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# The Culture of Boxing: Sensation and Affect

Kath Woodward

Joyce Carol Oates has argued that watching boxing on television is drama, whereas being at the fight is real. Staking a claim to reality is a strategy that is used in order to explain the lasting power of boxing to excite people and as part of the sport's historical endurance and the cultural investment in boxing that crosses a range of fields. This article uses Oates's distinction between drama and what is real to explore the culture of boxing and its continuing, if contradictory, appeal through different cultural forms. Boxing poses a cultural dilemma and raises questions about how something so apparently brutal retains its hold on contemporary culture. The material properties of boxing invoke the senses and prioritize corporeal, enfolded engagement. Oates also applies the notion of authenticity to men's boxing. Thus the focus of this article is upon the capacities of boxing and its affects and the particularities of the event of boxing which make its dramas real, wherever they are enacted, as well as the forces in play which create particular versions of masculinity which are enmeshed with the affects of boxing.

## Introduction

The writer and boxing fan Joyce Carol Oates argues that boxing is not drama, it is real.<sup>1</sup> Implicit in this argument is that what is authentic about boxing is flesh and the embodied material practices of the sport in the 25 ring, which are real in a way that cinematic versions or, in the case of Oates's argument, television cannot be. It also suggests an immediacy which contradicts the endurance of memory in boxing in the make-up of Kath Woodward, Open University, UK.

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the legends and myths which permeate the sport. The culture and reality of boxing is only accessible by 'being there', in the flesh; corporeal

30 presence is crucial to spectatorship as well as sporting participation in boxing's embodied practices; being in the ring or in the gym and running the risk of being hurt. Boxing offers particular relationships between people and things, words and flesh, images and practices, which are caught up in the dynamics of an event. The event may be the public  
35 spectacle of a big fight at a prestigious site embedded in the annals of the sport, like Madison Square Garden, or the routine of everyday practices in the local gym, and the art forms that represent boxing such as those of literature, film, theatre or photography.

The 'Rumble in the Jungle', the name given to Muhammad Ali's and Joe  
40 Frazier's heavyweight title fight in Kinshasa, Zaire, in 1974 has inspired creative as well as social commentary in the golden age of heavyweights, popularly described as 'When We were Kings', which is also the title of Leon Gast's 1996 film of the fight. The film, *When We were Kings*, also demonstrates a strand of the relationship between different compo-  
45 nents 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. What is perceived as authentic is then re-produced in the creative narratives of writers such as Norman Mailer in his account, *The Fight*.<sup>2</sup> In this book, Mailer engages with the intensities of being there  
50 somewhat unusually by describing himself in the third person, firstly, as Norman, then Norm and occasionally, as Norman Mailer. Great moments such as the 'Rumble' in Zaire, which become classified as legendary, are made in the spaces between the real and the representational, here evidenced in the interface between documentary and drama, reportage  
55 and creative reconstruction.

This article addresses some of the questions about boxing culture which are embedded in this distinction between drama, which includes representations of boxing, and what is real. Boxing is a sport which has the distinction of being premised upon the aim of one protagonist to  
60 knock the other unconscious. It is one-on-one combat with particularly strong connections to conflict, bellicosity and pugilism; boxing is pugilism, albeit regulated and disciplined pugilism. Boxing has powerful links to transgressions of legality and to exploitation.<sup>3</sup> It is the dark continent

in a number of ways.<sup>4</sup> Yet boxing also inspires some of the most  
65 interesting and the best artistic and cultural projects, in film, art and  
literature. Is this because what is real about boxing is separate and distinct  
from its representations or is it because they are inseparable? In this  
article, I argue that the enfolded practices of boxing and its regulatory  
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mechanisms are inextricable from its cultural representations, its myths  
70 and its legends. This claim is based upon the relationship between the  
capacities which boxing has to generate affects and the way in which the  
enfolded practices of the sport are themselves re-produced by its cultural  
manifestations. The culture of boxing occupies the spaces in between and  
the to and fro of affect.

75 Boxing is both ordinary and spectacular; it is a back-and-forth dialectic  
of naturalism of affect and of iconography, which Kasia Boddy conceptualizes  
within the Lévi-Strauss structuralist paradigm of the raw and  
the cooked: 'Boxing is an artificial creation that culture cannot resolve.'<sup>5</sup>  
Boxing is, however, cultural and constitutive of culture and one beset by  
80 contradictions and ambivalences, which is also why boxing inspires  
imaging through art, cinema and photography. Boxing may always be  
raw because it necessarily involves a one-on-one combat with one person  
trying to knock the other unconscious, but there are other ways of  
interrogating boxing, through the arrangement of people, things and  
85 places that make up boxing culture, which I consider in this article.  
Boxing has endurances and persistences, but it is not a linear narrative;  
although boxing does draw heavily upon myths and legends and  
memories of the great events which make up the sport. For example,  
many boxing films tell a story, especially one configured around the heroic  
90 legend, most crudely in the *Rocky* series.

Boxing's great iconic moments are never entirely absent from the  
experiences of the sport's routine practices. These stories are part of the  
delivery systems which make up boxing and intersect with the sport's  
enfolded practices<sup>6</sup> and the ways in which flesh is implicated at different  
95 sites; in the gym, in the ring, on film and in sentient spectatorship. This

article explores the drama of boxing working through the ways in which the relationship between the sport's routine and spectacular affects play out within the cultural practices focusing upon the genre of film, including the example of a film that sought to embrace documentary coverage of the everyday experiences of boxing and of art, *A Bloody Canvas*.<sup>7</sup> I include this film because I was part of the team that made it as an adviser and participant and the film was an eclectic mix of disparate strands, although underpinned by some of the enduring boxing relationships and connections, notably those forged through the discursive regimes of hegemonic masculinity. This was disrupted by my presence, although I am both inside, as a boxing fan, and outside as a white, educated, middle-class woman who has never boxed; most male researchers, for example do engage in active participant observation with maximum participation.<sup>8</sup> There were also questions raised by the *Sport in History* 489

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disconnections as well as the synergies in putting together a film that included the materialities of histories, social, spatial and temporal axes of power, art forms and enfolded practices. The processes through which *A Bloody Canvas* was made present a particularly good example of how the affects of boxing as a cultural event and set of practices are generative of and are themselves generated by the diverse strands which encompass the disparate elements of enfolded routine practice, spectacle and social and cultural inequalities, which themselves make up the world of boxing. The mix of the film recreates some of the spaces in between by highlighting some of the elements of boxing which affect and are affected by the sport and its perceptions.

#### Ordinary Affects

After his defence of his WBA heavyweight title on 3 April 2010 the usually (at least in his media interviews if not in the run-up to fights) charming, engaging David Haye was interviewed on BBC Radio 4. He responded to the interviewer's comment about looking good the day after a fight that went the full 12 rounds against an opponent who has been described as more fighter than boxer. Almost inaudibly he slipped in that Ruiz had

come off worse with a broken jaw, broken nose and broken rib. It's par for the course in boxing. Such injuries are not dramatic; you pick yourself up unless you are actually unconscious and most of them come back.<sup>9</sup> Although boxing is a sport associated with violence, it is not however, the sport which tops the league table of injuries,<sup>10</sup> according to an Australian survey in 1998 reported by AIBA.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless violence is one of the ordinary affects of boxing. Boxers routinely damage their hands in training. Perhaps surprisingly, 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 thousand 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.<sup>12</sup>

The everyday damage to the hands and injuries like 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,<sup>13</sup> 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

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{RSIH}articles/RSIH650371/RSIH\_A\_650371\_O.3d[x] Friday, 6th January in the traditional route out of poverty and social exclusion; the forces of heroic narratives of hegemonic masculinity; the spectacle of competition and the enfolded 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.<sup>14</sup>

#### Affects and Sensations

<sup>155</sup> The concept of affect presents alternatives to narrative and mediation and presents a route into understanding the relational processes which have affects and are affected. It also offers a particular perspective on the agency of people, living things and objects that moves away from notions of intention to a consideration of the relational force of things, the

160 unconscious and the capacity of events to intervene in social processes. Agency is in the event: an affect gathers diverse materials and sweeps them up into a new consistency, a transformation for the duration of the affect. Events such as a fight, a film, a photograph or a painting encompass a wide range of materials, and how they are arranged is central to the 165 discussion of affect. People, places and things and the affects they generate are understood through sensation, which is central to explanations of affect. Flesh and emotion are implicated in sensation, as material having its own affects and being affected, but also as having specific capacities and properties which contribute to sensory processes. Different senses are 170 evoked and, for example, some are more present in different situations and, even at a distance, spectators are caught up in the maelstrom of the event and movement develops its own consistencies and intensities and thus sensation.

Affects include the past, which generates consistencies and dura- 175 tion and raises questions about representation and memory. Flesh is implicated in sensation, as material having its own affects and being affected, but also as having specific capacities and properties which contribute to sensory processes, none more so than in boxing for spectators and viewers as well as for boxers. Movement takes place within 180 sensation which includes the embodiment and enactment of thought through sensory media.

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 is drama, 185 representation and en fleshed. What is spectacular, for example through boxing legends and 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 Sport in History 491

{RSIH}articles/RSIH650371/RSIH\_A\_650371\_O.3d[x] Friday, 6th January ordinary and routine. Boxers in the gym routinely attribute their interest in the sport to some heroic figure, whether a family member or more 190 public legend,<sup>15</sup> which then becomes swept up in the event of the fight.<sup>16</sup> Boxers even claim to be thinking about their heroes when competing, and

these events are conventionally re-told as stories. For example, Naseem Hamed before his bantamweight title fight with Vincent Belcastro in 1993 informed Donald McRae: 'I'm gonna be a legend'<sup>17</sup> and after the fight<sup>195</sup> justified his own excesses as the result of his not really being there, because his imagination had transported him to Las Vegas in 1983 and he thought he was Sugar Ray Robinson defeating 'Marvellous' Marvin Hagler at Caesars Palace in 1983.<sup>18</sup> The hero, however, is also created through the relationship with the different elements that make up the event, including<sup>200</sup> how the hero is perceived, and films play a key role in the making and re-making of these events.

### Boxing Affects: Fights and Films

Boxing lends itself well to the insights of the affective turn,<sup>19</sup> which brings the relationship between all the elements of people and things: subjects<sup>205</sup> and objects. In boxing and in boxing films, the relationship between objects, the equipment, the ropes, the gloves, the gum shields, the boots, satin shorts and paraphernalia of the spectacle, perception in the to-and-fro between subjects, boxers, trainers, cut men, promoters, commentators and spectators are all implicated in the mix that makes the event.

<sup>210</sup> Different materials include their pasts, which generate consistencies and duration through the memories that are such important components of sports legends. Although some aspects of the event may seem static, framed in film or photograph, they incorporate movement; even objects within the image can be arranged so that they develop their own<sup>215</sup> consistencies and intensities and thus sensation, for example in Neil Leifer's photographs of Muhammad Ali, one of which appears to portray Ali boxing under water. In the *Rocky* series of films the actor Sylvester Stallone merges with the hero of the films: Stallone is Rocky.<sup>20</sup> Sensation applies to spectatorship too and to the reception of texts such as films<sup>220</sup> as well as to physical presence at a fight. Flesh and sentience are also implicated in the processes of constructing and regulating authenticity in the reality of being there. The whole event of the film, as of the fight, is sensory through the organization of light, movement and matter<sup>21</sup> as in art and expressive systems, which boxing is as drama, as an enfolded<sup>225</sup> event. This is evident in the performance in the drama of theatre too, as



in Bryony Lavery's play *Beautiful Burnout*<sup>22</sup> about the three seconds when  
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a boxer's guard drops and the hammer blow that is a knockout is  
delivered. The play uses different planes of movement and movement  
image and the mobilities of light to capture the impact of the punch and  
230 the drama of the ring. More frequent, however, are attempts to recapture  
the intensities of boxing in film.

### Boxing Films

The sport of boxing has a very special place in film history and boxing  
films represent a long tradition. Boxing has arguably produced more  
235 high-class films than any other sport.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> Early films were records of fights rather  
than creative reconstructions but it is a fine line and boundaries are  
240 blurred between what is real and what is drama, notably, in film, through  
the technologies of reconstruction and the techniques through which a  
film is made, whether with actors or actual boxers in real time. Boxing  
was seen as early as the late nineteenth century to have enormous potential  
as a spectator sport, which transforming technologies could make  
245 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 US, the site of technological experiment in a  
wooden amphitheatre, with peepholes for cameras, was crucial in shaping  
250 future links between film, spectacle and fighting. 'Filming of the fight',  
AQ2 as McKenna has claimed, 'was always integral to its planning.'<sup>25</sup>  
One of the most significant points at which boxing has the capacity to  
make its own stories and embed memories in its culture is through the  
spectacle of film. Although boxing films have a long history, the cinematic  
255 depiction of combat in the ring generates a set of aesthetic and ethical  
relationships which might be antithetical to commercial movie-making.  
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.

260 Boxing has capacities to engage with the social, economic and cultural AQ3 forces through which the construction of heroic figures occurs, usually coded masculine, and the hero is central to boxing culture. However, this requires further explanation. There are more alternatives than the economic determinism which compels the boxer to fight and take up 265 the noble art as a route out of the ghetto or economic deprivation,

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{RSIH}articles/RSIH650371/RSIH\_A\_650371\_O.3d[x] Friday, 6th January as in the case of the white working-class hero on the one hand or the existentialist, agentic perspective of the individualized hero,<sup>26</sup> or even psycho-social approaches which link the personal psychic investment of the boxer to social forces, as in Tony Jefferson's discussion of Mike 270 Tyson.<sup>27</sup> All of these elements are present and can be seen to make the assemblage of systems through which heroic figures are reproduced and lived.

Boxing films are either only tangentially associated with boxing or, even if they do purport to be 'about boxing', 'are always about so much more, 275 especially, they are about social commentary more or less bound up with issues of masculinity'.<sup>28</sup> Boxing, and especially the archetypal boxer in film, has traditionally generated a singular heroic figure of troubled masculinity. This figure is 'a romantic-modernist representation of existential man in all his bleak grandeur [who] attained definition in 280 Hollywood post World War II, but also in other visual and textual arts'.<sup>29</sup> 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 less romanticized form in *The Fighter* in 2011. Familiar matters of honour, desire for respect and self-esteem 285 combine to reiterate a story of honour.

Boxing films are frequently implicated in the representation of violence. This invokes associations of violence within boxing, which Kevin Mitchell calls the 'glamour of violence'.<sup>30</sup> One of the most highly rated boxing films ever made, Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, has scenes of

290 violence that are resonant of the experience of witnessing a fight and of  
'being there'. 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'<sup>31</sup> lend  
themselves well to a powerfully intense portrayal of boxing and the elision  
295 of anger, enflamed contact and aggression which are in the material of  
boxing, its spectatorship and its films. The intensity of the spectacle also  
invokes anxieties about voyeuristic spectatorship which are integral to the  
culture of boxing, which is so often inflected by ethical concerns and  
moral dilemmas sometimes elided with medical discourses of risk.

300 Boxing films range from those which explicitly tell a boxing story, for  
example in the 1940s, such as Robert Rosen's *Body and Soul*,<sup>32</sup> Robert  
Wise's *The Set-up*<sup>33</sup> and Mark Robson's *Champion*<sup>34</sup> to films such as  
David Fincher's *Fight Club*<sup>35</sup> which are less centrally concerned with the  
sport of boxing. Other films such as Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*<sup>36</sup>  
305 have a fight element, but could not be said to be 'about boxing', even  
bareknuckle

fighting, although boxing films are never just about boxing.

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The internal conflicts of *Fight Club*, like the Palahniuk novel upon which  
it is based, is concerned with dislocation and disconnection enacted in  
scenes of violent pugilism. *Fight Club* assembles psychic conflict and  
310 brings together the discursive regimes of pugilism, especially those which  
take place outside the law and those of the internal, psychic drama of  
the film's main protagonist. The films that might be more narrowly  
categorized as 'boxing films' have often been bio-pics, which bring  
together the real hero and the actualities of fights and the cinematic hero  
315 into one figure. Some of the most notable are the Ali movies. Boxing  
biographies re-generate heroes, largely through chronological life stories,  
AQ4 like Michael Mann's *Ali*<sup>37</sup> and Robert Wise's *Somebody Up There Likes  
Me*<sup>38</sup> about Rocky Graciano. They also focus on pivotal moments in  
boxing history, such as the documentary *Rumble in the Jungle*<sup>39</sup> and its  
320 reincarnation in 1996 in Leon Gast's, *When We Were Kings*<sup>40</sup> and, in 2000,

One Nation Divisible,<sup>41</sup> on the Frazier-Ali rivalry, again arising from key boxing events.

Boxing occupies the relational space between flesh, conflict and social forces of economic deprivation, racism and the insecurities of migration <sup>325</sup> and mobility that become concentrated on a particular version of masculinity. Thus boxing and boxing films provide a relevant context in which to explore and question the ubiquity and hegemony of existential angst, especially in relation to masculinity, at a time of change as both 'true' and authentic, but which it has been difficult to regain<sup>42</sup> <sup>330</sup> especially since the 1940s and 1950s, in what has been called the heyday of boxing films.<sup>43</sup> Boxing heroes in the twenty-first century are more often tainted by the contradictions of the sport, although they still present satisfying accounts of an heroic, usually linear narrative of triumph over tragedy.

<sup>335</sup> Boxing films may also appear to represent hyperbole and excess. Mitchell, following the claims of the boxing writer Richard Hoffer 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.<sup>44</sup> Hyperbole <sup>340</sup> occupies the in-between relational spaces. This raises further questions about the relationship between what is real and what is artifice and between the actual pugilist and the actor who plays him, or more rarely her. Boxing films and boxing as a sport always exaggerate and it is boxing which aspires to magnification. Actors are expected to become caricatures <sup>345</sup> of themselves, just as some actual boxers enact an excessive version of masculinity. Boxing and boxing films especially affect and are affected by Sport in History 495

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the manifestations of excess and the complex relationship between authenticity and deception and between fantasy, aspirations and reality. Hyperbole also serves to re-instate gender binaries implicated in <sup>350</sup> the reinstatement of the heterosexual matrix.<sup>45</sup> The overstatement of masculinity reconstitutes the exclusion of femininity and the necessary avowal that boxing is for 'real men', who are made through the capacities

of the sport to re-produce these corporeal practices and enfolded dimensions as well as implicated in the heroic narratives of boxing films.

355 One of the major affects of boxing is its capacity to generate a version of corporeal, aggressive, hegemonic masculinity. Women can and do engage in the iterative practices of masculinity which mark boxing culture. Women boxers such as Ann Wolfe have engaged in what Judith Butler calls the performativity of doing masculinity,<sup>46</sup> in a masquerade of macho 360 posturing<sup>47</sup> which includes the adoption of the comportment and dress of machismo in press photographs where, for example, she has posed arms akimbo, chin jutting forward, surrounded by a posse of aggressive-looking young men. The anatomical body also underpins the performance of masculinity, for example in the embodied practices of boxing and the 365 measurement of the enfolded selves who take part in them. Boxing is one of the relatively few sports which is measured and classified by body size, thus giving primacy to the anatomical body. 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 370 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. Boxing does have the capacity to create alternatives; for example Leila Ali occupied a heroic public space through the associations with her heroic father, the legendary Muhammad Ali, as 375 well as through her sporting success; kinship ties are widely enmeshed in the generation of consistencies and endurances of boxing. Leila Ali is imbricated in the kinship and family group, caught up in the legend that is her father, but she is also part of a sport in which she has demonstrated a high degree of competence. It is troubling in some ways, but also 380 celebratory of a strong black woman who has been part of the endurance of boxing's power and is part of its transformations. The acceptance of women's boxing as an amateur sport in the Olympics in 2012, the first time there has been any display of women's boxing in the games since 1904, means that there are more young hopefuls across the world, even in 385 the powerfully patriarchal Afghanistan, where boxing might be a site of some cultural change. These are largely private spaces, however, and the

public arena of film offers more possibilities for change.

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Boxers become part of the popular imagination through their place in the movies, whether they are actual fighters or fictional ones like Rocky 390 Balboa, the film character 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. If it had not been for Robert de Niro's Academy Award-winning performance and Martin Scorsese's direction of Raging 395 Bull, Jake LaMotta might not be still remembered.<sup>48</sup> Cinema plays an important role in the re-configuration 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 400 here which make up boxing, which are reproduced. What is real is implicated in both.

A Bloody Canvas

A Bloody Canvas, directed by Alan Gilson and produced by Martin Mahon presents an idiosyncratic journey into the world of the ring by 405 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.

The discussion which inspired and shaped this film embraced the division of art and action, which has always held a particular fascination 410 for artists, and the brief for the film sought to explore a reconciliation of the world of the imaginary and transcendent and that of the physical, enfolded engagement. Although it may seem impossible to reconcile these opposites within a binary logic that divides the cerebral from the corporeal, boxing, which is, in a very tangible way, legalized brutality, in 415 spite of this, or perhaps because of it, has been bestowed the status of an art-form by a number of artists.

Sean Scully is a world-famous visual artist, who presents himself as the embodiment of an ageing boxer. This maverick image is matched by

what he describes as a pugilistic personality which is embodied in his  
420 description of himself as a warrior poet. The film combines elements of a  
personal pilgrimage into the dark and theatrical world of boxing in search  
of what makes up the noble art. Each scene frames particular aspects of  
Scully's quest to unravel the nature of the warrior poet, ranging from the  
highly personal to explorations of broader social and cultural matters,  
425 from the confrontational to the romantic, from the poignant to the  
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bizarre, from the humorous to the disturbing \_ all in the high drama of  
boxing ring.

Although the film is primarily concerned with the points of connection  
between art and boxing, it aims to capture the specificities of boxing, its  
430 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. The most notable of  
435 these eccentricities is embodied in the Irish trainer Brendan Ingle's  
Chaplin-like dance at the end of the film, which merges into a parody of  
the British comic duo Eric Morecambe and Ernie Wise. Morecambe and  
Wise always concluded their television comedy show by turning their  
backs to camera and moving away, each kicking his legs sideways in an  
440 absurd parodic dance; a parody of a parody.

The film uses the iconography of the ring as a framed space. As David  
Chandler argues, each 'boxing match is story but it is also a picture',<sup>49</sup>  
with the ring as frame. This frame, however, carries the movement of the  
picture image. The frame of the ring is a relatively closed composition,  
445 like the frame of the film, which demonstrates movement image and not a  
series of separate still shots.<sup>50</sup> Even a film can produce the new in that  
reception and sensation cannot be determined or even mediated and the  
event of the fight is always uncertain (the practice of throwing a fight for  
money notwithstanding). The ring is acknowledged as the frame of the  
450 event as an iconic frame embodying the endurance of boxing legends and

there are strong links between the frame of the painting and the frame of the ring throughout the film.

Art offers the transcendental possibilities of going beyond discourse<sup>51</sup> and art plays an important part in the film, at some points with direct links to boxing. Scully is also filmed at the internationally renowned Petronelli Gym in South Boston, where he talks to Kevin McBride, the Irishman who beat Mike Tyson in the last fight of his career. Debates about representational art underpin another conversation, this time in New York, where Scully talks to LeRoy Neiman, a boxing painter who achieved considerable acclaim through the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Scully is filmed in his own studio in Ireland in a context which presents another spatial frame, that of the bounded physical space of the studio.

Scully is also filmed in Rome where he explores some of the implications of the work of Caravaggio. Caravaggio, himself a pugilist and street fighter, is used in the film more for his use of planes of light and

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{RSIH}articles/RSIH650371/RSIH\_A\_650371\_O.3d[x] Friday, 6th January dark, although Caravaggio's life story of street fighting lends another strand to the mix of fine art and the art of boxing the noble art 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,<sup>52</sup> for example in his paintings of David and Goliath.<sup>53</sup> Caravaggio's own violence on the street is used to situate some of the different materialities that intersect to assemble boxing culture; the regulatory mechanisms of boxing and the brutalities inside and outside that framework. Caravaggio's work resonates with the stark contrasts of boxing; the black background, visceral simplicity and flat sculptural moments where miraculous moments are made permanent. This resonates with Deleuze's argument about Francis Bacon's paintings, in which he suggests that the essence of painting is experienced as rhythm.

480 'Rhythms and rhythms alone become characters, become objects. Rhythms are the only characters, the only Figures.'<sup>54</sup> Thus Bacon's accomplishment, according to Deleuze, is in showing 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. Rhythm is also affect, in that affect needs a virtual surface for the expression of a logic of sensation.

The crew also visited the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition in the UK and images of Mapplethorpe's work are presented in contrast to other material but also as unmediated sensation which generates instabilities in much the same ways as boxing can. The film moves to and fro between boxing myths and iconography through a visit to the grave of Gene Tunney, the heavyweight legend and world 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, 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. Conversations often focus on reflection and the ways in which memory affects and is affected by boxing. In the final scene, 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'.<sup>55</sup> The moments of reconstituting memory and the conversations between 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 Sport in History 499

{RSIH}articles/RSIH650371/RSIH\_A\_650371\_O.3d[x] Friday, 6th January masculinity. Even when a boxing film is overtly about a woman it is hegemonic masculinity that is largely what dominates the discursive field. One example is *Million Dollar Baby*,<sup>56</sup> directly 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 and thus take care of her wayward and dependent family. Clint Eastwood, the film's director, also stars in the film alongside Hilary

515 Swank as Maggie the boxer and Morgan Freeman as Eastwood's trainer. Maggie is the vehicle through which the film explores Eastwood's character, Frankie's problems and the dilemmas of contemporary masculinity.<sup>57</sup>

The invisibility of women is also part of their absence from the histories  
520 and legends that are the delivery systems of boxing culture. Spectacle and iconography are part of the gym. The real of boxing is not entirely separate from its dramas, but part of the assemblage and boxing traditions are made through the capacities of boxing to re-create ordinary affects of masculinity in kinship ties and routine practices as well as through its  
525 cultural representations. Drama in the ring and on film, in the following case inseparably, is also central to boxing.

#### Conclusion

Boxing, in all its myriad cultural forms, has the capacities to generate affects which range from the spectacular to the routine and has a powerful  
530 presence in the field of artistic representation. Boxing demonstrates the flows of visceral forces that go beyond discourse and even beyond emotion and beyond conscious knowing.

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  
535 as the dignity of 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.

Whatever binaries may still have some purchase in regimes of truth in boxing such as sex gender differences, winning and losing, the real versus  
540 drama is neither useful nor sustainable. 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 and psychic investment to draw in and to exclude and to invoke sensations that are sensate and not always sensational, although boxing  
545 can certainly be spectacular and always offers that possibility.

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One of the major affects of boxing is its capacity to generate a

particular version of hegemonic masculinity which has considerable purchase among networks of men, in particular those who are implicated in its peripheries as well as its core enmeshed engagements and whose 550 participation also affects boxing.

Enmeshed presence – being there – is bound up with the sensate person who can locate their own presence, an experience which may be described as transcendent and so more real than it might be beyond discourse.

Sensation is most powerfully expressed in the distinction between the 555 reality of the enmeshed presence of boxing and the occupancy of virtual space of viewing at a distance which 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 560 through the event in which they take place through the processes and intensities in which people are implicated. That intentionality, too, is constituted through these processes rather than agency being the starting point of action. In boxing, events include the routine enactments and the mega-events and spectacles that create sensation in those caught up in the 565 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 570 existential heroes or of economic determinism in explaining the endurance of boxing.

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