

Abstract:

This article explores representations of modern sport in the art of German Expressionism, c. 1910-1920. Following a brief outline of the movement's main artistic concerns, the discussion will focus on a small number of art-works which depict a range of modern sports (cycling, football and boxing) as well as exemplify some of the movement's main artistic genres – from painting to woodcut to sculpture to film. As well as paying attention to genre, style and other artistic features, I will explore the ways in which these Expressionist representations of sports emerged, and the cultural contexts in which they operated. As the article focuses on a movement contributing to the development of 20th-century art, rather than an individual artist or a specific sport, it will, finally, articulate the methodological implications of the approach taken here, and consider the relationship between art history and sport history.

Keywords: Expressionism; visual art; film; sport; cycling ; boxing; football; Feininger, Lyonel; Richter-Berlin, Heinrich; Pechstein, Max; Bloch, Albert; Haqller, Hermann; Martin, Karlheinz

This article explores representations of modern sport in the art of German Expressionism, c. 1910-1920. I will first offer a brief outline of the movement's main artistic concerns, before focussing on a small number of art-works which depict a range of modern sports (cycling, football and boxing). I have chosen these works also to exemplify some of the movement's main artistic genres – from painting to woodcut to sculpture to film. As well as paying attention to genre, style and other artistic features, I will consider some of the ways in which these Expressionist representations of sports emerged, and the cultural contexts in which they operated. As the article focuses on a movement contributing to the development of 20th-century art, rather than an individual artist or a specific sport, it will, finally, articulate the methodological implications of the approach taken here, and consider the relationship between art history and sport history.

Before turning to individual works, a brief outline of Expressionism's main artistic and ideological concerns is required. Emerging towards the end of the first decade of the 20th century, and lasting until the early 1920s, Expressionism comprised not merely the visual arts, but literature, theatre, architecture, film, music and dance as well.¹ Most of the artists associated with the movement were born in the 1880s and 1890s, and their art was part of a broader protest against the stifling bourgeois world of late-Wilhelmine Germany. Expressionist painting, graphic arts, and sculpture were at least in part a reaction to official academic art and conventional bourgeois taste at the time. Resistance to prevailing artistic conventions as well as to the increasing institutionalisation of art further entailed the gradual development of a radically new aesthetic that would connect Expressionism to other modernist or avant-garde movements emerging across the continent at about the same time.² The new Expressionist aesthetic centred around the attempt to render reality and human subjectivity in ways more real than Realism, to represent human perception, emotion and thought in ways that would decisively challenge and modify, if not overturn conventional modes of artistic representation. In this vein, practitioners and theorists of Expressionism believed art should take on a new role altogether – it was no longer to reflect external reality, reproducing the visible; instead, as Paul Klee (1879-1940) put it, art makes visible.³

The Expressionists' emphasis on a 'new visibility', on the need for new artistic modes to represent reality and human subjectivity, has given rise to a widely-held view that regards Expressionist art as mere expressivity, as the more or less idiosyncratic way in which an individual artist would project his or her subjectivity onto the objective, external world. This view is somewhat simplistic in that it tends to overlook art-historical (dis-)continuities, such as the movement's departure from representational

¹ See, for instance, *The Total Artwork in Expressionism: Art, Film, Literature, Theatre, Dance and Architecture, 1905-1925*. Ed Ralf Beil and Claudia Dillmann (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012).

² For an instructive and concise account of Expressionist art, see Shulamith Behr, *Expressionism* (London: Tate Publishing, 1999).

³ Paul Klee, in: *Schöpferische Konfession* (Creative Confession) (Berlin: Erich Reiss, 1920) (Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit. Ed. Kasimir Edschmid, vol. XIII) p.28-40 (p.28). His essay begins with the statement: 'Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, sondern macht sichtbar.' (Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible.)

Realism and its development of a radical visual language, which was partly influenced by French and Italian avant-garde tendencies such as Fauvism, Cubism and Futurism. The new visual language of Expressionism, evident first and foremost in the visual arts, but discernible in film and on the stage as well, includes bright, anti-naturalistic colours and lighting; tilting, distorting angles as a challenge to traditional linear perspective; broad, sharp and rough lines and brushstrokes, and angular forms and shapes that complicate the representation of a seemingly organic world. As more recent accounts of Expressionism, such as Behr's, have suggested, rather than regard the movement's artistic as mere individual expressivity, it is more productive to see the violent distortion of reality in Expressionist art as a way to articulate a profound sense of crisis, anxiety and discontent about the self and the world. Expressionist artists were clearly fascinated by the urban culture and modernity, translating the increased pace of life into artistic forms, but at the same time, they protested loudly against the dominance of instrumental reason, and against the debilitating effects of individual and social alienation. This is not to say that Expressionist art is all doom and gloom; rather, it is to open the eye for a profound ambivalence that might be detectable in this kind of art, produced shortly before and after the turbulence of the First World War. Key Expressionist watchwords were 'Leben', 'Erlebnis', 'Kampf' (life, lived experience, struggle). These watchwords though pale in translation, reflect contemporary ideas about vitalism and had powerful contemporary implications; they point to the attempt to revitalise, via artistic and cultural intervention, what was perceived to become increasingly lifeless and objectified, and incorporate this concern within a revitalising aesthetic. So, if Expressionism constitutes a creative, imaginative, if ambivalent reaction to the perceived sapping effects of living under the social and cultural conditions of modernity, its artistic themes and new representational modes would nonetheless gestured towards a new, better or alternative mode of living, a new vitality which would emphatically include the utopian hope for a 'new man', a new humanity or humanity transformed.

Expressionist artists' engagement with modern sports remains vastly under-researched. Peter Kühnst, in an ambitious, chronological survey of representations of sports in the fine arts from the Renaissance to the present day, refers to a number of Expressionist paintings in relation to more general cultural contexts and concerns,

for instance, when he discusses the representations of nude bathers and swimmers in work by Brücke artists Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel and Max Pechstein as reflecting a broader yearning for an alternative, a more natural physical culture away from the constraints of the city.⁴ Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe has given an account of how the renewed emphasis on physical culture in Germany from the late 19th century onwards can be connected to larger social and political discourses, and while much of what he covers and uncovers is relevant to the Expressionist generation, there is little actual discussion of Expressionist writings or art-works.⁵ The lack of attention to the subject is astonishing when one considers the richness and diversity of sport representations in Expressionist culture, including in the fine arts. The lack is astonishing also in light of the fact that there are numerous studies and a mature and well-developed critical discourse about the status and significance of sport in the culture of the Weimar Republic – the period immediately following and partially overlapping with late Expressionism. This field is constituted by a critical discourse ranging from literary studies to art history and cultural studies, yet any discussion of the Expressionist engagement with modern sports is virtually occluded.⁶ In that sense, then, the present article can be but a first, modest attempt to cover some ground.

Broadly speaking, Expressionist artists turned to modern sports because it was a phenomenon of urban modernity and the emerging mass culture. Their own artistic revolution against bourgeois society found a perfect counterpart in the social transformations engendered by the evolution of modern sports in Germany. Indeed, historians have investigated how the turn towards “English sports” and its new athletic competitions helped shape middle-class identity, and how sports could become a driving force of modernisation in Germany.⁷ If modernisation refers to

⁴ Peter Kühnst, *Sport: Eine Kulturgeschichte im Spiegel der Kunst* (Amsterdam: O.P.A., 1996), pp. 255-260.

⁵ Bernd Wedemeyer-Kolwe, *Der „neue Mensch“: Körperkultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004)

⁶ See, for instance, Frank Becker, *Amerikanismus in Weimar: Sportsymbole und politische Kultur 1918-1933* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 1993), and Erik N. Jensen, *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, and German Modernity* (Oxford / New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). In addition, there is a copious critical literature on individual Weimar artists and writers, such as Brecht and Musil, and the significance of sport in their work.

⁷ See for instance Christiane Eisenberg, *“English Sports” und deutsche Bürger: Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1800-1939* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1999).

ongoing, dynamic change, then certainly by the time of the early 20th century. As both social and political conditions in the German Empire became consolidated around 1900, sport could be thought of as a key player in bringing about change even faster or even more radically. Indeed, Carl Diem (1882-1962), best known as a leading sports administrator and also an important advocate and propagator of modern sports in the first half of the 20th century, described active participation in modern sports around 1900 as a 'revolution led by 20-year olds and those even younger'; Diem was aged 14 years when he founded the Berlin athletic club, Aro, in 1896.⁸ Importantly in the context of a cultural and aesthetic 'revolution', Expressionist sport images tend to be about modern sports, that is, English sports, and not with German Turnen, which, by the end of the 19th century, had distinctly political aims. In contrast to this, the attractiveness of English sports, i.e. team and individual sports including football, cycling, boxing, athletics and swimming as well, lay not merely in the fact that they were new, and to some extent bound up with new developments in mechanics or technology, as in cycling, but perhaps more importantly in the German context, these English sports were regarded as emancipatory forms of physical culture. At the same time, they came to be seen as sports that raised important new questions about the status of the individual living athletic body and their relationship with a larger community and society.

In his painting *Das Radrennen (Bicycle Race)* of 1912, Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956) represents a new competitive sport that was proving extremely popular in the early years of the 20th century (Figure 1). We know that Feininger was an extremely keen cycling enthusiast, riding the latest racing bikes available, though for his own pleasure rather than competitively.⁹ Born in America to German immigrants, he moved to Germany in the late 1880s to study and then became a free-lance artist; his early artistic career was spent producing caricatures and cartoons for a range of newspapers and sports magazines. These included a number of cycling-related works, usually in a mildly satirical or grotesque vein. It was not until 1913 that he publicly exhibited some of his 'serious' paintings in which he had been experimenting

⁸ Carl Diem, *Ein Leben für den Sport*, quoted in Gertrud Pfister / Elke Mosberger, *Sport auf dem grünen Rasen. Fußball und Leichtathletik*, in: Gertrud Pfister / Gerd Steins, *Sport in Berlin: Vom Ritterturnier zum Stadtmarathon* (Berlin 1987) pp. 78-79.

⁹ See the photographs dating from 1898 and 1928 resp. in Ulrich Luckhardt, *Lyonel Feininger* (Munich / Berlin / London / New York: Prestel, 2004), pp. 174 and 178.

with the modernist style, and when he was offered an opportunity to do, he selected *Das Radrennen* for his portfolio at the *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* held in Berlin in 1913. Organised by the collector, writer and editor, Herwarth Walden at his own STURM gallery, this was one of the first major exhibitions in Germany to announce Expressionism as a serious modernist art to a national and an international audience. In *Das Radrennen*, Feininger keeps realistic detail to a minimum, which makes it difficult to say whether the painting depicts a moment in long endurance race or a short sprint race, and whether the action takes place outdoors, on the road, or in an indoor arena, such as the Berliner Ausstellungshallen am Zoo or the purpose-built Sportpalast in Potsdamer Straße, where the popular and lucrative Six-day cycling events would be staged. Resisting mimetic realism to an extent, Feininger's painting is distinctive because it uses form, colour and style to convey two key ideas: the uniformity of cyclists hunched over their handlebars and locked in competition, and the notion that they are at one with their racing machines, that their athletic ability has been enhanced by technology. The diagonal composition of the painting strongly suggests movement and speed. As a result of this composition, some of the cyclists' bodies have been truncated not included within the frame, further emphasising their secondary role within the race. Feininger's use of anti-realistic colours (a different one for each cyclist) is in tune with the Expressionist aesthetic. Feininger's painting is also distinctive for its geometric style, which art historians have variously identified as the result of his encounter with Cubist painting on a visit to Paris in 1911, and with Futurist painting in Berlin in 1912.¹⁰ Among the Futurist artists, Boccioni, Carrá and Russolo used cycling images to experiment with the representation of dynamic, thrusting speed. In *Das Radrennen*, Feininger, though, seems to resist the Futurist emphasis on celebrating the fusion of man and machine; instead, he uses this scene from a competitive bicycle race to develop a new, more moderate visual language more in tune with Expressionist concerns.¹¹ Feininger's own use of geometry is all the more striking when one compares

¹⁰ See Bernard Vere, 'Pedal-Powered Avant-Gardes: Cycling Paintings in 1912-13', in: *The Visual in Sport*. Ed. Mike Huggins and Mike O'Mahony (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 70-87 (p. 72); Peter Nisbet, *Lyonel Feininger: Zeichnungen und Aquarelle* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), p. 33. Nisbet discusses a charcoal and ink drawing which is an early study for *Das Radrennen*. – Vere's analysis of Feininger's painting is largely confined to a stylistic comparison with an earlier caricature, *Balance*, and the documenting of influences from advanced French and Italian art.

¹¹ Cf. Luckhardt, p. 74.

Radrennen with an earlier caricature, *Bilanz* (Balance, 1908); the latter shows six riders, its composition is nearly identical but the representation is much more realist in style and as a result individualises the riders' facial expressions, with an interesting correspondence emerging between some of the riders' handlebar moustaches and the rounded drop-down handlebars of their racing machines.¹² The geometric style of *Das Radrennen* relies on a combination of curves and diagonals, with multiple and repeated similar lines additionally creating a layered and serrated effect. Circular forms are used to represent the six bicycle wheels and one chainwheel; again, realistic detail in regard to those seems subordinated to the overarching compositional idea that wishes to emphasise rhythm and repetition. Feininger's emphasis on unidirectional movement underlines the competitive nature of the race. The overall effect is that they are discernible as different competitors, yet their body language is the same, and their bodies appear to be integrated into, if not subservient, to their racing bikes. Instead of focussing on an individual athlete's body, the work subordinates individuality to the competitive collective constituting a modern bicycle race. What might make this painting typically Expressionist, irrespective of the various stylistic influences from Cubism, Futurism and Fauvism, is its fascination with a kind of new, heightened vitality enabled by competitive sports, while simultaneously casting doubt over the integrity and viability of the individual human body so closely associated with a mechanical racing bike, and so intensely engaged in modern competition.

A key genre within Expressionist art is the woodcut, a form of graphic art. Drawing on the practice and theories of Edvard Munch and Vincent van Gogh, many Expressionists felt the woodcut with its black/white contrast, was perfectly suited to evoke strong emotional tension. Furthermore, the Expressionist artists regarded the woodcut also as a more immediate, more primal form of expression, and they would explore the expressive potential of the rough, crude woodcut, and not the more refined wood engraving. Finally, many Expressionist artists would cut their own wood blocks, often against the natural grain, and sometimes print the wood cuts themselves, as a means of bypassing or challenging the increasing mechanisation of artistic production. The artist Heinrich Richter-Berlin (1884-1981), who was originally a member of the Berliner Secession before he left the group to produce work

¹² Feininger's *Bilanz* is reproduced in Luckhardt, p. 74, and Vere, p. 75

published in a range of Expressionist magazines, shared his contemporaries' penchant for urban life, and some of his work is concerned with the presence of the new physical or athletic culture in modernity. His woodcut 'Der Torsteher' (Goalkeeper) (Fig. 2) takes as its object a new team sport, football, which had become enormously popular in Germany in the early years of the 20th century and can be regarded as the English sport par excellence.¹³ Its popularity in Germany led to a demand for new spaces to freely practice and play football, often undeveloped land on the edge of towns, as in this woodcut. Richter-Berlin has foregrounded a scene near the goal where a goalkeeper is seen leaping high above two of his defenders, marked by the white jerseys and black shorts, and is about to make contact with a high ball. It is unclear whether the ball is flying towards his goal or whether the keeper has just palmed the ball away. The scene is watched by three players from the opposing team, wearing white jerseys and black shorts. The players' bodies are represented in typically Expressionist style, angular, yet all of them look ready to jump. Richter-Berlin's woodcut captures a dynamic situation full of heightened tension. Although the piece lacks linear perspective, it does have a discernible composition. There is a good harmony or interplay of angular, tilted lines and forms (the players, their limbs; the roofs of the houses in the background), and circular shapes (the ball; and the circular lines/ rhythms around the edges of the woodcut). This is an effective composition as it guides the view from the bottom to the top, towards the goalkeeper's outstretched left arm and the ball. The goalkeeper wears the same outfit as his team mates, but he is distinguished by his elongated upper body, his very long left arm, and most importantly, by the glove he's wearing which is quite large and has an opening which would make it the perfect shape for catching the loose ball. The visual idea of the goalkeeper transcending his team-mates is heightened by the fact that the glove looks like bird's claw, making the goalkeeper a kind of bird-man, or a modern Icarus. This woodcut, then, with its deeply gouged, broad lines is an Expressionist sport image that isolates in a single moment a bold drama or incident. Although the woodcut in its focus on the goalkeeper echoes an established mode by which football scenes would be conveyed in the visual culture at the time, as can be seen in a contemporary

¹³ The woodcut was published in Herwarth Walden's magazine, *Der Sturm*, vol. 3, no. 111 (May 1912), p. 53.

photograph from a 1912 football match, published in Germany's illustrated sports magazine (fig. 3), its anti-naturalistic style and form give it additional meaning. The goalkeeper, jumping high into the sky as if reaching out to the sun, assumes, at least in part, a trans-human shape, or a sort of redemption through the individual sporting effort that benefits the team and the community. That means the artist portrays the goalkeeper as the 'odd one out' in two senses: the keeper stands apart from the rest of his team because he, unlike the outfield players, is allowed to handle the ball, and he embodies the possibility of an Expressionist transformation, a transfiguration even.

Among the new, modern sports to arrive and be embraced in Germany was boxing. It also caught the imagination of Expressionist artists, although the sport's cultural and social contexts were vastly different from cycling and football. Because there was an official ban on public boxing matches in Germany until 1918, the sport was confined to a very small number of clubs and unable to develop much.¹⁴ Boxing bouts were therefore largely held in cabarets, circuses and fairgrounds, where they featured alongside other physical acts such as acrobats, jugglers, wrestler or trick cyclists. Boxing thus was closely associated with cultural spaces where a clearly anti-bourgeois body aesthetic would be staged and consumed. Max Pechstein's (1881-1955) gouache of such a performance conveys some of the exoticism of the boxing performance in the playful representations of the boxers and the artificial, brightly illuminated setting (fig. 4). The cursory nature of this piece, executed on the back of a postcard that he, and other Brücke artists like Kirchner, would send each other immediately after visiting the cabaret. Moreover, boxing could be regarded as a recent incarnation of a primitive fight man-to-man, even though the introduction of the so-called Queensberry rules in the late 19th century had protected its practitioners from the more extreme forms of violence and injury. In the early years of the 20th century, boxing had implications of strength, virility, violent aggression, and the quickness and agility of body and mind, and in the century's second decade, it became an extremely attractive subject matter to a range of European avant-garde artists at the time, including the Futurists in Italy, the Vorticists in England, and

¹⁴ For an instructive survey, see Karin Rase, *Kunst und Sport: Der Boxsport als Spiegelbild gesellschaftlicher Verhältnisse* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 97-132. Rase's monograph documents and explores representations of boxing and the boxer in German fine arts and applied arts during the Weimar Republic.

Dadaists in Switzerland, Germany and France.¹⁵ Albert Bloch (1882-1961), the American-born member of the Blaue Reiter, produced a large painting depicting a boxing match, in 1912 (fig. 5). The composition and colouring clearly highlight the boxers in the ring. But unlike Pechstein in his quickly executed, miniature sketch, Bloch also emphasises the boxing match as a public spectacle. The colour contrast evident in Bloch's painting is enhanced through the contrast between the elaborately clothed, middle-class spectators (inc. the referee in the ring) and the nearly naked boxers. The scene represented by Bloch may be based on his watching of a fight in the US; the painting, however, became part of the Expressionist canon not merely because of Bloch affiliation with the Munich-based group, but also on account of the fact that it was exhibited, like Feininger's *Das Radrennen*, was exhibited at Herwarth Walden's ground-breaking *Erster Deutscher Herbstsalon* in 1913, which paved the way for the wider dissemination of a modern style in the visual arts.

A different perspective on boxing and the individual boxer was provided in two works by Swiss artist Hermann Haller (1880-1950). In 1915, Haller, a friend of Paul Klee, produced two bronzes of the black American boxer Jack Johnson (1878-1946) – *Jack Johnson* and *Jack Johnson in Boxerstellung* (fig. 6). Johnson had become the first black heavyweight champion of the world in 1908, and retained that title until 1915. From 1912, he was living in Paris, where he became a celebrity of sorts and frequented artistic and intellectual circles. Haller met Johnson in the studio of a friend, the Dutch painter, Kees van Dongen (1877-1968), where the American boxer would often spar with any visitor who wanted to challenge him. In two bronze sculptures, Haller presents the boxer as a male nude, adopting an artistic convention that dates back to classical antiquity. The two works do not depict a fighting scene, but instead focus on an individual athlete, who is ready to fight, on his guard, and suggested as being strong and virile. Johnson's body is smooth, yet muscular; the body comes across as more statuesque in the resting pose, which shows the boxer with angled muscular arms resting against his buttocks, and with the potential of aggression and agility in the *Boxerstellung*. In either work, physical prowess is conveyed as being all potential, especially in the former sculpture. Neither sculpture amounts to a realistic depiction of the boxer, though. Haller de-emphasises

¹⁵ See the excellent account in Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2008), pp. 208-258.

Johnson's muscular build and elongated the boxer's limbs and his torso. Haller also keeps Johnson's head fairly small in relation to the rest of the boxer's body, and particularly in contrast with a bulging and muscular neck; this is a familiar trope and strategy in European primitivism, and here it serves the Expressionist emphasis on vitality and strong action, 'Leben' and 'Kampf' over thought and intellect. At the same time, the works serve to aestheticise the boxer's body, and this artistic strategy produces a tension with the primitivist intent. Although the statues are relatively small (50cm), and were probably created for wealthy collectors or boxing enthusiasts, their underlying classicism seeks to convey an element of stability, continuity and monumentality. At least one of the few commentators on Haller has noted a resemblance to Egyptian sculpture, which presented the human being as permanent and immutable, as inhabiting an ideal body whose representation tended to abstract from individualising physical features.¹⁶ Furthermore, these are bronze sculptures, in a most durable metal, as if to bestow permanence on the athletic body. There is a tension, then, between primitivism, classicism and Expressionism; the potential for primitive, violent aggression and strength is held in check by an almost classical form. Haller's sculptures of Jack Johnson display the ambivalent fascination European artists held for the black American superstar, and the ambivalence is reflected in the profound tension between representation and sculptural form.

William Wauer's (1866-1962) sculpture of a boxer is far more abstract than Haller's, although like him, he depicts a single boxer (fig. 7). A member of Walden's STURM-Kreis of writers and artists, Wauer takes the Expressionist aesthetic of anti-naturalist abstraction to an extreme. Like Walden and others, he adhered to the belief that artistic creativity and the art-work that springs from it, would immediately evoke some sort of 'Geist', or spirit, and convey of sense of rhythms of Leben and lived experience. For Wauer, this meant the translation of 'lebende Form', or 'living form' into a series of rhythmic movements, with the formal dynamics of the work in turn suggesting that matter had become immaterial, spiritual.¹⁷ As a result, when Wauer's

¹⁶ Maria Theresia Apel, *Hermann Haller: Leben und Werk, 1880-1950* (Münster: LIT, 1996), p. 101.

¹⁷ William Wauer, 'Das Körperliche in der Plastik' (The Bodily Element in Sculpture), in: *Expressionismus: Die Kunstwende*. Ed. Herwarth Walden (Berlin: Der Sturm, 1918), pp. 44-48. See also Anna Beloubek-Hammer, '„Warum ich viereckig modelliere“: William Wauer und die zeitgenössische Berliner Bildhauer-Avantgarde in im Zeichen des Vitalismus', in:

sculptures depict sportsmen and women, including ice-skaters, runners, stone thrower and boxers, their emphasis is far less on competitiveness and optimal physical performance, and far more on formal properties. In accordance with the *Sturm* aesthetics, the human body becomes largely abstract, rendered into a dynamic interplay of geometric lines and surfaces and cubistic volumes. As in the sculpture of the boxer, the athletic bodies seem organically united with the action or movement they perform; their arm and leg muscles subservient to flowing form. Indeed, any sense of boxing's violence and aggression that even a classicising work such as Haller's suggested, is absent here. In refusing to mimetically depict an existing human form, and in expurgating signifiers of muscular strength, the sculpture emphasises ideal, spiritual form over realistic content. Wauer's refusal to represent the human sporting body in realistic terms suggests the potential of sporting art to point towards, and embody, a new man, a harmonious humanity. It is perhaps no coincidence that Wauer's sporting sculptures should have been produced after the end of the First World War, when the Expressionist belief and hope in a 'neue Menschheit' or new humanity was as urgent as it was problematic. A much more sceptical and critical view of Expressionism's utopian humanist hopes can be discerned in boxing images created within the context of Berlin Dada, such as by George Grosz (1893-1959) and Erwin Blumenfeld (1897-1969).¹⁸

My final example is drawn from yet another artistic genre, Expressionist film. Film was regarded as potentially an Expressionist *Gesamtkunstwerk*, underpinned by the intention to combine art, theatre, music and architecture or stage design. Karlheinz Martin's (1886-1948) feature film *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (*From Morn to Midnight*, 1920), contains an extended sporting scene. The scene is significant not merely for the way in which it encapsulates the Expressionist aesthetics of film, and how the relatively new medium embraces modern sport, but also for its post-war articulation of Expressionist hopes for creating a new humanity. Martin's film is an adaptation of a stage play of the same name, which he had also directed in Hamburg and in Berlin. The play was written by Georg Kaiser (1878-1945), then the best-

William Wauer und der Berliner Kubismus. Ed. Marc Wellmann and Ursel Berger (Cologne: Wienand, 2011), pp. 71-84.

¹⁸ For an exploration of some of their work, see my essay "Every Man His Own Football": Dada Berlin, Sport, and Weimar Culture', in: *Virgin Microbe: Essays on Dada*. Ed. David Hopkins and Michael White (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), pp. 252-274.

known and most successful Expressionist playwright. The play's protagonist is a bank employee, a Kassierer or cashier, whose infatuation with a mysterious lady customer leads him to embezzle money and dream of leaving his constrained, petty-bourgeois existence of employee, husband and father in a small town behind for what he believes might be a freer life in the big city, easily recognisable as Berlin. However, his attempt to escape from his claustrophobic world to a better life, with the help of the money he stole, does not bring him the freedom he desires. Instead, his experiences in the city, including in bars, a brothel, and a sports venue, only increase his feeling of alienation from a society in which human relationships have transactional character, and emotions and desires have become commodified and exploited. At the end of this typically Expressionist Stationendrama, the Kassierer will take his own life, paradoxically seeking in death the fulfilment that a devitalised modernity denies him.

In adapting Kaiser's play to the screen, Martin imposed a consistent visual style onto the film narrative.¹⁹ Cinematic devices such as flashbacks and split screen visualise his protagonist's inner conflict, and disrupt the flow of the action. In numerous scenes, the Kassierer's body movements (played by Ernst Deutsch) are highly stylised, mechanical, as if this was a man not in control of his emotions and actions. Martin also emphasised throughout the film the immense contrast of black and white; the flat, painted décor and stage architecture look primitive and stylised, suggesting a two-dimensional rather than a three-dimensional world, a world of surfaces rather than depth. Summarising these stylistic features, contemporary film critic Rudolf Kurtz suggested: "everything is geared towards a linear graphic effect, toward the effect of movement of surfaces and lines, light and darkness."²⁰ The film's sport scene illustrates this graphic effect and at the same time, conveys a social and political message as it shows the interaction of individual, crowd, and sportsmen. The Kassierer appears at a six-day cycling event, which is underway, but lacks excitement, despite the best efforts of the referees and stadium announcer. However, he causes the crowd to cheer as he instantly pledges a large sum of

¹⁹ For a discussion of the film's aesthetics and its contemporary contexts, see Jürgen Kasten, 'Film as Graphic Art: On Karl Heinz [sic] Martin's *From Morn to Midnight*', in: *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives*, ed. by Dietrich Scheunemann (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2003), pp. 157-172.

²⁰ Cited in Kasten, p. 166.

money as a prize for the cyclists to compete for, and the audience to place bets on. The film does suggest a slight speeding up of the cyclists in response to this news. Martin's montage, moreover, allows the viewer to observe the rush and ecstasy of the spectators addicted to the entertainment they have paid to watch, and the hope of winning a large sum of money by placing a bet on the winner. More importantly, the montage allows the viewer to recognise that the spectators are from different social strata and include the privileged upper-class; the bourgeoisie; the petty-bourgeoisie; and the proletariat. Alternating with these 'social' shots of spectators, are images depicting a highly abstract cycling race (fig. 8) The cyclists and their bikes appear in outline only; they race through the dark stage set as if they were nothing but an effect of the lighting; yet their appearance conforms to what might be the rhythm of a long-distance indoor cycle race. Martin filmed the scene through a mirror or a convex lens, and the use of the camera, light and a distorting lens 'stretches' and 'foreshortens' the cyclists and their movement, making them appear ghostly and unreal. More importantly, the aesthetics of the graphic line, of abstraction and movement is embedded within a social and political commentary. The repetitive action of the cyclists circling the track symbolises modern life going round in circles (as in fact some lines in the play, and intertitles in the film, suggest). What is more, the film's montage initially correlates the movement on the track with the increasing excitement and excitability of the ranked masses across the different strata, only for this vitality to be shown what it really is, an artificial and manufactured form of escapism that will revert to its usual social stasis in the face of authority and power (the scene ends with the appearance of His Majesty, the Kaiser).

As it does in the play, the cycling scene in Martin's adaptation explores the possibility and limitations of a 'vital' life in a modern mass society. Martin's radical stylisation of the bicycle race (which anticipates experimental film of the later 1920s) is an example of abstract Expressionist sporting art in narrative cinema; it illustrates eloquently the implications of modern competitive sports for both individual and society. It appropriates endurance cycling as a form of organised entertainment for spectatorial consumption. It suggests that the sport is capable of moving and animating people, yet that its production and consumption is subject to social and economic conditions that work to maintain, rather than shake up, the status quo. Martin's distinctive visual style, and the use of montage in this scenes, makes visible

a tension between artistic or sporting movement and wider social stasis. The cinematic abstraction evident in the depiction of the bicycle race exemplifies a social form of abstraction: like the Kassierer and the ranked classes who momentarily turn into frenzied mass, the riders have become largely abstract ciphers in a larger system of exploitation and profit-making.

To conclude: I have looked at several examples of sport art within Expressionism, and I have focussed on style and visual form, artistic traditions and innovations. In addition to this kind of formal analysis, I have considered contextual factors, to suggest what these various art-works reveal about the cultural phenomenon and the social issues associated with cycling, football and boxing at the time. With the exception perhaps of Haller's statue of Jack Johnson, Expressionist sporting art rarely features individual sporting heroes, and it certainly does not feature German athletes, as would the artists of the Neue Sachlichkeit in the 1920s.²¹ In artistic terms, Expressionist sporting art develops a visual language of antirealism and abstraction, to paradoxically suggest a fuller, authentic vitality submerged or suppressed in a contemporary life-world dominated by instrumental reason. A further paradox emerges when we properly contextualise Expressionism's new visual language within broader discussions about modernity and its discontents. Fascinated by modern competitive, spectator-oriented sports, and casting a critical eye over it, Expressionist art explores how representations of sport might both help and hinder release that vitality. Seen through the lens of Expressionist sporting art, where radical aesthetics combines with a problematic ideology, modern sport comes across as a two-sided phenomenon, riven by tensions and contradictions. It is both welcomed as a new, vital part of social and cultural modernity, and a means by which to offer an indirect critique of the devitalising tendencies of that modernity.

Finally, the conjunction of modern art (in our case, Expressionism) and modern sports raises an interesting methodological issue about the encounter of two fields and its associated academic disciplines, art history and sport history. Allen Guttman has recently advocated a 'sibling' theory of sports and the arts; he regards the two as "closely related cultural domains" that operate in the same field of a given national

²¹ See for instance David Bathrick, 'Max Schmeling on Canvas: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture', *New German Critique*, no. 51 (Autumn 1990), pp. 113-136.

culture while being subject to historical change.²² Guttman is understandably keen to argue for a similar kind of sibling relationship for art historians and sport historians, and build a bridge between the two disciplines so that each may benefit from the other's approach and knowledge. Art historians are interested in accounting for change in representation in their formal, stylistic and cultural contexts – they ask what a piece of art (which happens to depict sport) might say about a historically specific way of visual representation; whereas sports historians will be looking at what an image or representation of a particular event (which could be a piece of fine art such as a painting) can tell us about sport as a wider cultural and social practice at the time. The difference in focus will probably mitigate against complete convergence of the two fields. In the case of Expressionism, however, we observed the convergence of radical art and the beginning of modern competitive, spectator sports in Germany; a convergence which allowed us to track radical changes in artistic representation to the point of antirealism and abstraction, and understand these changes in terms of no less radical changes in the way modern sports were configured, practiced, organised and consumed in early 20th-century Germany. The convergence works the other way, too, as changes in the idea of sport as a cultural and social practice shed light on some of the more radical changes in artistic representation. The focus on sports-themed art that was at the same time representative of the generic and stylistic diversity of an artistic movement, as was attempted here, entailed, to an extent at least, the opening up of art history and sport history to the shared goal of cultural and social inquiry.

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²² See Allen Guttman, *Sports and American Art from Benjamin West to Andy Warhol* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), pp. 1-5.

NB: Author will provide suitable high-res 300dpi+ images if article is accepted for publication.

Fig. 1

Lyonel Feininger, *Das Radrennen (Bicycle Race)*, oil on canvas, 1913. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. © DACS 2017



Fig. 2

Heinrich Richter-Berlin, *Der Torsteher (Goalkeeper)*; woodcut, *Der Sturm*, vol. 3, issue no. 111, 18 May 1912.



Fig. 3

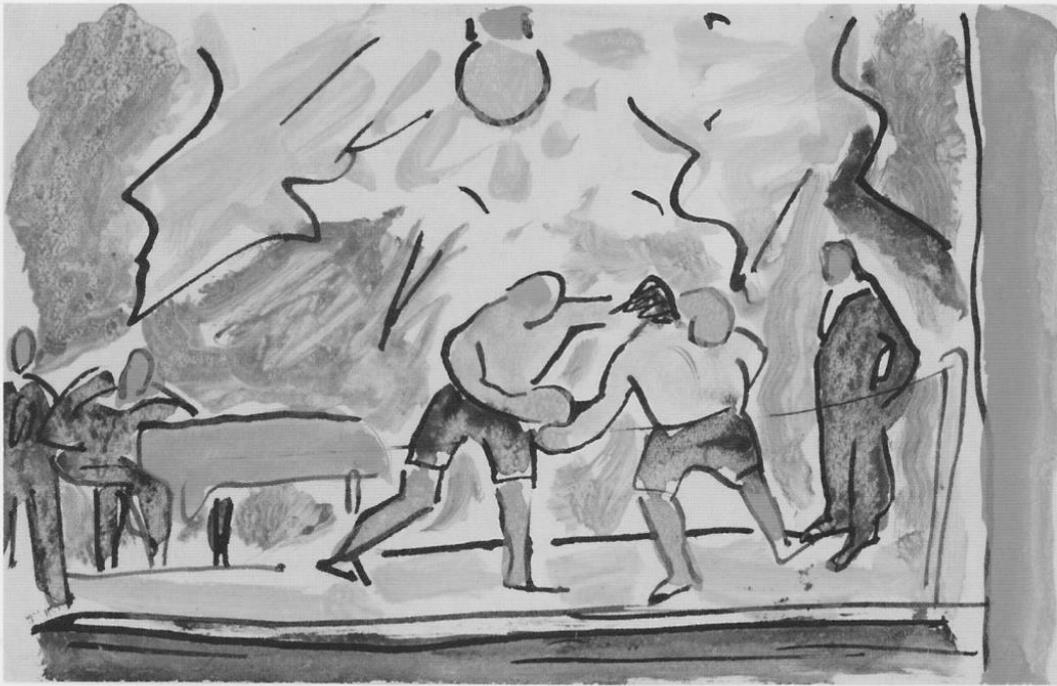
From: *Sport im Bild*, May 1912



Der Leipziger Ballspiel-Club im Kampi mit dem Berliner Fußball-Club „Hertha“; ein kritischer Moment vor dem Tore der Leipziger, die mit 3:0 unterlagen. Phot. Jnt. Jll.-Verl.

Fig 4

Max Pechstein, *Boxer im Ring* (1910), gouache; Brücke-Museum, Berlin © DACS 2017



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Max Pechstein, *Boxer in the Ring*, postcard to Erich Heckel, 4 November 1910.

Fig. 5

Albert Bloch, *Boxkampf (Boxing Match)*, oil on canvas, 1913; Lenbachhaus, Munich,
© Lenbachhaus, Munich 2017



Fig. 6

Hermann Haller, *Jack Johnson and Jack Johnson in Boxerstellung*, bronze sculpture, 1915; © Kunstmuseum Winterthur 2017



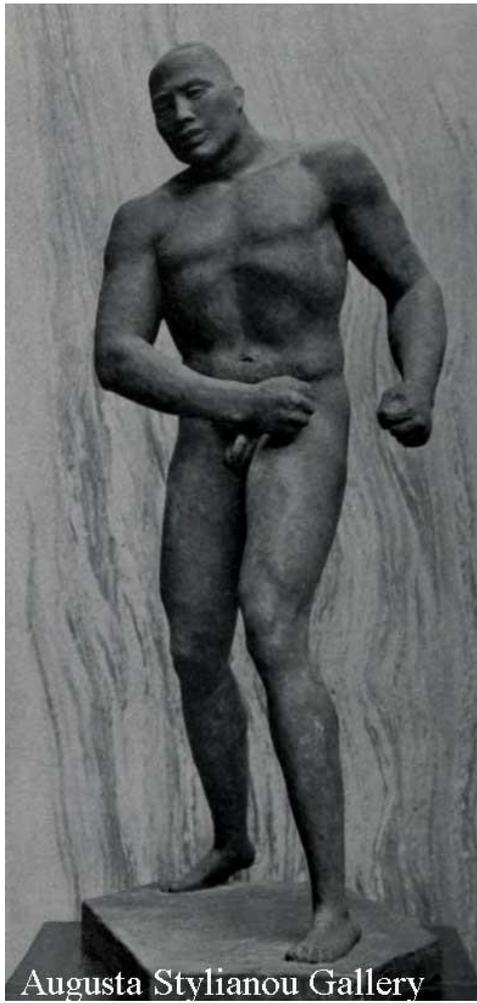


Fig. 7

William Wauer, *Boxer*, sculpture; c. 1918; © DACS 2017



Fig. 8

TO BE PROVIDED. Still from Karlheinz Martin, (1920); © Filmmuseum München