

## Introduction: why sport?

In 1927 Theo van Doesburg followed the English poet Sidney Hunt in terming ‘the international innovation attempts in the arts and architecture “the art-sports of Europe”’, going on to claim that: ‘Life, technique commerce, the arts, architecture – all have become one big match. Nobody, not even the most conservative, can escape this acceleration, for it manifests itself everywhere, tangibly, audibly, visibly.’<sup>1</sup> Three years earlier Hans Richter had dismissed László Moholy-Nagy as ‘that sprinter’, while even before this, in 1916, F. T. Marinetti had asserted that ‘sportsmen are the first neophytes’ of the futurist ‘Ethical Religion of Speed’. Two years previously, in a manifesto co-authored with C. R. W. Nevinson, Marinetti had desired ‘that sport be considered as an essential element in art’.<sup>2</sup> A Dutchman quoting an Englishman, a German insulting a Hungarian, and an Italian who spent much of his time travelling around Europe promoting the futurist movement, recruiting another Englishman in the process; the list of those thinking about sport as analogous to art, or as an example for it, is far from limited to these six figures, as will be seen below, but their geographical spread indicates that we are dealing with a phenomenon that might be more pervasive than has hitherto been acknowledged.

But what type of sport? Firstly, this book is concerned with competitive sport, which is to say, not with games or pastimes, or exercise carried out for its own sake, whether individually or collectively. It is not my purpose to define what is, or is not, a sport, but my main examples – competitive cycling, motor-racing, tennis, boxing, soccer, rugby and athletics – would all conform to any plausible definition that has been or could be advanced.<sup>3</sup> These sports, as with almost all others, were invented, codified or radically altered in the latter part of the nineteenth century. For the first pair of sports, this is self-explanatory, as one cannot race a car or a bicycle before they are invented. Boxing and athletics, on the other hand, had both been performed in recognisable forms for centuries. However, boxing’s adoption of the Marquess of Queensbury rules, written in 1867, imposed gloves, standardised lengths for rounds and introduced the count

of ten to determine the victor by knockout. This, along with the adoption of different weight classes, ushered in a much more regulated sport. The establishment of the British Amateur Athletics Association in 1880 and, even more significantly, the modern Olympic games, first held in Athens in 1896, also meant that athletics was regulated in a way that it had not been previously and international competition was promoted. Although tennis, soccer and rugby all had identifiable precursors these were far remote from the sports that emerged following the first Wimbledon tournament in 1877, the establishment of the Football Association in 1863 and the Rugby Football Union in 1871. Associations such as these led to the development of standardised rules and laws, the establishment of major competitions, and the construction of specialised venues to cater for a watching public. As these sports spread around Europe and further afield, international competition also became commonplace. Much has changed in sport over the past hundred years, but the sports that are played today are easily recognisable as those played in the in the period covered by this book, with many of them retaining the same governing bodies.

Secondly, the book is primarily concerned with elite sport, that is, sport as carried out at or near the highest level of the time, whether or not its practitioners were amateurs or professionals (and indeed whether or not they themselves were part of a social elite). This is not to say, of course, that non-elite sport is not of interest. However, one of the features of elite sport is that it attracts a crowd. This audience also increased dramatically in the last years of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, as the sports I discuss consolidated their popularity. When Italy played its first soccer international in 1910 a crowd of four thousand turned out to watch.<sup>4</sup> This is not big by today's standards, but was large compared to contemporary rival attractions. The following year saw the country's first soccer stadium open, with a capacity of twenty-five thousand. When Italy won the World Cup in 1934, the attendance was fifty thousand. In what follows, I will place artists amongst those who attended sporting events: Moholy-Nagy briefly watched the 1936 Olympics, Amédée Ozenfant and Marinetti were spectators at automobile races, Pablo Picasso was in the crowd at both boxing and bull rings. Alongside rising attendances, other indicators testify to the mass appeal of elite sport. It was reported on extensively, both in the general press and in specialist sporting publications. Some of the works I discuss, most notably those by Jean Metzinger and Robert Delaunay, take this mediated experience of sport as their inspiration, even, in Metzinger's case, literally incorporating it into the work. This coverage was further augmented by cinema newsreel and, later, radio broadcast. This in turn led to more people playing sport as well as watching it. Artists also participated. Metzinger and Lyonel Feininger cycled, Le Corbusier played basketball, Georges Braque boxed. So too, at a higher level, did the self-styled 'poet and boxer' Arthur Cravan, at one time the amateur light-heavyweight champion of France.

This rise of sport took place as a corollary of industrial modernity. Initially what one did when one was not working, sport flourished in urban areas with

the introduction of half or full day's holiday and limits to the working day. Individual sports were dependent on these for their establishment as viable spectator sports. If the participants were not necessarily being paid, with sports such as rugby and tennis having at least notionally strict amateur codes, then they were definitely working in the sense of expending effort. But people were making money from this endeavour. A whole range of reporters and photographers owed their professional existence and livelihood to sport, while advertising was a prominent feature at many commercial sports venues. In some sports, such as cycling and motor racing, manufacturers sponsored the teams that competed. Sport became an early example of that oxymoronic sector, the leisure industry. Perhaps it is not surprising also that many soccer teams had their origins in industrial concerns. Arsenal, formerly Woolwich Arsenal, of London was a munitions factory team, while Thames Ironworks are now better known as West Ham United. In Italy, Juventus of Turin effectively became the side of the automotive giant Fiat, while Piero Pirelli of the rubber business was one of the founders of AC Milan and its president from 1908–29. In the Netherlands PSV Eindhoven, founded in 1913, remained the club of electronics company Philips for most of the remaining period covered by the book. Encouraged by what they perceived as the health benefits and team spirit inculcated by sport many employers facilitated its practice, whether in terms of providing space and equipment or by making time available. A survey carried out in 1935 found that eighty of eighty-five French factories had their own sports facilities.<sup>5</sup> As I will discuss, many architects after the First World War turned to stadium design. The famous Van Nelle factory by Brinkman and Van der Vlugt included soccer pitches and tennis courts in its grounds. The same partnership designed the soccer stadium for Feyenoord Rotterdam, a project that garnered sufficient attention to be included in *Circle: An International Survey of Constructive Art*, edited by Naum Gabo, Leslie Martin and Ben Nicholson.<sup>6</sup> The supposedly uplifting aspects of sports were also promoted in educational establishments. English public (i.e. private) schools had provided a nineteenth-century model for integrating sport into education, one that inspired Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the Olympic games, amongst others. The common perception of this educational role for sport has been that it exemplified a form of muscular Christianity, as well as having the dual military benefits of fostering an *esprit de corps* and producing a trained, physically fit male body. Certainly these considerations played a part in the Baron's enthusiastic promotion of sport in France. In England, positions hardened at the University of Oxford during the 1920s, where the aesthete 'arties' of the W. H. Auden generation (including Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood and Isaiah Berlin) defined themselves against the rugby-playing 'hearties', enshrining an opposition between intellectual and physical effort. In Europe, this opposition was far less obviously the case. One of only five teams to enter the second French Rugby Union championships in 1892–93 was a side from the Académie Julian, the art school that Henri Matisse had recently left. There is no suggestion that Matisse had any particular interest in the sport, but this was not the case with the group around

the journal *Nouvelle Revue Française*. In 1913, the journal's editorial secretary and sometime cubist critic Jacques Rivière and the writer Alain-Fournier formed the rugby team Club Sportif de la Jeunesse Littéraire.<sup>7</sup> Once the Bauhaus moved to Dessau it also put sport at the centre of activities.

As the twentieth century progressed some aspects of professional sport began to resemble Taylorist and Fordist industrial principles; more and more attention was paid to the documentation of results. Timings became increasingly accurate and league tables demonstrated achievements (or lack of them) by a statistical analysis. In soccer, relegation was the penalty for poor performance, promotion and trophies the reward for those achieving the best results.<sup>8</sup> For the very best, records established new benchmarks for human achievement. Marinetti praised 'the concept and love of achieving "records"', his use of inverted commas around the English word also signalling that this was something new.<sup>9</sup> Such an obsession was reliant on the existence of highly calibrated technology that could establish what that record was without equivocation. As Mandell observes: 'The sports record presupposes a keen appreciation of a measurable accomplishment and, necessarily, precise measurements of time and space.'<sup>10</sup> Technology played its part in other ways too. Fast steamship travel and, later, aeroplanes facilitated international competition. Wireless telegraphy and the telephone permitted results and reports of sports events to be communicated rapidly. Photography and cinema newsreel provided a visual record.

By virtue of its popularity, sport also cropped up in some initially surprising places. It was a subject of music hall revue and sportsmen (and, more rarely, sportswomen) appeared on the stage, either as themselves or playing a role, albeit usually a thinly disguised one. With this level of publicity, elite sport's practitioners, such as the boxer Jack Johnson or the tennis player Suzanne Lenglen, became celebrities, their images promulgated all over Europe and beyond. As Siegfried Kracauer wrote in relation to the nexus between photography, sport and fame: 'Sometimes it is the fraction of a second required for the exposure of an object that determines whether or not a sportsman will become famous to the point where illustrated magazines commission photographers to give him exposure.'<sup>11</sup> With contests not only watched by a crowd, but followed by a wider public reading articles, sitting in the cinema or listening to the wireless, with people increasingly playing sports themselves, and with its leading exponents becoming stars, sport has legitimate claims to be the most pervasive cultural form of the early twentieth century. According to Steven Connor, 'mass spectator sport was one of the most salient and defining features of urban modernity ... what we now mean by sport was the invention of the twentieth century, and, reciprocally, sport was one of the most distinctive ways in which the modernity of the twentieth century was produced'.<sup>12</sup> If that is the case, we would expect to find that feature portrayed, discussed and incorporated in the works and writings of modern artists or architects, especially those where the question of a relation to urban modernity was central to their practice. As hinted at by the names I have listed thus far, we would not be disappointed. Yet few books have pointed

out this link and none has treated the subject internationally and with a specific focus on the modern period.

There was a contemporary awareness that the lure of sport had consequences for the arts. As I discuss in the fifth chapter, Hannes Meyer was the Bauhaus director who did most to promote sport there. Shortly before assuming his post, he wrote that ‘the stadium has carried the day against the art museum’. In the mid-1920s, Meyer was just one among many Germanic figures who sensed that the existence of the sporting crowd could serve as a model or a constituency for the arts. Speaking of his ‘Total Theater’, Walter Gropius, Meyer’s predecessor as director, asserted that the primary form of the stage was ‘the central arena on which the play unfolds itself three-dimensionally while the spectators crowd around concentrically. Today we know this form only as a circus, a bull ring, or a sports arena.’<sup>13</sup> Bertolt Brecht, in his ‘Emphasis on Sport’, opened:

We pin our hopes to the sporting public.

Make no bones about it, we have our eyes on those huge concrete pans, filled with 15,000 men and women of every variety of class and physiognomy, the fairest and shrewdest audience in the world. There you will find 15,000 persons paying high prices, and working things out on the basis of a sensible weighting of supply and demand.<sup>14</sup>

In the visual arts, G. F. Hartlaub pressed the claims of advertising art as the only art, along with modern architecture, capable of reaching those in the stadium:

Aside from modern functional architecture, advertising art is today the one true public art. It alone – as graphics, as mass reproduced printed type and images – reaches the nameless urban masses, whose enthusiasm no longer belongs to the church or to municipal authorities but rather to sports, fashion, and especially such ‘enterprises’ as football, boxing matches and bicycle races. This select cross section of the secular population, the big, broad ‘public’, is much more at home with these spectacles than in the galleries, expositions and high-mindedly artistic theatres.<sup>15</sup>

These four quotes were either written in or refer to projects spanning just three years, 1926–28. All make the claim that traditional high art has lost touch with its public. All oppose the sport venue to the theatre or the art gallery as they now exist, and all therefore ally modernist architecture to sport, Hartlaub by his pairing of functional architecture with advertising art, Brecht by his invocation of ‘concrete pans’ and Meyer and Gropius by virtue of their profession.

Sports are not all equivalent to one another, of course. The sports I examine have a range of different venues, were played and watched by a different mix of classes, are financed in different ways and were covered from different angles by the media of the day. Different countries and different regions favoured one or the other sport. Cultural responses to them are even more open, overdetermined as they are by the interests, associations and affiliations of both individual artists and groupings. Sports history as an entity dates back to the 1960s, but since the early

1980s, when Richard Holt's *Sport and Society in Modern France* appeared, Mandell published his *Sport: A Cultural History* and the *International Journal of the History of Sport* was founded, there has been a notable and welcome increase in interest in the cultural history of sport. Lengthy and high-quality books on individual sports such as tennis and boxing have appeared with 'A Cultural History' as a subtitle, while equally good books have appeared on individual sports in individual countries, such as rugby in France, soccer and cycling in Italy or the still more specialist soccer under Italian fascism.<sup>16</sup> These are just a few examples, and the reader will find many more references to similar works in what follows, as my analyses are in many cases dependent on this type of approach. Being confined to the visual arts and a relatively short thirty-year period, one aspect of this book is a similar microhistorical examination of the response to specific sports at specific conjunctures. Nevertheless, these, taken together, range across different sports as well as different countries, in line with Pierre Bourdieu's claim that 'a particular sport cannot be analyzed independently of the totality of sporting practices'.<sup>17</sup> Sport's popularisation across Europe meant that many countries underwent broadly congruent experiences. It is not coincidental that the word for sport in almost all European languages is 'sport' or 'sports', or that soccer is called 'football', or some close variant, in all countries with the exception of Italy, where the word *calcio* was adopted to suggest an autarchic development of the sport, *calcio* being an old Florentine ball game.<sup>18</sup> It is no surprise either, that Italy and Germany, with their relatively high levels of industrialisation, emerged as France's principal challengers in motor sport, or that Italy inaugurated its own response to the Tour de France, the Giro d'Italia, six years after the first French race of 1903. As both these countries came under the control of fascist dictatorships, sport played an important part in the ideology promulgated by the regimes. This was perhaps more marked in Italy, where Mussolini's government promoted the building of new stadiums, made sport an integral part of the Opera Nazionale Balilla youth groups and sponsored a National Exhibition of Sport in 1935 featuring designs by the rationalist architect Giuseppe Terragni and the artist Mario Sironi, amongst others.<sup>19</sup> In the new Soviet Union, sport was put to similar overt propaganda purposes and these also involved artists and designers. El Lissitzky, working with Nikolai Ladovsky and his architecture students at the VKhUTEMAS, was prominent in the plans for an International Red Stadium to be built in the Lenin Hills above Moscow. Aleksandr Rodchenko's photographs documented the Dynamo sports club, of which he was a member and which was the de facto club of the Ministry of the Interior, in its new modernist stadium.<sup>20</sup> Gustav Klucis produced the publicity designs for the Spartakiada of 1928, an event consciously conceived as the remodelling of the Olympics along revolutionary lines, established by the Comintern agency Red Sports International. Although individual authorities might have promoted one sport above another and an individual sport's popularity might have varied from country to country, it is clear that we are dealing with a phenomenon that is wide enough to constitute a field of study while not seeking to ignore the overdetermined

circumstances of its treatment in individual cases, or the responses to sport on the part of artists.

It has become possible to identify two major currents in these cultural responses: the first, most prevalent immediately before and in the early stages of the First World War, sees sport as part of what Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, writing of Delaunay's *Cardiff Team*, call 'fairground modernity'.<sup>21</sup> Sport is part of the spectacle of modern life, something that jostles up against a myriad of other endeavours (pioneering aviation and polar exploration being amongst the closest prominent analogues). Beyond its immediate performance, it can then be the subject of further entertainments (primarily music hall, newspapers and newsreels) and occasionally overlaps with these. Contests were engineered by newspapers, fights were promoted on the basis of profits to be made through their newsreel distribution, competitors appeared on the stage. This is very much the way that sport appears in the early collages of Picasso, where headlines dealing with sport and physical exercise feature prominently.<sup>22</sup> Marinetti listed Japanese athletes and black boxers as amongst the attractions one could see at the music hall.<sup>23</sup> Cravan's fight against heavyweight champion Johnson was a logical, if extreme, outcome of this blending of sport and show business. As I discuss in chapter two, Johnson was no stranger to music hall, having appeared in staged fights in Paris and written and starred in a review, 'Seconds Out', in London. It is here that the boundaries between different areas of fairground modernity become extraordinarily blurred.

The second current of cultural response to sport occurs in the aftermath of the First World War and lasts for longer. Sport becomes one way of thinking about rationalisation, a topic of central concern to artists, architects and designers. Whether it is Meyer instituting athletics training at the Bauhaus, Werner Graeff or Ozenfant writing about car design, Varvara Stepanova thinking about sports clothing in the Soviet Union or El Lissitzky, Klucis and Rodchenko photomontaging and photographing athletes and swimmers, reactions to sport put less stress on its entertainment value, or think about it significantly as aligned with other forms of entertainment. Instead its capacity to discipline and train the body, its lessons for rational design, its innovation and its ability to draw crowds and enervate them are all of interest, especially to Western and Soviet constructivists. Of course, to identify different responses is not to make them absolutes; both sport and art are too complex to be circumscribed by such attempts to draw overly prescriptive boundaries. These currents also co-existed with more conservative views of the relationship between art and sport, such as those of de Coubertin, whose Olympic games wished to honour achievement in the arts as well as achievement in sport, as the ancient games had done, and the rugby paintings of André Lhote that I discuss in chapter three.

Most of my examples are drawn from more-or-less canonical names in histories of visual modernism, and certainly from countries (primarily France, Germany, Italy and the USSR) long held to be centres of modernist activity in painting, film, photography and architecture. This is not to suggest that links between

sport and the visual arts are less strong elsewhere, or less deserving of attention. The situation in Britain in particular would warrant further examination, since many modern sports originated there.<sup>24</sup> My choices have been conditioned by the relative neglect of visual art that deals with sport, both amongst sports historians and art historians. In 1984, Mandell wrote that: 'Even now, however, as this is written, it would be difficult to assemble an exhibition of first-rate modern painting, graphics, or sculpture all dealing with sport.'<sup>25</sup> Just over a decade later, Peter Kühnst's compendious *Sports: A Cultural History in the Mirror of Art* proved Mandell wrong.<sup>26</sup> Running to over four hundred pages, Kühnst included many of the same works that I discuss in detail here. However, in a sort of visual equivalent to the bird's-eye view of sport and culture that Mandell and Allen Guttmann produced, Kühnst also traced the relationship between sport and art back to the Renaissance and included leisure activities such as ballooning and recreational skiing. My own project is more narrow, both in chronological terms and in the sort of activity I wish to study. Given the surprising lack of critical material on the relationship between the visual arts and sport in general, and in order to establish the point that sport was an activity that, like the music hall, fashion or scientific advance, was integral to modernity and, like them, was an aspect of everyday life that captured the imagination of at least some modern artists, it was necessary to choose studies that could not easily be dismissed as marginal or irrelevant. In addition, Kühnst apart, much of the existing writing on sport and modernism had confined itself to a single country.<sup>27</sup> It seemed to me that a study that emphasises the multi-national range of responses to sport both acts as a guarantee of the theme's importance and allows the different approaches towards it to emerge. International competition is something that is common to both elite sport and, very often, avant-garde thought. That said, many of my chapters discuss the works of French artists and architects. This is not because French sport was embedded especially strongly in French culture. Britain, again, had larger crowds for most events, a more established sporting press and a greater history in major sports. In the modern sports of cycling and motor racing, with their links to industry, however, France could justifiably claim to be the world leader before the First World War. Sport in France is interesting not because it was firmly established, but precisely because it was a source for debate. In the wake of the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, sport was mobilised as an ideological force in French life. As we will see, these debates were not lost on artists of the period, who often had their own perceptions of the French nation and what direction it should take, both politically and culturally.

As this should demonstrate, the overt linking of sport and political ideology by both fascist and communist regimes should not obscure the fact that sport was never totally divorced from ideological concerns in democratic societies. There remains more, much more, to sport than its reduction to an instrumental tool of totalitarian thought, an important aspect though this is in the period I am discussing. Particularly in the inter-war period, this mixture of sport facilities as integral to new conceptions of urban planning, emphasis on training the body,



the affinity with industry and a concept of spectacle established even before the First World War made it a topic of concern to artists and thinkers throughout Europe, with production ranging across film, design, photography, photomontage and architecture. The ideological uses to which sport was put by totalitarian regimes were also often not antithetical but in convergence with the interests of members of the avant-garde, an instance of the traversal of the 'porous membrane separating cultural and political modernism, whether of the right or the left', to use the words of Roger Griffin.<sup>28</sup> Nor should it be forgotten that I am primarily concerned with representations of sport and its associated ideologies, rather than social documentary. The implementation of those ideologies, even in situations where one might suppose a receptive populace, was not straightforward. According to André Gounot, the soccer players of the French Fédération Sportive du Travail – affiliated to the Red Sport International – indulged in 'extensive drinking bouts and made a name for themselves for their singing of offensive songs rather than for their renditions of the classic repertoire of revolutionary anthems'.<sup>29</sup> Sport could also be an occasion for dissent. Robert Edelman writes of the support for soccer team Spartak Moscow that: 'Hatred of the structures of force was central to the fans' preference for Spartak.'<sup>30</sup> Even before General Franco took power, FC Barcelona had become a focus for Catalan nationalism and dissent directed towards Madrid.<sup>31</sup> Sport can be as anti-authoritarian as administered.

In recent years there has been a welcome focus on cultural readings of women in sport, primarily as practitioners and spectators.<sup>32</sup> It is certainly true that women cycled, boxed, played soccer and competed in the Olympics from 1928 and in the separate Women's Olympic games from 1922. However, these activities remained largely marginalised by both the mainstream and sporting press. Few ideologies explicitly promoted competitive sport (as opposed to physical exercise and bodily training) for women. For this reason, my discussions of women's sport tend to be concentrated on tennis, where the women's game was the subject of great media attention, and the USSR, which was unusual in promoting competitive sport for women as part of its broader *fizkultura*, or physical culture, programme. Women as spectators were the subject of little comment, except at the boxing ring, where debates centred on the suitability for female eyes of the spectacle of men stripped to the waist hitting one another. Behind these debates it is not hard to distinguish anxieties over the disruption of a previously male homosocial environment. As sport was largely conceived of as a male pursuit, art that concerned itself with sport, sporting technologies, questions of the male body and its supposed physical decline was often aligned with groups such as the Italian futurists, where it chimed well with notions of that male body reimagined, an emphasis on muscularity and action, and a belief in the benefits of competition and records. Similarly, once sport came to be seen as a model or important component of modern society, whether in Western constructivism or Italian rationalism, for example, those thinking about sport and producing work related to it tended to be men. This is not, of course, exclusively the case and I discuss at length work by Leni Riefenstahl and Varvara Stepanova – the latter produced under the

specific sporting conditions of the Soviet Union – but it does help to explain the gender imbalance in my examples.

In common with a number of studies, I do not see a virtue in drawing strict lines of demarcation between the use of the terms avant-garde and modernism. Rather, artistic movements seeking to innovate and to reflect the period in which they operate are linked by familial ties – with all the antagonisms that can imply – in the same way that we can speak of sport as a practice, but also note the differences between individual sports. My chapters focus on producing detailed analyses of a relatively small part of the corpus of art relating to sport that was produced. They are ordered on thematic lines: sports that were possible thanks only to technical innovations; individual sports; team sports; sports organisations and meetings; and finally, the stadium. Roughly speaking, the examples chosen also adhere to a chronology, so that the first part of the book deals primarily, although not solely, with work produced before the First World War and the years immediately following it, with the second concentrating its attention on the later 1920s and 1930s. The first half of the first chapter concentrates on three paintings of racing cyclists produced in quick succession by German expressionist Feininger, French cubist Metzinger and Italian futurist Umberto Boccioni, analysing them in relation to one another. The second half of this chapter looks at responses to motor-racing from the same three countries. Starting with Marinetti's notorious infatuation with the motor car, the chapter then considers the importance of the automobile to the purist project of Le Corbusier and Ozenfant. The chapter concludes by looking at a pair of articles that Graeff wrote for the journal *G*. Although there are many similarities between Graeff's attitude and those of the purists, it is Graeff who is most uncompromising in his vision of a modern artist-engineer.

The second chapter deals with two individual sports. Boxing and tennis might appear strange bedfellows, but as well as being primarily individual sports, they are also united by their transatlantic nature. A word here about American sports. By and large I have omitted much mention of the United States, as I have for Great Britain. In part this is in recognition of Guttmann's *Sports and American Art*. But it is also because although the United States again imported sports from Britain, these very quickly took on their American guises of gridiron football and baseball, whereas basketball was an American invention. Moreover, these sports were also notable for the lack of international competition they engendered. A study that tried to encompass American art in addition to that of Europe would miss the singularity of both its sports and visual arts scenes. Tennis and boxing are exceptional in this regard as they, along with athletics, had representatives from the United States competing at the very peak of the sport. Boxing and tennis also shared in a celebrity culture. The flamboyant figures of boxer Johnson and tennis player Lenglen were famous on both sides of the Atlantic. Johnson lived it up in nightclubs in both Paris and London, Lenglen played host to American film stars on the French Riviera. My work on boxing traces this Americanism in the writings and life of Cravan that culminated in the fight against Johnson in

Barcelona, which is then refracted through the fascination of American journal *The Soil* for both boxing and Cravan. Tennis was particularly associated with modernist architecture, with players featuring in books written by Le Corbusier, Adolf Behne and Sigfried Giedion. It was also a rare example of a sport where the women's game attracted as much, if not more, attention as that of the men. This, I contend, caused problems for Le Corbusier, who preferred to concentrate on the geometrical court and the anonymous male players that he includes in his *Urbanisme*, rather than the glamour and fame of Lenglen, a woman dressed by the couturier Jean Patou and who served as an inspiration for a Jean Cocteau piece for the Ballets Russes.

My third chapter deals with the wholesale importation of a British team sport, rugby, into France. Led by de Coubertin, who was the referee in the first French championship, its adoption by the French was a self-conscious response to defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Choosing rugby over the more proletarian soccer, an haute-bourgeois and aristocratic elite played rugby at Paris' most exclusive clubs, a moment reimagined by Henri Rousseau. But rugby could not be confined to these environs for long, and by the time of Delaunay's *The Cardiff Team*, with its press photograph source, the sport was included alongside aeroplanes, the Eiffel Tower and advertising as a cipher of all that was modern in the Paris of 1913. During the Great War, rugby was celebrated as a sport that had trained its participants to become heroes on the battlefield. This, I surmise, is what led Lhote to produce his cubist paintings of rugby during and after the conflict.

De Coubertin was also responsible for the founding of the modern Olympics. Its antique ideals were consecrated in a painting by his father, an artist of the French salon, who pictured modern sportsmen from Paris paying tribute to Athena. My fourth chapter analyses the most notorious visual artwork concerning the games, Riefenstahl's film of the 1936 event, the so-called Nazi Olympics, *Olympia*. The status of this film is highly contested in the fields of history and film studies. I argue that the film evinces attitudes not incompatible with, although not reducible to, Coubertin's own conflicted views on modernity. I contrast it with Moholy-Nagy's abortive project to film the same games, before considering Klucis' designs for the Soviet response to the Olympics, the Spartakiada and other constructivist engagements with sport in light of the Soviet emphasis on *fizkultura*.

As mentioned above, the stadium was invoked by Meyer and others as an example for the arts and architecture. My final chapter concerns this building type, once again with its roots in the antique, but thoroughly reimagined for the twentieth century. Amid a slew of projects two stand out. The first is the aforementioned International Red Stadium in Moscow. Although never realised, with its constructivist impulse it drew attention in Western Europe, partly as a result of being featured in the famous Parisian Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in 1925 and partly by virtue of the contacts that El Lissitzky, who worked on the project, had established there. The second is Pier Luigi Nervi's remarkable stadium in Florence. Named for a fascist martyr, the Giovanni Berta epitomised Italian rationalist ideals. It, like Raffaello Fagnoni's

closely related Mussolini stadium in Turin, was aggressively promoted as an example of the modernity of Mussolini's Italy.

If sport was spectacular, then it has also been viewed as simply one distraction among many. Guy Debord's argument can stand for several here: sport 'evolves into a contest among phantom qualities meant to elicit devotion to quantitative triviality'; it is specified as part of 'the never-ending succession of paltry contests – from competitive sports to elections – that are utterly incapable of arousing playful feelings'.<sup>33</sup> I hope that this Introduction and what follows will convince the reader that sport was and is anything but a trivial distraction and was and is always shot through with ideological meanings and readings.

### Notes

- 1 Theo van Doesburg, 'The Active Straight Line: Construction versus Composition', *Het Bouwbedrijf* 2, no. 4 (Spring 1927), translated in Theo van Doesburg, *On European Architecture: Complete Essays from Het Bouwbedrijf, 1924–1931*, ed. Cees Boekraad, trans. Charlotte I. Loeb and Arthur L. Loeb (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1990), 127.
- 2 Hans Richter, 'To Constructivism', *G* 3 (June 1924), translated in *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923–1926*, eds Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Steven Lindberg with Margareta Ingrid Christian (London: Tate, 2010), 146; F. T. Marinetti, 'The New Ethical Religion of Speed', *L'Italia Futurista* (1 June 1916), translated in Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 255; F. T. Marinetti and C. R. W. Nevinson, 'Futurism and English Art', *Lacerba*, 15 July 1914, translated in Marinetti, *Critical Writings*, 95.
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- 18 For linguistic similarities, see Norbert Elias, 'The Genesis of Sport as a Sociological Problem, Part 1', in *The Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process*, ed. Eric Dunning, rev. ed. (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2008), 107–9. For Italy's use of 'calcio', see Foot, *Calcio*, 1–2.
- 19 See Antonella Russo, *Il fascismo in mostra* (Rome: Riuniti, 1999), 18–23 and 96–117.
- 20 Varvara Stepanova writes in a letter of 6 May 1934 to Rodchenko, 'when you get home you'll rest here, you'll go to Dinamo, swim, and get a suntan'. The letter is included in *Experiments for the Future: Diaries, Letters, Essays, and Other Writings*, ed. Alexander N. Levrentiev, trans. Jamey Gambrell (New York: MoMA, 2005), 295.
- 21 Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture*, exh. cat. 7 October 1990–15 January 1991, Museum of Modern Art, New York, then touring, 248.
- 22 Picasso's *Bowl with Fruit, Violin and Wineglass*, 1912–13, contains the headline 'La Vie Sportive' (Sporting Life), while *Bottle of Vieux Marc, Glass and Newspaper*, 1913, features a headline for an International Congress of Physical Education. Jeffrey Weiss discusses both works in relation to music hall in *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-Gardism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 22–32.
- 23 Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', 121.
- 24 Sarah Victoria Turner has made valuable contributions here. See her 'A "Knot of Living": Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's Wrestlers', in *New Rhythms: Henri Gaudier-Brzeska: Art, Dance and Movement in London, 1911–1915*, ed. Jennifer Powell (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard, 2015), 90–8; and her 'In Focus, *Wrestlers*, 1914, cast 1965, by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska', Tate, July 2013, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/audier-brzeska-wrestlers> (accessed 15 June 2015). See also my "'BLAST SPORT"? Vorticism, Sport and William Roberts's *Boxers*', *Modernism/modernity* 24, no. 2 (April 2017), 349–70, as well as John Hughson, 'Not just *Any Wintry Afternoon in England*: the curious contribution of C. R. W. Nevinson to "football art"', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 18 (November 2011), 2670–87 and Mike O'Mahony, 'Imaging Sport at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art (1929–1937)', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, nos. 8–9 (May–June 2011), 1105–20.
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- 26 Peter Kühnst, *Sports: A Cultural History in the Mirror of Art*, trans. Allen Guttmann (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1996).
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- 29 André Gounot, 'Sport or Political Organization? Structures and Characteristics of the Red Sport International, 1921–1937', *Journal of Sport History* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2001), 31.
- 30 Robert Edelman, 'A Small Way of Saying "No": Moscow Working Men, Spartak Soccer, and the Communist Party, 1900–1945', *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 5 (December 2002), 1455.
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- 33 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone, 1995), 40.