Woodward, Kath. "Inside and Outside the Ring." *Globalizing Boxing*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 111–128. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849667982.ch-006>>.

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Inside and Outside the Ring

This chapter develops an analysis of the relationship between the embodied practices of boxing which were addressed in Chapter 5 and the wider social, political and cultural arena, as a productive means of explaining the relationship between flesh, bodies and representation which is so significant in boxing. How are representation and enfolded practices linked? As was argued in Chapter 5, the local boxers who train in the gym within particular communities cite boxing heroes and key figures whose status attracted them to the sport. These issues were raised by Lafferty and MacKay's discussion of women boxers (Lafferty and MacKay, 2004) which suggests questions about how far the connections between embodied practices and representational systems are gendered. How are the relationships between what happens in the gym and in the ring and representational systems constituted? How is boxing as a set of embodied practices represented in cultural forms and in the media? As has already been suggested in this book, boxing, with its expressiveness and intensities, lends itself well to an explanation of sensation as unmediated and immediate.

Representations include media moments which are changing and are the subjects of global shifts in the media-sport nexus as well as artistic representations of boxing using the example of cinema which has generated a large number of what are called boxing films. This chapter uses Chapter 5's discussion of bodies, especially gendered bodies and the media, in relation to economic forces and focuses upon sensation and the relationship between images and representation promoted by the media and the enfolded experience of boxing. Does boxing offer a particular take on sensation and sentient experiences of spectatorship? Boxing is all about bodies, but is being there at an actual fight more real than viewing at a distance? This means that what makes the culture of boxing, especially outside the ring and boxing's visible representations and manifestations in the public arena, is always in conversation with its more routine practices in the gym and in local communities as well as with its embodied practices.

Visible bodies

Accounts of boxing in the public arena often focus upon the specificities of embodied practices and the centrality of flesh. The following extract is one such account of the particularly enfleshed exchange in one of the most famous fights of the twentieth century.

The Executioner's Song

So began the third act of the fight ... Foreman's head must by now be equal to a piece of vulcanized rubber ... Ali taunts him ... With twenty seconds left to the round, Ali attacked. By that measure of twenty years of boxing, with the knowledge of all he had learned ... he hit Foreman with a right and left, then came off the ropes and hit him with a left and a right ... a head-stupefying punch that sent Foreman reeling forward ... Ali struck him a combination of punches ... three capital rights in a row ... a big projectile exactly the size of a fist in a glove drove into the middle of Foreman's mind ... the blow Ali saved for a career. Foreman's arms flew out to the side like a man with a parachute jumping out of a plane, ... he started to tumble ... down came the champion in sections and Ali revolved with him, in a close circle hand primed to hit him one more time.

(Mailer, 1975:199–208)

This is how the writer Norman Mailer describes Muhammad Ali's defeat of the then world heavyweight boxing champion George Foreman in the 'Rumble in the Jungle' in Zaire, in 1974 (Mailer, 1975). This extract demonstrates the coming together of enfleshed activity, pain and corporeal injury and the making of myths and legends. This is not generally thought to be the most brutal fight of all times within boxing, but nonetheless Mailer's description evokes powerful sentiments and captures some of the enfleshed expressions and affects of boxing. In this book, Mailer engages with the intensities of being there somewhat bizarrely by describing himself in the third person first as Norman, then Norm and occasionally as Norman Mailer, which may be a literary device to distance himself from the action and to intensify and enhance the dynamics of the fight. Flesh and feeling are both material and constituted through symbols like words and representations, but how far are sensation and emotion mediated by these representations?

The wider cultural terrain as well as sports reporting invokes the language of boxing: out for the count, a KO, on the ropes, saved by the bell. Even television talent shows invite combat between contestants, such as the 'battle round', one-on-one singing contest between rival contenders in the UK BBC programme, *The Voice*.

A bowler and a batsman in cricket may be described as two heavyweights, but few sports' reporters dwell on the impact of flesh upon flesh in the manner in which it happens in boxing, in the manner which boxing demands. In boxing the techniques of the sport are enfleshed such that these bodily encounters are crucial to the public stories and representations of the sport. The impact of flesh and sensation upon sentient beings calls into question the over-simplification of those stories and the construction of boxing heroes through those narratives.

Great moments such as the 'Rumble in the Jungle' in Zaire which become classified as legendary are made in the spaces between the real and the representational, in the extract from Norman Mailer, evidenced in that interface between documentary and drama. The film drama is a mechanism of representation which has responded to boxing and from which boxing has benefited.

Boxing films

The sport of boxing has a very special place in film history and boxing films represent a long tradition. Boxing has produced more high-class films than any other sport (Berlins, 2008). There have been some 150 films made, starting with some very early recordings of fights, including eight minutes of Gentleman Jim Corbett against Peter Courtney in East Orange, New Jersey, in 1894 (Mitchell, 2005). Boxing was seen to have enormous potential as a spectator sport as early as in the late nineteenth century, which transforming technologies could make more widely available and which could benefit the development of those very technologies. Performance and display are integral to boxing. A Gentleman Jim Corbett fight, the 1897 Fitzsimmons–Corbett fight, in the Nevada desert in the USA, which was the site of technological experiment in a wooden amphitheatre, with peepholes for cameras, was crucial in shaping future links between film, spectacle and fighting. 'Filming of the fight was always integral to its planning' (McKernan, 1998) as was the choice of the location in, of course, the Nevada desert. Boxing's links to illegality, the sport's occupation of the interstices between legal and criminal activities, discussed in Chapter 4, make such sites particularly attractive for big fights, any fights. The legacy of Nevada Territory demonstrates the liminal spaces occupied by boxing in relation to illegal, quasi-legal and semi-legal, immoral practices, as well as the specificities of place in the North American landscape.

One of the most positive celebratory points at which boxing has the capacity to occupy the centre stage is through the spectacle of film. Film offers possibilities

for the enfleshed and the emotive dimensions of sensation through cinematic technologies which integrate heroic narratives with a visual and audible close-up focus on flesh and corporeal movement. Boxing films like Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* recreate the corporeal contact of the ring, rather than adopting realistic techniques of the documentary, but nonetheless generate the sensation of flesh on flesh. However, although boxing films have a long history, the cinematic depiction of combat in the ring generates a set of aesthetic and ethical relationships which might be antithetical to commercial moviemaking. These contradictions may also account for the ubiquity of moralistic tales of triumph over tragedy, of comeback boxers and the respectability of boxers like Cinderella Man James Braddock who, against the odds, fight for their family, a trope which also informs some of the *Rocky* series. James Braddock's is an actual story of struggle during the Great Depression which became translated into a story of national triumph and redemption embodied in an ageing boxer who acts honourably in a metaphor for the nation, and becomes world champion. Films are part of the wider social and cultural terrain in which these tensions are played out through the points of connection and disconnection between the axes of power of social cultural and economic factors and the materiality of boxing bodies.

These factors also play out in different ways spatially and the genealogy of boxing presents different narratives and trajectories which are specific to place and culture. For example, the martial arts film genre draws upon similar strands of corporeality, in that fights and scenes of combative action are central to the genre as are narratives of good over evil, but the form these tropes take differs greatly according to the particular culture as well as the embodied practices. The action of martial arts with the inclusion of kicking generates a particular kind of action which has been the focus of the genre's publicity with stills of its stars like Bruce Lee captured in action apparently flying through the air, as well as the emphasis of the film upon the movement of the whole body in the fight and in competition.

Martial arts films constitute a significant genre of fight films which could also be classified as action films par excellence. This genre has much in common with what are loosely called boxing films, although there are distinctive features to the martial arts genre, which is marked by the particular attractions of fight action woven around an often thinly constructed plot, but with distinctive narratives. The role of the teacher or trainer plays a particularly strong part in the narrative of martial arts films, reflecting the status of the teacher in the culture of many martial arts. The binary logic of good versus evil and corruption underpins

the storyline which is delivered through stylized action, which is performed through complex and sophisticated computer technologies designed to deliver the dynamic movement and excitement of the genre.

Different martial arts are featured in particular subgenres: Kung fu and ninja in the 1970s and the 1980s. The stars of the films are frequently real martial artists translating the drama of the real into the drama of representation. Thus it is through the embodied persona of the star that the dramatic and the real elide. Such films have achieved cult status with substantial followings across the globe from both television broadcasts and Hollywood films which facilitated wide coverage transnationally and the embrace of a number of national and culturally specific versions of martial arts, such as karate in Japan.

The genre abounds with big names, many of whom have global currency like Bruce Lee, whilst others are more specific to particular parts of the world. Martial arts are travelling however, and film-makers like Tony Jaa of Thailand are fast becoming international names. Whilst there are points of connection between the genres, there are also significant differences which demonstrate the operation of g/local forces across cultures.

Boxing films which feature western boxing are either only tangentially associated with boxing or, even if they do purport to be about boxing, 'are always about so much more, especially, they are about social commentary more or less bound up with issues of masculinity' (Buscombe, 2005:67). Boxing and particularly the archetypal boxer in film have traditionally generated a singular heroic figure of troubled masculinity. Boxing is framed by the ring and transcends the ring through the intensities of triumph, defeat and perseverance. This figure is 'a romantic-modernist representation of existential man in all his bleak grandeur [who] attained definition in Hollywood post World War II, but also in other visual and textual arts' (Mellor, 1996:81). In the twenty-first century, the trope of the heroic triumph over adversity and especially economic disadvantage persists, for example, with *Cinderella Man* in 2005 and in a slightly less romanticized form in *The Fighter* in 2011. Familiar matters of honour, desire for respect and self-esteem combining to reiterate a story of honour is a key strand in the narrative and part of the framing device of many boxing films.

Boxing films are frequently implicated in the representation of violence in the cinematic context. This invokes associations of violence within boxing, which Kevin Mitchell calls the 'glamour of violence' (2001). One of the most highly rated boxing films ever made, Martin Scorsese's 1980 film *Raging Bull*, has scenes of violence that are resonant of the experience of witnessing a fight and of 'being there'. The film is based on the memoir of middleweight boxer Jake

La Motta (La Motta, 1970). La Motta was infamous for his violent behaviour outside the ring as well as inside and the film demonstrates well the sensation of breakdown and collapse in his relationships in his personal as well as his professional life. Scorsese's hallmark themes of violent men in crisis and his 'signature directorial style with flashy, imaginative visual flourishes, long and complex takes and pervasive pop music in the background' (French, 2004:125) lend themselves well to a powerfully intense portrayal of boxing and the elision of anger, corporeal contact and aggression which are in the materiality of boxing, its spectatorship and its films. The intensity of the spectacle invokes anxieties about voyeuristic spectatorship which are integral to the practice as well as the representation of boxing.

Boxing films range from films which explicitly tell a boxing story, for example in the 1940s, such as Robert Rosen's *Body and Soul* (1947), Robert Wise's *The Set-up* (1949) and Mark Robson's *Champion* (1949) to films like David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999), which are more tangentially concerned with the sport of boxing. Other films like Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) have a boxing/fight element and can be cited illustratively, but could not be said to be 'about boxing'; even bare-knuckle fighting, although boxing films are never *just* about boxing. The internal conflicts of *Fight Club*, like the Palahniuk novel upon which it is based, are concerned with dislocation and alienation played out in scenes of violent pugilism. *Fight Club* assembles psychic conflict and brings together the discursive regimes of pugilism, especially as enacted outside the law and those of the internal, psychic drama of its main protagonist.

Narratives of perseverance in the face of setbacks, which not only are defeats in the ring but can also be the outcome of corrupt practices outside the ring and impinge upon performance inside it, are central to boxing films and affect and are affected by boxing histories and culture. For example, *The Set-up* (1949) is a classic boxing film, with acclaimed fight scenes, which creates a narrative around the central figure of Charlie who comes from the predictably poor and violent neighbourhood, in this case Lower East Manhattan. After his father is killed in gangster turf wars, Charlie follows a conventional route, within the spatial and temporal context, by turning to boxing to support his widowed mother. Family, however violently family members, notably wives and sexual partners, are treated in boxing films, remains an important, if sometimes sentimentalized, trope. In *The Set-up*, Charlie is enmeshed in corrupt practices, and is ultimately compelled to make a decision, when his promoter attempts to compel him to throw an important fight, a decision framed by moral choices and the possibilities of redemption. Moral choices and the pressures of corruption

abound in these boxing films and redemption is not the only outcome; the wages of sin can be condemnation and damnation. In *The Champion* (1949) the lead character, played by Kirk Douglas, is a ruthless fighter, born in poverty and callously and single-mindedly pursuing fame and fortune, who is ultimately doomed.

The films that might be more narrowly categorized as 'boxing films' have often been biopics, some of the most notable being the Ali movies. Boxing biographies regenerate heroes, largely through chronological life stories, like Michael Mann's *Ali* (2001) and Robert Wise's *Someone up There Likes Me* (1956) about Rocky Graziano, the middle and welterweight Italian American champion boxer, played by Paul Newman. This film, like many other boxing films, elides the real with the fictional and dramatic and challenges distinctions that might be made between what is real and what is dramatic. The film follows Graziano's reckless criminal early life, through prison, followed by another conventional regulatory regime of discipline for deviant masculinity, the army. It is boxing which proves the more effective means of exerting control through techniques of self-regulation (Foucault, 1988) coupled with a secure heterosexual relationship with a devoted girlfriend. Boxing has been firmly entrenched in what Judith Butler calls the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990).

Boxing films focus upon boxing heroes and also focus on pivotal moments in boxing history, such as the *Rumble in the Jungle* (1974), described by Norman Mailer at the beginning of this chapter, which was classified as a documentary film. Its reincarnation in 1996 in Leon Gast's *When We Were Kings* and, in 2000, *One Nation Divisible*, on the Frazier Ali rivalry, again arose from key boxing events.

Boxing occupies the relational space between flesh, conflict and social forces of economic deprivation, racism and the insecurities of migration and mobility that become concentrated on a particular version of masculinity. Thus, boxing and boxing films provide a useful context in which to explore and question the ubiquity and hegemony of the existential angst in western films, especially in relation to masculinity, at a time of change as both 'true' and authentic, but which it has been difficult to regain (Mellor, 1996), especially since the 1940s and the 1950s, in what has been called the heyday of boxing films (Telotte, 1989).

Boxing films may also appear to represent hyperbole and excess. Mitchell, following the claims of the US boxing writer Richard Hoffer, who wrote for *Sports Illustrated*, as well as notably about Mike Tyson (Hoffer, 1998), about the properties of melodrama and hyperbole of boxing, argues that such films are not required to exaggerate; characters such as Don King, Mike Tyson and Jake La Motta are already personalities writ large (Mitchell, 2005). Hyperbole

occupies the in-between relational spaces. This raises further questions about the relationship between what is real and what is artificial and between the actual pugilist and the actor who plays him, or more rarely her. In martial arts films the actor is often a real fighter which creates another relationship between the real of body practices and the drama of the film in which those practices are performed. Boxing films and boxing itself exaggerate in some respects and it is boxing which aspires to magnification as well as the hyperbole of the fight film genre.

The hyperbole which may be demanded by boxing films can also lead to assumptions about what boxing *per se* can deliver, and produce bad films too. Sensation can be interrupted; films can demonstrate alienated sensation too. A bad boxing film can be particularly disappointing because boxing promises so much in relation to expressivity, intensity and emotive narrative such as was evidenced in Ron Howard's 1992 film *Far and Away*, in which the storyline of the migrant who seeks redemption through boxing produced a very lame version of the traditional boxing story, which might be more the outcome of a lack of chemistry between the actors Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise, than the tiredness of the storyline. Boxing films require commitment and imagination if they are to work as they can return to a parody of boxing culture, as seems to have been the case with some of the later *Rocky* series films.

Actors are expected to become caricatures of themselves, just as some actual boxers enact an excessive version of masculinity. Boxing and boxing films especially affect and are affected by the manifestations of excess and the complex relationship between authenticity and deception and between fantasy, aspirations and reality. The exaggerated caricature is mobilized through the charged affect of emotive links which start long before the fight with the taunts and insults that so often mark the weigh-in.

Hyperbole also serves to reinstate gender binaries implicated in the reinstatement of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990). The overstatement of a particularly aggressive masculinity reconstitutes the exclusion of femininity and the necessary avowal that boxing is for 'real men'. These 'real men' are made through the capacities of boxing to reproduce these corporeal practices in the gym and in the ring as well as embedded in the heroic narratives of boxing films. Women boxers, like Ann Wolfe, have engaged in what Judith Butler calls the performativity of doing masculinity (Butler, 1990, 1993) in a masquerade of performing masculinity, for example by adopting styles of dress and comportment and ways of speaking (Woodward, 2006).

The 'Rumble in the Jungle', in Kinshasa, Zaire, in 1974 has inspired much creative as well as social commentary. The golden age of heavyweights, popularly

described as *When We were Kings*, is also the title of Leon Gast's 1996 film of the fight. Gast's film also demonstrates a strand of the relationship between diverse components of what is authentic or real. For example, the real is constituted as documentary in the *Rumble in the Jungle* film and in journalists' accounts at the time and then reproduced in the creative narratives of writers like Norman Mailer in his account (1975), quoted at the start of this chapter. Critics and commentators seek both to mediate the sensations and affects of boxing and to capture its intensities. Boxing, however viewed, is also unmediated so that sensation is immediate and not interpreted or translated.

Boxing affects and sensations

Boxing lends itself well to the insights of the affective turn (Clough and Halley, 2007, Hardt, 2007). Boxing is both ordinary and spectacular; it is a dialectic of affect and of iconography: the raw and the cooked, to deploy Levi-Strauss's anthropological paradigm. Boxing is an artificial creation that culture cannot resolve (Boddy, 2008:391), but it is itself cultural and constitutive of culture albeit one beset by contradictions and ambivalences, which is also why boxing inspires imaging through art and cinema. Boxing may be raw because it involves a one-on-one combat with one person trying to knock the other unconscious, but there are other ways of exploring the culture of boxing, through the arrangement of people, things and places that make up boxing culture, through which the affects of a boxing event are generated and that event is itself affected by how it is perceived and understood. Boxing has endurances and continuities and it is not a linear narrative; although so many boxing films tell a story, especially one configured around the heroic legend, most crudely in the *Rocky* series. This series of films rehearses the appealing trope of the underdog fighting against the odds, a woman to fight for and a pugnacious trainer; a storyline beloved of traditional masculinity (AOM, 2012).

Boxing's great iconic moments are never entirely absent from the everyday affects of the routine practices of the sport. These stories are part of the delivery systems which make up boxing and intersect with the sport's enfolded practices (Woodward, 2012a) and the ways in which flesh is implicated at different sites: in the gym, in the ring, on film and in sentient spectatorship.

Although boxing is a sport associated with violence, it is not, however, the sport which tops the league table of injuries (Woodward, 2006). Nonetheless violence is one of the ordinary affects of boxing. Boxers routinely damage their hands in training, and the most likely injury in boxing is damage to the hands.

There are of course more dramatic injuries and even deaths in the ring; Becky Zerlantes was the first woman to die in the ring in modern times in 2005 and it is estimated that over a 1000 boxers have died in the ring in the last 120 years. The horrors of the spectacle are manifest in the fact that some of the more recent tragedies can even be viewed on YouTube (YouTube, 2012). Boxing is also a 'dark continent' (Irigaray, 1991 (not in the context of boxing), Woodward, 2006) and a 'rough trade' (MacRae, 1996).

In the everyday, however, the most common damage is to the hands. These injuries and the broken jaw, rib or nose that might result from a competitive bout are ordinary affects of boxing; as Kathleen Stewart describes the everyday, material intensities of life (2007), which, in the case of boxing involves routine practice in the downtown gyms as well as by the hopeful, aspiring boxers on the support card at public venues. Boxing has all sorts of capacities that are swept up into the new consistency of the event: the aspirations of the dispossessed in the traditional route out of poverty and social exclusion, the spectacle of competition and the enfleshed materiality of a sport, the main purpose of which is to render the opponent unconscious for the entertainment of those who watch and the profit of those who organize fights (Sugden, 1996, MacRae, 1996, Lemert, 2003).

Boxing affects include the past which generates consistencies in the making of heroic masculinities in particular in the sport. Sensation is implicated in these intensities in that the boxing event, for example the big fight, is drama, representation and enfleshed. What is spectacular, such as the display of boxing in public arenas, whether live or in film or on television or in other cultural forms, mixes up with what is ordinary and routine. Boxers in the gym routinely attribute their interest in the sport to some heroic figure, whether a family member or more public legend (Woodward, 2004, 2008) which then becomes swept up in the event of the fight (MacRae, 1996). Boxers even claim to be thinking about their heroes when competing, which are conventionally retold as stories. The hero, however, is also created through the relationship with the different elements that make up the event, including how the hero is perceived. There is thus collusion within the networks of hegemonic masculinity through which some of boxing's narratives are woven. It is an iterative dialogic process between representations and spectators. In a film however the authenticity of the experience of spectatorship can be achieved through identification with the heroic figure. Even though, for example, Sylvester Stallone is an actor and not a boxer, for the duration of the film (and through repetition and the iterative qualities of the Rocky series) Stallone *is* Rocky.

Events, like a fight or a film, encompass a wide range of materials, and how they are arranged. The arrangement of people, places and things and the affects they generate are understood through sensation, which is central to explanations of affect. A focus on events invokes the relationship between objects, the equipment, the ropes, the gloves, the gum shields, the boots, silk shorts and paraphernalia of the spectacle, perception in the mix of boxers, trainers, cut men, promoters, commentators and spectators. The emotions which bind boxing fans and the glue of boxing culture are based on memory as well as hopes and dreams. These affects are wound up in the 'real time' of the event, for example of the big fight, which condenses memories of past achievements and failures, the intensities of the moment and the aspirations of futurity (Woodward, 2012b).

Different and diverse materials include their pasts, which generate consistencies and duration. Memory, remaking and restating of the past matters enormously in sport, not least in boxing. Although some aspects of the event may seem static, framed in film or photograph, they incorporate movement, between past, present and future, which are caught up in the sensation of the moment. Sensation involves emotional encounters which are enfleshed in the relationship between flesh, muscle, sweat, sound, gloves, ropes and the ring itself. The generation of sensation includes trainers, promoters, referees, boxers and spectators. In boxing, flesh has specific capacities and properties which contribute to sensory processes. Flesh and sentience are also implicated in the processes of constructing and regulating authenticity in the reality of being there (Sobchack, 2004). Response to film bridges the gap between film text and spectator through vision, visibility and embodiment. The whole event of the film, as of the fight, is sensory through the organization of light, movement and matter (Deleuze, 1996) as in art and expressive systems, which boxing is as drama and as an enfleshed event.

Stage drama seeks to recapture the intensities of boxing through different technologies but the interrelationships between actors and performers and spectators and the processes involved are similar. This is evident in the performance of Bryony Lavery's 2010 stage play *Beautiful Burnout* about the three seconds when a boxer drops his guard and the hammer blow which knocks him out is delivered. The play uses movement and movement images and the mobilities of light to create the sensation of the punch and the drama of the play, which is condensed into a limited period of time for the duration of the play which mirrors the duration of the fight.

Boxing films are concerned with the making of heroes through the trope of masculinity. Boxing masculinity is also constituted in relation to femininity

through the inclusion of actual women in the narrative or of recognizably feminine traits and attributes and the status of femininity within the fight film genre. This raises questions about the spaces occupied by femininity in these stories of heroic masculinity. Valerie Walkerdine argues that the narrative is central to embodied experience of the film and of the spectator, however exaggerated the storyline, such as in the late films of the Rocky series (Walkerdine, 1986). Boxing does have the capacity to create alternatives; for example, Leila Ali was made famous through the associations with her heroic father, the legendary Muhammad Ali, as well as through her sporting success; kinship ties are widely enmeshed in the generation of consistencies in boxing. Leila Ali is imbricated in the kinship/family group, caught up in the legend that is her father, but she is also part of a sport in which she demonstrated a high degree of competence; it is troubling in some ways but also celebratory of a strong black woman who has been part of the endurance of boxing's power and is part of its transformations. Film is not far removed from the performance of everyday life. The acceptance of women's boxing as an amateur sport in the Olympics in 2012 means that there are more young hopefuls across the world, even in the powerfully patriarchal Afghanistan, where boxing might be a site of some cultural change, which is explored in more detail in the next chapter. These are largely private spaces, however, and the public arena of film may offer more possibilities for change. As I argue in Chapter 7, however, opportunities for change in the culture of boxing, although progress is mostly incremental, come through public, competitive sport, everyday practice and representations and the visible discourses of the media and cultural forms like film.

Boxers become part of the popular imagination through their place in movies, whether they are actual fighters or fictional ones like Rocky Balboa, a film character albeit reputedly based on the actual boxer, Chuck Wepner. Some boxers might have passed into cultural oblivion, apart from the memories of the boxing cognoscenti, if it had not been for cinematic representation. Were it not for Robert de Niro's Academy Award-winning performance and Martin Scorsese's direction of *Raging Bull*, Jake la Motta might not be still remembered (Tosches, 1997), and if he were his memory would not invoke sophisticated artistic cinematic techniques but probably more technologies of brutish violence. Cinema plays an important role in the reconfiguration of heroes and boxing heroes and villains are always implicated in the social and cultural processes through which they are constituted. It is difficult to disentangle the affects of the mechanisms of cinematic reproduction from the materials and objects, here which make up boxing, which are reproduced. What is real is implicated in both.

A Bloody Canvas: Making a film

I was involved in the process of making a film for the Irish television broadcaster RTÉ in 2010 which provided some insights into the processes through which boxing is represented and how boxing culture is made. *A Bloody Canvas* (RTÉ, 2010), which was designed to bring together the energies and technologies of art and boxing, was directed by Alan Gilsenan and produced by Martin Mahon. This was not an experience of mainstream cinema, but an innovative journey through art and boxing, through the life experience of the artist (and former boxer) Sean Scully. The film presents an idiosyncratic journey into the world of the ring by the internationally renowned abstract painter Sean Scully, who has been fascinated by boxing and boxers since his childhood in post-war East London and has himself practised both boxing and martial arts. Although the film is primarily concerned with the points of connection between art and boxing, it aims to capture the specificities of boxing, its particular capacities and its enduring appeal. This is effected through conversations, often reinstating the conventional patriarchal networks of older men who reconstruct memories of boxing histories, but these forces are disrupted by different interventions, for example through abstract art, less-predictable voices and even eccentric practices. One of the most notable of these eccentricities is probably the Sheffield-based Irish trainer Brendan Ingle's Chaplin-like dance at the end of the film, which transforms into a parody of the British comic duo, Eric Morecombe and Ernie Wise, who always concluded their television comedy show by turning their backs to camera and moving away, each kicking their legs sideways in an absurd, affectionately comic performance. The composition of the film was eclectic and aimed to present an off-centre take on boxing, which probably accounts in part for my role in the film too.

As a woman in a largely male assemblage of practitioners and aficionados, my presence was disruptive. It has always been my experience in the research process as a specifically gendered body that I am situated (Woodward, 2008). The sex gender of the researcher is not always marked in sport, even though whether the researcher is identified as male or female is often crucial both to gaining access to the research site and to the relationship between the researcher and the subjects of research, notably, in sport, through unstated collusions of networks of masculinity (Connell, 1995). Being a woman was more important than whether I had ever boxed or not; if I had boxed I could only have been included as woman boxer and not as part of the networks of hegemonic masculinity that dominates the field. Even the artist Sean Scully had boxed; as

is so often the claim of those who occupy the peripheries of boxing and whose central identity is not categorized as being that of a boxer. I was temporarily part of the network as a fan and as a sympathetic commentator. I was interviewed in the gym where I have carried out some of my work and most of this material was included in the film which moved between different locations and images, for example of artwork which speaks to boxing in different ways, either abstract as in Scully's own work or through an assemblage of narrative, experience and visual images such as the planes of light and dark in the work of Caravaggio or the dramatic homoeroticized sculptures of Robert Mapplethorpe.

The focus of the film was on synergies between art and boxing explored by framing elements of the combination of energies and intensities of each field. The film uses the iconography of the ring as a framed space. As David Chandler argues, each boxing match is a picture (1996:13) with the ring as the frame. This frame however carries the movement of the picture image, making it a series of separate still shots (Deleuze, 1983). Scully also visited the world-famous Petronelli Gym in South Boston where Scully talked to Kevin McBride, the Irishman who beat Tyson in the last fight of his career. The ring is acknowledged as the frame of the event as an iconic frame embodying the endurance of boxing legends in an iconography shared by the gym in cases such as this.

Art plays an important part in the film, at some points with direct links to boxing. The notion of representational art underpins another conversation, located in New York, where Scully interviewed LeRoy Neiman whose reputation as a boxing painter has had considerable influence through the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Scully is filmed in his own studio in Ireland and then in Rome, where the artist Caravaggio, himself a pugilist and street fighter, lived and worked. Caravaggio's life story of street fighting lends another strand to the mix of fine art and the art of boxing: the Noble Art both of which are imbricated in the film. Scully draws analogies between the artist and the fighter and argues that the fighter like the warrior is always ready to fight (RTÉ, 2010), for example in his paintings of David and Goliath (Caravaggio, 2010). Caravaggio's own violence on the street is used to situate some of the different materialities that intersect; the regulatory mechanisms of boxing and the brutalities inside and outside that framework. Caravaggio's preoccupation with the depiction of enfleshed sensation and the celebration of erotic masculinity, on occasion through cutting and damaging male flesh, invoke the stark contrasts of boxing: the black background, visceral simplicity and flat sculptural moments where miraculous moments are made permanent (Caravaggio, 2010). This resonates with Deleuze's argument about

Francis Bacon's paintings, in which he suggests that the essence of painting is experienced as rhythm. 'Rhythms and rhythms alone become characters, become objects. Rhythms are the only characters, the only Figures' (2002: xxxii). Thus Bacon's accomplishment, according to Deleuze, is to show that painting offers a virtual surface for the expression of a logic of sensation that may be the most conducive surface for doing so, at least at the time Bacon was painting.

The crew also visited the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition in the UK (also in Sheffield at the time) and images of Mapplethorpe's work is presented in contrast to other material but also as unmediated sensation which generates instabilities in much the same ways as boxing can. These images are underpinned by the connections to homoeroticism. Some sensualities are more accepted in the art gallery than in the gym, but the points of connection are visualized as unmediated sensation. There are debates about the homoerotic dimensions of boxing, in film (James, 1996) and in lived experience (Spencer, 2011), but *A Bloody Canvas* put them into discourse through images. The film moves to and fro between boxing myths and iconography through a visit to the grave of Gene Tunney, the world heavyweight legend and champion from 1926 to 1928 who twice defeated Jack Dempsey. The direct engagements with artistic practices are interspersed with frames which include conversations with boxers and trainers, such as with the legendary Irish boxing trainer Brendan Ingle in Sheffield in the UK who provides a discursive mix of the practicalities of the gym and training and claims to the spiritual transcendent qualities of boxing in a surreal display of enthusiasm; another example of the hyperbole which is also an ordinary effect of boxing. Conversations often focus on reflection and the ways in which memory affects and is affected by boxing. For example, Scully is filmed in his apartment and studio in Barcelona, where former World Champion Barry McGuigan joins him to 'look back at the mutual fascination between art and boxing, between what they call the men of art and the men of action' (RTE, 2010). The moments of reconstituting memory and the conversations between the two older men are resonant of the strong boxing tradition of making heroes through the framework of the dialogue between the present and the past which so powerfully generates the endurances of hegemonic masculinity.

Even when a boxing film is overtly about a woman, it is hegemonic masculinity that is largely what dominates the discursive field. More specifically it is patriarchy, the explanatory concept used to explore and understand the dominance of men over women and of older men over younger men. One example is *Million Dollar Baby* (2005), ostensibly the story of a white woman who attempts to follow the more traditionally masculine path of achieving a route out of the trailer park into

financial success through the boxing ring in order to support her wayward and dependent family. Clint Eastwood, the film's director, also stars in the film as her trainer Frankie, alongside Hilary Swank as Maggie the boxer and Morgan Freeman as Eastwood's former sparring partner and friend, Eddie 'Scrap iron' Dupris. Maggie is the vehicle through which the film explores Eastwood's character, Frankie, and the problems and the dilemmas of contemporary masculinity (Woodward, 2006). Frankie's relationship with Scrap, which is deeply imbricated in hegemonic masculinity, takes precedence over Maggie's role as a boxing hero.

The invisibility of women is also part of their absence from the histories and legends that are the delivery systems of boxing culture as well as the empirical enfleshed absence of women from most gyms, until some increase in their presence, for example in Europe and the USA, relatively recently (Heiskanen, 2012). The real of boxing is not entirely separate from its dramas, but part of the assemblage. Boxing traditions are made through the capacities of boxing to recreate ordinary affects of masculinity in kinship ties and routine practices as well as through its cultural representations. This is beginning to change, albeit incrementally, through increased infiltration on women and of men who seek to engage in the sport and its embodied practices but not its traditions of hegemonic masculinity. Women are starting to occupy some of the space traditionally dominated by a particular version of masculinity and change boxing.

My own part in the process of making this film demonstrates the to and fro between inside and outside and the diverse components that make up sensation in relation to the affects of and upon boxing. Drama in the ring and on film, in the above example, are inseparable and are also core to boxing.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored alternative arguments and ways of explaining the relationships between the real and the dramatic and between bodies in boxing and their representations, for example, in films, which of course also have embodied, sentient audiences and viewers. Boxing, in all its myriad forms, has particular capacities to generate affects which range from the spectacular to the routine and has a powerful presence in the field of artistic and cinematic representation. Boxing demonstrates the flows of visceral forces that go beyond discourse and even beyond emotion and beyond conscious knowing, which cross boundaries of the particular field of boxing and its culture and the wider social and cultural terrain.

Pain, flesh and nerves mixed up with agency and vulnerability are central to boxing; it is as much about defeat as success and damage as well as the Noble Art. Indeed destruction is as much an ordinary affect of what happens in the ring as the routine damage to the hands in the gym. Boxing is also what Stallybrass and White called 'the attraction of repulsion' (Stallybrass and White, 1986:140). Although Stallybrass and White were drawing on the historical 'alarming conjuncture of the elites and the vulgar' (Stallybrass and White, 135) in the context of the nineteenth-century bourgeois interest in the slum dwellers as expressed in the novels of Charles Dickens, the expression captures the coming together of disgust, violence and moral narratives, which illustrates well the relationship between boxing and the wider society.

Although binaries such as sex gender differences and winning and losing may have some purchase in regimes of truth in boxing, an opposition between the real versus drama is not one that is sustainable. The interrelationship between inside and outside the ring is dynamic and the boundaries are blurred, but boxing, as practised, is not an isolated field, however traditional some of its values and its specific enfolded practices. Boxing is both and this is why it has the capacity to generate such affects. These capacities operate through assemblages of power, economic, social, enfolded, embodied practices, psychic investment to draw in and to exclude and to invoke sensations that are sensate and not always sensational, although boxing can certainly be spectacular and always offers that possibility.

One of the major affects of boxing is its capacity to generate a particular version of hegemonic masculinity which has considerable purchase among the networks largely of men, particularly those who are implicated in its peripheries as well as its core enfolded engagements, whose participation also affects boxing.

Part of the appeal of boxing is the intensity of the activity for both participants and spectators. Boxing is not only constructed as sensational at some of its mega events, it also creates sensation which is unmediated, intense and direct. Sensation is most powerfully expressed in the distinction between the reality of the enfolded presence of boxing and the virtual space of viewing at a distance which Joyce Carol Oates characterized as 'drama'. Boxing however has the capacities to generate affects and sensation which operate in diverse spaces through display and through representation, for example, cinematically, and in different art forms. Experiences are constituted through the event in which they take place through the processes and intensities in which people are implicated and that intentionality too is constituted through these processes rather than agency being the starting point of action. Boxing events include the routine enactments and the mega events and spectacles that create sensation in

those caught up in the event and are themselves sensational in the mixture of materialities. *A Bloody Canvas* was implicated in these processes and reflected and refracted those materialities and offers a good example of some of the disparate capacities of boxing in a set of systems and processes that are more complex and multi-directional than conventional narratives of existential heroes or of economic determinism in explaining the endurance of boxing.

This chapter has addressed the issues of the specificities of representational systems as cultural practices and how symbolic and discursive regimes and sport are connected; representations of boxing and boxing are co-constituted.

Boxing films are not only concerned with the construction of heroic figures and legendary narratives of either decent people who seek self-respect and to look after their families or angst-ridden existential heroes. Stories are part of the mix, but not all of it. Representational systems like Mailer's literary accounts of a fight at the start of this chapter and boxing films are part of systems and processes through which boxing culture and practice are made and which link bodies and representations. Sensation works two ways: between the fight and the spectators and between representations and bodies; it presents an alternative to approaches, which suggest that the sensation of spectatorship and viewing is always mediated and specifically that boxing is constructed by its myths and legends. The event is a mixture of different strands and systems of power, but bodies and flesh and representations are essential elements too. The complexity of the assemblage through which boxing culture is made suggests that boxing does have the capacity to produce transformations and the impact upon as well as to be affected by the wider social and cultural terrain. Boxing is not just the remnant of a bygone age and a traditional mix of entrenched attitudes and practices, although it does manifest particularly enduring qualities of sex gender categories, social and economic inequalities and enfolded practices and qualities. The next chapter picks up on the possibilities and practicalities of change.