

Aesthetic and Ethical Themes in the *Revue Olympique*, 1901-1915: A study of reflexivity in the discourse of ‘Modernism.’

Douglas Brown

Centre for Olympic Studies, University of Western Ontario, London

This paper examines the relationship between the *Revue Olympique* (a monthly publication that first appeared in 1901), the Modern Olympic Movement and modern culture. Specifically, it demonstrates that the *Revue Olympique* provided a link between the ideology of the Modern Olympic Movement and the discourse of modernism. According to Art Berman (1994) modernism specifies a series of suppositions that defined an aesthetic-artistic movement which seemed to have formed in earnest in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It focuses on the period between 1894 and 1915. Although the first edition of the *Revue Olympique* was published in 1901, the study also considers newsletters and bulletins that preceded its debut. The year 1915 marks the first lengthy interruption in the publication of the *Revue Olympique*. Primary sources include the *Revue Olympique*, administrative documents from the International Olympic Committee, personal correspondence of Pierre de Coubertin, as well as a review of other sport magazines and journals from this period. The *Revue Olympique* as published exclusively in French during these years:

consequently, it has been forgotten or perhaps avoided, by many North Americans who study the Modern Olympic Movement. Secondary sources like Raymond Williams' "What Was Modernism?" (1992) describe the late-nineteenth century as the moment when cultural movements adopted the 'special magazine' or 'review' as a form of ideological treaty or manifesto. While a number of articles or excerpts of texts that were first published in the *Revue Olympique* have become standard reading for sport and cultural historians, their original context is often disregarded or simply not known. This paper re-contextualize the *Revue Olympique* as an autonomous and yet reflexive cultural product in the history of the Modern Olympic Movement. Analysis of this monthly review reveals a fluidity in the broader discourse of modernism where theories of aesthetics and ethics informed the conceptualization of sport and its spectacular 'Olympicization.' In the *Revue Olympique*, aesthetic concepts that constituted modernism, specifically the harmony, autonomy and universality, emerged centrally in the theoretical conceptualization of the Olympic Games. The paper concludes that the *Revue Olympique* was both an object and subject in the discourse of modernism. As an object, the *Revue Olympique* functioned as a cultural treaty that synthesized the ideas and beliefs on the International Olympic Committee. As a subject, this cultural treaty functioned as a discursive agent that helped construct the concept of modernism. Too frequently, the Olympic Games have been allowed to eclipse the composite nature of cultural production associated with the Olympic Movement and the vitality of its discursivity. Above all else, the analysis of the *Revue Olympique* helps demonstrate that the Olympic Games (and possibly modern sport, generally) is a cultural *heterogenre* (my word); it is a source for social learning and understanding that involves a variety of ephemeral and intellectual experiences.