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Book Review: Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, and German Modernity. By Erik N. Jensen.

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trauma, fit a stereotype of what a murderer was likely to be (pp. 127–129). She leaves unexplored another implication: that even with all this against him, the authorities were restrained enough to drop the case—a very self-controlled thing for a justice system to do when confronted with a plausible suspect, and one that speaks for the much-maligned professionalism of Weimar legal authorities.

Elder's presentation naturally raises questions of continuities, which she does not neglect. She stresses, for instance, that the police of democratic Weimar encouraged denunciations, a baleful anticipation of the later practice of the *Gestapo* and the *Stasi* (chapters two and five). The continuities in police and judicial personnel across these regimes make the point even more interesting: a detective investigating the Freudenheim murder to whom she refers in chapter five, Criminal-Commissar Quoss, would a few years later be “investigating” crimes for the Nazis, including some committed by Nazi authorities themselves.

Inevitably there are a few points about which one could quibble. Elder identifies the tremendously influential *Vossische Zeitung* columnist Paul Schlesinger (“Sling”) as “leftist,” while the *Weltbühne* is “left-liberal”—something close to the reverse would be right (p. 37). She characterizes Fritz Lang's *M* as a film contrasting rational citizens interested in justice with idle voyeurs, which seems to me to miss the important satirical fun Lang has equating the parallel investigations of police and gangsters. There are some infelicities in translation: *Dämmerzustand* as “unconscious state” rather than semi-conscious (p. 177), and a mysterious entity called “the First Criminal Court of Berlin” which, given the date and offense in question, probably means the jury court of *Landgericht* I (p. 162).

All in all, however, Elder's book is a thoroughly researched and thoughtfully argued contribution to the growing historiographical literature on crime and policing in modern German history.

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Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, and German Modernity. By Erik N. Jensen. New York: Oxford University Press. 2010. Pp. ix + 184. Illus. Cloth \$50.00. ISBN 978-0-19-539564-8.

Erik N. Jensen's brisk and engaging study of the public image of German athletes in the Weimar Republic begins with a comical image that appeared on the cover of the popular *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* on the day of the Weimar Republic's first presidential inauguration: Friedrich Ebert and Gustav Noske, in their swim

trunks, stand knee-deep in water at a beach and smile into the camera while in front of them a Neptune-like figure rises from the water. The white, flabby bodies of the two aged Social Democrats appear soft and weak, more like two grandfathers in retirement than two leading statesmen of the new German republic. These were hardly the strong, lithe, and athletic bodies that Germans believed they needed to rebuild their defeated and crisis-ridden nation. This task required new bodies, and for this reason, Jensen tells us, Weimar was the period of the athlete, in which the *Sportler* became a celebrity; it is this “star power” of the athlete and the cultural work that it performed that Jensen seeks to explain in his book.

Jensen posits that after World War I, the body became the focus of concerns about the health and vitality of the nation. This “somatic revolution” (p. 4), as he calls it, manifested itself in such movements as nudism, vegetarianism, gymnastics, and hiking. Yet unlike these other health and fitness movements, Jensen argues, athletics embraced modernity rather than rejected it. They did this through their emphasis on the regimentation and efficiency of the body, their meritocratic, achievement-based hierarchy, their republican openness to men and women, and their emphasis on speed. And unlike these other movements, athletics reached a mass public. The fact that few “real” Germans could actually achieve the idealized bodies of star athletes only contributed to their appeal. Invoking Reinhard Koselleck, Jensen argues that the discrepancy between experience and expectation is part of modernity itself and thus athletes offered more than just an unattainable ideal; they represented a new set of social values that accommodated the individual to modern society.

These new values were particularly pronounced in the gendered representations of elite tennis players, boxers, and track and field competitors, who are the focus Jensen’s three main chapters. Using the period’s remarkably wide array of sporting publications as well as the mainstream press, Jensen finds that each sport in its own way set new standards of sexual behavior and re-gendered bodies in surprising ways. The cosmopolitan sport of tennis, a fairly recent import from England, retained its aristocratic aura. Its elite male players were boisterous rather than competitive on the court, and they cultivated the role of the highly sexed playboy. By contrast, female tennis stars, such as Paula von Reznicek, honed their bodies to become as tough and competitive as possible, and in doing so sought economic self-sufficiency as well as nonreproductive sexuality. Meanwhile women’s boxing outgrew its prewar status as an exotic sideshow to become a popular pastime that offered women the opportunity to develop aggressiveness and physical strength. Male boxers such as Max Schmeling cultivated self-control and self-discipline even as they subverted the male gaze by transforming themselves into objects of (female) erotic desire. Male and female track and field athletes cultivated trim, rationalized, Taylorized bodies that reinserted the physical self into a mechanized world. Jensen observes that these

sports were just as emancipatory for men, who had chafed under the restrictions of Wilhelmine militarized masculinity, as they were for women.

Jensen concedes that there were limits to these liberating models. Although track and field evinced a “corporal revolution” (p. 102) in which men’s and women’s bodies were held to the same standards of leanness and litness, the press constantly reminded female athletes (and their female fans) of their ultimate duties as wives and mothers, thus limiting the defiance of their reproductive biology. On the other hand, the agony of male track and field athletes who pushed themselves to the competitive limit symbolized manly heroic self-sacrifice to the nation. Furthermore, athletes were generally permitted to express only normative heterosexual desire, although boxing was incorporated in the lively Weimar gay subculture. These limits notwithstanding, Jensen concludes that the somatic representations of star athletes challenge the notion that the 1920s witnessed a reassertion of the prewar gender hierarchy.

Jensen certainly makes a compelling case that sports occupied a significant and influential space in the Weimar imagination. Throughout the book he illustrates his evidence with well-chosen and highly evocative images from contemporary publications. He also takes care to point to the intersections of sports with politics and other aspects of Weimar’s mass culture. We learn, for example, that best-selling author and screenwriter Vicki Baum was a regular at the Turkish-born boxer Sabri Mahir’s gym, as were Carl Zuckmayer, Marlene Dietrich, Egon Erwin Kisch, and Carl Bois. Fritz Lang’s iconic Weimar film *Metropolis* (1926), to take another example, begins with a footrace that contrasts the organic human achievement with the tyranny of the clock (pp. 112–13).

One might have asked Jensen to push his analysis further in certain directions. The study lacks a systematic examination of the role of international competition in the development of “star power” or the genesis of a transnational “somatic revolution,” despite the importance of the Olympic Games in the public discourse about track and field and indeed despite the fact that all three sports were relatively recent imports. Readers will also find here only cursory discussion of sports prior to World War I as the basis for comparison. Finally, the fairly recent literature on the history and theory of celebrity might offer his analysis a useful connection between sports, the media, and mass culture.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Jensen offers a rich exploration of an under-examined aspect of German modernity. The specialist in the histories of Weimar, gender, the body, and sports will find the work theoretically informed and well researched, while even the advanced undergraduate will find the work (with its catchy titles such as “Belle of the Brawl,” chapter two) accessible and appealing.

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