

MODERNISM, POSTMODERNISM

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Pierre de Coubertin's Theoretical Legacy on Modern Sport Spectatorship: An Interdisciplinary Analysis

This paper attempts to articulate Baron Pierre de Coubertin's theory of modern sport spectatorship and understand the different discourses that gave it shape and relevance within the ideological context of Olympism as well as the broader cultural context of modernism. The paper presents original historical research based on Coubertin's early writings (1894- 1914) which constituted the primary theoretical and cultural texts of the Modern Olympic Movement during this period. The phenomenon of spectatorship has, remarkably, stimulated only a very few sport historians. This is especially true among sport historians who study the Modern Olympic Movement. On the other hand, cultural anthropologists, social philosophers and sociologists who study the conditions and consequences of modernity have dedicated volumes to the topic. Despite the vastness and diversity of his oeuvre, Coubertin did not attempt to present a formal theory of spectatorship. This seems somewhat odd in view of the fact that the modern Olympic Games were conceived of as a symbolic medium/spectacle intended to convey the values of an international humanist ideology. How does one construct a symbolic medium without considering the lexicon of the intended audience?

Although spectatorship was not isolated as a singular theoretical preoccupation by Coubertin, he frequently discussed the nature and value of sporting audiences in other subject areas. This research demonstrates that references to spectators emerged predominantly from articles, essays and commentaries that discussed architectural considerations for sport, the relationship between sport and art, and the democratization of modern sport. Further analysis of these references reveals that a theory of spectatorship did, in fact, pervade Coubertin's oeuvre on the Olympic Movement, and on modern sport in general. This theory incorporated concepts from several modern discourses, principally the philosophy of art and beauty (aesthetics), moral philosophy and sociology. As such, Coubertin's ideal sport spectator was a classless aesthetic subject (and) object who factored integrally into the festival of sport, contributing to the pleasurable experiences of the athletes and other spectators. This theory of spectatorship represented a critical response to the professionalization of sport and placed Coubertin at the conservative pole of cultural modernism. This exposition of Coubertin's theory of sport spectatorship is valuable

because it reveals how he hoped to translate the abstract ideological objectives of Olympism into a cultural experience for athletes and audiences.

A parallel objective of this paper is to explicate the interdisciplinary nature of the research question, and the methodological and theoretical considerations that shape and guide the analysis and discussion of the paper. It discusses the relevance and success of incorporating theories from cultural anthropology and aesthetics with methodologies most commonly associated with traditional descriptive narrative history, philosophy and cultural studies.