

The Weimar Republic 1: A Star is Born

SPORTS DISCOURSE AND THE RISE OF BOXING IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

The Weimar Republic started and finished in catastrophe. Yet the democratic “experiment” between military defeat in 1918 and the National Socialists’ seizure of total power in 1933 produced a rich, heterogeneous culture. It was a period of contradiction and contrast. The Republic was politically unstable but was famously open to new fashions, technologies and ideas. The capital city, Berlin, grew into a cosmopolitan European metropolis with over four million inhabitants, at the same time as the reactionary nationalism and ideological extremism that were ultimately to destroy the Republic emerged. An underlying democratic spirit, though by no means embraced by all, allowed a multifaceted intellectual and political culture to flourish and debates on the nation’s past, present and future to take place, in which little escaped scrutiny and analysis. Contemporary observers noted, for example, how avant-garde cultural trends, popular media such as film and radio, youth movements such as the *Wandervögel*, and dance crazes such as the Charleston seemed to be carried by the same ideological and cultural currents that were defining the era as a whole.¹ The same certainly applies to the increased popularity of sport in Germany after 1918, which saw boxing become fashionable and the young Max Schmeling rise to a degree of prominence that extended well beyond the context of sport. It is impossible to understand

how the latter came about, or what it reveals, without first reflecting on the factors that drove this boom in sport and informed the responses to it.

A specific constellation of circumstances allowed sport to become a mass phenomenon, peaking in the years of relative stability and prosperity between 1925 and 1929. It captured the collective imagination even in the early years of the Republic, as indicated by the expanding membership of sports clubs and organizations. One practical explanation for this was the establishment in 1918 of the 8-hour working day, allowing workers more time for leisure and recreation, which also resulted in attendance at sporting events becoming popular as never before. Venues such as the Sportpalast in Berlin soon became emblematic of the fast-paced tempo of modern life. Yet there may have been other, more profound, reasons for the emergence of sport as a collective obsession so soon after the war. Author and journalist Sebastian Haffner, born in 1907, experienced this “Sportfimmel” (sports mania) as a young man. Looking back as an exile in 1939, he recalled his dedication to athletics and to improving his personal best time over 800 metres. He had also been fascinated with the performances recorded by great international athletes, such as the German middle-distance runner Otto Pelzer: “Die Sportberichte spielten eine Rolle wie vor zehn Jahren die Heeresberichte, und was damals Gefangenzahlen und Beuteziffern gewesen waren, das waren jetzt Rekorde und Rekordzeiten”² (Sports reports played the same role that reports from the War had 10 years previously, with numbers of prisoners and quantities of captured material replaced by records and times). The novelty (in a German context) of a sport such as track and field lay in its performance-oriented, competitive nature. Prior to the war, a native tradition of militaristic but non-competitive gymnastics (*Turnen*), dating back over a century to the establishment of the gymnastics movement by Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, had been the dominant form of organized physical exercise in Germany. Gymnastics certainly remained a popular participation activity after 1918. Membership of the national gymnastics association, the *Deutsche Turnerschaft*, continued to grow, peaking at 1.6 million, but this happened alongside unprecedented growth in a diverse range of competitive sports, as well as in forms of expressive gymnastics (*Gymnastik*) and an aestheticized body culture (*Körperkultur*).³ These “new” forms of sporting and physical activity came to be perceived by some in Germany as international, as intensely modern, as an “Erneuerung der Vitalität” (renewal of vitality), or even, as one tongue-in-cheek article put it, as

the “Weltreligion des 20. Jahrhunderts” (the global religion of the twentieth century).⁴ Amateur participation sport, organized by an expanding network of clubs, by youth and workers’ organizations and by some businesses and organizations, flourished alongside professional sports such as cycling and boxing, which attracted a hugely passionate following and filled the expanding sports sections in newspapers and magazines. In 1920 there were already 160 different specialized German sports magazines and newspapers, and by 1928 that number had grown to 380.⁵ The emergence of sport as a cultural phenomenon on this scale coincided with the years in which a new Germany was emerging, falteringly, from the trauma of war and the shock of defeat, and some commentators were keen to make a connection between the two.

One of the central figures in the public discussion of sport and the sports movement, whose work represents a significant primary source for this chapter, was the Austrian journalist Willy Meisl. Meisl was based in Berlin from the early 1920s and became the sports editor at the liberal daily newspaper the *Vossische Zeitung*, published by Ullstein Press, where he made a major contribution to the development of sportswriting as a journalistic genre in Germany.⁶ He used his by-line not only to report on sports events, especially football and boxing, and on the career of Max Schmeling and other stars, but also to reflect on their cultural impact. In 1928, Meisl edited a volume, *Der Sport am Scheidewege* (*Sport at the Crossroads*), devoted to the question of sport and its various functions. It represented a cross section of the hopes and concerns for which sport had become a focus and outlet. Meisl himself argued the case for the specificity of sport to the era: “Kann es denn Zufall sein, daß gerade unsere Epoche, gerade die kurze, noch nicht einmal vollendete Nachkriegsdekade diese springflutartige Ausbreitung der Sportbewegung mit sich brachte?”⁷ (For can it be a coincidence that it happens to be our era, this brief, not-quite-finished post-war decade, which has produced such a flood-like expansion of the sports movement?) In the absence of conscription, forbidden under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, he asked whether the popularity of sport should be considered a form of compensation, an alternative means of asserting traditional national and gender identities. Meisl believed not, suggesting that it in fact served to strengthen democratic principles and reconnect individuals with a more holistic sense of physical and mental identity. It was certainly true that the Republic proved highly receptive to global trends and currents, and Meisl was not alone in speculating that the enthusiasm with which

sport had been embraced by all levels of society meant that it should be seen as a “Produkt seiner Zeit” (product of its time).⁸ There was arguably also a specifically German dimension to the way in which sport was perceived. Meisl suggests that it might be a means by which a damaged generation was seeking to heal itself from the lasting trauma inflicted by a static, destructive war. He also argues that, as a largely urban phenomenon, it could be understood as a form of physical compensation for the loss of nature in modern, industrialized cities, and even as a spiritual reaction to the notoriously rigid German education system, and of “[d]ie Negierung des Leibes” (the negation of the body) therein.⁹ These provocative thoughts are representative of an unusual degree of critical reflection on an activity that was seen either as a significant example of national (or transnational) culture or else as a potential threat to such a culture.

As was the case for other highly visible cultural innovations, notably film, the extent of the popularity of sport prompted analysis of and commentary on almost every conceivable aspect, both practical and theoretical. This was conducted, first and foremost, in the sports sections of local and national newspapers across the political spectrum. The exceptions were those on the extreme left and right wings, which, for different but comparable reasons, rejected commercialized and especially professional sport as a distraction from, or even a betrayal of, “class” or “national” identity.¹⁰ As the *Reichshauptstadt* (imperial capital) and Germany’s political and cultural hub, Berlin supported an extraordinary number of daily newspapers during the 1920s, many appearing in two editions per day.¹¹ The mass-appeal, so-called *Boulevard* newspapers variously appeared in morning, midday and evening editions, and all had illustrated sports supplements written by permanent sports correspondents such as Hans Bötticher of the *BZ am Mittag* (also published by Ullstein), Rolf Nürnberg of the *Neue Berliner Zeitung*. *Das 12 Uhr Blatt* (Steinthal, Stern and Co.) and Alfred Eggert of the *Berliner Morgenpost* (Ullstein).¹² Weekly magazines such as *Kicker*, founded in 1920 as a general sports magazine with in-depth coverage of football, and *Boxsport*, likewise founded in 1920 by Arthur Bülow, who became Max Schmeling’s manager in 1926, offered a more specialized platform.¹³ Reporters for *Boxsport*, such as Erwin Thoma, wrote expansively (filling as much as ten pages per weekly issue) on almost every conceivable aspect of an event, from technical matters to its broader cultural relevance. Sport was also a regular theme in popular illustrated lifestyle

magazines, such as *Sport im Bild*, *Uhu* and *Das Leben*, in the *Feuilleton* (cultural) section of daily newspapers and even in highbrow cultural and literary journals such as *Der Querschnitt*, *Die Weltbühne*, *Das Tagebuch* and *Die Neue Rundschau*.

Amongst these journals, *Der Querschnitt* (literally, The Cross Section), which is a key primary source for this chapter, is worthy of particular note. In its first incarnation (1921–1924), when the journal was published in a very limited edition by the influential gallery owner and art dealer Alfred Flechtheim, the publication defined itself on its cover as a “Magazin für Kunst, Literatur und Boxsport” (magazine for art, literature and boxing). It aimed to be a new type of magazine, liberal and free thinking, covering art, architecture, film, theatre, literature—as well as sport and what Silke Kettelhake refers to as “mondänes Savoir-vivre” (sophisticated *savoir-vivre*).¹⁴ “Die Zeitschrift der aktuellen Ewigkeitswerte” (The Magazine for Contemporary Eternal Values) was its well-known tagline in the late 1920s, when it acquired almost legendary status. Despite not attempting to offer a true cross section of society, it became, in Peter de Mendelssohn’s words, a “Wahrzeichen einer ganzen Zeit” (symbol of an entire era).¹⁵ Flechtheim was a passionate supporter of boxing, and so his magazine regularly featured writing about and illustrations of this sport in particular.

For all the near-utopian enthusiasm displayed by Flechtheim and many others for boxing and other sports, their sudden popularity was viewed by some, as a critical discourse around sport began to be articulated, with caution, cynicism and sometimes genuine concern. There were, for example, plenty of satirical depictions of boxing in particular as crude or mindless, as in Kurt Jackmusch’s 1923 comic poem “Mensch...det Boxen” (“Gosh...that boxing”), which employs Berlin dialect and simple rhyming couplets to dismiss intellect sarcastically as useless in comparison with boxing: “Weg mit allem Bücherknast, / Meld’ dir an im Sportpalast”¹⁶ (Get rid of your prison of books, / And sign up at the Sportpalast). Frequently, jokes were made poking fun at the way in which boxers were granted the same sort of public status as cultural or political icons such as Goethe or Bismarck. In 1924 the journalist and novelist Joseph Roth, for example, published a satirical “Lobgedicht auf den Sport” (Poem in Praise of Sport) in the left-wing magazine *Lachen Links*, in which the perceived disjunction between achievement and status is milked for humour:

Der Zeitgeist streckt den Bizeps und erfüllt
mit Knock-out und Bauchstoß das Jahrhundert –
wenn jemand ist, der sich darüber wundert,
der las noch nie die Zeitung: Sport im Bild.

Aus ihr erfährt man, wer die Welt bewegt:
Ob Neger Tompson oder Breitensträter –
Gott ist ein kleiner Mühlenaushilfsreter,
vergleicht man ihn mit dem, der Runden schlägt.¹⁷

(The Zeitgeist flexes its biceps and fills / The century with knockouts and body shots—/ If you're surprised by this / Then you've never read the newspaper *Sport im Bild*. // You read it to learn who really matters to the world: / Whether it be the negro Thompson or Breitensträter— / God himself is the lowest part-time labourer / Compared with the men who fight through the rounds.)

The poem is primarily concerned with the attention granted to boxers such as Hans Breitensträter, to whom there is an explicit reference. Often known as “der blonde Hans” (blond Hans), he was German heavyweight champion from 1920 to 1924 and then again from 1925 to 1926. The mocking tone depends for its effect on an acceptance of the dualist division between the intellectual and the physical and the implicit valuing of the former over the latter. Much the same ironic comparison, depicting the apparent progress from Goethe, via Bismarck, to Max Schmeling, was made in a cover illustration, “Deutschlands Aufstieg” (Germany's Rise), by the satirical journal *Simplicissimus* in 1930.¹⁸ Satire is one thing, but Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, speaking at the party conference of the Deutsche Volkspartei (DVP, German People's Party) in 1926, was quite serious when he gave voice to the view that veneration of physical achievements was un-German, fearing that an obsession with the sensationalism of elite and professional sport would have a pernicious effect upon the moral and intellectual life of the nation:

Hier scheint es notwendig, auch wieder auf die Gefahr hin, weiten Massen zu mißfallen, einmal ein Wort dafür zu sagen, daß das Geistige gegenüber dem Körperlichen nicht weiter so zurücktreten darf, wie das jetzt der Fall ist. [...] Wir sind Freunde jeder körperlichen Ertüchtigung, aber [...] die Aristokratie des Geistes [kann nicht] durch die Aristokratie des Bizeps ersetzt werden.¹⁹

(It seems necessary here, even at the risk of displeasing the masses, to argue that intellectual life cannot continue to be allowed to be secondary to the physical, as is currently the case. [...] We are in favour of all physical exercise, but [...] the aristocracy of the mind cannot be replaced by an aristocracy of the biceps.)

Such fears of a culture dominated by the biceps rather than the mind and by admiration for what might be considered trivial—or at any rate purely physical—achievements were perhaps unsurprising. The sentiment was consistent with long-established religious and educational norms in Germany, where *Bildung* (education, development) had been revered as the source of the fulfilled self. Physical education had, after Jahn, been included in the curriculum mainly as a means of imparting national character and teaching practical, especially militarily useful, skills. This was particularly the case after the introduction in 1813 of general conscription for men in Prussia.²⁰

However, one can argue that in the 1920s it was less the case that sport was somehow replacing so-called high culture, as feared by Stresemann, than that the boundaries between the two were being eroded, as was frequently asserted in contemporary reflections on the popularity of sport in Germany. Vivid evidence of such sentiments is provided by a lecture given in Berlin in 1925 by the young Russian émigré and novelist Vladimir Nabokov. It provides a passionate account of the fight between Breitensträter and the Spanish (Basque) boxer Paolino Uzcudun in Berlin in December 1925. Nabokov makes the case for the essential nature of play in human life and culture, anticipating the idea of *homo ludens* in Johan Huizinga's influential 1938 study of the play element in culture. Nabokov concludes his lecture by attempting to pinpoint the cultural value offered by the spectatorship of sport:

And so the match came to an end, and when we had all emptied out onto the street, into the frosty blueness of a snowy night, I was certain that in the flabbiest family man, in the humblest youth, in the souls and muscles of all the crowd, which tomorrow, early in the morning, would disperse to offices, to shops, to factories, there existed one and the same beautiful feeling, for the sake of which it was worth bringing together two great boxers—a feeling of dauntless, flaring strength, vitality, manliness, inspired by the play in boxing. And this playful feeling is, perhaps, more valuable and purer than many so-called “elevated pleasures”.²¹

Nabokov's sentiments, challenging the traditional cultural hierarchy of so-called higher pleasures, provide a sense of the cultural potential that many now saw in sport, even if it was sometimes underpinned by a certain ambivalence in general about mass phenomena. This positive spirit was even embraced by publications that were otherwise socially conservative, such as *Sport im Bild*, of which Roth, in his poem, was particularly dismissive. *Sport im Bild* was Germany's first illustrated sports magazine, founded in 1895 by two Britons, photojournalist Andrew Pitcairn-Knowles and publisher Horace F. Simon, and was later acquired by the publisher August Scherl, becoming one of the best-selling magazines in Germany.²² By the 1920s the magazine carried the revealing subtitle "Das Blatt der guten Gesellschaft" ("The paper for polite society") and was published bi-weekly by the conservative Hugenberg-Konzern. Despite the socially elitist tone of the publication, which also covered so-called high society and fashion, it was one of a number of publications to dedicate space to reflections on the social, aesthetic and cultural implications of sport. For example, in a 1925 article, we find the claim that sport had achieved parity with the theatre in the cultural life of the capital: "Sport ist im Grunde heute dem Berliner [...] nur eine andere Art des Theaters, des Films" ("Sport today is to the Berliner basically just another type of theatre or cinema").²³ The implication is that sport had a functional value as a form of entertainment, and perhaps also that it had an aesthetic value comparable with that of art.

For a commentator like Meisl, sport was identified with modernity itself, a symbol of a new, democratic, youthful and healthy age. By extension, a comparison could be made with the nation that seemed best to combine democratic ideals and a culture in which sport played a pivotal role, namely the USA. The 1920s saw the emergence in Germany of *Amerikanismus* (Americanism) (see also following discussion and Chap. 3) as a trend and discourse, of which the popularity of boxing was frequently viewed as a symptom. The term was often applied, negatively, to the superficial aping of what were perceived as American fashions, standards, attitudes and values. The phenomenon also reflected a positive desire, articulated by both liberals and conservatives, to learn from the example of America's economic and industrial might and from a society that was perceived as being dynamic and rational. "America", as an idealized rather than a geographical location, came to function for many Germans, most of whom had never crossed the Atlantic, as a synonym for modernity itself. David Bathrick, in

one of the first articles to consider the cultural value of boxing in Weimar Germany, locates sport at the centre of a “nexus between modernity and Americanism” that allowed it to “subvert 19th-century Wilhelmine culture”.²⁴ Boxing, as a manifestation of German “Americanism”, was invested with particular symbolic value, despite or perhaps because of the fact that in Germany the history of boxing dates back barely further than 1919, when the first public boxing match between the professionals Richard Naujoks and Gustav Völkel took place in the Sportpalast on 18 February.²⁵ Prior to this, boxing had been not only illegal but also widely perceived, as its popular appeal (in its brutal, bare-knuckle antecedent form) grew in Britain through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as an “englische Schrulle” (English eccentricity), or else as a debased form of entertainment for the *Pöbel* (mob).²⁶ Few considered it a serious sport or civilized pastime. By the early twentieth century, however, as it became subject to the same processes of rationalization, standardization and regulation that were shaping the development of modern sport in general and, inevitably, to commercial exploitation, perceptions were beginning to change.

Modern boxing had been standardized under the Marquess of Queensbury rules in 1867, became an Olympic sport for amateurs in 1904, and had world champions, at least in name, from the middle of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the century the idea of a *world* champion was becoming more meaningful as the sport was being adopted in more countries. Boxing became international, even if the long-standing association with Anglo-Saxon culture remained firmly in place, in a modified, transatlantic form. By the end of the nineteenth century, the USA, despite ongoing opposition in certain states and from determined “bluenose” protectors of public morals, had become the sport’s spiritual home. It was the place where boxers could make the move from socially marginal, outsider figures, comparable to circus strongmen or wrestlers, to popular, even mythic heroes, modern gladiators who were not only accepted but celebrated by society. Modest levels of interest in boxing had existed in Germany in the twilight years of empire, when it was technically illegal and restricted to unofficial so-called demonstration contests. In the space of a few years after its full legalization, paralleling in accelerated form its growth and commercialization in the USA, boxing made the transition from sideshow to mainstream.²⁷ This happened remarkably quickly. In 1921, the high-minded

Querschnitt still felt the need to proselytize, programmatically, on behalf of the sport in Germany:

Der Boxkampf ist verhältnismäßig neu in Deutschland. Das grosse Publikum, das sich aus Vorkriegszeiten immer noch der Reden von einer Brutalität des Boxens erinnert, hat von den Feinheiten dieses Sportes keine Ahnung. Es gilt, aufklärend zu wirken, es muß Lektüre geschaffen werden, die volkstümlich und gewinnend vom Boxsport plaudert, von seinen Sportregeln erzählt, das schwere Training schildert und gut sportliche Kämpfe in Wort und Bild demonstriert.²⁸

(Boxing is relatively new in Germany. The masses who still recall the pre-war talk of the brutality of boxing have no idea about the subtleties of this sport. We have to educate them, create reading matter which talks about boxing in an accessible and appealing way, explains its rules, describes the difficult training and shows off the sporting fights through words and images.)

Just 2 years later, in an article for *Sport im Bild*, Job Zimmermann was able to reflect on the irony of Germany's pre-war antipathy towards boxing: "Wie arg waren wir auf dem Holzwege, da wir die Deutschen für Verächter des Faustkampfes hielten..."²⁹ (How wrong we were when we thought the Germans had only contempt for pugilism.) By 1924, the year of Max Schmeling's first fight as a professional, boxing had established itself in Germany both as an amateur sport and, at the professional level, as a form of mass entertainment commanding the attention of the media. The professional sport was successfully promoted at the various arenas equipped to stage spectator sports. In the capital these included the Zirkus Busch, the Admiralpalast and, especially, the Sportpalast, the venue on Potsdamer Strasse just south of the centre of Berlin that could accommodate crowds of up to 10,000 at its "big fight" evenings (*Großkampftage*). Even the years of economic crisis in the early 1920s had little impact on the growth of boxing; indeed, it may have even helped. When the hyperinflation of 1923 made it difficult to attract foreign boxers to Germany, domestic fighters came to occupy centre stage. Boxing undoubtedly held a socio-economic appeal in this period. In the face of apparently insurmountable social and economic obstacles, boxing offered a potentially rapid route to success. In Germany in the years following the First World War, economic instability and high

unemployment levels made the dream of a professional boxing career attractive to many young men.

If Meisl was correct in identifying the German sports movement as a positive response to the war, then the individualistic nature of boxing, requiring total self-reliance, may have been the key to its social impact, not only in Germany, in the wake of the mechanized, anonymous and indeed dehumanized destruction witnessed in the war. This argument has been applied by Jeffrey Sammons, Roderick Nash and others to the American context, who view the popularity of boxing as a symptom of a desire for a reaffirmation of “self-worth and manhood”: “After the horrors of mustard gas, bombs, mortars, and machine guns, boxing represented a more simple and noble past, with men in control of their destiny.”³⁰ It may even be true that an appetite for an immediate, violent and direct approach to boxing arose as a means of “releasing aggression in a tense society”.³¹ Erik Jensen has also argued that boxing “counteracted the irrational violence of the First World War and of the turbulent post-war German society by refracting it through the prism of sport, a ‘rational form of violence’”.³² The assertion is difficult to prove, but it is a view that made sense to some contemporary commentators seeking a psychological explanation for what was happening. Rolf Nürnberg, introducing his 1932 biography of Schmeling, suggests that the common experience of the military and the war had resulted in a collective sense of lost or damaged self-worth and gender identity. For Nürnberg, the sports boom was driven by the impulse to reassert a form of masculinity in which, in contrast to what had happened on the battlefield, the body is subject to full, personal control:

In denen, die übrig geblieben, stauten sich mächtige Reflexe gegen diese Entmännlichung des Mannes, gegen diese Vernamenlosung des Körpers, gegen die Unpersönlichkeit der Kampfmaschinerie. Der Mann kam wieder auf, wollte wieder aufkommen. Das war die neue Sportidee.³³

(In those who survived, powerful reflex reactions had built up against this emasculation of men, against this anonymizing of the body, against the depersonalized battle machines. The man rose again, or wanted to rise again. This was the new idea of sport.)

For Germany in the post-war period, even more so than for America, acts suggestive of regeneration, recovery and youthfulness exerted a considerable psychological power, and not only for men. For example, jazz

and dance, particularly the wildly popular Charleston, functioned as symbols of a new age. The 1920s also saw the *neue Frau* (new woman), who was typically as enthusiastic about sport—even boxing training—as she was about jazz, challenge gender stereotypes. Competitive boxing was, however, seen as masculine territory, a form of regenerative self-assertion. A number of the most successful German boxers of the immediate post-war period had become proficient in the sport in the Knockaloe internment camp on the Isle of Man and had come to view sport as a healthy antidote to the privations of war and a means of asserting a very physical form of masculinity that was under threat.³⁴ Hans Breitensträter, a sailor, had been an internee at Knockaloe. In his 1923 memoir, he writes nostalgically of life in the camp: “Und eines Tages sehe ich, ich bin auf der schönsten Boxerinsel. Junge Kerle mit Muskeln und Knochen, herunter von der See und in die weiche Inselluft auf viele Jahre vielleicht hinter Stacheldraht—da geht der Sport auf.”³⁵ (And one day I saw that I was on the most beautiful island of boxers, full of muscular, bony young fellows. They had come straight from the ocean into the soft island air and were destined to spend years behind barbed wire—it’s only natural that sport flourished.)

As Germany struggled with its new identity after 1918, boxing seems not to have functioned straightforwardly as an extension of the rather aggressive, militaristic forms of national identity that had been promoted in the early years of the war effort. It is interesting to note that among the victorious powers, the situation was slightly different: the popular French champion Georges Carpentier’s distinguished wartime service record in the French Air Force was a significant factor in his broad appeal and allowed his presentation as a twofold focus for identification (military and sports hero). Likewise, the military record of Gene Tunney, heavyweight world champion from 1926 to 1928, facilitated his popularization as the “Manly Marine”. By contrast, the fact that Jack Dempsey, who held the title from 1919 to 1926 and was a global figure in the first half of the 1920s, had *not* served during the war was problematic for many sports fans and commentators in post-war America. Indeed, it became the subject of a much publicized trial in which Dempsey was accused of “shirking” (giving false information to avoid the draft). In the Germany of the early 1920s, the controlled violence of boxing could be said to have offered the boxer, and perhaps also spectators, a compensation of sorts for the anonymous suffering and static, interminable tension of the war. Yet if the spectacle of sports was also concerned with the

overcoming of the past, then perhaps it is appropriate that Schmeling, as the highest-profile German boxer of the era, was in any case too young to have participated in the war. This meant that there was never any sense that his success could be explained *only* as a form of recovery from trauma.³⁶ Schmeling's relative youth allowed him to function as a figure-head for modernity, and perhaps even democracy, in a way that would have been uncomfortable with older boxers.³⁷ The idea that boxing was defined by individual self-realization, coming after a period of the suppression and radical effacement of the self by social and technological means, offers a revealing parallel with Joyce Carol Oates' assessment of its popularity in America during the 1920s "as a consequence of the diminution of the individual vis-à-vis society; the gradual attrition of personal freedom, will, and strength".³⁸ Oates locates boxing's popularity as an element of "what Americans honor as the spirit of the individual".³⁹ The popularization of so individualistic a sport in the new, democratic Germany, a nation whose attitude to the rights of the individual vis-à-vis the state had traditionally been ambivalent, offers evidence of a cultural, perhaps even an ideological, paradigm shift. We should be cautious, however, in assigning a single interpretation to the sport and its popular appeal.⁴⁰

If boxing was seen as individualistic, then it could also be associated with the performance of a particular form of self-reliant masculinity. Such an understanding of boxing tends, reductively, to focus less on its highly regulated nature as a modern sport than on the inherent brutality and the finality of the knockout blow. Undoubtedly, this explained part of the popular appeal of boxing; contemporary reports frequently point to the behaviour of boxing crowds and their passionate, selfless immersion in the fight. This was sometimes viewed positively. The renowned theatre critic Herbert Jhering, writing in 1927, analyses the behaviour of crowds at boxing matches approvingly, noting their fixation on results rather than aesthetics, and on the moment of victory.⁴¹ Zimmermann, in *Sport im Bild*, evokes the atmosphere of a "big fight" night at the Sportpalast, focusing on the passionate responses of a socially diverse crowd, unified by its shared excitement. Employing an appropriately modern metaphor, the author describes it as electrified: "alles ist in der glühenden Spannung geeint, die wie elektrischer Strom zum Ring hinunterführt".⁴² (Everyone is united by the luminescent tension, which leads down to the ring like an electric current.) The article dwells on the socially and culturally levelling effects of immersion in the crowd and can be understood

in the context of a wider contemporary debate about mass culture. These effects were sometimes viewed as a source of potential liberation from the restrictions of class identity, but also as potentially threatening, in that individual inhibitions and identities can be abandoned in a crowd. Dieter Behrendt observes that the “Anteilnahme” (active participation) of spectators, and even an occasional loss of self-control, was legitimized in the sports arena as it never could be in everyday life.⁴³ For Siegfried Kracauer, the emergence of the urban masses had resulted in a culture of superficiality and distraction (“Zerstreuung”).⁴⁴ Sport as a spectacle in this respect was comparable to other mass phenomena such as the illustrated press, film, jazz and chorus lines. Boxing crowds, which in their excitement often seemed possessed by a sort of “bloodlust”, also elicited anxious reactions not only from sceptical observers but from some admirers of the sport. Writing in 1928, Curt Gutmann complains: “Wie wenig die breite Masse tatsächlich vom Boxsport, seinem Wesen und seiner Kunst versteht, ist bei jedem Kampf von neuem mit tiefem Bedauern festzustellen. Man will k. o.’s sehen, Blut muß fließen, Dreschen, Hinlangen will man sehen, bis der eine oder andere Boxer, noch lieber beide, umfallen”.⁴⁵ (How little the masses really understand about boxing, its essence and its artistry, can alas be seen at every fight. People want to see KOs, blood has to flow, they want to see wild punching and flailing until one or the other boxer, preferably both, falls over.)

It was clear that sport had the potential to generate emotional responses that took the spectator beyond everyday experience and rational thought. Some commentators sought to highlight the role played by emotion, instinct and the unconscious in sport itself. They argued that sport as a form of cultural expression should be an end in itself rather than a means to some other, utilitarian end. Reacting against its instrumentalization within a rationalist discourse that brought it into the proximity of scientific management (Taylorism) and “hygienic” lifestyles, the playwright Arnolt Bronnen, in keeping with his Expressionist background, praised the supposedly irrational, unpredictable nature of sport and the role of chance. In his contribution to Meisl’s 1928 volume of theoretical sportswriting, he argues that in sport the outcome is (or should be) determined by “der Instinkt der Reaktion [...] und nicht der Intellekt” (reflex instinct [...] and not the intellect).⁴⁶ His sometime collaborator Bertolt Brecht, just as he was to argue against bourgeois art forms such as opera, was critical of attempts to make sport “useful” or “gesellschaftsfähig” (socially acceptable): “Ich bin für den Sport, weil

und solange er riskant (ungesund), unkultiviert (nicht gesellschaftsfähig) und Selbstzweck ist" (I am in favour of sport because and as long as it is risky (unhealthy), uncultured (not socially acceptable) and an end in itself).⁴⁷ Brecht had applied this understanding of sport, and specifically of the boxing match as an absolute, self-contained world without "motives", as a central metaphor in his play *Im Dickicht der Städte* (*In the Jungle of the Cities*, 1923). It is unsurprising that Brecht disliked the regulation of boxing, suggesting that all fights should be settled by knockout.⁴⁸ Both he and Bronnen present a vision of sport as an expression of primal urges, as a form of risk taking that modern society otherwise excludes; they are undoubtedly correct in their identification of a significant element in the appeal of boxing. As Joyce Carol Oates observes in a long 1988 essay on Mike Tyson: "if 'sport' means harmless play, boxing is not a sport; it is certainly not a game". She views boxing as "the quintessential image of human struggle, masculine or otherwise, against not only other people but one's own divided self".⁴⁹ Oates' reading of the appeal and meaning of boxing echoes Brecht and Bronnen and recalls the terms in which fights were described in German sports reporting of the early 1920s. Yet this conception of sport as a performance of qualities that have a gendered (masculine) encoding, such as willpower and self-assertion, and of the male body as a symbol of the struggle between life and death is also problematic. As we shall see in Chaps. 4 and 5, in the German context, it had the potential to align closely with right-wing ideas of Germanness and masculinity that by the late 1920s had begun to appeal to Bronnen, who was later to become a Nazi.

In the Weimar Republic, however, as Brecht intimates, it was politically more expedient for advocates of sport and the sports movement to interpret boxing in a very different way. Far from being something risky and primal, possibly arising from trauma and loss, it had the potential to embody democratic modernity—it had after all been popularized internationally by the USA. And in practical terms, reliance upon primal "instinct" or gladiatorial willpower was wholly inadequate; winning required an approach that was a good deal more "scientific". Some optimistic commentators hoped that the raucous, bloodthirsty crowds would become more analytical once they had a grasp of finer points such as tactics and psychology. This conviction may help to explain the noticeable emphasis on the intellectual qualities of the best boxers in writing about boxing in the Weimar Republic. For example, the journalist, boxing referee and former Olympic athlete Kurt Doerry, who

was also editor in chief of *Sport im Bild* during the 1920s, reflects on a recent bout between two popular German middleweight boxers, Kurt Prenzel and Adolf Wiegert (a fight he had in fact refereed). He argues that the most successful boxers are not only physically and technically strong but also psychologically and intellectually superior. In this case, he suggests that Wiegert had lacked the psychological acuity to finish the fight when he had the opportunity and allowed his opponent to recover and eventually to emerge victorious. Newspapers and magazines also published first-hand accounts by boxers of their fights, which not only offered tactical and psychological insights but also gave readers access to the intense *experience* of boxing in a way that objective reports could not. Kurt Prenzel, for example, authored a first-hand, round-by-round account of the fight cited by Doerry. It appeared in the *Acht-Uhr Abendblatt*, was republished in *Der Querschnitt*, and includes a description of the experience of being knocked down and the struggle to recover in the aftermath.⁵⁰

Both Doerry and Meisl actively sought to promote boxing as a sport characterized by preparation, strategy, technique and willpower. They viewed successful boxers as individuals distinguished by both their physical and mental abilities. As such, boxers could be cited as role models in an era in which conceptions of the “*neuer Mensch*” (new man; literally, new human) had found fertile ground: “*Meisterschaften pflegen gewöhnlich nur von solchen Boxern errungen zu werden, bei denen sich zu den hohen körperlichen und technischen Fähigkeiten noch geistige Qualitäten gleicher Art gesellen.*”⁵¹ (Championships usually only tend to be won by those boxers combining a high level of physical and technical ability with intellectual qualities of the same standard.) Doerry concludes, however, by noting that German boxers still fell short of this ideal combination: “*Wir haben in Deutschland noch nicht allzu viele Boxer, die technisch weit genug sind, um in einem Kampfe den Gegner durch ihre überlegene Intelligenz zu besiegen.*”⁵² (In Germany we do not yet have many boxers who have sufficient technique to defeat a boxer through their superior intelligence.) That mildly nationalistic sentiment (with the implicit claim that German boxers are generally more intelligent than their rivals) is undoubtedly tempered by an awareness that German athletes were in any case banned from most international competitions, including the Olympic Games, as a sanction applied after the First World War.⁵³ It also, however, points to the manner in which sporting success could become a matter of national pride—but it was

not until the emergence of Max Schmeling that Germany could credibly claim to have a boxer in the mould of Doerry's ideal.

German boxing did, however, already have stars. It had been quick to market its first homegrown champions, who paved the way for and anticipated the subsequent construction of Max Schmeling as a national hero. In the early years of the Republic, the photogenic "blonder Hans" Breitensträter was the first example of this new phenomenon—the athlete as star.⁵⁴ As Schmeling would also do, he cultivated a reputation that defied the stereotypical image of the boxer, developing an interest in orchids and claiming he had a collection of teddy bears. He was also the first German boxer to become an object of fascination for artists and intellectuals, becoming a particular focus for *Der Querschnitt*. In an illustrated 1921 article for *Der Querschnitt*, republished in the left-wing literary journal *Die Weltbühne*, Hermann von Wedderkop (editor of *Der Querschnitt* from 1924) describes a visit he paid to the "Boxermärchen" (fairly tale boxer) Breitensträter in the company of a number of other journalists and artists, including Rudolf Großmann, Ernesto de Fiori and Renée Sintenis.⁵⁵ Wedderkop reveals little about him as a person, and even less about him as a boxer, instead presenting an abstract, mythologized sketch of a man whom he sees as the product of experience but who seems to live only in the present moment: "Dieser hier ist abgeschliffen, abgspült vom Leben im Freien, unter Fremden, durch unalltägliche Ereignisse, die durch Häufigkeit und Uebung zu Alltäglichem wurden. Er hat etwas durchgemacht, eine sehr wohltuende Schule, um die wir ihn sofort beneiden."⁵⁶ (This man has been washed up and polished by a life outdoors, among foreigners, by unusual events that became usual in their frequency and through practice. His experiences have proven to be a really beneficial school, of which we are immediately envious.) The article's illustrations include two photographs of Breitensträter as a boxer and two of him posing with the artists Sintenis, Susi von Zimmermann and de Fiori.⁵⁷ Breitensträter's status anticipates what Schmeling was to achieve, not least in the manner in which a public image was created by and for him: he published an autobiography, was a subject of works of art (including as a series of lithographs by Großmann, issued with the memoir, and a sculpture by Kurt Edzard (1923)), and was frequently photographed and filmed. His defeat against Paolo Uzcudun in late 1925 (the same fight attended by Nabokov) was documented in the first German sports feature film, *Breitensträter-Paolino. Des deutschen Meisters schwerster Kampf* (Breitensträter-Paolino.

The German Champion's Hardest Fight). His fights, particularly those against the first official German heavyweight champion Otto Flint (in 1919 and 1920) and the three against Paul Samson-Körner, the other truly popular German heavyweight in the first half of the 1920s, attracted huge crowds and became cultural events on a par with theatre premieres.

Breitensträter's career coincides with the development of sports reporting as a journalistic genre in Germany, and it is notable that the reports published by national newspapers frequently focus, as in the aforementioned article by Job Zimmermann, on the event and its atmosphere as a whole as much as the course of the actual fight. This applies, for example, to the reporting of the hugely anticipated attempt by Breitensträter, 3 months before the fight against Uzcudun, to regain his German title from Samson-Körner, after he had lost their previous contest in 1924. The fight took place amid chaotic scenes of overcrowding in a sold-out Kaiserdamm-Arena in Berlin on 11 September 1925 and was refereed by Kurt Doerry. Most newspapers carried a substantial report in the following day's edition, in many cases with equal weighting given to the occasion itself and the behaviour of the crowd. The *Berliner Tageblatt*, for example, begins by noting the extraordinary levels of interest generated by the fight, resulting in the "beängstigende Dimensionen" (frightening dimensions) of the crowd, to which the report later refers, in a conscious echo of Ernst Toller's Expressionist drama of 1921, as "Masse Mensch" (Mass Men).⁵⁸ Throughout, emphasis is placed on the total, fanatical *immersion* of the crowd in the event. In his report for the *Vossische Zeitung*, Willy Meisl begins with a pointed cultural comparison: "Massary-Premiere im Künstler-Theater, Knockout-Premiere am Kaiserdamm—kein Zweifel, die Saison hat pünktlich begonnen" (There's a Massary premier in the Künstler-Theatre, and a knockout premiere on the Kaiserdamm—there's no doubt about it, the season has started on time).⁵⁹ The implication is that boxing is not a fundamentally different cultural option to opera or theatre (the reference is to the popular Austrian soprano Fritzi Massary). The subsequent text, written as was typical for Meisl very much in the style of a literary *feuilleton* (cultural essay), devotes close to half its space to an evocation of the event as a sensual experience, with conspicuous use of descriptive language and metaphor to evoke the sense of scale, excitement and "occasion":

Menschenmassen treiben in dem Riesensaale. Grelle Lampen flammen plötzlich in der Mitte auf, bestrahlen das Ring-Plateau. Der wirbelnde Riesenraum versinkt im Dunkel, auch der Lärm scheint irgendwie dunkler geworden, alles verliert sich in dieser ungeheuren Halle, nur die grellen Lampen, das strahlende Plateau bleiben, geben Orientierung. Halt, Mittelpunkt.

(Masses of people are on the move in the gigantic hall. Bright spotlights suddenly flare in the middle and illuminate the plateau of the ring. The huge, turbulent space sinks into darkness, and even the noise somehow seems to have gone darker; everything loses itself in this colossal hall. Only the harsh lights and the glowing plateau remain, and give us orientation. Something to hold on to, a central point.)

The account of the fight, which saw multiple knock-downs and moments of controversy, and which Breitensträter won on points, likewise eschews technical precision in preference to dramatic metaphors (the fight as a storm), rhetorical rhythm and the deployment of motifs of willpower and determination:

Zum erstenmal in deutschem Ringe ist Samson am Boden. Er kommt hoch, er wird gefällt, er kommt hoch, er wird gefällt, bewußtlos steht er auf und wird niedergehämmt, aber irgendwo in diesem zerschlagenen Gladiator lebt der Wille, keine Niederlage hinzunehmen, und er übersteht fünf Niederschläge, er erlebt die rettende Pause. Im Saale tobt Sturm. Schlechtwetter für die Tausende von Wetttern ist heraufgezogen, sie alle segelten auf Samson. Plötzlich ist aus dem schon Geschlagenen der Schläger geworden. Amboß Breitensträter ward Hammer.

(For the first time in a German ring, Samson is down. He gets up, he's knocked down again, he gets up, he's knocked down again, unconsciously he gets up and is hammered down, but somewhere within this battered gladiator is the willpower to refuse to accept defeat, and he survives five knock-downs and is saved by the end of the round. In the hall a storm rages. Bad weather for thousands of gamblers has moved in, they'd all gone with Samson. Suddenly the man who had already seemed beaten has become the one delivering the blows. Breitensträter has changed from anvil into hammer.)

The reader learns little or nothing of the comparative styles or technical abilities of the two fighters, and despite Meisl's later support for sport as a civilizing, modern phenomenon, his report here reflects a more

sensationalist interest in boxing as a primal, “gladiatorial” contest. The article seeks, coloured far more by the Expressionism of the early part of the decade than by the “Sachlichkeit” (objectivity) of the latter part, to convey mood, an atmosphere in which a frenzied crowd is wholly absorbed by a fully engaged “battle” and which other forms of cultural entertainment were hard pressed to match.

Breitensträter was in fact technically limited, relying on what at the time was sometimes perceived as a typically German style—flatfooted, rather upright, and engaging the opponent head-on—that left him exposed against stronger or more artful opponents.⁶⁰ Samson-Körner, defeated that night by Breitensträter, boxed in a more American style (crouched, with much more lateral movement) and epitomized, according to most reports, stubbornly courageous determination. He was almost as popular a figure as Breitensträter, offering an alternative model for the modern sports star, for while Breitensträter was depicted in terms of cultural literacy and relative sophistication, Samson-Körner had a reputation for humility and a lack of pretension. In his report for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* on the 1924 fight between the same two boxers, Joseph Roth reports on Samson-Körner’s popular appeal: “Die Mehrheit schenkte ihre Gunst dem Samson-Körner, von dem die Berichte rühmend hervorheben, daß er ein einfaches möbliertes Zimmer bewohnt, genauso wie ich und du.”⁶¹ (The majority favoured Samson-Körner, who has been lauded in reports because he rents a simple, furnished room, just like you and I.) According to Roth, it counted against Breitensträter that he had a rich father-in-law and could fall back on resources that he had not strictly earned himself. Samson-Körner’s rise to prominence from humble origins, through a period spent in the USA and other countries (during which he added the “Samson” monicker), had a certain Romantic quality to it. It was precisely this that appealed to Brecht, who befriended Samson-Körner in this period and produced a number of boxing-themed texts inspired by his conversations with him. In 1926 he announced that he would write Samson-Körner’s biography and published four instalments of a playful “autobiography” in the short-lived sports magazine *Arena*, ostensibly narrated by Samson-Körner himself, covering his early years as a sailor.⁶² Brecht has his narrator suggest that he was born in Utah and that he was thus a “richtiger Yankee” (real yankee), rather than an immigrant—before he admits that, literally speaking, he was born in Zwickau in Saxony.⁶³ The implication is that in spirit, if not literally, this is to be an “American”

life of personal reinvention, upward mobility, willpower and achievement, not a “European” one restricted by class or by parochial identities. Breitensträter had spent far less time in the USA, but in his 1921 article *Wedderkop* thought he could detect the same “touch” of the American in him, conjuring an image that owes more to the popular German author of fantastical Westerns Karl May than to Breitensträter’s actual biography: “Aus Magdeburg? Aber sehr lange in den Wäldern von Westamerika. Also ‘getouched’ vom Amerikanischen.”⁶⁴ (From Magdeburg? But a long time in the forests of the American West. So was “touched” by American-ness.)

The idea that a boxer is a man who forges his own path and for whom anything is possible exercised considerable appeal, even though it was far from the reality of the professional sport. It closely relates to the potent myth of America—the sport’s symbolic home—as the land of opportunity. As already observed, in many ways Breitensträter anticipated Schmeling’s cultivation of the image of the boxer who transcended his sport, but from an early stage a crucial element in Schmeling’s image drew on the same themes that were applied to Samson-Körner. Even the latter’s supposed American style anticipated in some respects what Schmeling, modelling himself in his early career on Jack Dempsey, was to adopt. In an article for *Boxsport* in 1927, right at the start of Schmeling’s rise to prominence, Hans Bötticher argues that to be successful, the modern boxer needs to lead “ein vorbildlich sorgfältiges Leben” (an exemplary, careful life), citing Tunney and Corbett as the great examples of this. He concludes by naming Samson-Körner and Schmeling as the closest German equivalents:

Aber manches Beispiel von charakterfester Lebensführung zeigt unser noch so junger professioneller Boxsport, von ehrgeizigem Streben, hartem Training und selbstaufgelegtem Verzicht der mancherlei Freuden des Lebens. Nur zwei Namen sportlich vorbildlicher Lebensführung sollen zur Nacheiferung genannt sein: Paul Samson-Körner und Max Schmeling, Samson-Körners Nachfolger.⁶⁵

(But professional German boxing, still so young, can point to many examples of disciplined living, ambitious work, hard training and the self-imposed rejection of many of life’s pleasures. We will name just two instances of exemplary living as role models: Paul Samson-Körner and Max Schmeling, Samson-Körner’s successor.)

The transition between generations of boxers in the mid-1920s coincided with a temporary downturn in boxing's popularity.⁶⁶ By 1927, at the latest, this had reversed, and Schmeling, as Bötticher's article indicates, was identified as the star among a new generation of younger German boxers. The implication was that an essential prerequisite for a successful career in boxing is a willingness to work, to suffer and make sacrifices, and Schmeling, his supporters claimed (as they would repeatedly throughout his career), had precisely these qualities.

"BOXING IS AN ART TOO"

Schmeling was born in the village of Klein Luckow (today a part of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, close to the Polish border) but moved with his family at an early age to the working-class district of St. Georg close to the centre of Hamburg. Like many of his generation he had been swept up by the sports craze as a teenager and tried football and, for a short period, wrestling before taking up boxing. His career as a professional boxer started in Cologne, the city to which he had moved in search of work like so many other young men in the early 1920s. He joined the Mühlheimer Box-Klub and, after learning the basics of boxing in various self-study guides, began to train properly under the guidance of experienced boxers.⁶⁷ After making good progress as an amateur, Schmeling made the decision to become a professional at the age of eighteen in 1924, despite having promised his father that he would not do this. Under the management provided first by Hugo Abels and for a brief period in 1926 by Willi Fuchs, with whom the young boxer, according to the memoir he published in 1930 (*Mein Leben—Meine Kämpfe* (My Life—My Fights)), soon fell out, Schmeling made steady but hardly spectacular progress.⁶⁸ *Boxsport* reported favourably on the potential of the young Schmeling, but it was not until his move to Berlin, in the middle of 1926, that his fortunes began to change, both professionally and in terms of his standing as a public figure. Now managed by Arthur Bülow, the editor in chief of *Boxsport*, in August 1926 Schmeling succeeded Paul Samson-Körner as the German light-heavyweight champion. Erwin Thoma's report in *Boxsport*, which admittedly cannot be considered unbiased given the link to Bülow, was the first to claim that Schmeling might become something more than just another boxer: "Der deutsche Boxsport hat einen neuen Meister und einen neuen Mann, auf den er wieder bauen kann, vielleicht einen Stern

am Boxhimmel, der die Kraft besitzt, alle einstigen und vorhandenen zu überstrahlen.”⁶⁹ (German boxing has a new champion and a new man on whom it can build, perhaps even a star in the firmament of boxing with the power to outshine all those who have gone before.) Schmeling is imagined, literally, as a star with the power to reinvigorate German boxing, and this is the point at which a public image of the young boxer begins to emerge.

From 1926 *Der Querschnitt*, which was published as a monthly magazine and with a much higher circulation after being acquired by the publisher Ullstein in 1924, began to promote the star quality in Schmeling, initially as one of a number of boxers it regularly featured, primarily in photographic illustrations. As was the case with other boxers, including Erich Brandl and Adolf Heuser, the magazine included not only boxing photographs but also artistic nudes. A very good example is offered by the nude portrait of Schmeling published in late 1926, credited to the Atelier Baruch, the photography studio run by Lili Baruch in Berlin, which specialized in portraits of dancers rather than athletes (Fig. 2.1). It was paired on the same page with a photograph of the cabaret artist and actress Alexa von Poremski (better known as Alexa von Porembsky).⁷⁰ The photograph frames Schmeling from the hips upwards, showing him with his right biceps flexed, left fist lightly clenched and head turned to his right. His face is expressionless, his gaze directed downwards. It is a striking image of poised masculinity that clearly revels in the athletic male body.

It is tempting to detect in an aspirational image of youthful bodily “perfection” elements of the pseudo-Nietzschean vitalism that had shaped discourses of health, gender and the body in previous decades and that had been ideologically exploited by proponents of militarism, nationalism and eugenics. Maurizia Bosagli, for example, writing of images of masculinity at the turn of the twentieth century, argues that “[t]he qualities of endurance, discipline and strength suggested by the toned muscles of the national athlete anticipated and provided an image for the agonistic-sportive totalitarian state of 30 years later, in which ideological muscularity would be deliberately trumpeted against liberalism and its ‘disembodied’, weak politics.”⁷¹ Yet the composition of the portrait of the muscular Schmeling emphasizes poise and balance rather than agonistic endurance; this is not a body fit for war but is in fact, with the discreet framing just above the groin, eroticized and slightly vulnerable. The averted gaze is non-aggressive, even coy. The display



Fig. 2.1 Max Schmeling, photograph by Lili Baruch, 1926 (Ullstein Bild – Lili Baruch)

of ornamental rather than functional muscle suggests a fetishization of the male body that echoes images of the so-called father of bodybuilding, Eugen Sandow, who (quite unlike today's bodybuilders) had attempted to model his body on the proportions of classical statues. Indeed, as Erik Jensen notes, the renowned scientist Adolf Hirschfeld

included a nude photograph of Schmeling, placed next to a classical statue of Aphrodite, in his 1930 magnum opus *Geschlechtskunde* (*Science of Sex*).⁷²

Although Lili Baruch's photograph carries the title "Max Schmeling, der deutsche Meister im Halbschwergewicht" (Max Schmeling, German light-heavyweight champion), this is noticeably *not* a boxing photograph, which is perhaps unsurprising in the context of her work. It can instead be understood as part of the ongoing attempt, in the pages of *Der Querschnitt*, to normalize boxing and challenge any lingering sense that it is *roh* (crude).⁷³ Baruch's portrait is intended to be read as an image of the successful boxer as the embodiment of harmony, control and balance. The following year the photograph was used as an illustration in an article in the popular magazine *Uhu* (like *Der Querschnitt* an Ullstein publication), reflecting on shifting notions of masculine beauty.⁷⁴ In this context, no reference is made to boxing in particular, with the author instead noting the recent shift to a corporeal rather than a physiognomic ideal of aestheticized masculinity, with sport as the claimed catalyst: "eine Vorstellung, bei der Körper, Knochenbau und Muskulatur eine weit wichtigere Rolle spielen als das Gesicht: der Körper als zweckmäßigste Maschine, nicht einseitig ausgebildet (um Gottes willen keine Muskelprotzerei mit wulstigen Auswüchsen), langbeinig, gestrafft und leicht entspannt, mit stählernen Kugelgelenken".⁷⁵ (A conception in which the body, bone structure and musculature play a far more important role than the face: the body as the most functional machine, well proportioned (for God's sake no posturing with bulging muscles), long-legged, tensed and at the same time slightly relaxed, with joints of steel). The admiring, slightly coquettish language hints, perhaps, at the (homo) erotic nature of the Schmeling nude and similar depictions of masculinity. By removing the sporting context for which it has been trained, they in fact place little emphasis on the body as functional machine and invite a desiring gaze, from both men and women.

The Baruch portrait marked the start of a period in the later years of the Weimar Republic in which images of Schmeling, in parallel with his growing reputation as a boxer, shaped perceptions of him. In a period in which sport was becoming a major theme for international art, he repeatedly stood as a model, just as Hans Breitensträter had in the early 1920s.⁷⁶ These works were for the most part commissioned by Alfred Flechtheim from artists with whom he had a contract.⁷⁷ According to Schmeling, he also starred in a film, *Ein Filmstar wird gesucht* (*Searching*

for a *Film Star*), for the first time in 1926, well before his name was widely known beyond boxing aficionados.⁷⁸ Just as Breitensträter and Samson-Körner had come to be admired by artists, intellectuals, journalists and writers in aesthetic or metaphorical terms, Schmeling too was embraced by representatives of Berlin's artistic circles in a manner that has become firmly fixed in the Schmeling legend. This cultural interest in boxing and boxers extended to the widely reported practical interest in boxing training from various prominent individuals, including women. However, the embedded association of boxing with masculinity meant that women were normally permitted only to learn the techniques and to train using implements such as punching bags, not to actually fight in the ring. Yet the masculine image of the boxer, as visualized in the portrayals of Schmeling from the late 1920s, is nuanced and open to symbolic readings that are not tightly bound to a reactionary embracing of the "primitive". Indeed, the association with Weimar culture came to have a lasting, arguably redemptive, effect on the reputation of Max Schmeling, who could claim to have belonged, at least briefly, to the inclusive, liberal and creative Berlin scene that would be wiped out by the Nazis just a handful of years later.⁷⁹

Schmeling himself, in his *Erinnerungen*, refers to himself as "eine Art Symbolfigur des Sports" (a kind of symbolic figure for the sport) and claims to have understood that the various artists were fascinated with the idea of the boxer rather than with him as an individual ("Dazu ist es erst viel später gekommen" (that only came much later), *Erinnerungen*, 85). The boxer, he suggests (*Erinnerungen*, 86), represented an "Idealtypus" (ideal type). The depictions of Schmeling in visual art would appear to confirm this, although the precise nature of the ideal in question needs explanation. Alongside the countless informal photographs, sketches, prints and caricatures that appeared in newspapers and magazines, at least three formal portraits of Schmeling, dating to the late 1920s, were made by significant artists. The earliest, and probably the best known, is the large-scale oil portrait "Der Boxer Schmeling" (Schmeling the Boxer) by George Grosz, usually dated 1926 and reproduced in the May 1927 edition of *Der Querschnitt*.⁸⁰ The Italian-born German artist Ernesto de Fiori produced a plaster sculpture, "Der Boxer Max Schmeling" (The Boxer Max Schmeling), in 1928, and Rudolf Belling made a bronze, "Der Boxer (Max Schmeling)" (The Boxer (Max Schmeling)), in 1929.

Schmeling reports in his *Erinnerungen* that he also posed for the German sculptor Renée Sintenis, who produced “eine Plastik von mir in Kampfstellung” (a statuette of me in fighting stance) (*Erinnerungen*, 86). Sintenis was a member of Flechtheim’s circle, and her striking height and appearance meant that her image, presented as the visual embodiment of the so-called new woman, was seen regularly in the pages of *Der Querschnitt*. She developed an interest in sport and was an acquaintance of Hans Breitensträter. During the 1920s she produced a number of small sculptures depicting boxers, dancers and other athletes, including one of the Finnish runner Paavo Nurmi in 1924 titled “Der Läufer Nurmi” (Nurmi the Runner). However, the nude bronze figure reproduced in *Erinnerungen* (239) dates to 1925 and in fact depicts the German middleweight boxer Erich Brandl, who was active between 1925 and 1929.⁸¹ A photograph of the statuette appeared in *Der Querschnitt* in February 1926 alongside an oil painting of Brandl, depicted wearing only a jockstrap, by Alfred Sohn-Rethel.⁸² The magazine had featured Brandl the previous year in a nude photographic double portrait by Frieda Riess, one of the most prominent portrait photographers in Berlin. These soft-focus images and Sohn-Rethel’s portrait are decidedly more eroticized than any of the images of Schmeling.⁸³ At the same time, Schmeling’s mistake demonstrates that many of the depictions of boxers from this period, particularly the sculptures, are to an extent interchangeable, emerging from a desire to capture the ideal rather than the individual. Something of the same idealism applies, for example, to de Fiori’s statuette “Boxer Jack Dempsey” (1926), depicting a slightly built male nude who bears only a passing resemblance to the ostensible subject.⁸⁴ From around 1929, as Schmeling became more successful and his distinctive features better known, artistic depictions of Schmeling are generally much more personalized and recognizable. We can point, for example, to the lithograph of Schmeling by Rudolf Grossmann, which was issued by the Verlag der Galerie Flechtheim in 1929 in an edition of 100 copies at a price of 25 German marks, and to the very personal, instantly recognizable 1931 sculpture of Schmeling’s head by Josef Thorak. Thorak became Schmeling’s close friend, hunting companion and neighbour at his countryside house in Bad Saarow in the early 1930s. He used Schmeling repeatedly as a model, not only for such small-scale, personal works but also for some of the monumental sculptures Thorak produced for the Nazis, under whom he became a significant, officially favoured artist.

The portraits by Grosz, de Fiori and Belling all depict their subject in variations of an orthodox boxer's stance, with clenched fists and left foot forward, but are not depictions of boxing as a sport, as indicated by the absence of gloves. The iconography of boxing is in fact noticeable by its absence. The images might be contrasted with the highly dynamic boxing paintings and prints by the American artist George Bellows, in which boxers are usually depicted in frenzied action, and the referee, the ring, the crowd and the punch (throwing and receiving) all feature prominently in the composition. Indeed, one of Bellows' best known works, "Dempsey and Firpo" (1924), not only attempts to depict, in dramatic fashion, the physical impact of a punch but also documents a specific moment in an actual fight, when the Argentinian challenger Luis Firpo knocked the champion Jack Dempsey out of the ring in their controversial 1923 fight, which Dempsey came back to win. The portraits of Schmeling are quite different. As in Baruch's photographic portrait, their interest is in the male body, in particular the torso. In the case of the sculptures, the recognizability of the subject is clearly a secondary consideration: these are evocations not of aggression, dynamism or triumph but of strength, confidence, stability and balance. They recall the perceived classical harmonies of ancient sculptures of athletes and suggest a return to an ideal balance of body and spirit that Willy Meisl and Carl Diem detected in sport: "eine Vergeistigung des Körpers zum Geiste" (a transformation of the body into intellect).⁸⁵

This utopian ideal informs numerous cultural artefacts and events from the period. For example, in 1925, UFA, Germany's major film studio, released the *Kulturfilm* (documentary) *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit* (*Paths to Strength and Beauty*), directed by Wilhelm Prager and the medical doctor Nicholas Kaufmann. The film is structured as a visual essay, documenting the physical benefits of various fitness programmes and forms of dance, gymnastics and sports, including boxing. As its title suggests, it sets out an argument that both mind and body should be cultivated according to an aestheticized ideal of harmony, which is visualized in protracted slow-motion sequences focused on the bodies of athletes and dancers. The principle of a balance between body and mind was equally in keeping with the sort of very modern, socially ambitious idealism that underpinned the Düsseldorf GeSoLei expo in 1926, the largest such event held in the Weimar Republic, which aimed to promote health, "hygiene" and the athletic body as a means "zum leistungsfähigen

Menschen" (of producing a human capable of performing), a new type of dynamic, high-functioning citizen.

The sculptures of Schmeling, which can also plausibly be related to the discourses of renewal, regeneration and recovery that informed the reception of sport in general, are relatively small scale. In their suggestion of poise and harmony they form a striking contrast with the aggressively muscular pseudo-classicism that is a feature of the depictions of the athletic male body under fascism, as for example in the post-1933 work of Arno Breker and Thorak. Indeed, one can locate de Fiori's work in particular within German Expressionism and the shift away from naturalism that was a feature of German modernism; it bears comparison with that of contemporaries such as Wilhelm Lehmbrück or Ernst Barlach, in whose works human emotion is embodied in idealized, symbolic figures. If Lehmbrück's "Der Gestürzte" (The Fallen Man) (1915–1916) expresses the despair felt as the world was engulfed by war, then the many sculptures of athletes made by de Fiori, Belling and Sintenis would seem to express a much more optimistic vision of mankind that can be connected both to the utopian Expressionism of the early 1920s and the forward-looking ambitions for a kind of new sort of capable citizen that were at the core of the much discussed GeSoLei expo.

Grosz's oil portrait differs slightly, not just in terms of the medium, but in the precision of the style and recognizability of the subject.⁸⁶ Painted using a relatively soft palette in the "veristisch" (veristic) manner favoured by Grosz in other portraits of this period, such as his well-known portrait of the poet Max Hermann-Neiße (1927), it directs our attention to Schmeling's muscular body and powerful fists. The plain background heightens this effect, removing all depth from the image. In Schmeling's account of the painting of the portrait in *Erinnerungen*, he claims to recall that Grosz had spelled out that he would aim to produce an idealized image:

"Ich möchte Sie allerdings nicht so sehr als Max Schmeling porträtieren", sagte er zu meiner Verblüffung, "sondern als den Typus des Faustkämpfers. Was mir vorschwebt, ist ein Bild, das Sie als Kämpfer zeigt oder, noch richtiger, ein Bild, das die Idee des Mannes im Ring zeigt. Daher möchte ich Sie in Kampfpose malen." (*Erinnerungen*, 89)

("Admittedly, I don't really want to paint you as Max Schmeling", he said to my considerable surprise, "but as the pugilist as a type. What I have in mind is a picture that shows you as a fighter, or, to be more precise, a

picture that shows the idea of the man in the ring. That's why I want to paint you in a fighting stance.")

The image contrasts markedly with Grosz's better-known and highly controversial political satire from the same period. A painting such as "Stützen der Gesellschaft" (Pillars of Society, 1926), for example, depends for its effect on the use of viciously caricatured representations of the conservative forces of the Weimar Republic. Grosz, writing in 1926, describes his approach thus: "Ich zeichnete und malte aus Widerspruch und versuchte durch meine Arbeiten die Welt davon zu überzeugen, daß sie häßlich, krank und verloren ist." (I drew and painted to be contradictory and tried in my works to persuade the world that it was ugly, sick and lost.)⁸⁷ His Schmeling portrait, however, depends for its effect upon the isolation of the individual and the removal of context and background. It is possible, at one level, to read the image as a portrayal of youthful self-assurance. One should note, for example, the casually defensive stance, with fists ready but not raised. In the context of Grosz's oeuvre, however, it can also be viewed as an optimistic image of an alternative force in contemporary German society—unencumbered by the past, balanced and, as the blue trunks and the stance make clear, incorporated into a global phenomenon, a *Weltsport* (global sport), with strong ties to the USA.

In his Berlin period between 1926 and 1928, Schmeling's career went from strength to strength. Training in a close-knit group under Max Machon, from whom he acquired a cautious, counter-punching style, he fought often, recording fifteen wins in 1927. As Kluge notes, he was not hugely popular in these early years, despite his growing prominence and a degree of celebrity within Berlin society, yet he was able to achieve key sporting goals. He became the first German European champion, again in the light-heavyweight category, won an unusually personal match after being challenged by the German middleweight champion Hein Domgörgen, a rival from his days in Cologne, and defended his European title a final time against the Italian Michele Bonaglia in Berlin in January 1928.

The press had begun to pay close attention to Schmeling, and a public image was in the making. His European title win was achieved, according to Erwin Thoma's report in *Boxsport*, through "systematische, kühl berechnete Kleinarbeit" (systematic, coldly calculated precision work). It provided, in Thoma's nationalistically oriented view, an affirmation

for German boxing as a whole: “Das in Boxsport so junge Deutschland hat jetzt, nach neun Jahren, den Beweis erbracht, dass sein Material, das ja immer vorzüglich gewesen ist, Qualität genug besitzt, um mit den Besten Europas in einer Linie zu stehen.”⁸⁸ (Germany, still young in boxing terms, has now, after 9 years, proved that its material, which was always excellent, has sufficient quality to hold its own against the best in Europe.) The fight was relatively poorly attended at a venue, the massive Westfalenhalle in Dortmund, that was much too large. Yet it was also greeted by Alfred Flechtheim, writing in *Der Querschnitt* with a degree of prescience, as a symbolic moment, establishing the international quality not only of Schmeling but of German sport in general.

In an article accompanied by a sketch of Schmeling by Ernesto de Fiori (who attended the fight), Flechtheim goes further, arguing that too few Germans *in general* operate at a European level and comparing the achievements of other athletes, such as the swimmer Erich Rademacher as well as those of various artists, musicians and scientists: “Deutschland ist an Menschen internationaler Klasse arm. [...] Nun hat Deutschland aber wieder einmal einen Mann europäischer Klasse.”⁸⁹ (Germany is short of people of international class. [...] But now Germany has once again got a man of European class.) The line of argument is interesting in that it runs counter to the triumphalist, nationalistic narratives that frequently accompany an international victory of any kind. Although Flechtheim had a vested interest in promoting Schmeling, whose image so often graced the pages of the magazine he had founded, the text nevertheless points to the way in which Schmeling was being adopted, without really being a public favourite, as a figurehead of transnational, or European, Germanness. Flechtheim states that Schmeling had been warmly greeted as European champion on a visit to London: “weil die sportverstehenden Gentleman in diesem jungen Bengel den Menschen ahnen, der vielleicht einmal eine Weltmeisterschaft für Europa retten wird” (because the gentlemen there, who understand sport, recognize in this young lad somebody who may one day win a world title for Europe).⁹⁰ Undoubtedly, Flechtheim misjudged British as well as German national sentiments when it comes to sport, for, aside from a handful of partial exceptions such as the Ryder Cup in golf, there has rarely been much enthusiasm for a collective European identity in sport. Yet it is a remarkable claim all the same, in that it anticipates precisely the sort of transnational identity that later became an established part of the myth of Max Schmeling.

This emerging image was further nuanced when Schmeling successfully defended his European light-heavyweight title against the Italian Michele Bonaglia in a sold-out Sportpalast in Berlin on 6 January 1928. It proved to be a hugely successful international sports event, promoted by Paul Damski, who was one of the three major boxing promoters in Berlin and was to become a close friend to Schmeling. With his name topping the bill at the capital's premier sports arena, the fight generated the sort of excitement and attention that boxing had not seen in Germany since the peak in the popularity of Breitensträter and Samson-Körner in the earlier part of the decade. Regional venues, such as the Westfalenhalle, were never able to do this, but above all a suitable new hero for the masses was needed.⁹¹ In Ernst Thoma's view, they now had one:

Es war wie zu Zeiten unserer Größten. [...] Die Krisis ist überwunden. Wir haben in Max Schmeling wieder einen Helden des Ringes, und lediglich dieser fehlte unserem Boxpublikum, um sich wieder in Scharen um die Standarte unseres schönen Sportes zu sammeln.⁹²

(It was like it was in the days of our greatest fighters. [...] The crisis is overcome. In Max Schmeling we once again have a ring hero, and that was all that our boxing fans needed in order once again to gather in their masses around the standard of our beautiful sport.)

In advance of the fight, Schmeling, with other members of his camp, had conducted public training sessions at the Sportpalast (in its sports "school", a sort of fitness centre), on which the press duly reported. The arrival of his unbeaten opponent from fascist Italy was also covered in detail in most of Berlin's daily newspapers in the days leading up to the fight. Schmeling was now enjoying the levels of attention enjoyed by a bone fide star. "Und wenn immer der deutsche Europameister trainierte, fand sich stets eine große Schar Interessierter und Fanatiker ein, die jede Bewegung, jeden Schlag Schmeling's mit größter Spannung verfolgten, die den Boxmeister in jeder seiner Trainingsphasen studierten."⁹³ (And whenever the European champion trained, a great crowd of the curious and the fanatical gathered who watched Schmeling's every movement and every punch with the greatest excitement and studied the champion in each phase of his training.) These visitors included other celebrities; the *12-Uhr-Blatt* published a sketch of the well-known actors Fritz Kortner and Alexander Granach attending a sparring session (which was

jokingly labelled a “rehearsal”).⁹⁴ The sense of an *occasion* was palpable, prompting Nürnberg in the *12-Uhr-Blatt* to grant Schmeling the status of “ein repräsentativer deutscher Boxer” (a representative German boxer) and his sport greater, national significance.

Man geht heute wohl auch nicht nur in den Sportpalast um des Boxens willen, nicht nur, um zu sehen, wer der Bessere wird, wie es so ausgeht, man geht heute wohl nicht nur in den Sportpalast, um Boxkunst zu genießen und boxerisches Können zu bewundern, man geht wohl einmal in den Sportpalast, weil das hier eine *nationale Sache* ist.⁹⁵

(These days you don’t go to the Sportpalast just because of the boxing, or just to see who’s the best or how it turns out. You probably don’t go to the Sportpalast just to appreciate the boxing artistry and admire the boxing skill. You go to the Sportpalast because it has become *important for the nation*.)

Nürnberg’s typical, rhetorical use of repetition lends the sentiment weight, and the association with national feelings proved remarkably prescient. On that night, all the major sports reporters were in attendance, and their reports were given considerable space in the following day’s editions, with many displaying the result on the front page. The *Berliner Volkszeitung*, for example, placed a sketch by Julius Kroll, depicting the moment of Schmeling’s victory, in a prime location on the front page of the evening edition. All the reports of the fight are in agreement about the frenzied atmosphere amongst the excited crowd of 8000. “Tausende aber im Sportpalast haben Alltagsträume und Sorgen, Krisen und Börsen vergessen; Tausende überrennen die Bordermänner, Stühle werden niedergerissen, Frauen kreischen auf.”⁹⁶ (But the thousands in attendance at the Sportpalast forgot their everyday dreams, forgot their worries, the crises and stock exchanges. Thousands pushed past the security men, knocked down chairs. Women were screaming.) The challenger Bonaglia was reputed to be a particular favourite of Mussolini and was thus associated and perhaps even identified with Italian fascism. This is quite possibly one reason why he proved to be unpopular with the partisan crowd. In the *Vossische Zeitung*, Willy Meisl, as he had done in his 1925 report of the Breitensträter–Samson–Körner fight, comments on the somewhat hypocritical psychology of the crowd, which he deems “die Masse Mensch” (mass men): “Sie verlangt vom Boxer, dem bezahlten oder auch unbezahlten Gladiator alles, Mut, Selbstaufopferung, Selbstbeherrschung,

sie selbst aber *pfeift* im Wortsinne auf alles.”⁹⁷ (It demands everything of the boxer, regardless of whether he is a professional or amateur gladiator—courage, self-sacrifice, self-control. But the whistling crowd allows itself to do whatever it likes.) He is particularly critical of the unsporting booing and whistling meted out to the Italian, although this was partly prompted by the foul blows he delivered, for which he received a warning from the referee. Bonaglia achieved little else in the fight, as in the final minute of the first round he was dramatically knocked out by a powerful short right from Schmeling. The *sachlich* (objective) Hans Bötticher, writing in the *BZ am Mittag*, employed a range of metaphors suggesting what he saw as Schmeling’s “cold”, mechanical precision in the short fight: “Genau so, wie Schmeling an der schweren Birne diesen Rechten durchbrachte, genau so kalt, mit eiserner Ruhe, schlug er ihn gestern, dafür mit einer cleverness, Präzision, die ihm so leicht kein deutscher und—kein europäischer Boxer nachmacht.”⁹⁸ (Just as Schmeling had on the heavy bag, yesterday he used his right with the same coldness, with steely calm, and with an intelligence and precision that other Germans, indeed other Europeans, will struggle to match.) This stood in considerable contrast to the huge excitement in the arena created by the spectacular victory. Almost all the accounts attempt to convey the extraordinary response from the crowd. Erwin Thoma, in *Boxsport*, evokes the transformative effect upon the otherwise cynical urban crowd: “Das Haus ist irrsinnig. Brüllen, Lachen, Jauchzen, —noch nie sah ich die Berliner so ehrlich und tief mitgerissen wie an diesem Tage und in diesem Moment.”⁹⁹ (The venue goes crazy. Screaming, laughter, yelling. Never before have I seen Berliners so honestly and deeply moved as they were on this day and at that moment.) In the *Berliner Tageblatt* the reference is to “der außergewöhnliche Beifall, der orkanartige Stärke erreicht hatte” (the extraordinary applause that had reached the strength of a hurricane), while the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* chooses an even more dramatic comparison: “Die riesige, unter dicken Nebeln der Leidenschaft flimmernde Arena wird zu einem speienden Krater, zu einem einzigen, tosenden Maul”.¹⁰⁰ (The huge arena, shimmering under a thick mist of passion, becomes an erupting crater, a single, great, wild mouth.) Meisl also comments on the crowd’s reaction, focusing again on the negative reaction to the defeated man: “Und den Abgang dieses geschlagenen Kämpfers [...] begleitete ein Teil der Zuschauer mit Pfeifen und Johlen.”¹⁰¹ (And a section of the spectators accompanied the departure of the defeated fighter with whistles and booing.)

These reports provide vivid evidence of the perceived psychological effects of the collective spectatorship of sport. However, one particular detail, mentioned in most but not all of the accounts of the evening, elicited explicitly political interpretations. Following Schmeling's victory, amid chaotic scenes and considerable noise, the brass band in the Sportpalast struck up the German national anthem, the *Deutschlandlied*, and it seems clear that at least a portion of the crowd stood up to sing: "Wer in dem nicht endenden Donner des tobenden Beifalls die Melodie erkennt, singt begeistert mit."¹⁰² (Those who were able to pick out the melody within the never-ending thunder of the raging applause sang along enthusiastically.) Neither Bötticher nor Nürnberg, whilst noting this occurrence, attempts to make much of it. For Erwin Thoma, however, it was a symbolic moment in which Schmeling *represented* Germany:

Zum erstenmal ist ein Boxkampf eine nationale Angelegenheit im besten Sinne des Wortes geworden. Schmeling ist in diesem Augenblick nicht Boxer, er ist ein großartiger Repräsentant einer ganzen Nation, die ihren Meister mit einem Feuer und einer Begeisterung ehrt, wie wir alle, die wir von den ersten Anfängen an dabei waren, es noch nicht erlebt haben.¹⁰³

(For the first time a boxing match has become a national matter in the best sense of the word. At this moment Schmeling is not a boxer but a great representative of the entire nation, which honours its champion with a fiery enthusiasm never before experienced by those of us who have been there from the start.)

Thoma was a nationalist, and later a Nazi, and the evocation here of *national* triumph experienced through a representative figure anticipates the way in which he and other writers would attempt to configure Schmeling's landmark victories in the 1930s as *German*. Yet in 1928 this was not the only possible interpretation. Retrospectively, at least, this moment was identified by some who had witnessed it, including Fritz Kortner, as "ein Triumph des demokratischen Prinzips über das faschistische Italien" (a triumph of the democratic principle over fascist Italy) (*Erinnerungen*, 64). Of course, this precisely reverses the political allegorization that was later applied to Schmeling, and it is unclear how many of the excited fans in attendance really felt this. What seems most likely is that a degree of confirmation bias coloured the responses, with those who most wanted to connect Schmeling and his sport to the new, democratic Germany most open to reading the event in this way. Yet

it is worth observing, as additional context, that the Sportpalast itself had an association with Republicanism in the mid-1920s; it had provided the venue for numerous pro-Republican political events and had been christened the “Haus der Republik” (House of the Republic) by the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* in 1925.¹⁰⁴ In any case, the political readings of the aftermath of the Bonaglia fight set an ambiguous precedent for the politicization of Max Schmeling.

A more concrete impact was the cementing of Schmeling’s status within Berlin’s high society and artistic elite. Already he was becoming a divisive figure, in many respects reflecting the divergent views on sport in general and boxing in particular and on culture and identity, that were at the heart of the intellectual discourse of the later Weimar years. Some commentators, such as Meisl, viewed Schmeling and his approach to his sport positively: “Max Schmeling ist erst 22 Jahre alt. Er ist im Ring und außerhalb des Ringes ungemein sympathisch, intelligent und ein ernster Sportsmann, der ein musterhaftes Leben führt.”¹⁰⁵ (Max Schmeling is just 22 years old. In the ring and outside it he is uncommonly sympathetic and intelligent and is a serious sportsman who has an exemplary lifestyle.) The statement, with its motifs of intelligence, seriousness and exemplariness, undoubtedly reflects aspects of Schmeling’s personality and anticipates some of the ways that Schmeling would continue to be viewed for the next eighty or so years. As he became better known and, eventually, internationally famous, Schmeling’s “musterhaftes Leben” (exemplary lifestyle), the image of the “good boy”, was reinforced in multi-media performances that capitalized on the rapidly developing technologies shaping modern culture. Many of these were stage-managed by others, but Schmeling, increasingly aware of the value of publicity, willingly complied. In 1929, for example, Schmeling found the time to star in one of the first German sound films, *Liebe im Ring* (*Love in the Ring*, directed by Reinhold Schünzel, released early 1930).¹⁰⁶ The film was conceived as a silent but, as was common in this transitional period in film history following the success of the first sound films in 1928 and 1929, several sequences of recorded dialogue and music were included, as well as a musical soundtrack and post-production background sound. The film is a bespoke vehicle for its star, a novice actor, and can be classified as an early example of the so-called boxing film (see also Chap. 6). As is typical of the genre, it uses a variant of the archetypal rags-to-riches narrative. Although *Liebe im Ring* is a much simpler effort than well-known later examples, such as *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (directed by Robert Wise, 1956),

Rocky (directed by John G. Avildsen, 1976) or *Cinderella Man* (directed by Ron Howard, 2005), like these films it structures the story of a boxer's journey to success around the obstacles, both sporting and social, he faces on the way. By casting Schmeling in a central role that is reminiscent of aspects of his own career, and moreover by calling his character "Max", the film rises to what we might think of as a metatextual level. As would be the case with the other film in which Schmeling starred in the 1930s, *Knock Out* (directed by Carl Lamač, 1935) (see also Chap. 4), the viewer is encouraged to retain an awareness of the identity and established image of the actor, which the sentimental narrative simultaneously embellishes.¹⁰⁷ Schmeling plays a fantasy version of himself, a young man from humble origins whose talent is spotted by a manager (Kurt Gerron) but who is then tempted away from both his girlfriend Hilde (Renate Müller) and his training regime by wealthy socialite Lilian (Olga Tschechowa), before discovering the latter's shallow nature and renewing his dedication to his sport. The film concludes with a climactic fight, staged with the Portuguese heavyweight José Santa, in which Max survives several knock-downs and, showing "heart", comes back to win by a knockout. The final scene has Schmeling and Müller kissing (for a full 10 count), having rediscovered true love.

Schmeling's performance is today mainly remembered for the song, "Das Herz eines Boxers" (The Heart of a Boxer), that he performs with his co-stars Gerron and Hugo Fischer-Köppe, who plays one of Max's trainers. The lyrics of the song, whose refrain Schmeling delivers in a sort of *Sprechgesang*, summarize one of the film's central ideas, namely that women and love (by which of course we should understand above all sex) are fatal to a boxer's career:

Das Herz eines Boxers kennt nur eine Liebe,
den Kampf um den Sieg ganz allein.
Das Herz eines Boxers kennt nur eine Sorge,
Im Ring der erste zu sein.

(The heart of a boxer only knows one love, / And that is to fight for victory. / The heart of a boxer only knows one worry, / And that is to be number one in the ring.) Rolf Nürnberg was scathing in his dismissal of the film as "das Musterbeispiel eines schlechten und noch dazu

unverständlichen Tonfilms" (the perfect example of a bad film that is also incomprehensible).¹⁰⁸

Comparing *Liebe im Ring* to a canonical film such as Josef von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel* (*The Blue Angel*), also released in the spring of 1930, it is hard to disagree with Nürnberg. Yet the film is nevertheless an interesting example of the manner in which generic motifs (of the boxer; the romantic hero; the son) were being incorporated into a collectively imagined "Max Schmeling"; the deliberate blurring in *Liebe im Ring* of fictional and actual identities is an indication of this. The story hinges on the dichotomy between a supposed pure masculinity, required in order to perform in the ring, and the alleged corrupting force of sexualized femininity, represented in the film by the *femme fatale* played by Tschschowa. The maternal and the virginal, represented respectively by Max's mother and Hilde, who are frequently seen together, are by contrast safe and non-threatening.

This motif is echoed in many later examples of the boxing film, such as *Body and Soul* (directed by Robert Rossen, 1947, see also Chap. 6), an excellent film that depends on the same constellation of figures—a boxer caught between two women and between two opposing lifestyles: pleasure, money and sex are contrasted with work, discipline and family. It is a socially conservative scenario; indeed, it is reminiscent of the dynamic in many of the proto-fascistic texts persuasively analysed by Klaus Theweleit. It also draws on stock motifs and character types that appear regularly in Weimar cinema. The work of F.W. Murnau frequently plays with such contrasts; for example, it is central to *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927), the first film Murnau made in America, in which nameless, archetypal characters are used to embody a binary understanding of the world—the city not only contrasts with but is seen as entirely incompatible with the country, lust with love, pleasure with morality. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) is likewise fascinated by symbolic contrasts, memorably represented by the two roles played by Brigitte Helm, the virginal Maria and the robotic "false" Maria, who seduces the masses into a self-destructive revolution. These films, like *Liebe im Ring*, draw on ancient motifs, present in the Bible, Homer, Arthurian myths and numerous folk tales, in their construction of masculine heroes who must overcome temptation in order to return to the true path.

Such comparisons may seem far-fetched, yet in the modern context, sports heroes have frequently been judged by very different standards than those that prevail in society. Black American athletes like Joe

Louis and Jesse Owens for many years had to maintain a pretence of chastity and devotion to their mothers, even when, in Owens' case, he already had a child by his long-term girlfriend. In the case of the young Schmeling, devotion to his mother was also an important part of the public image; on 22 May 1930, just 2 months after the premiere of *Liebe im Ring* in March 1930, a conversation between Schmeling, who was in the USA preparing for his world title fight, and his mother Amanda, who was in a Berlin studio, was broadcast live on radio to a national audience. The event had a dual significance, showcasing the power of radio and capitalizing on Schmeling's popularity. It further reinforced the sentimental image of the hardened boxer's love for his mother. Although the broadcast was widely reported on, not everyone was willing to accept Schmeling's emerging image as a man of culture and familial devotion.¹⁰⁹ For Nürnberg, Schmeling seemed to embody a culture of vacuous celebrity and self-serving ambition. In his generally hostile biography of Max Schmeling (see Chap. 3), Nürnberg observes that the Bonaglia fight marked the start of Schmeling's widespread popularity, implying that it was the product of happy circumstance as much as anything else:

Was soundsoviele Siege, soundsoviele Erfolge, soundsoviele Arbeit, soundsoviele Zufälle nicht vollbracht hatten, das erreichte dieser eine rechte Schlag nach einer Kampfdauer von zweieinhalb Minuten. Ueber die Nacht dieses 6. Januar 1928 war Schmeling Deutschlands Sportheros geworden.¹¹⁰

(A single right after a fight lasting two-and-a-half minutes brought about what previous successes, work and coincidences could not. Overnight, on 6 January 1928, Schmeling had become Germany's sporting hero.)

In the months that followed, Schmeling, very much in the style of the reigning world heavyweight champion Gene Tunney, became an active participant in Berlin's cultural scene, attending theatre premieres, being seen in the company of liberal and left-wing intellectuals, actors and artists, and frequenting Viktor Schwannecke's *Weinstuben* (wine bar) on Rankestraße, a favourite haunt for Berlin's theatrical and literary circles. He was already well known within Alfred Flechtheim's circle, and now he began to read newspapers and literature, while cultural celebrities like the stage actor Fritz Kortner, who had been swept up in the general enthusiasm for boxing, were keen to befriend Schmeling. It was in the guest book at Schwannecke's that Schmeling entered his

famous two-line motto: “Künstler, schenkt mir Eure Gunst / Boxen ist doch auch ’ne Kunst!”¹¹¹ (Artists, lend me your favour / As boxing is an art too!) Schmeling’s retrospective explanation for his behaviour, in his *Erinnerungen*, is that he wanted to make up for a lack of education: “Versuche Dir anzueignen, was Du versäumt hast” (Try to make up for what you missed out on, 87); and this is not fanciful, for, as we shall see, a desire for continuous self-improvement emerges in the late 1920s as a distinct and lasting element in Schmeling’s public image. For Nürnberg, however, Schmeling’s desire to be seen as more than *just* a boxer was unforgivable pretension, a symptom of what he saw as shallowness and vanity. The willingness of Berlin’s cultural elite to indulge him in this respect reflected what he viewed, in unintended anticipation of the attitude of many on the Far Right, as the cultural decadence of the metropolis and of contemporary society. Yet Schmeling’s public self-stylization, in defiance of formulaic expectations of both boxers and Germans, reflects revealing changes in the way in which so-called national identities were subject to change.

In the spring of 1928, Schmeling, after suffering an unexpected knockout defeat to the British boxer “Gypsy” Daniels, made the widely expected decision to step up to heavyweight, and his fight in April 1928 against the German champion Franz Diener, who was himself becoming something of a star, became a cultural occasion comparable to a theatrical premiere, with the Sportpalast completely sold out despite extraordinarily high ticket prices.¹¹² Indeed, the programme for the fight, which was a close affair and decided on points in Schmeling’s favour, featured essays and comments from writers, journalists, artists, actors and directors, including Kurt Pinthus, Max Hermann-Neiße, Leo Lania, Egon Erwin Kisch, Leopold Jeßner, Werner Krauß and others. The playwright Carl Zuckmayer’s short contribution to the programme reflected a tendency to view boxing itself as an expression of a supposed democratic ideal: “Boxen: der prachtvollste, fairste Kampfsport / Der Kampf über den Klassen und Massen / Das heroische Ideal des Kampfes: Mann gegen Mann.”¹¹³ (Boxing: the most splendid, fairest combat sport / To fight above all classes and masses / The heroic ideal of battle: man against man.) Naïve as this seems in an age in which gambling, racism, corruption and fixed fights were already a part of the culture of boxing, particularly in America, the sentiment reflects a sense that, though still very much a gender-specific phenomenon, boxing, in its simplicity, represented a means to bypass and perhaps even combat age-old class

divisions and prejudices.¹¹⁴ The aspiration was occasionally voiced in America, too, where, despite the deep-rooted racism that prevented a non-white from challenging for the heavyweight title for 22 years (see Chap. 5), black boxers were making names for themselves: “You can’t Jim Crow a left hook” was the view of one.¹¹⁵ Zuckmayer’s optimistic sentiment says less about his awareness of the realities of professional boxing than it does about the willingness on the part of liberals to embrace boxing as a symbol, or principle, suitable for a *fair* society.

In a sense, both the new, democratic Germany and the sport of boxing had been born at the same moment. Schmeling himself, in his first memoir, seems to invite the comparison between his sport and the development of the German Republic. It is interesting to note the way in which national identities play a role in the text’s depiction of the (sporting) progress the nation had made by the mid-1920s, when Schmeling turned professional: “Aber gegen die führende Weltklasse konnten die Deutschen wenig ausrichten, ein Beweis dafür, daß es für uns noch emsigster Arbeit bedurfte, um im Boxring der Völker einmal eine Runde mitkämpfen zu können” (*Mein Leben*, 41). (But Germans could do little against the best, world-class boxers, proving that we still needed to work hard if we were ever to hold our own for even a single round in the boxing ring of nations.) To improve, and to be able to match the Americans, he goes on to say, it was necessary to learn from them, echoing contemporary discourses of positive *Amerikanismus*. Discussions of America and its influence often had less to do with the USA as it really existed and everything to do with competing aspirations and claims for Germany; Hans Joachim observes, writing in 1930: “Wie wir zu Amerika standen, zeigte, wo wir standen.”¹¹⁶ (Our view of America showed our view of ourselves.) Expressed in numerous articles, essays, reports and monographs, attitudes ranged from extreme, optimistic openness to American influence, to outright hostility to the idea of American “civilization”. The sports administrator Carl Diem was not alone in admiring the American culture of individual aspiration and success, finding particular inspiration in American “Körpererziehung als Weg zur Menschbildung” (physical training as a means to personal development).¹¹⁷ By contrast, in his 1927 study *Amerika und der Amerikanismus* (America and Americanism), Adolf Halfeld portrayed America as materialistic and mechanistic and contrasts it, in a conscious application of Oswald Spengler’s influential diagnostic categories, as the antithesis to European (or at least German) *Kultur* (culture), which he

understood in traditional terms as entirely non-physical and thus excluding sport.¹¹⁸

In *Mein Leben*, the association of boxing with training, learning and self-improvement is significant. In a reversal of the previously widespread association of boxing with *Pöbel* (mob), the notion was beginning to be voiced that the physical discipline demanded in the sport could result in self-improvement and, moreover, have a beneficial effect in the moulding of individuals not only into better human beings, as per Diem's concept of *Menscbildung*, but into *better citizens*. There was an emerging interest in this period in the transformative effects of sports. The aforementioned film *Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit*, for example, presents the argument that the modern, urban human will be *improved*, both physically and morally, by a return to a more natural, harmonious and physical self, which it associates with classical culture. The film's intertitles are frequently categorical and universalizing, suggesting that *all* humans will benefit from this, as will the nation: "Heute ist es nicht militärischer Drill, sondern der Sport, der die Quelle der Stärke der Nation ist." (Today the source of the nation's strength is not to be found in military drills but in sport.) This is consistent with comparable views voiced in the American context, often in connection with boxing. Former champion "Gentleman Jim" Corbett had argued, in 1905, that "if every young man in America would take up boxing as a pastime we would have better men *and better citizens*".¹¹⁹ In many respects, Gene Tunney was the living embodiment of Corbett's claim, and indeed he took care to craft precisely such an image. Tunney's first, rather fragmentary, autobiography seems only ever to have been published in German translation, appearing in 1927 shortly after the second and most controversial of his two victories over Jack Dempsey. The appetite in Germany for information about American boxing is reflected in the very existence of the publication. Although it does not always read as if conceived as a single volume, this autobiography precedes by some 5 years the first to appear in English. Schmeling was often compared to Tunney and, in his own autobiographical writing, frequently cites his admiration for him. There are striking parallels between Tunney and Schmeling in temperament, training methods and approach, and outlook. The "intellectual" athlete Tunney and, to a lesser extent, the rather less cerebral but ruthlessly effective Jack Dempsey served as models for Schmeling, not only in his development as an athlete, but in his conscious construction of himself as a modern individual. In his text Tunney is concerned to define his sport in terms

consistent with an optimistic vision of modernity as civilizing, progressive, healthy, constructive and rational:

Später bin ich dann zu der Erkenntnis gekommen, daß auf dem Wege der Evolution alles menschliche Kämpfen und Ringen nach oben strebt und daß die Zivilisation selbst das Resultat von der Menschen Tasten nach einem fernen Lichte ist. Und so lernte ich auch, daß selbst die Boxkunst einem ständigen Hang nach besseren und vornehmeren Regeln unterlag und daß damit von Generation zu Generation gesündere Wirkungen erzielt worden waren.¹²⁰

(Later I came to recognize that on the path to evolution humanity has struggled and fought its way upwards and that civilization itself is the result of humans striving towards a distant light. And so I also learned that even the rules of boxing have been subject to constant improvement and refinement, and in the process, from generation to generation, healthier effects have been achieved.)

Elsewhere in his volume it becomes clear that this understanding of boxing's development is related to a positive conception of American values—in particular fairness and equality of opportunity—that Tunney, the son of Irish immigrants, certainly shared with many.¹²¹ In the context of a German Republic still seeking widespread acceptance and identification, it is possible, despite the divergent views on the nature and purpose of sport, to locate the impetus behind the emergence and continued promotion of boxing in Germany during the 1920s within a liberal discourse in which citizenship and responsibility are core values. Such a discourse did not remain unchallenged—for example, by the distinctly nationalistic (and anti-Semitic) agenda embedded in the German gymnastics movement. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the later claims on boxing made under National Socialism, the popular appeal exercised by a so-called foreign sport that was illegal and marginalized only a few years previously is remarkable.

Could one therefore argue that, in the latter years of the Weimar Republic, boxing functioned as a metaphor for the democratic principles of republican Germany, with Schmeling as its appropriate champion? Perhaps. Schmeling, probably more by an accident of his American manager Joe Jacobs's planning, certainly presented himself as such a symbol of the Republic when, in 1930, he appeared at a demonstration bout in Berlin wearing trunks in black, red and gold, the national colours

of the Republic that were hated by those on the right.¹²² The association was not accepted by all, and one finds little evidence of it in the many pages of *Boxsport* devoted to Schmeling during this period. From 1928, as Schmeling became closely identified with America and with an individualistic, supposedly American approach to sport, it also became less than straightforward to claim that he represented Germany, republican or otherwise. Indeed, it seemed to some that Schmeling was attempting to live the American, not the German, dream.

NOTES

1. A classic account of the cultural life of the Weimar Republic is given by Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). On the *Wandervögel* and the post-war “hunger for wholeness” see 77–9.
2. Sebastian Haffner, *Geschichte eines Deutschen. Die Erinnerungen 1914–1933* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), 74.
3. See Stefan Jacob, *Sport im 20. Jahrhundert* (Münster, Hamburg: Lit, 1994), 17–18; Gabriele Wesp, *Frisch, fromm, fröhlich, Frau: Frauen und Sport zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik* (Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer, 1998), 9–11; Peter Tauber, *Vom Schützengraben auf den grünen Rasen* (Berlin: Lit, 2008), 8–9. The term “Sport” was still generally reserved for modern competitive sports, and was distinguished from “Turnen”.
4. Hermann Kasack, “Sport als Lebensgefühl”, *Die Weltbühne*, 24:21 (9 October 1928): 557–60 (558); Hans Seiffert, “Weltreligion des 20. Jahrhunderts. Aus einem Werk des 120. Jahrhunderts”, *Der Querschnitt*, 12:6 (June 1932): 385–7.
5. See Erik Eggers, “‘Deutsch wie der Sport, so auch das Wort!’ Zur Scheinblüte der Fußballpublizistik im Dritten Reich”, in *Fußball zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus: Alltag – Medien – Künste – Stars*, ed. Markwart Herzog (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 161–82 (162–3).
6. Meisl was born in Vienna and enjoyed some success as an amateur football player and coach before moving to Berlin and beginning his journalistic career in 1924. His older brother, Hugo Meisl, was the legendary manager of the Austrian football *Wunderteam* (wonder team) of the 1930s. Meisl was Jewish and emigrated to Britain in 1934, where he re-established himself as a sportswriter and administrator. He was one of relatively few journalists to have his own by-line (always “Dr. Willy Meisl”) in the sports section of a daily newspaper, which is also

- an indication of the importance that the *Vossische*, published by Ullstein Press, attached to sport.
7. Willy Meisl, "Der Sport am Scheidewege", in *Der Sport am Scheidewege*, ed. Meisl (Heidelberg: Iris, 1928), 19–131 (20).
 8. *Ibid.*, 20.
 9. *Ibid.*, 21.
 10. The communist newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* and the National Socialist newspapers the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the Berlin-based *Der Angriff* adopted this stance towards sport during the 1920s. The attitude of the Nazi press to professional sport shifted radically in the early 1930s (see Chap. 4).
 11. An authoritative account of Berlin's newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century is provided by Peter de Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin: Menschen und Mächte in der Geschichte der deutschen Presse* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1959).
 12. Hans Bötticher, who wrote for the *BZ am Mittag* and was also a contributor to *Boxsport*, is certainly *not* identical with the poet and artist Joachim Ringelnatz, as claimed by Knud Kohr and Martin Krauß (in Kohr and Krauß, *Kampftage: die Geschichte des deutschen Berufsboxens* (Göttingen: Die Werkstatt, 2000), 50), and again by Krauß in his 2005 biography of Schmeling (28). The mistake arises from the fact that Ringelnatz was the pseudonym used by *another* Hans Bötticher. Ringelnatz was primarily based in Munich, not Berlin, and died in exile in 1934. The Berlin journalist Bötticher (often given as H.Bö., as was typical for the German press in this period, when many journalists were identified by a unique set of initials or similar abbreviation) continued to write on boxing in the Third Reich, contributing to newspapers such as *Der Angriff* until at least 1938.
 13. Unlike the majority of national newspapers, both *Kicker* and *Boxsport* resumed publication after 1945 and continue to be published to the present day.
 14. Silke Kettelhake, *Renée Sintenis: Berlin, Boheme und Ringelnatz* (Berlin: Osburg, 2010), 87. For a good account of the career of Flechtheim see Kettelhake's chapter, "Alfred Flechtheim und *Der Querschnitt*", 81–8.
 15. De Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin*, 259.
 16. Quoted by Dieter Behrendt, "Boxen muß de, boxen, boxen", in *Arena der Leidenschaften: Der berliner Sportpalast und seine Veranstaltungen 1910–1973* (Berlin: Verlag Willmuth Ahrenhövel, 1990) ed. Alfons Ahrenhövel, 84–9 (84). The reference to *anmelden* ("signing up") alludes to the Sportschule (sports school) at the Sportpalast, about which more is written in Chap. 3.

17. Joseph Roth, *Werke*, ed. Fritz Hackert and Klaus Westermann, 6 vols. (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1989–91), II, 4.
18. *Simplicissimus* 35 (7 July 1930).
19. Gustav Stresemann, “Rede auf dem Parteitag der DVP in Köln vom 2. Oktober 1926”, in *Gustav Stresemann – Reden: 1926*, ed. Wolfgang Elz (Online publication: http://www.geschichte.uni-mainz.de/neuestegeschichte/Dateien/Text_1926.pdf, 314–337 (334). Accessed 19 November 2016.
20. The resultant confusion between national, military and masculine identity has been explored in particular by Ute Frevert. See Frevert, “Soldaten – Staatsbürger: Überlegungen zu historischen Konstruktionen von Männlichkeit”, in *Männergeschichte – Geschlechtergeschichte: Männlichkeit im Wandel der Moderne*, ed. Thomas Kühne (Frankfurt a. M., New York: Campus, 1996), 69–87.
21. Vladimir Nabokov, “Breitensträter – Paolino”, trans. by Anastasia Tolstoy and Thomas Karshan, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 August 2012. Accessed 19 November 2016. <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/breiten-strater-paolino>.
22. See de Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin*, 139.
23. “Adam”, “Berlin beim Sport”, *Sport im Bild* 20 (1925): 1264.
24. David Bathrick, “Max Schmeling on the Canvas: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture”, *New German Critique* 51 (1990), 113–36 (116).
25. See Alfons Arenhövel, “Chronik der Veranstaltungen 1910–1973”, in Arenhövel ed., *Arena der Leidenschaften*, 129–571 (153). Naujoks was one of the most popular early champions in Germany, and was later part of the same training group as Schmeling, for whom he frequently acted as second.
26. Herbert Heckmann, “Der Faustkampf als edle Kunst”, in *Schneller, Höher, Weiter: eine Geschichte des Sports*, ed. Hans Sarkowicz (Frankfurt AM.: Suhrkamp, 1999), 113–24 (117); Kluge, 33.
27. See Kohr and Krauß, *Kampftage*, 46–9; Manfred Luckas, “So lange du stehen kannst, wirst du kämpfen”—*Die Mythen des Boxens und ihre literarische Inszenierung* (Berlin: dissertation.de, 2002), 64.
28. M. te Kloot, “Wie gewinnt der Boxsport das Allgemein-Interesse”, *Der Querschnitt* 2:6 (1921): 218–21 (219).
29. Job Zimmermann, “Großkampftag”, *Sport im Bild*, 16 (1923): 496–7 (496).
30. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring*, 49, 49–50.
31. *Ibid.*, 50.
32. Erik Jensen, “Crowd Control: Boxing Spectatorship and Social Order in Weimar Germany”, in *Histories of Leisure*, ed. Rudy Koshar (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 79–101 (85).

33. Rolf Nürnberg, *Max Schmeling: die Geschichte einer Karriere* (Berlin: Großberliner Druckerei für Presse und Buchverlag, 1932), 5–6. Compare also Schmeling's own speculative comments on the popularity of sport after military catastrophes (*Erinnerungen*, 512).
34. See Kohr and Krauß, *Kampftage*, 38–40; Kluge, *Max Schmeling*, 47.
35. Quoted in Kohr and Krauß, *Kampftage*, 39. Another internee who became interested in boxing and fitness was Joseph Pilates, inventor of the fitness programme. Pilates was a pioneer of boxing for fitness and personal training in Berlin in the 1920s before he emigrated to the USA. He claimed to have made the boxing journalist Nat Fleischer, of *Ring* magazine, aware of Max Schmeling and to have indirectly helped shape Schmeling's career. See Eva Rincke, *Joseph Pilates: Der Mann, dessen Name Programm wurde* (Freiburg: Herder, 2015).
36. Schmeling's cumbersome ring nickname in the USA, the "Black Uhlan of the Rhine", was entirely fanciful—Schmeling was neither from the Rhineland nor had served with the Uhlans.
37. That he had had nothing to do with political or paramilitary organizations after 1918, such as the so-called *Freikorps*, is also significant in this regard. Franz Diener, whom Schmeling defeated in 1928 to take the German heavyweight title, was a veteran of the *Freikorps* and later a member of the NSDAP.
38. Oates, "On Boxing", 114.
39. *Ibid.*
40. The National Socialists, from the early 1920s, embraced boxing under rather different terms, for example. See Chap. 4.
41. Herbert Jhering, "Boxen", *Das Tage-Buch* 8 (1927): 587–9.
42. Zimmermann, "Großkampftag", 497.
43. Behrendt, "Boxen mußst du, boxen, boxen", 84.
44. "[D]as homogene Weltstadtpublikum, das vom Bankdirektor bis zum Handlungsgehilfen, von der Diva bis zur Stenotypistin eines Sinnes ist." (The homogenous metropolitan masses, which are made up of bank managers and trainees, divas and shorthand typists, and yet have a single identity.) Siegfried Kracauer, "Kult der Zerstreuung", in Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1977), 311–17 (313).
45. Curt Gutmann, "Boxen als Geschäft und Sport", *Der Querschnitt* 8:8 (1928): 560–63 (560).
46. Arnolt Bronnen, "Sport und Risiko", in *Der Sport am Scheidewege*, 140–3 (141).
47. Bert[olt] Brecht, "Die Krise des Sports", in *Der Sport am Scheidewege*, 144–6 (146).

48. See also Eric Jensen's suggestion that, especially in the middle part of the 1920s, more and more Germans came to favour the "American style of boxing, which favoured the knockout blow". This perception may have derived from Dempsey's reputation, but in fact there were plenty of examples of American boxers who used a tactical approach, particularly in the lighter weight divisions. Eric N. Jensen, *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender and German Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 63.
49. Joyce Carol Oates, "On Mike Tyson", in Oates, *On Boxing*, 119–181 (125–6).
50. Kurt Prenzel, "Fünf Runden gegen Adolf Wiegert", *Der Querschnitt* 3 (1923): 71–2.
51. Kurt Doerry, "Der psychologische Moment", *Sport im Bild* 16 (1923): 493–5 (493).
52. *Ibid.*, 494.
53. The Olympic ban was lifted in 1925.
54. See Kohr and Krauß, *Kampftage*, 49.
55. H. von Wedderkop, "Hans Breitensträter", *Der Querschnitt* 1:4/5 (1921): 136–41 (137); also in *Die Weltbühne* 38 (1921): 296–8.
56. *Ibid.*, 140.
57. All three produced works depicting Breitensträter. Von Zimmermann's oil portrait was published in *Der Querschnitt* in the following issue.
58. "E.", "Wie Breitensträter Samson bezwang", *Berliner Tageblatt*, 12 September 1925 (evening edition), 5.
59. Willy Meisl, "Breitensträters Wiederkehr", *Vossische Zeitung*, 12 September 1925 (evening edition), 4.
60. See Kohr and Krauß, *Kampftage*, 43.
61. Joseph Roth, "Der Kampf um die Meisterschaft" (*Frankfurter Zeitung*, 3 March 1924), in Roth, *Werke*, II, 72.
62. *Der Lebenslauf des Boxers Samson-Körner. Erzählt von ihm selber, aufgeschrieben von Bert Brecht* (The Life of the Boxer Samson-Körner. Told by himself, written up by Bert Brecht) was never completed. The other literary texts relating to boxing written by Brecht in this period are the short story "Der Kinnhaken" ("The Uppercut", published in *Scherl's Magazin*, 1926) and the unfinished *Das Renommée. Ein Boxerroman*, which was inspired by the fight between Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier in 1921.
63. Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei and Klaus-Detlef Müller, 30 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1992), IXX, 216–35 (216).
64. Wedderkop, "Hans Breitensträter", 141.

65. Hans Bötticher, "Noblesse oblige. Auch für den Box-Champion", *Boxsport*, 361 (30 August 1927), 1. Of all the German boxing writers of the 1920s, Bötticher consistently places the most focus on the "science" of the sport and the need for so-called modern methods and a healthy lifestyle, and as such was amongst Schmeling's most prominent supporters.
66. See Kohr and Krauß, *Kampftage*, 58–9.
67. The guides he consulted seem to have included Georges Carpentier's *Meine Methode des Boxens*, *Boxen* by Joe Edwards, the pseudonym adopted by Paul Maschke, who had spent time in England and later ran boxing courses in Berlin, and the "Lehrbriefe" (letters of instruction) written by Jack Slim, a British boxer who had given boxing demonstrations in late Wilhelmine Germany and for a brief period gave lessons to Prince Friedrich Karl, son of the Kaiser.
68. Max Schmeling, *Mein Leben – Meine Kämpfe* (Leipzig: Grethlein, 1930), 49. Further references to this text (*Mein Leben*) will be parenthesized in the main text.
69. Erwin Thoma, "Die kürzeste deutsche Meisterschaft", *Boxsport* 309 (25 August 1926): 3. Thoma, later a convinced Nazi who was editor of *Boxsport* during its rapid *Gleichschaltung* (synchronization) in 1933, provides a retrospective account of Bülow's and *Boxsport*'s "discovery" and support for the young Schmeling in the 1937 biographical volume published in Nazi Germany (and therefore to be read critically) in the aftermath of his victory against Joe Louis. Erwin Thoma, "Vom Amateur zum Weltmeister: kleine Studie über Kampfstil und Charakter", in *Max Schmeling: die Geschichte eines Kämpfers*, ed. Arno Hellmis (Berlin: Ullstein, 1937), 31–45.
70. "Max Schmeling, der deutsche Meister im Halbschwergewicht", 6:12 (1926), 108. Jensen mentions this photograph but incorrectly states that its use on the cover of *Boxsport* 339 (29 March 1927) was its first publication (Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, 72). A second portrait of Schmeling by Atelier Baruch was published in *Der Querschnitt* 8:2 (1928): 61. In this photograph Schmeling wears a suit and tie, projecting an image of affluence and success.
71. Maurizia Boscagli, *The Eye on the Flesh: Fashions of Masculinity in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 83.
72. See illustration in Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, 74.
73. See for example O.F., "Ist der Boxsport roh?", *Der Querschnitt* 1:6 (1921): 221–3. This is a propagandistic article which argues for the "noble", formative nature of a sport which has been unfairly stigmatized: "So wird durch den Boxsport der junge Mann zu einem gesunden, gekräftigten und harten Menschen erzogen, der jeder Lage im Leben gewachsen ist." (Thus a young man will through boxing be

- shaped into a healthy, strong and tough person, able to cope with any situation in life; 223).
74. Jensen (*Body by Weimar*, 72) also notes that the photograph was used in 1927 in the magazine *Sport und Sonne*. The multiple republications provide evidence of the power of the image and its widespread appeal.
 75. Ludwig Reve, "Der schöne Mann", *Uhu* 4:3 (1927/28): 78–83 (82).
 76. Willy Meisl writes about the growth in the artistic interest in sport in *Der Querschnitt* in 1927: "Sieh da, der Sport!", *Der Querschnitt* 7:4 (1927), 300–02. There were a number of major sport-themed exhibitions in the 1920s, including Düsseldorf's Große Ausstellung für Gesundheitspflege, soziale Fürsorge und Leibesübungen (GeSoLei; Great exhibition for healthy living, social care and exercise), a colossal Expo featuring numerous art works, the spring exhibition "Sport" at the Berlin Secession in 1927, and the international art exhibition held in Amsterdam as part of the 1928 Olympics.
 77. In his *Erinnerungen* Schmeling suggests (83) that he only met Flechtheim in late 1927 or early 1928, as he reports that before meeting him Flechtheim had travelled to Leipzig to watch his fight against Hein Domgörgen (on 8 November 1927) in the company of the sculptor Rudolf Belling and the British conductor Leopold Stokowski. This dating seems quite unlikely as by that point both the Baruch portrait and the large portrait by George Grosz (see below) had already appeared in *Querschnitt*, and Schmeling is quite clear that the latter was a commission from Flechtheim ("Flechtheim wollte mich von ihm malen lassen" (Flechtheim wanted to have me painted by him)) (*Erinnerungen*, 88). It seems more likely that the introduction to Flechtheim and his circle happened in 1926, possibly after he became German light-heavyweight champion in August 1926. According to Volker Kluge, Schmeling's introduction into artistic circles came through the journalist Wolfgang Fischer in August 1926. Kluge, *Max Schmeling*, 95–6.
 78. The film seems to have been made as an amateur enterprise and may never have been officially released, as I was unable to find any record of a film with this name from 1926. Kluge states that Harry Piel, a major star at the time, appeared as an extra. See Schmeling, *Erinnerungen*, 141; Kluge, *Max Schmeling*, 96.
 79. For example, reviewing Schmeling's 1977 *Erinnerungen*, the novelist Siegfried Lenz argued for the particular importance of this period in the construction of the myth of Schmeling: "Was seinen Ruhm über alle bisherigen Lebensrunden brachte, kann wohl nur dadurch erklärt werden, daß Max Schmeling einst zum Matador und Idol einer Epoche gekürt wurde, die mittlerweile zu einer der attraktivsten Legenden geworden ist: die späten zwanziger- und die frühen dreißiger Jahre."

- (Max Schmeling's fame throughout each stage of his life can probably only be explained by the fact that he was once the matador and idol of an era that has since become legendary: the late 1920s and early 1930s.) "Rezension: Schmeling, Max: Erinnerungen", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 September 1977, 24. Lenz undoubtedly exaggerates by suggesting that his fame can *only* be explained in this way, but the identification of Schmeling with an era was undoubtedly formative.
80. See *Der Querschnitt* 7:5 (1927): 69. The painting was also exhibited at the Berlin Secession at its annual spring exhibition in 1927, and features in the catalogue.
 81. See Kettelhake, *Renée Sintenis*, 160–1. The other figure of a boxer produced by Sintenis (1927) depicted Helmut Hartkopf.
 82. "Der Boxer Erich Brandl", 6:2 (1926), [112]. Sintenis' sculpture is now a part of the collection of the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. See: <http://www.kulturelles-erbe-koeln.de/documents/obj/05020557>). Accessed 19 November 2016.
 83. "Der Boxer Erich Brandl", *Der Querschnitt* 5:9 (1925): [100]. A photograph of Schmeling posing informally with "die Rieß", as she was known, appeared in *Der Querschnitt* 7:12 (1927): [69].
 84. Dempsey had in fact sat for de Fiori in Berlin in 1925, not for the statuette, but for a bust.
 85. Meisl, "Der Sport am Scheidewege", 23.
 86. The painting also featured as the cover image of the weekly satirical magazine *Jugend* (44, 29 October 1927). There are two photographs in the Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz of Grosz completing the portrait, apparently using another model. Incongruously, this model is bald, rather overweight and considerably older than Schmeling. He is also wearing boxing gloves, unlike Schmeling in the portrait. The photographs are dated to 1930, which is incorrect if it is the actual portrait depicted in the photographs and may well have been staged as a prank on Grosz's part.
 87. Quoted in *George Grosz, Leben und Werk*, ed. Uwe M. Schneede (Stuttgart: Hatje, 1975), 161–2.
 88. Erwin Thoma, "Schmeling Europameister", *Boxsport* 351 (21 June 1927): 1.
 89. Alfred Flechtheim, "'So fast as Döörpen'", *Der Querschnitt* 7:12 (1927): 923–5 (925).
 90. *Ibid.*, 925.
 91. In the mid 1920s the Westfalenhalle in Dortmund, under the management of the promoter André Picard, who had previously promoted boxing at the Sportpalast, had been able to attract many of the major boxing matches in Germany, primarily because of the high taxes

- demanded in Berlin. Despite this, in the late 1920s the Sportpalast in Berlin once again became the country's chief venue.
92. Erwin Thoma, "Schmelings Blitzsieg", *Boxsport* 380 (1928): 1–3 (1).
 93. Anon., "Schmeling ist 'fit'", *Neue Berliner Zeitung: Das 12-Uhr-Blatt*, 5 January 1928, sports section (unpag.). These and the other unattributed boxing reports in the *12-Uhr-Blatt* are almost certainly the work of Rolf Nürnberg, editor of the sports section and the newspaper's lead boxing reporter.
 94. Illustration ("Fritz Kortner und Alexander Granach bei Schmelings 'Probe'"), *Neue Berliner Zeitung: Das 12-Uhr-Blatt*, 5 January 1928, sports section (unpag.).
 95. Anon., "Es geht um Europas höchsten Titel", *Neue Berliner Zeitung: Das 12-Uhr-Blatt*, 6 January 1928, sports section (unpag.).
 96. Rolf Nürnberg, "In 2 Minuten 32 Sekunden", *Neue Berliner Zeitung: Das 12-Uhr-Blatt*, 7 January 1928, sports section (unpag.).
 97. Willy Meisl, "2500 Mark für 2½ Minuten", *Vossische Zeitung*, 7 January 1928 (evening edition), 5.
 98. H.Bö. (=Hans Bötticher), "Statt 15 Runden 2 Minuten", *BZ am Mittag*, 7 January 1928, sports section (unpag.).
 99. Erwin Thoma, "Schmelings Blitzsieg", 1.
 100. A.H., "Knock out auf den ersten Blick", *Berliner Tagesblatt*, 7 January 1928 (evening edition), 5; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, quoted by Kluge, 90.
 101. Meisl, "2500 Mark für 2½ Minuten", 5.
 102. H.Bö., "Statt 15 Runden 2 Minuten".
 103. Erwin Thoma, "Schmelings Blitzsieg", 2.
 104. See Karlheinz Dederke, "Vom Kaiserreich zum Dritten Reich: Massenaufgebot zur Politik", in Arenhövel ed., *Arena der Leidenschaften*, 42–64 (44–5). The association was short lived—in the 1930s the Sportpalast became an important propaganda venue for the Nazis, hosting numerous events and proclamations, many of them recorded and broadcast.
 105. Meisl, "2500 Mark für 2½ Minuten", 5.
 106. The film was made by Terra Filmkunst and premiered in Berlin on 17 March 1930. It also starred Max Machon, who played Schmeling's trainer. An American version was released in August 1930, and a further re-edited version (*The Comeback*) was released in 1937 to capitalize on Schmeling's renewed fame in the wake of his victory over Louis in 1936.
 107. This applies especially to the American re-release of the film in 1937, which, rather bizarrely, includes introductory captions suggesting that

what follows will be the *actual* story of Max Schmeling's early career. Schmeling's full name is used throughout, and this version also includes a concluding "appendix" in which the former lightweight champion Benny Leonard summarizes Schmeling's career.

108. Nürnberg, *Max Schmeling*, 117.
109. *Boxsport* (504 (1930): 7) reproduced the rather banal conversation in full.
110. Nürnberg, *Max Schmeling*, 39.
111. See the account in Schmeling, *Erinnerungen*, 87.
112. See Behrendt, "Boxen mußst du, boxen, boxen", 87.
113. Quoted by Krauß, *Schmeling*, 44.
114. For a survey of some of the many controversies and allegations of corruption that dogged American boxing in the 1920s see Sammons, 66–72. Despite continued corruption, American boxing had become socially acceptable in a way that anticipates this phenomenon in Germany. The presence of women at boxing matches provided an indication of shifting social attitudes. See also Jack Cavanaugh, *Tunney: Boxing's Brainiest Champ and His Upset of the Great Jack Dempsey* (New York: Ballantine, 2007), 313.
115. Quoted by Margolick, *Beyond Glory*, 11.
116. See Jon Hughes, "'Sprechen wir wie in Texas': American Influence and the Idea of America in the Weimar Republic", *Edinburgh German Yearbook 1: Cultural Exchange in German Literature*, ed. Eleoma Joshua and Robert Vilain (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), 126–41. Joachim quoted by Erhard Schütz, "'Fließband-Schlachthof-Hollywood: literarische Phantasien über die USA" in *Willkommen und Abschied der Maschinen: Literatur und Technik – Bestandaufnahme eines Themas*, ed. Schütz (Essen: Klartext, 1988), 122–43 (125).
117. Carl Diem, *Sport in Amerika: Ergebnisse einer Studienreise* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1930), x.
118. See Adolf Halfeld, *Amerika und der Amerikanismus: Kritische Bemerkungen eines Deutschen und Europäers* (Jena: Diedrichs, 1927).
119. James J. Corbett, *Scientific Boxing: Together with Hints on Training and the Official Rules* (New York: Fox, 1912), 12 (my italics).
120. Gene Tunney, *Wie ich Weltmeister wurde* (Berlin-Schöneberg: Peter J. Oestergaard, 1927), no translator named, 46.
121. His views echo an aspect of the nineteenth-century American discourse of "muscular Christianity", which found virtue in a robust physical life, and the related advocacy of boxing and other sports a means of invigorating the "character" and health of the nation.
122. In his *Erinnerungen* (176) Schmeling recalls a near-riot breaking out in response. Compare Kluge, *Max Schmeling*, 135.

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