and societies of sport--as he had been mandated by the delegates--to communicate the resolutions established at the Conference.<sup>16</sup> He summarized these resolutions in the following passage:

Elles nous a surtout demandé d'intervenir auprès des principales universités, fédérations ou sociétés de sport de l'univers à l'effet d'obtenir que, désormais, toutes grands manifestations sportives

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puissent revêtir un caractère littéraire et artistique par l'adjonction de concours de poésies ou de représentations dramatique appropriées et surtout de musique chorale en plein air--insistant d'ailleurs sur les nombreux avantages qu'il y aurait pour les sociétés de sport à créer dans leur sein même des sections chorales.<sup>17</sup>

(Above all else, we have been requested to work closely with the major universities and sport societies, in effect, to ensure that in the future, all great sporting manifestations can be clothed in a literary and artistic character by the addition of poetry competitions or the presentation of appropriate theatre productions and above all else open-air choral music--and to emphasize the numerous advantages for sporting societies that create their own choral sections.)<sup>18</sup>

Here, it is important to note that Coubertin emphasized the general, motherhood-type, resolutions as opposed to the very specific and tangible plan to hold Olympic Fine Arts Competitions. The discussions and resolutions of the conference were predominantly concerned with the relationship between art and sport in common daily situations. In at least two instances, Coubertin received confirmation that these recommendations would be considered.<sup>19</sup>

### Narrowing the High Culture Low Culture Polemic

The most significant contributions to the development of the aesthetic idea of Olympism, as it was articulated in the historical legacy of the Consultative Conference, came from Maurice Pottecher, M. Bourgault-Ducoudray, Pierre Roche and Max d'Ollone and, of course, Pierre de Coubertin.<sup>20</sup> The lectures and essays of these men were reproduced in *the Revue Olympique* following the Conference and constitute the primary sources examined in the remainder of this paper.

Pierre de Coubertin founded his Modern Olympic Games at approximately the same time that a new type of theatre, “people’s theatre,” was gaining critical force across Europe. The 1906 Consultative Conference brought the “people’s theatre” movement and the Modern Olympic Movement together briefly in the cultural history of France. Maurice Pottecher, one of France’s most prominent figures in the people’s theatre movement, factored prominently in the discourses generated by the Consultative Conference. Pottecher was the founder of the *Théâtre du Peuple* in Bussang and was a respected advocate for this new genre of theatre. “People’s theatre” troupes were characterized by amateur actors, the production of locally or regionally inspired plays, and rustic outdoor theatres.<sup>21</sup> Pottecher was insistent that the “people’s theatre” movement not be confused with other types of urban-based popular theatre such as vaudeville or the proletariat-based theatre movements associated with political socialism. His vision was clear:

..., j’en conçois un autre (genre du théâtre) plus vaste s’adressant à tous, capable à la fois d’émouvoir les cœurs les plus ingénus et d’intéresser les intelligences les plus cultivées, un théâtre aux vastes actions ou l’imagination fraîche et le jugement naïf mais sans part-pris et sans préjugés de la foule rajeuniraient le goût blasé de l’élite et se sentiraient en même temps guidés et soutenus par lui.<sup>22</sup>

(I have conceived of an other type of theatre, one much greater that is intended for everyone, capable at once of evoking the most unsophisticated hearts and interesting the most cultivated intellects, a theatre where grand actions from which fresh imagination and naive judgement, but without partisanship or prejudice of the masses, will rejuvenate the blase taste of the elite and at the same time be guided and sustained by it.)<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, he was proposing an unique genre of cultural performance that incorporated the best elements of folk culture and traditional elite theatre.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, a class defined aesthetic paranoia is quite evident in Pottecher’s theory. In stressing the importance of bridging social classes in culture without descending to the pathetic “vulgarity” of the lowest common denominator, he conveyed the same top-down (paternalistic) reformist methodology that Coubertin expressed in many of his texts.

Pottecher was not the only representative of a new trend in turn-of-the-century performance culture attending the Consultative Conference. The theories of Professor Bourgault-Ducoudray paralleled those of Pottecher in the areas of art, sport and culture, but with an emphasis on the discipline of music. Bourgault-Ducoudray promoted the formation of popular choral societies (*sociétés chorales populaires*). The ideas expressed in the essays of Bourgault-Ducoudray and Pottecher provided a conceptual link between aesthetic ideals and social ideals. They emphasized a fusion between traditional elite culture and manifestations of popular culture. But, for Bourgault-Ducoudray and Pottecher, popular art culture--be it theatre or choral music--was not conceived as a method of resolving social class distinctions.<sup>25</sup> Instead, they wanted to encourage a sharing of enthusiasm for, and exaltation of, art between diverse social classes.<sup>26</sup> This very particular theory of ‘popular art’ relied on the idea that universal ideals of beauty would evoke the same emotion and experience of pleasure in all social classes. Pottecher’s aspirations for a new classless theatre culture required that new theatrical productions be written and performed that represented the spirit of the French nation.<sup>27</sup> Thus, a new popular repertoire was intended to produce theatrical and musical masterpieces that conveyed the most universal ideas but within the context of burgeoning cultural nationalism. Expectations held that ‘people’s theatre’ and popular choral societies would unite different social classes through the clarity, simplicity and grandeur of innovative spectacles. In relation to the aesthetic idea of Olympism, the ideas expressed by Pottecher, Bourgault-Ducoudray and other representatives of this particular popular culture movement, such as René Morax and Romain Rolland, are significant because they represent an assimilation of aesthetic and social

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ideals that was particularly telling of French cultural politics of this period.<sup>28</sup>

Bourgault-Ducoudray, in his essay "*La musique et le sport*," proposed an interesting, but ambiguous theory of aesthetic perception. This theory considered both the participant and spectator experience. In terms of pure spectatorship, Bourgault-Ducoudray rejected the importance of man's intellectual faculty in the perception of the beautiful. Here, he very explicitly rejected the notion that aesthetic perception ought to be exclusively focused on high art which, according to Bourgault-Ducoudray, would simply reduce all artistic spectating experiences to a boring process of judging, analysing and dissecting works of art. Both Pottecher and Bourgault-Ducoudray shared this critical view of modern bourgeois art culture and referred to "le gout blase d'élite" and "le spectateur blase" respectively. They romanticized the idea of naive (common) spectators who surrendered themselves entirely to the sensations and emotions evoked by great spectacles and defamed the extreme intellectualism of bourgeois art connoisseurs. Massive, open-air, choral concerts and the plays performed by 'people's theatres' were considered performative genres that could stir the most profound emotions of an audience in which all social classes participated. An important emphasis was placed on the ephemeral experience of these spectacles. The simplicity, clarity and grandeur of these performances was seen as a counter-point to the overly refined, intellectual and unemotional spectating experiences offered by the bourgeois theatre.

As cultural reformers, men like Pottecher and Bourgault-Ducoudray were not solely concerned with the experience of spectating. For example, a very significant aspect of Pottecher's *Theatre du Peuple* was the local and amateur status of the players. Bourgault-Ducoudray also considered the aesthetic experience of the choir members and stressed the importance of sustaining a particular disinterested attitude. Here, the discourses of art and sport appear to overlap on one very interesting concept: disinterested, and consequently, moral participation. Bourgault-Ducoudray's references to the "culte noble et désintéressé de l'art" evoked the essence of the amateur spirit that Coubertin and his sporting colleagues revered.<sup>29</sup> In the context of choral performances, the idea disinterested participation was equated with the

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experience of profound joy--the wholesome sensation of the beautiful (l'émotion salubre du beau)--derived from singing in great choral ensembles. This disinterested pleasure was contrasted favourably against the type of pleasure derived from the external and material rewards that choral competitions offered singers and which Bourgault-Ducoudray decried as an undesirable occasion that promoted rivalries and antagonism.<sup>30</sup>

Bourgault-Ducoudray's comments on spectatorship also alluded to a philosophical conceptualization of beauty that was similar to what Coubertin developed in his 1901 essay, "L'Art dans l'éducation."<sup>31</sup> He described an ideal beauty and the relationship between the perception of beauty in art and the knowledge of worldly truths. In essence, Bourgault-Ducoudray shared Coubertin's desire to find a philosophical link between the perception of beauty and the perception of goodness.

Avant tout, il s'agit de ramener l'ame populaire à une conception plus haute de la mission de l'art, et assigner pour recompense à nos chanteurs, non plus une medille d'or ou une somme d'argent, mais la joie profonde, incomparable que procurent à l'homme l'émotion du beau et la perception de l'idéal.<sup>32</sup>

(Before everything else, it is a question of restoring the popular spirit to a conception more elevated than the mission of art, and to assign as reward to our singers, no more gold medals or sums of money, but an incomparable profound joy that will procure for man a sensation of beauty and the perception of the ideal.)<sup>33</sup>

The texts of Pottecher and Bourgault-Ducoudray intersected with some of the concepts that characterized fin de siècle social progressivism. In other words, their ideas about art, beauty and sport were bound to the moral and social reform beliefs of Republican-minded Frenchmen of this era. This was especially evident in the repertoire performed by the *Théâtre du Peuples in*

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Bussang, that consisted primarily of Pottecher's own morality plays. As an example, his play *Le Diable Marchant de Goutte* (1895) examined the social problems associated with alcoholism.<sup>34</sup> The nature of Bourgault-Ducoudray's social reform was more directly aligned with the physical education and hygiene interests of Coubertin. The popular choral societies were intended to promote open-air singing as a fitness and hygiene practice. The physical exertion of singing in the gymnasium or out-of-doors was regarded as a viable activity for the healthy development of respiratory organs.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the popular choral societies defined themselves, in part, within the context of the hygienist, or open air, movement of the period. Infatuation with the out-of-doors reflected a common concern over the decrepid effects of urban industrialization on national health and welfare. The idea of moving traditional cultural practices out-of-doors became a unifying concept that drew different cultural institutions together in the broader discourse of popular culture. The legacy of the Consultative Conference demonstrates that the idea of moving to greener pastures--literary--appealed to theatre, music, and sport types.

Pottecher described, in practical terms, a new type of sporting festival. He explained specific ways of integrating sport into a cohesive, and yet multi-faceted spectacle. Although he claimed to extend his theories of popular spectacle to the Modern Olympic Games, his true commitment lay in the realm of local and regional festivals. In spite of this, he suggested that the Olympic Games provided the greatest occasion in which to unite the arts and sport on a grand scale. He was insistent, however, that the production of local and regional festivals was essential to the ultimate unification of art and sport. He proposed that communities organize sporting competitions and theatrical presentations over the duration of a day long open-air festival. These 'fête sportif' did not integrate into theatrical presentation. Instead, this was a theory of spectacle that preserved the distinctiveness of sport and theatre. The aesthetic experience was dependant on recognizing the complimentary nature of sport and theatre as opposed to identifying or creating shared elements.

Pottecher did more than simply theorize about this type of open-air festival. On 5 August 1906, he

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orchestrated a 'fête sportif' in Bussang as an experiment to reconcile the theories that were discussed at the Consultative Conference with the mandate of his *Theatre du Peuple*:

Ce pittoresque spectacle, on avait associé une recreation sportive destinée à realiser l'idée èmise au dernier Congres olympique: l'union des plaisir intellectuels et des jeux ou le corps déploie son adresse et sa vigueur.<sup>36</sup>

(This picturesque spectacle, was associated with a sporting element destined to help realize the idea proposed by the latest Olympic Congress: the union of intellectual pleasures with games in which the body displays its dexterity and vigour.)<sup>37</sup>

Coubertin, himself, who was given the honour of presiding over the Bussang festival described the event in the introduction to Pottecher's conference paper which was reproduced in the August issue of *Revue Olympique*.<sup>38</sup> The festivities began with an automobile race around a mountain. Other activities included a balloon ascension, gymnastic demonstrations, fencing matches and running races, all contested in a 'gaily decorated field'. The day of festivities culminated at the rustic open-air theatre where athletes and spectators united for the debut of Pottecher's play, *Sotré de Noel* which was followed by group singing and dancing.<sup>39</sup> Pottecher's efforts to integrate sport with art into a single festival-type experience for the 'people' was relatively conservative as he saw sport as sport and theatre as theatre.

### La Beauté Plastique de Sport

This discussion of Pottecher's and Bourgault-Ducoudray's contributions to the aesthetic discourse generated at the 1906 Consultative Conference, illuminates a cultural bond between Modern Olympism and aspects of France's nationalistic popular culture movement. This association has been overlooked by historians of the Modern Olympic Movement. As theorists of performance arts, Pottecher and Bourgault-

Ducoudray struggled awkwardly to incorporate the athletic body into their dialectics between sport and arts, and sport and beauty. The sculptor Pierre Roche and the composer Max d'Ollone were more successful when they discussed the 'plastic', or physical, beauty perceivable in sport and sporting bodies. They also developed theories out of aesthetical concepts that had been, at least traditionally, implicit in theories of the visual arts.<sup>40</sup> Thematically, d'Ollone's "Le sport et la beauté plastique" and Roche's "Sculpture et sport" examined the human body as a source of aesthetic contemplation and artistic inspiration. These men justified their theories with the historical *a priori* established by the ancient Greeks. Max d'Ollone described the relationship between beauty and sport in ancient Greece in the following passage: "Une lien logique et puissant--la beauté plastique--unissait chez les Grecs la <<gymnastique>> aux arts et tous les entre eux"<sup>41</sup> (Physical beauty provided a logical and powerful link that unified gymnasium exercises with the fine arts and all of the other arts in between).<sup>42</sup> Elaborating on this historical connection, he stated that the incontestable influence of the gymnasium on cultural production in ancient Greece was facilitated by two conditions that he hoped would be returned to the practice of sport in modern times. These conditions were, specifically, practising and competing in sport in the nude (or possibly even semi-nude) and practising and competing in sport with proper musical accompaniment. In promoting exercise in the nude, d'Ollone addressed the philosophical concept of beauty more directly than any of the other participants of the Consultative Conference for the Arts, Literature and Sport. For d'Ollone, the perception of beauty was achieved most effectively by contemplating the naked human body, and specifically the male body. He explained the implications for art with reference to the theories of John Ruskin: 'the beginning of art consists of unveiling the beauty of people'.<sup>43</sup> He also qualified his comments by paraphrasing the French author, Renan: 'the reign of sculpture ended when man stopped going about his daily business half naked'.<sup>44</sup> By emphasizing the human body as an object of aesthetic perception and artistic inspiration, d'Ollone expressed an objective theory of beauty that was not contingent on his theory of art: Man's nudity gave artists an occasion to contemplate the grand and eternal ideas of all humankind. He did not see the source of the beauty--the athlete--as the producer of art or even,

necessarily, as the participant in an aesthetic experience. In a sense, at least, d'Ollone appeared to be developing his arguments around a theory of beauty in nature, as opposed to a theory of beauty in art. His essay described the benefits artists could reap from observing naked sportsmen, but did not address the benefit that sportsmen could reap from the experience of their own nakedness. D'Ollone, like Coubertin, seemed to have difficulty distinguishing the idea of beauty in nature from the idea of beauty in art. Consequently, the suggestion that the beauty of the human form can evoke knowledge of universal truths, or metaphysical-type ideals, is confusing and seemingly contradictory.

D'Ollone also discussed the idea of 'orchestrating physical exercise' with music as a way of increasing the aesthetic experience for the spectator. In this sense, he reiterated and developed ideas that Bourgault-Ducoudray had raised when justifying the union of popular choral societies and sporting societies. D'Ollone, however, distinguished himself by stipulating that the athletic body could be appreciated aesthetically if movement was accompanied with rational rhythmic music. Unlike Pottecher, and even Bourgault-Ducoudray, he seemed more committed to conceptualizing a homogenous multimedia-type performance in which the combination of sport and the rational mathematical art form, music, would produce a unique 'rational' aesthetic experience. He illustrated this point with references to the system of body movement developed by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze which he described as the fusion of poetry, music and pantomime. He also discussed Richard Wagner's innovations in modern opera as prototypical. Dance was not d'Ollone's focus. In fact, he was extremely critical of modern ballet; calling it 'acrobatics unworthy of the name, art'.<sup>45</sup> His emphasis remained on the development of a 'rational physical culture that would encourage the normal development of force and suppleness and the production of harmonious proportions that constitute *la beauté*'.<sup>46</sup>

Pierre Roche (author of "Sculpture et sport") emphasized many of the same themes addressed by Max d'Ollone.<sup>47</sup> In other words, he was predominantly concerned with an objective theory of beauty and a normative theory of art in which athletes provided a source of beauty for artists to study and interpret in

their art. Unlike d'Ollone and many other participants at the Conference, Roche elaborated on specific ways that artists might interpret the plastic (physical) beauty of sporting bodies. Particularly revealing were his comments on the variety of physiques modern sporting specialization produced. He suggested that the variety and perfection of these different human forms signified a new and emerging modern aesthetic.<sup>48</sup> He accepted and condoned the effects of specialization in modern sport on the human body. Thus, the ideas of specialization and utility associated with the sporting body factored integrally into his theory of physical beauty. In examining the unique demands of modern sport, he discussed several aesthetic concepts that were central to his own theory of art and beauty.

Ce n'est plus là l'inutile beauté mais la beauté conciliée avec l'action. On trouve là sans s'écarter du beau ce qui lui donne au premier chef sa valeur, à savoir le caractère. Les Grecs l'avaient bien compris. A côté du type parfait de l'Apollon, ils avaient l'Achille, l'Hercule; ils ne reculaient ni devant le Faune ni devant Marsyas.<sup>49</sup>

(It is no longer simply useless beauty but beauty reconciled with action. We find there, without turning aside the beautiful, that which gives value to the true master, knowledge of his character. The Greeks understood this well. Along with the perfect-type of Apollo, they had Achilles and Hercules; they did not recoil in front of the Faune or in front of the Marsyas.)<sup>50</sup>

While conceding that modern sport was not the source of one singular physical ideal of beauty, Roche proposed that each sport produced an ideal type that reflected the demands of the sport and the inherent natural human physique intended to excel in a particular sport. In this sense, he suggested that art and sport were mutually beneficial; sportsmen would provide artists with an "anatomie artistique" that conveyed an equilibrium between the human body and the modern world; artists would fix the aesthetic type

of each sport and in turn help identify those physiques naturally suited to excel in particular sports. Although Roche clearly accommodated the diversification of the embodied human experience in modern life and disposed with the singular ideal as an expression of man's harmony with nature, he still attempted to convey a particular humanism in his explanation of the modern aesthetic. This was certainly a theory of earth-bound beauty, but one in which nature and modern man contributed to the ideals.

Pierre Roche also commented on the artistic interpretation of athletic effort.<sup>51</sup> For Roche, paintings and sculptures based on sporting bodies ought to convey an artistic interpretation of effort. The body, itself, was not the sole mimetic challenge. Thus, the painter or sculptor was required to study sport and identify and capture those brief movements of pause in athletic performance that signify departure or completion of a great exertion. Roche described these specific moments in terms of balance and equilibrium between action and non-action. Thus, while he spoke in terms of static physical beauty, the artistic expression of effort in sculpture demanded a vivid depiction of the human energy either completely garnered or completely and instantaneously expended.<sup>52</sup>

The theme of physical beauty (beauty in the round) presented in the essays of d'Ollone and Roche signified an articulation of a number of concepts that shaped the aesthetic idea within the discourse of modern Olympism. Coubertin, himself, reinforced these aesthetic concerns when describing the fencing match that was incorporated into the closing ceremonies of the Consultative Conference: "..., c'est prise d'armes s'est ainsi distinguée par des allures inusitées au point de vue du geste et de la plastique" (this call to arms was also distinguished by the rare allure the movement [gestures] and the poses).<sup>53</sup> For Coubertin and Pierre Roche the beauty of sporting bodies was associated with the demands of the sport and was, therefore, associated with earth-bound beauty or a moral and social utility. In other words, they were not concerned with human form that was beautiful in, and of, itself. When incorporating this idea of beauty into a theory of art, Roche emphasized the responsibility of the artist to portray the harmony between physical or plastic attributes of the body and the movement that it was intended to perform. Thus, as a theory of art, the

concept of mimesis was as important as the perception of harmony was contingent on the artists' ability to represent the proportion of the body and allude to its athletic utility.<sup>54</sup> Here, the emphasis on utility--even if it is only specific to sporting proficiency--must be attributed to the pervasive postivism in European culture at this time.

### Summary and Conclusions

Historically, the 1906 Consultative Conference for the Arts, Literature and Sport represents a moment in time when the Modern Olympic Movement articulated with a variety of cultural institutions that, through their different media, brought meaning to social life in France (and perhaps Europe, generally) in the first decade of the twentieth century. In effect, these institutions were united by a discourse that was structured around specific ideas about art, beauty and culture--the discourse of aesthetics. This analysis of the Conference has revealed that the objective to unite art and sport at the Olympic Games proved awkward for the delegates. For example, throughout d'Ollone's article, implications for the Olympic Games were rarely discussed. This was, in fact, the case with most of the important essays that contributed to the discourse articulated at the Conference. The most interesting recommendation for the Olympic Games that d'Ollone presented was hidden in the last footnote of his paper. Here, he suggested that Olympic Games officials consider introducing a type of contest in which athletes of different sports are judged for the physical beauty "*la plastique*" of their bodies and movement instead of for their force and skill.<sup>55</sup> In spite of delivering a erudite lecture on the nature of beauty, art and the athletic body, d'Ollone's recommendation for the Olympic Games was simplistic and demonstrated that his ideas about art and sport were clearly dialectical. As with Pottecher, Roche and Bourgault-Ducoudray, d'Ollone seemed more concerned with the aesthetic inspiration that sport could offer artists as opposed to the aesthetic inspiration that art could offer the athletes or even the spectator of sport.

Although the Conference delegates may not have proposed many practical solutions for integrating the arts into the Olympic Games, their discussions certainly revealed unique and timely ideas about the nature of art, sport, beauty and cultural production.

Beauty in sport was described, for the most part, as a theory of beauty in nature. This was somewhat tempered, however, by the notion that a beautiful body reflected its adaptation to the demands of modern social practices. Beauty in art, on the other hand, was described in terms of ideals derived from nature, which were also ambiguously associated with the perception of moral goodness. Art, consequently, was described from the perspective of a normative and objective theory of perception. In other words, these theorists were preoccupied with the idea of producing an aesthetic spectator experience that would reinforce the tenets of French-nationalistic social reform. In short, this research demonstrates that the cultural production of sport was greatly influenced by theories of art and beauty. Indeed, the men who gathered at the Comédie Française in 1906 represented a very homogeneous perspective within a much broader aesthetic discourse; a discourse structured primarily around the polemical theories of objective and subjective perception of beauty. For future research on the aesthetic idea of Olympism, this encourages the identification and analysis of other discursive activities that might describe how the Modern Olympic Movement articulated with different cultural movements.

### Endnotes

1. Pierre de Coubertin, "The 'Trustees' of the Olympic Idea" (Address delivered by the President of the International Olympic Committee at the dinner given by the British Government on the 24 July 1908), *The Olympic Idea: Discourses and Essays*, Stuttgart: Carl Diem Institute, 1967, p. 21.
2. Pierre de Coubertin, *Olympic Memoirs* (originally published in French in 1931), Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 1979, p. 49.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. Brackets mine.
5. Pierre de Coubertin, *Olympic Memoirs*, op. cit., p. 49.
6. Pierre de Coubertin, "Deuxième étape," *Revue Olympique*, May 1906, p. 67.
7. Pierre de Coubertin, *Olympic Memoirs*, op. cit., p. 50.
8. "Invitation, Conférence consultative," International Olympic Committee, April 1906, IOC Archives, Lausanne.

9. This Olympic Conference has been studied primarily by historians who have been interested in the Olympic Fine Art Competitions. See, for example, Susan J. Bandy, "The Olympic Celebration of the Arts," *The Olympic Games in Transition* (Jeffrey Seagrave and Donald Chu, Editors), Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics Books, 1988, pp. 163-169; Suzanna Halpert Levitt, "The 1984 Olympic Arts Festival: Theatre," PhD Dissertation, Davis: University of California, 1990; Andrea Petersen, "The Olympic Art Competitions 1912- 1948," *Sport Science Review*, 1989, pp. 44-51; and, Norbert Müller, *One Hundred Years of Olympic Congresses, 1894-1994* (Ingrid Sonnleiter-Hauber, trans.), Lausanne: International Olympic Committee, 1994.

10. The "cultural component" of the Olympic Movement is a term frequently used by historians and sport administrators in reference to the IOC mandated inclusion of the fine arts in the Olympic Games. Today, rather than art competitions, Olympic Games Organizing Committees are required to host cultural festivals. Olympic Fine Art Competitions were held between 1912 and 1948. See Susan J. Bandy, *Ibid.*, p. 167.

11. Discourse connotes the existence of knowledge without the necessity of specifying the knowing subject. I have found that Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillan (*Michel Foucault: Social Theory and Transgression*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, 129- 130) have offered one of the most readable explanations of the Foucauldian concept of discourse: "In the lexicon of modern linguistics, discourse is distinguished from the formal aspects of language (Saussure's la langue) and the specifics of actual speaking (la parole). Discourse is understood to have its own rules of operation and, empirically, to have its own forms. However, as a more inclusive instance of language use, its analysis is limited neither to the customary elements of linguistics (semantics and grammar) nor to linguistics basic units (the sentence, the preposition, or the speech act). Discourse, therefore, is susceptible to analysis in relation to the other aspects of social life: politics, culture, economics, social institutions."

12. In total, approximately sixty individuals participated in the event. Apart from Coubertin, himself, only four of these participants were IOC members. The Reverend Courcy Laffan of England, Count Brunetta d'Usseaux of Italy, Hébrard de

Villeneuve and Ernst Callot of France represented the IOC at the Conference. Pierre de Coubertin, "Les seances de la Conference consultative" *Revue Olympique*, June 1906, pp. 83-87. Although Coubertin listed a number of individuals who participated in the Conference at the beginning of this published summary, one finds that through the article new names appear. I have tried to determine the number of participants based on a full reading of documentation pertaining to the Conference. The number that I have arrived at concurs, approximately, with that derived by historian Norbert Müller, *One Hundred Years of Olympic Congresses*, 1994, p. 69. The problem posed by the archival and literary documentation from the conference is that it lists only those individuals who made strong comments during the deliberations but does not refer to individuals who were passive observers.

13. To qualify this statement, I have analysed the transcribed minutes from the different sessions and counted only those decisions that were clearly adopted by a voting process. Although numerous assertive statements are evident in this document, only seven statements can be definitively categorized as group decisions, or results of the deliberations. This archival documentation is a true transcription of verbal discourse and therefore includes the commentary of individuals as well as the opinions of the assembly.

14. Pierre de Coubertin, "Les décisions prises," *Revue Olympique*, June 1906, pp. 87-93. Curiously, the unpublished record of the deliberations does not indicate that the delegates participated in any formal discussion pertaining to the establishment, or even regulation, of Olympic Art Competitions. Perhaps the transcript of the session has been lost, but more than likely, formal discussions were never recorded.

15. Although the question of erecting such a monument was not listed on the original program, Coubertin successfully convinced the delegates to form a special commission of architects and sculptors to ensure the progress and development of the project. The minutes from the meeting held on Wednesday 23 May (at 2:30 PM) describe the formation of two commissions. One is described as a provisional commission for the realization of the "Project du Monument Bartholdi à la glorification de la Renaissance Physique envisagée comme une caractéristique des temps modernes." Coubertin appointed three individuals, Jourdain, Segoftin and Vauthier, to form the commission. The

other commission was intended to be a permanent group within France that would help orient all manifestations of sport towards a more artistic and aesthetic ideal. See "Compte-rendu: Seance de Commission du Mercredi 23 mai, 2h1/2," IOC Archives, Lausanne.

16. Pierre de Coubertin, "Bulletin officiel du Comité International Olympique," *Revue Olympique*, July 1906, pp. 111-112.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

18. Translation mine.

19. The President of the *Fédération Française des Sociétés d'Aviron* assured Coubertin that his federation would inform the member associations that 'in the future, all nautical festivals ought to reflect an artistic and literary character by including contests in poetry, appropriate dramatic production and choral performances in the open air. See [*Le Président de la Fédération Française des Sociétés d'Avirons*] to Pierre de Coubertin, 30 July 1906, IOC Archives, Lausanne. Similarly, the Chairman of the Athletic Committee of Harvard University, H. S. White, assured Coubertin that he would introduce the question of "uniting poetical competitions and dramatic representations with the various national athletic contests" to the athletic committee. See H. S. White, Chairman of the Harvard Athletic Committee to Pierre de Coubertin, 20 August 1906, IOC Archives, Lausanne.

20. The essays to which I refer in this analysis are: Maurice Pottecher, "L'Art dramatique et le sport," *Revue Olympique*, August 1906, pp. 117-122; Pierre Roche, "Sculpture et sport," *Revue Olympique*, September 1906, pp. 135-137; M. Bourgault-Ducoudray, "La musique et le sport," *Revue Olympique*, July 1906, pp. 104-107; Max d'Ollone, "Le sport et la beauté plastique," *Revue Olympique*, December 1906, pp. 181-186; Pierre de Coubertin, "Les décisions prises," *Revue Olympique*, June 1906, pp. 87-93.

21. For a brief introduction to the theories and development of the "people's theatre" movement, see, David Bradby and John McCormick, *People's Theatre*, Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978.

22. *Ibid.* Brackets mine.

23. Translation mine.

24. These ideas were expressed most succinctly in an autobiographical essay from 1913. "Although on a more modest scale, the Bussang experience could be said to bring a new note of artistic sincerity, natural

freshness, and (if I may so sa?), rustic ingenuity, which appealed not only to the local spectators, but also to the artists and critics who happened to notice it ... People's theatre, I say and not popular theatre. Notice this distinction. Popular theatre addresses itself to the poorest and usually the least cultured class. The people's theatre, on the other hand, attempts to mingle the classes, and far from excluding the elite, assumes it to be a necessary part of the audience, to ensure that artistic quality of the performance remains high, and the effects do not descend into vulgarity, banal melodrama, rough farce." See Maurice Pottecher, "Lessons of the Bussang Experience" (1913), in Robert White, "A Chronology of People's Theatre since 1870," *Theatre Quarterly*, Volume VI, No. 23 (Autumn, 1976), p. 15.

25. In this sense, Pottecher and Bourgault-Ducoudray reflected the same philosophical understanding of society that Coubertin and many Fin de Siècle French Republicans shared. For an interesting summary of the secondary literature that critiques this particular class-based paternalism, see Patrice Cholley, *Pierre de Coubertin: La deuxième croisade; Améliorer la condition humaine par le sport et l'éducation, facteurs de paix universelle*, Lausanne: Comité International Olympique, 1996.

26. M. Bourgault-Ducoudray, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

27. Maurice Pottecher, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

28. Although I have not analysed the individual histories of each participant of the Consultative Conference to determine their affiliations with specific arts organizations, my attention was drawn to the names of René Morax and Romain Rolland. Morax was one of the organizers of a well-known popular festival in Switzerland. In the IOC Archives, I was fortunate to find a newspaper article written by Morax that Coubertin had clipped and saved. Morax's motivation to write this rather lengthy article most likely stemmed from his participation in the Consultative Conference. The article examines the phenomenon of the 'fête sportive' in ancient Greece, in Switzerland and in the modern revival of the Olympic Games. From the published results of the Consultative Conference (*Revue Olympique*, June 1906, p. 85), Morax appears to have been an active contributor to the discussions. Romain Rolland, who did not attend the Consultative Conference but gave his support, was the most influential French proponent of People's Theatre in the first decade of the twentieth century. Another

personality associated with the popular culture movement was Pierre Roche, who was the president of an organization called “*Arts populaire*.” Romain Rolland, who wrote the most influential treatises on people’s theatre in 1903 was, in fact, a disciple of Pottecher. See David Bradby and John McCormick, op. cit., p.32. For additional biographical information on Rolland, an historical summary of his contribution to the theory of people’s theatre see Robert White, “A Chronology of People’s Theatre since 1870,” *Theatre Quarterly*, Volume VI, No. 23 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 17-23. As well, see Miriam R. Levin, *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986.

29. M. Bourgault-Ducoudray, op.cit., p. 106.

30. Ibid., p. 106. The popular choral societies, and the aesthetic experiences that they provided, were intended to combat, what was apparently a contemporary trend of large choral competitions.

31. Pierre de Coubertin, “L’Art dans l’éducation,” *Textes Choisis, Tome I, Revelations* (Georges Rioux, Editor), Zurich: Weidmann, 1986, pp. 268-273. Published originally in *Notes sur l’Éducation publique*, Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1901, pp. 297-310.

32. Bourgault-Ducoudray, op. cit., p. 106.

33. Translation mine.

34. Pierre de Coubertin, “L’Art dans l’éducation,” op. cit., 268-273.

35. “‘Musique’ Compte-rendu, Seance de Commission au Touring Club, Mercredi 23 mai 2h1/2,” p.2, IOC Archives, Lausanne. One can not help but notice the frequent use of the expression “en plein air” in the minutes of the Consultative Conference.

36. Maurice Pottecher, “Spectacles d’Été: Le Théâtre du Peuple,” *Les Annales*, No. 1207, 1906. I obtained this newspaper clipping from the Maurice Pottecher Collection at the Archives Départementales des Vosges in Epinal, France.

37. Translation mine.

38. Beginning with his participation in the Consultative Conference for the Arts, Literature and Sports and followed shortly afterward by the organization of the Bussang ‘fête sportif’, Maurice Pottecher sustained an intellectual and creative relationship with Pierre de Coubertin that lasted nearly ten years and peaked with their collaboration on the special celebrations held to honour the winners of the International Architecture Competitions in 1911. The duration of their friendship and the nature of their collaborations indicates that

Coubertin and Pottecher shared many common ideas about art, sport and beauty.

39. Pierre de Coubertin, “Introduction: L’art dramatique et le sport,” (Maurice Pottecher, Author), *Revue Olympique*, August 1906, p. 117. See, also, *Le Petit Journal*, 21 July 1906 (clipping), Archives Départementales des Vosges, Epinal, France.

40. Translation of the word ‘plastique’ to ‘plastic’, ‘material’, or even ‘physical’, has proven awkward for the purpose of this discussion. I use these words interchangeably to describe the type of beauty perceived from observation of an athletic body.

41. Max d’Ollone, “Le sport et la beauté plastique,” *Revue Olympique*, December 1906, p. 181.

42. Translation mine.

43. D’Ollone paraphrased John Ruskin [a quote from a French source entitled *Ruskin et la Religion de la Beauté* by R. De la Sizeranne] and noted the ideas of several other modern philosophers of art including Hippolyte Taine. These footnotes enabled d’Ollone to contextualize his ideas with other, perhaps better known theories of art and beauty from this historical period. In particular, his explanation of the relationship between plastic beauty of the athletic body with rhythmical movement brought about a discussion that signified the emergence of one particular concept (idea) that pervaded the aesthetic discourse of Olympism, that of physical culture. Ibid., p. 182.

44. “Le commencement de l’Art, a dit Ruskin, <<consiste à rendre le peuple beau>>; and, <<Le règne de la sculpture est fini, écrivait Renan, du jour ou l’on cesse d’aller à demi-nu>>.” Ibid., p. 182.

45. Ibid., p. 185.

46. Ibid., pp. 185- 186.

47. Pierre Roche, “Sculpture et sport,” *Revue Olympique*, September 1906, pp. 135-137.

48. Sporting specialization refers to the habit of practising one sport intensely as opposed to practising many sports adequately.

49. Ibid., p. 136.

50. Translation, mine.

51. Ibid., p. 136. Here, Pierre Roche is extremely oblique in expressing his theory of beauty in relation to the static beauty and movement: “En ce qui concern l’interprétation de l’effort, je suis de ceux qui se refuse à considérer la beauté comme inséparable de l’inaction.”

52. Not surprisingly, he illustrated his theory of physical beauty with evocations of (what must have been) Myron's "Discobolus" and a well-known sculpture of a wrestler from the Louvre collection.

53. Pierre de Coubertin, "Le festival de la Sorbonne," *Revue Olympique*, June 1906, p. 94.

54. Utility was a very important consideration in the Republican theory of art and beauty at the turn of the century. I refer the reader to Miriam R. Levin, *Republican Art and Ideology in Late Nineteenth-Century France*. Arm Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986.

55. Max d'Ollone, op. cit., p. 186.