Visual Sources in the History of Sports: Potential, Problems, and Perspectives with Selected Examples of Sporting Art

Krüger, Michael

Visual Sources in the History of Sports: Potential, Problems, and Perspectives with Selected Examples of Sporting Art

Michael Krüger *

Abstract: *»Bildquellen in der Sportgeschichte: Möglichkeiten, Probleme und Perspektiven der Interpretation anhand ausgewählter Beispiele der bildenden Kunst«*. The paper considers the relevance and use of a specific sort of visual source in sport history referred to as sporting art. After some theoretical reflections on sport, sporting actions, and their perception and conversion by the media, the term sporting art is explained and discussed. Following, selected examples are described, analyzed historically, interpreted and contextualized in detail. The focus is on examples of sporting art in Germany and the former German Democratic Republic.

Keywords: Visual sources, sporting art, cultural history, art history, Germany, German Democratic Republic.

Sport is a phenomenon of modern societies, but based on anthropological and universal facts like the nature of the human body and the ability to perform complex movements and performances. The genesis of modern sport is usually regarded as occurring during the 18th and early 19th centuries in Europe. According to scholars like Norbert Elias, Eric Dunning, and Allen Guttmann, who tried to differentiate between pre-modern patterns of body exercises, movement, and play on the one hand, and "the nature of modern sport" on the other, one major difference seems to be that modern sports are conveyed and transmitted to a wider audience, and received and commentated by public media. Consequently, historical research on sports as a phenomenon of modern societies, is able to draw on a complex range of sources and documents, similar to other phenomena of recent and contemporary history. Photos, films, and further visual sources are fundamental for a better understanding of the development of sports as a phenomenon of modern societies (Guttmann 2004 [1977]; Elias and Dunning 1986; Huggins 2015).

The iconic or pictorial turn is regarded as a crucial subject of the "New Cultural History" (Burke 2010; Maar 2005; Landwehr 2009). The attention paid to

* Michael Krüger, Arbeitsbereich Sportpädagogik & Sportgeschichte am Institut für Sportwissenschaft der WWU Münster, Horstmarer Landweg 62b, 48149 Münster, Germany; mkrueger@uni-muenster.de.

and the debate on visual sources promise new, innovative knowledge about sport and sport history in its context as cultural history. Therefore, visual sources in the history of sports should be accorded greater relevance, simply because sport is basically non-verbal, and sporting acts are mainly visual performances. In modern times, sport is becoming a subject of social and public relevance through its conversion into verbal communication, including painting, film, and photography. However, we should bear in mind the difference between the sporting act (or action) itself and that of communication about and on sport by various media.

The following paper will discuss the relevance and use of a specific sort of visual source in sport history referred to as sporting art. What sporting art means will be explained later, before selected examples are described, analysed historically, interpreted, and contextualized in detail. The focus will be on examples of sporting art in Germany or in former East Germany.

As an introduction, some general, theoretical reflections on sport, sporting actions, and their perception and conversion by the media are made, in order to understand how various sources including visual ones, tell rather different stories on sport.

1. Introduction – Sports Facts and Fakes

For historians in general, and specifically for sport historians, both the pro and con are that they cannot refer directly and literally to the act of movement in sports, but only to texts and images, or in general, to sources. What we are trying to research in sport history is never first hand, but always second-hand sport. Our image or remembrance of movement and sport is principally filtered by the media. The question is how far or near are the facts of real life or real sport to those conveyed by various media.

These considerations remind us of the current and broader discussion on facts and fakes. The "word of the year" for 2016 in Germany was "*postfaktisch*" – facts beyond the facts,[1] reflecting the general and worldwide debate on the media. Since the rise of web-supported social media, the exclusive right of the classic media to convey facts, or their claim to reflect reality and tell the truth, is constantly and increasingly being challenged. Social media are constructing "fake news" or "alternative facts," to cite in a different context some famous words from Kellyanne Conway, counsellor of US-president Donald Trump. She had been asked for the reason why the number of visitors at the inauguration of Mr. Trump was perceived and reported completely differently by the White House speaker, compared to the traditional media. She answered

[1] <http://gfds.de/wort-des-jahres-2016/> (Accessed April 2, 2017).

that the White House tells "alternative facts." The basis of these facts and their alternatives were, among others, different photos, the one implying that only a few visitors were gathering for the celebration, and the other showed a huge crowd.[2] Pictures can tell lies, and the old saying "the camera never lies," clearly no longer applies, assuming that it ever did.

There is a difference between fake news and alternative facts, in that producers of fake news are always aware of their lies. The intention to deceive the public is typical of fakes, whereas alternative facts may merely reflect various perceptions and assessments of the same reality. In his campaign, Trump had harshly attacked the traditional media for their journalistic work. His criticism is that the media would not report the truth but their truth, alternatively expressed, the truth of the educated establishment of the USA. In Europe and Germany, right-wing parties and politicians argue in a similar manner. The "quality press" is called the "*Lügenpresse*" – press of lies – meaning that the established press keeps quiet about or twists and manipulates the "truth" in favour of the educated classes. The working class of "normal people" are allegedly not respected by the established media.[3] In fact, it is not exactly news that there is not one reality and even less one truth. It is nevertheless surprising that this criticism of manipulating and deceiving the public about reality is directed to those very societies and their media claiming to be free, independent, and respecting the diversity of press, media, and basically opinions.

However, the international dispute on fakes, facts, and alternative facts is rooted deeper in philosophical questions on what and how we can perceive and understand reality. The German philosopher of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), posed these fundamental questions in his three criticisms of rationality (Weltecke and Koester 2011). Ultimately, his ideas considered the status of philosophy and science in modern societies since the age of Enlightenment, when there was not one truth proclaimed by priests and ideologists, but in fact, a discourse based on various facts and rational arguments. Jürgen Habermas, standing in the long queue of Kant's followers, argued with the "discourse without power" (*herrschaftsfreier Diskurs*) as a precondition of the search for knowledge and truth, which are indeed the fundamental obligations of science, research, and education (Habermas 2014). The function of scientists and scholars in these societies is no less than that of checking diverse facts and striving towards the ultimate truth. The attack of Trump and other populist leaders in the world against the media, sometimes including academics, is that powerful media makers could create a new regime based on manipulated public opinion.

---

[2] There is already a long article in Wikipedia on "alternative Fakten"; see at <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_Fakten> (Accessed April 2, 2017).

[3] <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%BCgenpresse> (Accessed April 2, 2017).

This discourse and the development of modern societies, including their media diversity, demonstrate that scholarly debates should consider more intensively and critically the role of various media in the process of constructing and deconstructing reality and truth. Although sport and sport history are probably of less relevance for the problems of the "post-factual age" (*postfaktisches Zeitalter*), media remain crucial for our perception and understanding of what is really going on in and about sports.

2. Facts, Fakes, and Myths on Doping

One major example is the doping issue. Apparently, there is a gap between the reality of sports, doping in sports, and its image in the media. This example also tells us of facts or fakes in the never-ending story of performance enhancement in sports, but rooted in very different sources and perceptions (Reinold 2016; see also Dresen et al. 2015; Hertling and Patzphal 2011). The doping issue may also be an example for the myth that only the sporting act itself is real and true. Spectators or even competent observers of a sporting event cannot possibly observe whether the athletes have doped or not. Sometimes, they can reasonably assume that they are indeed doped when female athletes look like male athletes, or when female swimmers talk with deep, male voices, as occurred in 1977, when the coach of the female swimming of the GDR was asked why the female swimmers had such deep voices. His remarkable response was that the athletes' task was not singing, but swimming.

The South African runner Mokgadi Caster Semenya, winner of the gold medal in 800m female run in Rio de Janeiro 2016, looked like a doped female athlete. However, she was not. Her case clearly shows that visual perceptions are by no means neutral but filtered by valuing associations or connotations. Spectators are generally informed only subsequently about doped athletes by the media, sometimes years after the event and after the doping test. Confronted with information that an athlete had doped, the public inevitably feel deceived. In fact, the sporting act itself may be a kind of fake, as happened, for example, with the spectacular victory of Ben Johnson in the 100-meters finals of the Olympics in Seoul 1988, or with seven Tour de France triumphs of Lance Armstrong and its subsequent detection as a huge doping fraud.

What we see with our own eyes is not always identic to the real sport. Our eyes do not always tell the truth. Sport spectators can only see and hear with their eyes and ears what happens in front of them, but not what goes on behind the scene. A fake can only be uncovered by doping tests and then exposed by the media. There were, however, many positive doping tests in the past which were not made public. For the public, the performance of the athlete remains an authentic fact. Furthermore, there are probably many doped athletes who have

never tested positively. Although their performance is a fake, according to the rules, it remains 'fact' in the public awareness.

In sum, sport scholars, sport scientists, and sport historians are well advised to reflect and consider critically the significance of media reports and various sources for the study of sports. According to Norbert Elias, scholars ought to be "*Mythenjäger*" – hunters of myths, looking for evidence and critically evaluating sources and documents (Elias 2013). There are important differences between media, sources, and documents. The process of filtering, and in consequence the variation and conveyance of the sporting act itself by media and its meaning, may be more or less strong, depending on the type of media – words, texts, images, films, arts, reports, journals, TV, digital media, etc. – as well as on the context.

3. Understanding Verbal and Visual Sources

Visual sources like photos and films seem to be closer to reality than verbal documents. We believe rather what we have seen with our own eyes than what we are told. Language is indeed a more complex and abstract process of processing reality for use of our intelligence, than using our eyes and ears as primary means of perception. Language, words, terms, grammar, and so on are all abstract symbols of both the reality and our ideas (Chomsky 2007). We believe that perceptions by senses are more authentic than words. However, as modern neuro-scientific research claims, visual *per*ceptions can be *de*ceptions, just as much as verbal communication. Furthermore, one's memory of experiences causes additional deformations of what really happened or what we have really witnessed. On the one hand, misunderstanding is part of every form of perception, memory, and communication. But on the other hand, the opportunity created by communication is also that of discussing various perceptions, memories, and understandings which opens the door to facts and reality. That is, after all, why courts of law attempt to find the truth by checking various perceptions, memories, and evidence.

What does this imply for sport history and visual sources in this context? In a sense, historians are like judges who are obliged to evaluate critically various perceptions, sources, documents, and memories. And finally, historians should come closer to the truth, or, to cite some famous words of the historian Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886), one of the founders of the scholarly art of history in Germany, when explaining the obligation of historians to "show what really happened" (Ranke 1885, 7). Of particular relevance is the one word "*eigentlich*" (really or actually), meaning that reality and truth are more than a mere collection of sources, or related to visual sources, a picture itself does not tell the truth. A competent observer is needed to interpret and understand it. Only the creative 'performance' of the historian produces sense in history. However,

the difference between historians and judges is that the former should not judge what is right or wrong, but just check the facts and tell the truth – according to Ranke and other wise scholars of historism.

Sport historians attempt to explain and understand sporting acts as a first-hand experience by using second-hand sources of various media. An initial task is to differentiate between various levels during the process of converting sports, sporting acts, and sporting events into public discourses which are then condensed into sources. Scholarly analysis, reflection, and interpretation are ultimately the job of the sports historian. Methods of providing a better understanding of sporting acts in history or sports as cultural history, are related to classical hermeneutics and phenomenology, as developed by German scholars like Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). Originally, hermeneutics was the classic method for interpreting texts. The "science of history," in German called historism (*Historismus*), was grounded in the hermeneutic method of understanding historical texts and documents. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), who is respected as the founder of German *Geisteswissenschaften* (arts or humanities), established the method of hermeneutics to explain and understand all manner of cultural products, not only texts. He regarded culture as a result or "objectivation" of the human mind (or spirit).[4] Related to Dilthey, body culture, gymnastics, sports, and games are objectivations or phenomena articulated in sporting acts or actions and furthermore in texts, images, the arts and indeed any further form of expression. This means that attempts at explaining and understanding the complex cultural phenomenon of sport relies on hermeneutic methods to evaluate all kinds of relevant sources related to the phenomenon of sport especially visual ones.

4. Photosport – An Example of Visual Sources in Sport History and Its Interpretation

Herman Bausinger, one of the founders of empirical cultural studies in Germany, clarified the difference between the complex reality of a crucial sport event on the one hand, and its specific perception and interpretation through photos on the other hand when he analysed the official photo albums of the Berlin Olympics of 1936. They had been distributed millionfold by the German cigarette company Reemtsma at that time (Bausinger 2009). People could buy a blank album, and every time they bought a pack of cigarettes, they got a photo of an athlete or another image to stick into the album. This marketing strategy

[4] See the biographical draft in the *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB), written by Otto Friedrich Bollnow: <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/gnd118525727.html#ndbcontent> (Accessed April 2, 2017).

of such collectors' albums (*Sammelalben*) was first implemented successfully at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1932, and is still used today in Germany and Europe by the Panini soccer guard books. Bausinger's main thesis was that this *Bildersport* ("sports by photos") was far from identical to the real event of the Berlin Games, but that these photos and the texts and subtexts in the albums would remind the German population of these Games, because they were present in everyday life, even though only a small group of visitors were able to witness the real event directly.

Figure 1a: Award Ceremony at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, 1932

Eine denkwürdige Siegerehrung: Der Deutsche *Arthur Jonath* neben den beiden Negerstudenten *Eddie Tolan* und *Ralph Metcalfe* auf dem Siegerpodium im Stadion.

Source: Die Olympischen Spiele in Los Angeles 1932, edited by the Cigaretten-Bilderdienst, Hamburg-Bahrenfeld, Hamburg 1932, 19.

Bausinger is a professional scholar of peoples' culture. His interest in this subject of collectors' albums was to change the perspective of perceiving the Berlin Olympics from the top to the bottom. Which chances did the normal population in Germany really have to get to know the Olympics? One way was these albums. The marketing strategy was by no means an idea or invention of the Goebbels' ministry for propaganda, but rather a copy of the Los Angeles-Games of 1932. However, the goal was the same, public relations for the Olympic Games by making the man on the street familiar with the Olympics.

Figure 1b: Award Ceremony of the Gymnasts in the Olympic Dodecathlon: First, Schwarzmann (Germany), Second Mack (Switzerland), Third Frey (Germany)

Source: Die Olympischen Spiele 1936 in Berlin und Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Volume 2, edited by the Cigaretten-Bilderdienst Hamburg-Bahrenfeld, Hamburg 1932, 134.

The subtexts of the albums and its photos were diverse and manifold. A major theme was that the Olympic Games were an international event for peace and understanding which fully conformed to the Olympic ideal. Another narrative was that the Germans were going to be perfect and friendly hosts. A third was that the Olympics were an event enabling everybody to come and see what happens in Berlin. Nowhere in the albums and its photos is indicated or could even be inferred that the Berlin Games were to become a showcase of the Nazi tyranny and an ideological prelude to World War II. Even now, the albums are essential parts of the popular culture of remembrance of the Berlin Olympics. You can still find them in bookcases of German living rooms, which are sometimes filled with second hand books from grandparents or even great-grandparents.

Further influential media in the process of constructing the collective remembrance of these Games were undoubtedly the German *Wochenschau* (weekly newsreels) in the cinemas, and, last but not least, the Olympia films

directed by Leni Riefenstahl. However, their premiere was in 1938, two years after the Games, on the occasion of Hitler's 50th birthday.

All these media contributed to a popular cultural construction of the Berlin Olympics as a highlight of cultural and sporting life in Germany of the 1930s. It contrasted completely with the cultural construction of the Berlin Games by post-war professional historians. For them the Berlin Olympics were "Hitler's Games" (Hart-Davis 1986). It is noteworthy that historians refer to mostly the same images as the much-emphasized visitors (Hübner 2017).

In sum, various visual sources contribute to the construction of different images of the past. The same visual sources can even be interpreted in very different ways, as we also know from art historians and their attempts to analyse and interpret works of art. The obligation and responsibility of historians is to make these various perspectives and ways of interpretation and understanding transparent, through revealing the different sources and their nature. Visual sources certainly contribute to this multi-perspective approach to sports historical research. They are part of an essential paradigm of modern historiography, namely the relativity and limitation of historical studies and knowledge, depending on both the historian's interest and empirical evidence based on different sources (Rüsen 2013).

5. Sporting Art

Below, I would like to give another example of this relationship between the reality of sport and its communication by visual means. The famous paintings of so-called sporting art, a special genre of fine arts by mostly English painters since the 18th century, shows dogs and horses, generally racing and competing, and attended by gentlemen spending their time riding and fox hunting (Walker 1972). Today, we would not recognize these paintings as depictions of sport, if British Art Historians had not categorized them as sporting art, and if we did not know that the early forms of English gentleman sport are regarded for the most part as animal sport, such as horse riding, fox-hunting, dog races, and fishing. Sporting art in this sense, as a technical term, is a cultural construction.

Specifically, sporting art may be used to enhance our knowledge of various sorts of animal and gentleman sports, by analysing the various motifs or themes of these paintings. The clothing and posture of the gentlemen represent a specific habitus of this social group. Some sport historians have additionally interpreted the way racing horses were painted, stressing flying forelocks and long bodies that demonstrate speed and strength, as symbols of the main characteristics of modern societies and modern sports, such as "performance, excitement, and speed" (Eichberg 1978). These three words – *Leistung*, *Spannung*, *Geschwindigkeit* – are the title of Henning Eichberg's classical book, arguing that modern sport represents a new paradigm of body culture, full of dyna-

mism, rapidity and strength, compared to the court society and its body culture, or to the body culture of German *Turnen* (German gymnastics). According to Eichberg, the typical body and social habitus of the court society was courtesy and tranquility, and that of German *Turnen* collectivity and popularity.

What I want to convey with this example is that there is a difference between (1) specific practices in the past like horse riding and fox-hunting, (2) paintings displaying these practices, (3) categorizing these works as sporting art, and – finally – using (4) these paintings as visual sources for sport history. Sport historians must have and indeed have a certain understanding and concept of sport and sport history, in order to use these paintings as a relevant historical resource on the genesis of sport. Therefore, they should surely reveal their historical interests, previous knowledge, and perspective, which form the basics of a hermeneutic access to such cultural and social phenomena as sports. The fact that painters used these motifs, representing social practices of the gentleman class such as horse riding and fox hunting, indicates that such sports were regarded as part of culture, even upper-class or higher culture, and the paintings as "art," which were later defined by art historians specifically as sporting art.[5] By contrast, at the same time in Germany, sport and gymnastics were not respected as culture, at least not as higher or sophisticated culture (Grupe 1987; Bausinger 2006). Furthermore, sporting art did not exist in Germany at all (for the USA, see Guttmann 2011).

6. English Sporting Art, German *Reiterstandbilder*, and the Running Prince

To be sure, a larger number of so-called *Reiterstandbilder* – statues or monuments of dukes, kings, emperors and (other) heroic warriors – still exist in Germany as elsewhere. However, these monuments are by no means sporting art, but remnants of former heroic societies before the modern age of sport (Münkler 2015). Mostly, the person is depicted statically and not in motion. Sitting on his horse, he represents power and dignity.

During the 19th century, the prevailing and popular body culture in Germany was called *Turnen* – gymnastics. Gymnastics was for the lower and middle classes. "Gym was for Germans, the British played rather than exercised," as Richard Holt pointed out (Holt 1992, 11). However, the German upper classes were indeed not familiar with *Turnen* and gymnastics, but rather with the British traditions of upper class sports and games. These entailed hunting, horse riding, sailing, and later – at the beginning of the 20th century – rowing, tennis,

[5] See the website of the British Sporting Art Trust <http://www.bsat.co.uk/what-is-sporting-art> (Accesses April 2, 2017).

and golf (but not cricket) and then motor sport. The Prussian King and German Emperor, and the house of Hohenzollern were indeed sporting fans, but not all interested in gymnastics (Langenfeld 2012).

A grandnephew of the last German emperor William II, Prince Friedrich Karl von Preußen (1893-1917), even did athletics in the sporting club of Berlin Charlottenburg, managed by Carl Diem, who became the German "Mister Olympia" of 1936. The sculptor Ernst Gorsemann had created a statue of the running Prussian Prince Friedrich Karl, a pentathlete and horse rider. His mother and the sister of the empress, Luise Sophie of Prussia, had financed the statue in memory of the Prince who died at war (Diem 1974, 67-72). The monument was intended to decorate the area of the planned games of Berlin 1916, which were cancelled due to the First World War. The statue was exhibited in the 1920s at the forum of the German house of sport, located at the "*Reichssportfeld*," where the Olympic stadium for the Berlin Olympics of 1936 was erected. At the base of the monument, the following sentence had been engraved in the stone: "*Der deutschen Sportjugend zum Vorbild*" – As a Role Model for the German Sport Youth. Regrettably, the statue, made of bronze, was probably smelted in 1943, according to the historian Volker Kluge (Kluge 2000, 45). Both this statue and the person of Prince Karl Friedrich represent in some way the transition of German society from a heroic one characterized by Prussian virtues and the military during Wilhelminism (the regency period of the Prussian emperor William II over the German empire), to a modern and sporting society, in which even the Princes did sport and athletics in sporting suits. In addition, he had not died like a classical warrior on his horse in battle, but as a military officer in an aircraft. The contrast between numerous *Reiterstandbilder* of the ruling Prussian dynasty of the Hohenzollern, such as the last German emperor William II in Düsseldorf, and his grandnephew Prince Friedrich Karl, the runner, could not be more evident.

Therefore, the statue of the running Prince Friedrich Karl of Prussia can be regarded as sporting art on the one hand, because the prince was eternalised as an athlete. But on the other hand, it is also a modernized version of the tradition of the feudal monuments of kings, emperors, and other German "heroes" like those of William II, Bismarck, and Hindenburg. By contrast to the running prince, these statues embody stability, power, and dignity representing the nation.

Figure 2: Inauguration of the monument of Prince Friedrich Karl of Prussia in the 1920s

Prince Friedrich Karl of Prussia died in World War I during an air combat. The monument was located at the Sportforum of Berlin-Grunewald. Present were the President of the German „Reichsausschusses für Leibesübungen" Secretary Dr. Lewald (*), and as a representative of the German Army General General Heye (**).
Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/47/Bundesarchiv_Bild_102-08171,_Denkmal_des_Prinzen_Friedrich_Karl_von_Preu%C3%9Fen.jpg> (Copyright Bundesarchiv).

Actually, sporting art is by no means limited to traditional paintings including motifs of early British gentleman sport. The British Sporting Art Trust claims on its Website:

> sporting art can be understood to have a much wider artistic and historic scope. Perhaps the genre can also be seen to encompass all types of sport, both amateur and professional, from archery to football and cycling to motor racing.[6]

Meanwhile, the number of fine artists choosing sporting motifs for their paintings or artistic work in general is uncountable. Sports have always been interesting objects to modern artists. This fact is not really surprising, because sport itself is a typical phenomenon of the age of modernity or modernism.

7. Olympic Art Competitions

The founder of the Olympic movement, the French Baron Pierre de Coubertin, bore this broad genre of sporting art in mind when he initiated art competitions

[6] <http://www.bsat.co.uk/what-is-sporting-art> (Accessed April 2, 2017).

during the Olympic Games. However, Coubertin did not use the term sporting art. Rather, according to his vision of the Olympic Games, art was part of the Olympic festival, of his idea of Olympism, or of the Games which were themselves devised as a total work of art. Accordingly art competitions took place between the Games of Stockholm in 1912 and London in 1948. After these second Games in London, art competitions were abandoned, but art – music, fine arts, architecture, theatre and performance – developed as a stable, distinctive, and indispensable part of the overall program of every Games since 1948 (Stanton 2000; Kramer 2004).

It was no coincidence that Coubertin included art in his concept of Olympic Games and sports. In 1896, the year when the first Olympic Games of modern times took place in Athens, Coubertin's father, Charles Frédy, painted a work named "Jeux Olympiques 1896." Charles Frédy de Coubertin lived from 1822 until 1908. He was both wealthy and a well-known painter in France at that time. Apparently, on the one hand he supported the work of his son in reestablishing the Olympic Games, and on the other hand, his son Pierre functionalized painting to underline his main aim of glorifying sports as a modern form of religion through fine art. Pierre used the painting as the title page of the newsletter of the International Olympic Committee, named "Revue Olympique" (Camps Y Wilant 2016a).

Coubertin regarded both sport and art as related to each other or even as basically the same thing. However, fine art should contribute to the apotheosis of sports or Olympic sports as a new, modern form of a secular religion, *religio athletae*, as he named it, or a religion of muscles, as some fans of the British cult of athleticisms stated. Similar to antiquity when arts had to glorify the Greek gods, in modern times, art should glamourize the modern, secular religion of sports. Arts and the humanities should become part of the modern Olympiads, as Coubertin said at the opening of a meeting in Paris, May 23, 1906, where the modalities to integrate them were to be discussed. They should both contribute to "glorify practical sports" at the Olympics and for their own sake (Coubertin 1966). The critical and sceptical function of arts respecting society and sport, as modern art is expected to be today by contemporaries as a matter of course, was not implied by Coubertin. However, the artistic works which had been submitted at the Olympic art competitions included some which can also be interpreted as critical or sceptical towards sport; for example, representing athletes with faces distorted by pain and exertion.

Figure 3: "Jeux Olympiques 1896" Painting of Charles Frédy de Coubertin, father of Pierre de Coubertin

Source: Olympic museum, Lausanne, Cover of the "Revue Olympique" (1906 to 1908 and 1910 to 1914), official journal of the IOC.

In fact, both the modern phenomenon of sport and the Olympic art competitions motivated a number of contemporary artists to deal with sporting motifs in various forms and guises, such as architecture, literature, music, and last but not least, fine arts and sculpture. Even when the Olympic art competitions ended in 1948, modern artists of every kind continued to respect sport as a phenomenon of modernity in their works.

There were also a number of German artists participating at the Olympic art competitions (Kramer 2004). The most famous include Max Liebermann (1847-1937), Willi Baumeister (1889-1955), Georges Grosz (1893-1959) and, last but not least – the female sculptor Renée Sintenis (1888-1965), who won a bronze medal for her sculpture "Football Player" at the Olympic Games at Amsterdam in 1928 (Camps Y Wilant 2016b). Baumeister's female runner was not nominated for an Olympic medal by the jury. The same happened to George Grosz's painting of Max Schmeling and to the painting "Polo Player" by Max Liebermann. All these artists were representatives of modern fine arts in Germany, epitomizing the impressionist and expressionist style of modern

art. They even enjoyed an excellent reputation worldwide. Modern art was as international as modern Olympic sport. When the Nazis came to power, their work was denounced as "*entartet*" (degenerate) in the view of the Nazi propaganda. Today, their work is highly respected and prized, both by the art market and art scholars. They all belonged to the circle of modern artists sponsored by the art dealer and gallerist Alfred Flechtheim (1878-1937). He sponsored modern art and established a kind of European and international network for modern art (Dascher et al. 2011).

One may well speculate about two issues. Firstly, why did the paintings of Baumeister, Liebermann, and Grosz not win any Olympic medals at the art competitions, and secondly, why did the concept of Olympic art competitions fail, although sports offered substantial scope to numerous fine artists?

A possible answer to the first question might be that their paintings, which they submitted in the hope of winning Olympic art medals indeed included motifs of sport, but they cannot be interpreted as an apotheosis of sport as Coubertin imagined the function of art relating to Olympism. Liebermann, for example, was not actually interested in sport or high performance, but how the people of modern society spent their free or leisure time. Indeed, sporting activities were going to become essential activities. His painting of a polo player is less a study on that particular sport, but of the settings and habitus of the modern society, using impressionist styles, forms, and colors. However, Lieberman had intensively studied the specific movement of running horses and polo players. Yet, the paintings are much more than studies of movement, they also capture the scenery and atmosphere of leisure and pleasure sports in modern times.

George Grosz's portrait of "Max Schmeling the Boxer"[7] (1926) does not show Schmeling as a sporting hero like antique athletes posing in statues. Schmeling's fists look like those of a working man, a proletarian. He wears boxer shorts, but not boxing gloves. His fists remind us more of tools than of hands, and they are not protected by gloves like those of boxing athletes. Schmeling's body posture is not upright like that of an athletic male model, but rather defensive, slightly bent forward. He looks muscular but not excessively powerful, even shy and cautious. His facial expression is stoic and without recognizable emotion. The painting shows Schmeling neither as a glorified winner nor as a dejected loser, but as a neutral fighter, more defensive than offensive. In sum, Schmeling is not depicted heroically. The painting may be perceived less as a symbol of sporting heroes, than as an existentialist allegory of the fighting modern man.

Baumeister's "female runner II," painted in 1925, is part of a series of sporting paintings that he created between 1922 and 1934.8 The painting shows a

[7] <http://de.wahooart.com/@@/8XY3Y3-George-Grosz-Max-Schmeling-der-Boxer> (Accessed May 28, 2018).

[8] Following <http://alfredflechtheim.com/werke/laeuferin-ii/> (Accessed July 21, 2016).

female runner on a track. The figure is painted in a diagonal from the toes at the bottom left hand side of the picture up to the head in the top right corner. She is apparently running at high speed around a track. Her look is that of a typical modern sportswoman, with a blue headband and short hair, fashionably cut in the style of an "Eton crop." Her face and physiognomy are androgynous, and she does not express any emotion, neither of enjoyment nor effort. Her view is simply fixed on the next corner she must pass as quickly as possible. The body of the runner is athletic, slim, fit, and trained. She is naked like ancient athletes, whereas the young man lying on the pitch, painted in blue, and watching the female runner quite impassively, wears shorts. In the background, buildings with a modern, functional sporting architecture can be identified. The figures are painted in the style of a poster, geometric and two-dimensional, with clear lines and colours, functional, without any decoration.

According to art historians, Baumeister adopted the style of the "*Neue Sachlichkeit*" (Karg-Baumeister and Beye 2002, 183). This genre, the "New dispassion," prevailed during the Weimar Republic in various fields of art, especially in architecture and design. The famous architects Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, all members of the so-called Bauhaus group of modern artists, typify this style of "*Neue Sachlichkeit*." "New dispassion" implied and even underlined the spirit of rationality, soberness, and clarity of modern times.

Whatever the reasons, Baumeister did not receive a medal or even a laudatory acknowledgment at the Olympic art competitions in Amsterdam during the IX Olympic Games. The painting is nevertheless typical of the artistic reception of this new societal phenomenon of sport. The painting of the female runner includes some essential elements and settings of modern sport, namely athletes and spectators, emancipated females performing athletic sports, and male spectators, athletic bodies, strength and rapidity, functionality and rationality. However, it seems that the complexity of the phenomenon of sport is not evident in Baumeister's art. Modern sport is by no means as dispassionate and two-dimensional as Baumeister expresses it in his painting. By contrast, sport provides ample leeway for passion, excitement, and multidimensionality, in accordance with the conditions of the civilized modern world.

Regarding the contributions of artists to the art competitions at the Olympic Games during the 1920s until the 1936 Games, one notices that a wide range of modern, contemporary artists participated in several categories at these contests. Their work represented both the differentiated and distinct commitment of artists in the world, respecting sport, sporting bodies, athletes, sporting architecture, literature, and music. Various artistic means were used to express how sport, as a phenomenon of the modern world, was received and transformed artistically into different subject matters and genres. Art in the context of sport became more than just a means of glorifying the Olympic movement. It included

an artistic discourse on sports in the civilized world. At the Los Angeles Olympics in 1932, 540 artistic works from 24 nations were submitted to the juries.

However, the Olympic art competition did not survive as part of the Olympic Games. There is no space here to reflect and discuss in detail the reasons why. Sporting art in a wider sense became a genre of its own in contemporary art and culture, but not as art competitions in the context of the Games. The Games themselves developed towards an overall event of modern culture and media, including much more than sports and sport competitions. The opening and closing ceremonies are now general art and artistic displays of body and movement, often with respect to national traditions. They create a culture of their own, beyond the sporting competitions. However, art as a contest is not a part of the Olympics anymore, whereas various art contests could be established independently of the Olympics in the media, like music contest and awards of every conceivable kind. "Olympiads" as symbols or models for contests of every kind were established, from mathematics or physics Olympiads up to Olympiads for young scholars, the arts seem to remain free of contests in a strict sporting sense.

8. Sporting Art in Socialist East Germany

Finally, two examples of sporting art in Germany are discussed, both related to East German sport history. The guideline for my understanding and interpretation of these paintings was less that of art history but rather a sport historical approach. I hope that my interpretation will enhance our knowledge of sport in the historical and political context of the GDR.

A major difference between sporting art, in contrast to other visual sources, is the work of the artist on his subject. It is not just a moment of sporting action, captured on a screen, but the artist is following certain intentions through his work. As explained above with the paintings of Lieberman, Baumeister, and Grosz, artists consciously use certain forms and colours to create the effects, and they ultimately attempt (not always but often) to realize their vision – whether positive or negative – through their sporting motifs. Furthermore, the artistic work is part of a wider political and cultural context, which ought to be part of its understanding and interpretation.

In the German context, Peter Kühnst is probably the most prominent expert in the field of sporting art in the GDR. He has collected and researched sport and art in the socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) under the banner of "Sporting Art in der DDR" (Kühnst 1985, 1996).

During the GDR period, as in other socialist or communist regimes behind the iron curtain after World War II, sport and art were both functionalized through Marxist ideology and the socialist structures of the "*Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*" – the state of the workers and peasants, as the leaders of the GDR

called their own regime, which was in fact a tyrannical and oppressive "dictatorship of the proletariat," in the manner of Lenin. Both sport and art had to contribute to the teleologically defined power and glory of socialism.

In consequence, when GDR painters worked with sporting motifs or athletes, the latter looked like workers in training suits, and indeed, this was both the reality and ideology of GDR sport, work, and art. A large collection of GDR sporting art was permanently exhibited in the buildings of the German *Hochschule für Körperkultur* (DHfK) in Leipzig – German University for body culture – some of them until today.

Two examples of this style of GDR socialist realism as sporting art are explained below. First the painting "Swimmer"[9] by Willi Sitte (1921-2013), a leading artist of the GDR and president of the GDR society of fine arts. This painting was created in 1971, one year before the Olympics of Munich in 1972, where GDR athletes celebrated an enormous triumph by defeating their 'hostile brothers' in the west of their common country.

The following analysis of this painting is not an iconological one with respect to outstanding art historians like Erwin Panofsky (Panofsky 1967). Loosely based on his method, we propose a 'sporthistorical' interpretation. The painting simply shows how athletes and sports were looked upon in the GDR. This could also be true of the work of a convinced socialist artist like Willi Sitte, namely reflecting hard work and the battle against a hostile environment. The swimmer combats troubled waters, painted in rather gloomy colors with broad strokes of the brush. Body and water merge into each other. For me as a viewer of the painting, the entire body fighting its way through the water with strong movements expresses extreme effort and a commitment to the obligations of a swimming athlete. The face of the swimmer cannot be recognized. What can be interpreted here is that in GDR sport, the individual athlete is not relevant, but rather his efforts, strength, struggles, and achievement for triumph – of GDR and socialism.

The other example of a painting in the sporting art style of the GDR is the work of Bert Heller, entitled "*Gustav Adolf Schur und die Jungen*"[10] (Gustav Adolf Schur and the Young Boys), dated 1959. Ilona Petzold, art scholar in Leipzig during the GDR-period and curator of an art exhibition in Leipzig in 1983, identified this painting as the first classic work of GDR-paintings: "The painting […] was a real alternative to the loss of humanity during the period of late capitalism," she maintained.[11]

The painting shows the early GDR superstar, the cyclist Täve Schur, in front of some young boys, surrounded by bicycles (for a biographical draft see Meier

[9] <https://www.bildatlas-ddr-kunst.de/item/5521> (Accessed May 28, 2018).

[10] <http://home.uni-leipzig.de/kustodie/ausstellungsarchiv/rasenballett/index.htm> (Accessed May 28, 2018).

[11] Petzold, quoted by Gerling in Kühnst (1985, 1, translation by the author).

2009). Everybody in the GDR knew Täve Schur. His face is in the center of the picture. He looks self-conscious, which is revealed by his face and body language or, in general, habitus. His features are distinctive and strong-willed. Additionally, all figures are looking at the viewer of the painting. Täve and the boys want to convey a message to all viewers. This message seems to be clear: Täve Schur is a man who is ready and willing to build the new GDR. He is an idol, and the young generation should and will follow him. They even look like him, just younger. Their features are still infantile and soft, but if they act and work like Täve Schur, they will become strong and successful like him, not for their own sake, but for the future of the GDR. The picture also expresses that one was not alone as a sportsman in the GDR, but part of a strong collective, and supported by a modern state – symbolized by bicycles, produced by GDR industries and technicians.

9. Summary

Visual sources are just one of numerous other categories of sources and documents with respect to the history of sport, but no doubt a very important one. Among visual sources in general, sporting art is again a special category. It is usually considered as a category of fine arts in art history. In this paper, various types of sporting art were discussed in order to contribute to a better understanding of the history of sports.

Historians should be aware that visual sources need to be checked and examined critically, just like every other historical source or document. As a matter of course, the contextualization of every source, whether visual or written etc., belongs to the set of methodical tools of historians. Furthermore, the use and interpretation of any source is dependent on the perspective of historians, on their intentions and the questions they raise, their theoretical background and not least, their context as historians. Naturally, this is also true for visual sources.

Sporting art is a unique form of visual source. First, the source is the work of an artist. It is not just a copy of a sporting action or sporting scene as captured on camera, but an artistic construction. To be sure, photographers can and mostly do also construct their photos and edit them. Photos can also be manipulated. It is difficult to judge whether a photo is entirely real or not. When artists or sculptors work with sporting motifs, they realize their artistic intentions by using forms and colours and other artistic means. They consciously create another artistic reality of sport beyond the real sport, including various and complex influences they are exposed to as artists in their time.

Historians using sporting art as historical documents attempt to describe, explain, and understand the genesis and context of a specific work. Additionally, in doing so, historians create another level of sporting reality. All in all,

sport and sporting art used as visual sources, are social and artificial constructions on various levels.

References

Bausinger, Hermann. 2006. *Sportkultur*. Tübingen: Attempto-Verlag.

Bausinger, Hermann. 2009. Bildersport: Olympische Spiele im Kleinformat. In *Der deutsche Sport auf dem Weg in die Moderne*, ed. Michael Krüger, 105-18. Berlin: LIT-Verlag.

Burke, Peter. 2010. *Augenzeugenschaft: Bilder als historische Quellen*. Berlin: Wagenbach.

Camps Y Wilant, Natalia. 2016a. Art Works as Sources for Sport History Research: The Example of 'Sports Allegory/The Crowning of the Athletes' by Charles Louis Frédy de Coubertin. *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33 (10): 1028-45. doi:10.1080/09523367.2016.1229308.

Camps Y Wilant, Natalia. 2016b. A Female Medallist at the 1928 Olympic Art Competitions: The Sculptress Renée Sintenis. *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33 (13): 1483-99. doi:10.1080/09523367.2017.1280026.

Chomsky, Noam. 2007. *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univiversity Press.

Coubertin, Pierre de. 1966. *Der olympische Gedanke: Reden und Aufsätze*. Schorndorf: Hofmann.

Dascher, Ottfried, Rudolf Schmitt-Föller, and Rico Quaschny. 2011. *Es ist was Wahnsinniges mit der Kunst: Alfred Flechtheim; Sammler, Kunsthändler, Verleger*. Wädenswil: Nimbus.

Diem, Carl, ed. 1974. *Ein Leben für den Sport: Erinnerungen aus dem Nachlaß*. Ratingen: Henn.

Dresen, Antje, Laurens Form, Ralf Brand, and Franz Baumgarten. 2015. *Dopingforschung: Perspektiven und Themen*. Schorndorf: Hofmann.

Eichberg, Henning. 1978. *Leistung, Spannung, Geschwindigkeit: Sport und Tanz im gesellschaftlichen Wandel des 18. /19. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Elias, Norbert, and Eric Dunning, eds. 1986. *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Oxford, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Elias, Norbert. 2013. *Der Mythenjäger: Texte von Norbert Elias*, ed. Hermann Korte. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Grupe, Ommo. 1987. *Sport als Kultur*. Zürich: Edition Interfrom.

Guttmann, Allen. 2004 [1977]. *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Guttmann, Allen. 2011. *Sports and American Art from Benjamin West to Andy Warhol*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2014. *Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft*. *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*; vol. 2. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Hart-Davis, Duff. 1986. *Hitler's Games: The 1936 Olympics*. London: Century Hutchinson.

Hertling, Jens, and Trond Patzphal, eds. 2011. Doping im Breitensport. *Doping: Die Zeitschrift für Sport, Recht und Medizin* 2 (2).

Holt, Richard 1993. *Sport and the British: A Modern History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Hübner, Emanuel. 2017. *Olympia in Berlin: Amateurfotografen sehen die Olympischen Spiele 1936*. München: morisel.
Huggins, Mike 2015. The Visual in Sport History: Approaches, Methodologies and Sources. *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32 (15): 1813-30. doi:10.1080/09523367.2015.1108969.
Karg-Baumeister, Felicitas, and Peter Beye. 2002. *Willi Baumeister: Werkkatalog der Gemälde*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag.
Kluge, Volker. 2000. *Olympiastadion Berlin: Rundgang durch das ehemalige Reichssportfeld*. Berlin: Parthas.
Kramer, Bernhard. 2004. *Die Olympischen Kunstwettbewerbe von 1912 bis 1948: Ergebnisse einer Spurensuche*. München: Gallas.
Krüger, Michael, ed. 2009. *Der deutsche Sport auf dem Weg in die Moderne: Carl Diem und seine Zeit*. Berlin: LIT-Verlag.
Krüger, Michael, ed. 2012. *Impulse für die Sportgeschichte: Zum 80. Geburtstag von Hans Langenfeld*. Hildesheim: Arete-Verlag.
Kühnst, Peter. 1985. *Sport und Kunst: Sporting Art in der DDR*. Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft u. Politik.
Kühnst, Peter. 1996. *Sports: A Cultural History in the Mirror of Art*. Dresden: Verlag der Kunst.
Landwehr, Achim. 2009. *Kulturgeschichte.* Stuttgart: Ulmer.
Langenfeld, Hans. 2012. Aristokratischer Sport im Wilhelminischen Deutschland. In *Impulse für die Sportgeschichte: Zum 80. Geburtstag von Hans Langenfeld*, ed. Michael Krüger, 171-43.Hildesheim: Arete-Verlag.
Maar, Christa, ed. 2005. *Iconic turn: Die neue Macht der Bilder*. Köln: DuMont.
Meier, Henk E. 2009. Selbstlosigkeit, Authentizität und Unbelehrbarkeit: Täve Schur und die "Hall of Fame des deutschen Sports". In *Der deutsche Sport auf dem Weg in die Moderne*. *Carl Diem und seine Zeit,* ed. Michael Krüger, 151-62. Berlin: LIT-Verlag.
Münkler, Herfried 2015. *Kriegssplitter: Die Evolution der Gewalt im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Rowohlt.
Panofsky, Erwin 1967. *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance.* New York: Harper & Row.
Reinold, Marcel. 2016. *Doping als Konstruktion: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Anti-Doping-Politik.* Bielefeld: Transcipt Verlag.
Rüsen, Jörn. 2013. *Historik: Theorie der Geschichtswissenschaft*. Köln, Wien: Böhlau Verlag.
Stanton, Richard. 2000. *The Forgotten Olympic Art Competitions: The Story of the Olympic Art Competitions of the 20th Century*. Victoria: Trafford.
von Ranke, Leopold. 1885. *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 33/34, Vorrede zu „Geschichte der romanischen und germanischen Völker“. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblodt.
Walker, Stella A. 1972. *Sporting Art: England 1700 – 1900*. London: Studio Vista.
Weltecke, Manfred, and Jan Koester. 2011. *Immanuel Kant: Was kann ich wissen? Was soll ich tun? Was darf ich hoffen? Allgemeinverständliche Einführung in Leben und Werk Immanuel Kants*. Edewecht: Hierax-Medien.

Historical Social Research
Historische Sozialforschung

All articles published in HSR Special Issue 43 (2018) 2:
Visualities – Sports, Bodies, and Visual Sources.