Chapter 1 Boxing and Urban Culture

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Professional boxing may not be an exclusively urban sport, but, at least in the United States, it is a quintessentially urban one. US-based boxing clubs are not merely physical places typically located within cities. More fundamentally, they characteristically constitute part of a physically precarious but historical and socio-economically durable landscape of deprivation, disrespect, and disorder, commonly known as the 'the hood'. Given the distinctly urban inflection of US boxing, one needs to understand how the attitudes, choices, and actions of urban boxers intersect with the larger forces and constraints that define 'the hood' and inform the culture of boxing in America.

It is precisely the intersection of professional boxing and American urban life that I want to examine in some detail here. To that end, I draw on several years of experience as an active member of a Kansas City boxing gym to explore some of the complex ways in which various forces and constraints of life in 'the hood' shape the agency and self-understandings of those individuals who opt to pursue a professional boxing career in the States. The point of such an exploration is decidedly not to romanticize or aestheticize boxing or, for that matter, American urban life – there are, as we shall see, precious few 'rags-to-riches' narratives to be found in a typical urban American boxing gym. Still less, however, do I want, in what follows, to reduce American boxers in stereotypical ways to so many effects of the forces and constraints of their metropolitan contexts, presenting boxers as mere 'urban cultural dopes', to extend Harold Garfinkel's (1964) formulation. Instead, the aim here is to provide an observer-participant description and mutually illuminating analyses of American boxers and the metropolitan milieu in which they are embedded.

The relative obscurity of American boxers from places like Kansas City is surpassed only by the shabby and faceless gyms in which they train. While its neighbour to the east, Detroit, boasts the Kronk Boxing Gym, Brooklyn has Gleason's and LA has

the Wild Card, Kansas City is home to boxers and boxing gyms whose names virtually no one outside of the city has ever heard – gyms like Eastside, the Whatsoever Boxing Club, and Authentic Boxing Club. Such marginal urban boxing gyms, and the many average club fighters who train there, are nonetheless crucial to the sport of professional boxing. To put the matter bluntly, those gyms provide the fodder upon which the sport depends for the continual matchmaking and staging of bouts between up-and-coming prospects and the 'opponents' against whom prospects hone their pugilistic skills and progress in the calculating world of professional prizefighting. Kansas City, it is often said by trainers on the US coasts, is a good place to find an 'opponent'. And so it is. Indeed, more or less the only time one sees modestly accomplished boxers from Kansas City compete in televised bouts is when a rising fighter from a gym like Gleason's needs a last minute replacement or tune-up 'opponent' for an undercard on ESPN's Friday Night Fights.

At one level, then, it is clear that the boxers who live and train in places like Kansas City are quite typical inasmuch as they are both subject to and yet very much an indispensible part of the brutal economic logic of contemporary professional prizefighting. Questions of fairness and morality aside, in boxing, unlike most professional sports, one can – and, for many good reasons, in fact often should – pick one's opponent. Indeed, the choice of an opponent is a crucial one, especially for emerging professional fighters with talent and potential, as the longevity and future earnings of any pro boxer is dependent on fighting the 'right' opponents at the right times in his or her career. A boxer who is 'in tough' (matched against an equally skilled or potentially better fighter) too early and/or too often in his or her career is almost certain to suffer physically and financially.

Conversely, a fighter who is brought along slowly and given time to develop against lesser 'opponents' has the time to master his or her craft, cultivate 'ring generalship', and can reasonably look forward to a more economically rewarding career. And yet, given the physical depredation inherent in the sport, even those boxers who are 'brought along' in the right way and manage some degree of economic success in professional pugilism can – and all too often do – become 'opponents' as their time in the ring inexorably begins to take its toll and their skills decline precipitously.

Not all professional boxers come from cities like Kansas City, that is to say, but if they are poorly managed or fight too long they almost always complete their careers boxing on a card held in places not unlike Kansas City's second-rate casinos or its local National Guard Armory. I was ringside and saw this happen in a Kansas City casino where Emanuel Augustus fought as the main event. A once superb boxer-puncher whose 2001 epic battle with Micky Ward was named ESPN Fight of the Year, Augustus was clearly on the downside of his career and gave a lacklustre performance in narrowly defeating journeyman Marteze Logan. In the years since, Augustus has lost the majority of his fights in serving as a 'name opponent' for rising young fighters such as Ruslan Provodnikov, Charles Hatley, and Vernon Paris.

At a deeper level, however, the prosaic careers of the boxers who labour in prototypical urban gyms such as one finds in Kansas City provide a unique window into the everyday urban life in which American boxers and the sport of boxing are characteristically embedded. Here there is a profound tension between, on the one hand, the way in which so many professional boxers from such places serve merely as fodder in the broader economic logic of professional pugilism and, on the other hand, those boxers' own reflexive attempts to assert their agency and articulate a unique kind of identity from within the confines of their local urban milieu. To put the matter somewhat differently, at the cultural level the interesting question is not so much about why anyone in a place like Kansas City would undertake a professional boxing career but rather *how* the practice of boxing – and the unique identity of individuals *as boxers* – comes to be articulated and gain significance in such harsh urban contexts.

It was on a scorching July afternoon several years ago that I finally managed, after three unsuccessful attempts, to find Authentic Boxing Club. Housed in the basement of one of the many mostly abandoned ware- and packinghouses in the old industrial district of Kansas City known as the 'West Bottoms', I found the gym – or, more accurately, the entry door to the gym – with the help of a man who, along with two dogs, was scavenging in a dumpster nearby.

'Hey, excuse me, can you tell me where the Authentic Boxing Club is?', I inquired.

‘Man, you standin’ right in front of the muthafucka’, he answered as he looked up, witheringly, through the late afternoon haze of dust and heat.

‘That?’, I said, gesturing toward the two story shell of brick in front of me. He nodded. The old warehouse seemed both threatened and threatening; years of neglect had given it the appearance of being dangerously close to collapsing under its own weight, and this precariousness in turn gave the building the general feel of a place better left un-entered. I circled the warehouse, less as a prospective gym member than as an amateur building inspector. The few windows on the first floor were barred and covered, the gravel lot that surrounded the building was strewn with trash and more than one stripped and burned out car, and one side of the building had no windows at all. Only a heavy metal door punctuated the red brick.

When I opened the door, the smell and the heat were stifling. Bud-dum, bud-dum, bud-dum, ding-ding-ding – the sounds of the bags and timing bell were everywhere, mixing with the hip-hop beats of a thumping boom box. But the gym and the fighters could not be seen. To my immediate right was a staircase. From where I stood all that could be seen was cracked landline telephone dangling from the wall at the base of the stairway.

I hesitated, and was about to leave when the phone rang, and a guy with a silvery ponytail moved into my field of vision to answer it. As he did so, he spotted me and gestured for me to come down. I started slowly down the stairs. By the time I reached the bottom he had hung up the phone.

‘You new?’, he asked.

‘Uhm, yes’, I stammered, peering around the corner and catching my first glimpse of the gym.

‘Yo, we got a live one up in here’, he yelled, to no one in particular. ‘You livin’ in the mission over there?’, he asked.

‘Uhm, no, I have my own place’, I answered, not anticipating the question.

‘I’m Monty. Coach aint here today. Come back tomorrow. Gym hours is Mondays through Thursdays, 5 to 8, and Fridays till 7.’

Returning the next day, I meet coach Edgar. He takes me into his ramshackle office. In a few short sentences, I tell him that I used to box as an amateur, when I was a

kid back in Milwaukee, at the Martin Luther King Community Center. But it has been more than 20 years since I have been in the ring. I say that I want to train, get in shape, work on my skills, be a good sparring partner for his younger guys – in boxing parlance, I offer myself as a 'gym fighter'.

'What about you?', he asks. 'This aint no health club. This gym takes and gives', he says. 'Everyone sweats the same sweat down here. You thinking pro or amateur? Judging by your age, pro would be better for you. Might as well get paid. And I can control who you fight, set up a couple a smokers for you. It's a lota guys will fight just to make some money. You think about what you want from the gym'.

'Ok', I say. Feeling as if I am in over my head, I redirect the conversation.

'So, are there any fees or membership dues or anything'?

'Nope', coach Edgar answers, 'no fees, but it aint free, either; you pay in blood and sweat down here'. He sells me a pair of handwraps and I agree to start the next day.

Weeks go by. With no air conditioning or fans, the gym is so goddamned hot that I come near to fainting during the first weeks. But, eventually, the work starts to feel good, and in another month or so I begin to get some of my skills back. The humidity and the smell and the roaches, the hip-hop lyrics and the sound of the bags and the bell – all these start to become familiar to me.

The gym is ethno-racially diverse – most of the boxers are black, with the rest evenly split between Mexican and white. Later I learn that most of the black boxers live east of Troost Avenue, in an historically black district of the city that continues to serve as a locus of ethno-racial division and enclosure; while most of the Mexican and white boxers reside either in an area known as 'Northeast' or in Kansas City, Kansas, both ethno-racially mixed and largely impoverished parts of Kansas City's urban core.

New guys show up all the time – usually with baseball caps on sideways and crazy bandanas tied on their heads. Coach yells out to them: 'Yo, get that shit off your head. This aint no ghetto up in here'. But no one talks to me, and for a long while I endure a kind of social invisibility.

Then one day one of the guys turns toward me during a minute interval between rounds on the speed bag and asks:

'How long you been boxin'?

‘I used to box as a kid, but it’s been a long time. Over twenty years’, I answer.

‘Damn, that long?’ He pauses, then asks: ‘You been in the joint?’

‘No, nothing like that’, I say.

‘They call me Little Mike’, he says.

‘I’m Joseph’, I answer. The bell rings, and we go back to the bags.

With that exchange I slowly become visible to the other guys in the gym, and in the months that follow I get to know most of the fighters. There’s Rocky, the coach’s son. In his mid-twenties, Rocky has already served often as an ‘opponent’ in the local professional scene. And he has the short-term memory loss to prove it. Once, when I asked him where his upcoming fight was to be held, he responded, ‘Shit, bro, I don’t even know. When you take punches for a living you gotta be somewhere three o’ fo’ times fo’ you remember it’.

Then there’s Dennis, ‘The Punisher’. An ultra-lean welterweight, Dennis is the best pound-for-pound boxer in the gym, and eventually ends up going to Las Vegas to train for a while. In the squalid locker room there is a poster with an image of Dennis alongside Ali. The caption reads: ‘He was just another skinny black kid once, too’. I never found out who made that poster, but I always liked it. And so did Dennis.

There is John, ‘The Terminator’, and Big Will, both big heavyweights; Jesse, ‘The Mexican Assassin’, who has a hell of a temper; Rafael, Maurice, Little Maurice (Maurice’s son), Little John, Ernest, Bud, ‘Pretty Boy’ Keith; and Greg, my frequent sparring partner. In a heated spar later that autumn, Greg does me the courtesy of badly bruising my ribs. I take some time off from the gym to recover, and I am unable to write on the board for a month’s worth of philosophy lectures. I come to find out later, through a chance encounter on my university campus, that Greg is in fact a student in my college. I also get to know Aaron, a decent welterweight who later that year ends up fighting Julio Cesar Chavez, Jr in Madison Square Garden. Aaron got TKO’d in the third round, but he never stopped talking about that trip to New York.

And, in time, I get to know the best female boxer in the gym, Franchesca, ‘The Chosen One’. I remember the day a German film crew was in the gym, doing interviews for some project. It was around the time that Clint Eastwood’s *Million Dollar Baby* had appeared in theatres, and the film crew seemed keen on talking to Franchesca and

drawing parallels between her and the lead character in the film. They asked her what she thought of the film. She answered: 'I wouldn't know shit about that. I'm a hundred dolla baby'. The monetary reference was hardly rhetorical, as professional club fighters in places like Kansas City typically earn $100 per round, with 40% of the total purse going to their promoter.

As time passes I also come to know the other players in the gym: Frank, one of the coach's assistants; Monty, the pony-tailed guy who, as it turns out, owns the warehouse and several others in the area and is the gym's promoter and matchmaker. All the guys hate Monty, whom they refer to as a 'lil' bitch' for the way in which he pressures them to take fights as 'opponents' or on short notice. And I come to recognize a kaleidoscope of others – wives, girlfriends, brothers, sisters, lots and lots of kids, and various associates who come and go and often sit on the four or five beat up plastic chairs that line the exterior wall of coach Edgar's office. The cast of characters varies greatly from day to day. On some days I see nothing but familiar faces. On other days, especially Fridays, of the 5 or 6 people training, only Rocky, Dennis and Aaron are familiar to me.

Along with Rocky, Denis and Aaron, the boxer I get to know fairly well is Erik. A cruiserweight with a 2-3 record, originally from Gary, Indiana, Erik and I typically arrive to the gym early. Sometimes I see him sitting around the corner, leaning against the side of the building, smoking weed. We talk a lot. Erik talks a lot of shit. But he's not much of a boxer. I saw him box once in a local club; he got disqualified in the second round when he grabbed his counterpart and threw him, wrestling style, to the mat.

One late August afternoon Erik and I were waiting for coach Edgar to open up the gym. Coach wasn't late. We were early once again. And Erik was talking about the 'shit' he had to deal with living with all those other 'homeless motha fukhas', as he put it, in the mission. A prostitute walked by, slowly, on her way to Happy Gilmore's, the deli and liquor cornerstore nearby, where you could get a fried chicken sandwich, french fries and a cola for $5.50. As she passed Erik shook his head, turned to me and said:

> 'Man, I know I aint all that either, you know. But its two ways of doin' things – with style, and without. Everybody recognize style…and I got plenty a that. It's all about style, bro, it's all about style…'

A few months later Erik is gone. When I ask Rocky what happened, he says, simply, 'My Pops got sick of his ass'. Someone said later that Erik wound up in East LA. I never heard from him again.

While Erik was a particularly hard case, it would be an understatement to say that, professionally speaking, the boxers at Authentic were nothing special: none of them went anywhere with their careers, they all earned precious little money, and only a few managed winning records. It thus became apparent to me that the gap between the sheer banality of their circumstances and their self-understanding and identities as boxers could only be understood in cultural terms. For indeed, despite their sub-par won-loss records, miniscule earnings, and a professional career that consigned them to fodder within the wider boxing world, the boxers at Authentic articulated and exuded a unique sense of self vis-à-vis their urban milieu. In that local context, where 'everybody recognize style', to borrow Erik's phrase, the practice of boxing and distinction of being a boxer were in themselves expressions of autonomy and an achievement of a kind of style *worth recognizing*. Regardless of one's record, skills, or earnings, simply being a professional boxer was in their world already a mark of distinction: even being recognized as a 'hundred dolla baby' meant, at the very least, being something more than another marginal inhabitant of 'the hood' or 'just another skinny black kid'.

What I came to realize, in other words, was that the unique self-understandings of individual boxers could neither be separated from nor reduced to the urban milieu in which professional boxing in the US is embedded. Culturally speaking, to be a boxer in such places is to engage in a reflexive mode of recognizing and being recognized within a milieu of profound scarcity, violence, and disrespect. In this regard, everyday professional boxers, I came to understand, are never merely bearers of historical forces and socio-economic forces and constraints but also agents who actively scrutinize, negotiate, and transform themselves and their relation to the contexts in which they are embedded.[1]

Indeed, the achievement of such a reflexive agency is remarkable, especially when one considers that most American boxing clubs are located in those sectors of US cities where the state – and the market – have largely retreated and where physical

violence and bodily insecurity is part of the everyday existence. In fact, deprivation, disrespect – and, especially, violence – pervade and largely come to define daily life in such places. The forms of agent-specific physical violence endemic to such spaces are many, and range from episodic street corner disputes regarding women and perceived displays of disrespect, to drug-trade related clashes over territorial control and more orchestrated gang-related retaliations (and here it hardly needs to be said that the bodies of more than a few fighters at Authentic were adorned with gang-affiliated tattoos). In these and countless other moments, an individual's familiarity with and capacity to assert (or withhold) physical violence at the right times and in the right ways is crucial to getting on with everyday life.[2]

Yet in my experience it is clear that any account of professional boxing that reduces participation in the sport to mere individual effects of so-called 'cultures of violence' should be rejected. For it is not just in contexts of agent-specific physical violence that American urban boxing gyms and the fighters who train in them are persistently situated. While such violence takes place in the foreground, as it were, of daily life in 'the hood', there is another kind of violence – one far less apparent – that backgrounds and deeply informs the urban milieu in which boxing is practiced in the US. That is 'structural violence'.[3] Such violence, while certainly related to the agent-specific violence that dominates the foreground of the 'the hood', must be distinguished from it in terms of its functions and effects.

Unlike agent-specific physical violence, structural violence is tacit and seemingly agentless. In the face of structural violence, agents typically feel and yet often struggle to make explicit and grasp the complex functioning and corrosive effects of such an elusive force on their minds and bodies and shared ways of life. Most generally, structural violence amounts to the more or less hidden ways in which macro-level forces constrain agents in ways that place them at risk – or exacerbate existing risks – for physical, economic, psychic, and social harm.

In this regard, structural violence is a particularly insidious mechanism of constraint that engenders human depredation and suffering; it produces what, in another context, Theodor Adorno (1951; 2005) once called 'the damaged life'. Structural violence not only limits what can be thought and/or done. More fundamentally, its

diffusive power and refractive effects make it exceptionally difficult for individuals caught within it to see it and bring it into focus. In this way structural violence not only damages agents but also tends to hinder their power to scrutinize and articulate the causes and effects of that damage. In his study of the 'pathologies of power', the medical anthropologist Paul Farmer describes the link between human suffering and structural violence in Haiti in the following way:

> such suffering is 'structured' by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire – whether through routine, or, as is more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life – to constrain agency[…]. While certain kinds of suffering are readily observable […] structural violence all too often defeats those who would describe it. (Farmer, 2003: 40)

Now, admittedly, Kansas City is not Port-au-Prince. Yet, in the context of a discussion of American boxing gyms and the urban milieu in which those gyms are characteristically located, two interconnected forms of structural violence must be highlighted here for the ways in which they continue to shape the 'hard surfaces' of the daily lives of those individuals most likely to train in places like Authentic Boxing Club.

Ethno-racially, the principles of division and enclosure that inform the history of US cities have proven to be an unexpectedly durable form of structural violence. 'Dark' and 'Brown' ghettos, like the one east of Troost Avenue in Kansas City, persist as the locus of entrapment for many ethno-racial sub-groups. In fact, in built environments of what were once 'institutional ghettos' (Wilson, 1997) – sites of ethno-racial enclosure where residents nevertheless managed to exert a certain measure of social stability, control, and neighbourhood organization – one finds today, amid the striking ruins and decay of once architecturally significant neighbourhoods, profound anomie, isolation, and crushing poverty. These 'new American ghettos' (Vergara, 1995) bear witness to the degeneration of what were once functioning urban *neighbourhoods* to 'the hood'.

In such cases it is evident that the structural violence visited upon certain urban residents cannot be explained merely by appeals to the history of race relations in American cities. One must also consider the more recent ravaging effects of the storm of neoliberalism and concomitant 'globalization-friendly' policy shifts that have disemboweled the manufacturing economies upon which so many urban working-class dwellers once depended for their livelihood, community stability, and economic dignity.

In this way the 'hard surfaces' of the ethno-racialized 'hood' have been made infinitely sharper and harder by the economic forces of neo-liberalism in US urban policy-making.

What makes structural violence in US urban settings so insidious is not merely its effects, but how it comes to operate, subcutaneously, as it were, in the minds and bodies of individuals. Infection-like, the effects of structural violence course through the very being of individual agents and exert themselves continually: one doesn't merely reside 'in the hood'; rather, in time 'the hood' comes to live '*in me*', as the saying goes. The pernicious effects of structural violence – of lives lived in a world where constraints are so durable and demeaning – defeats many of 'those who would describe it', as Farmer suggests. Indeed, the social death toll of structural violence in the American urban milieu is in many respects immeasurable.

Given the prevalence of structural violence inherent in the American 'hood', one might even be tempted to claim that such violence generates precisely the kind of disrespected individuals most likely to offer themselves up, unwittingly, as fodder in professional boxing. Yet the notion that structural violence operates behind the backs – or over the heads – of all those who live in 'the hood' is profoundly misleading. Indeed, one need only listen to the many hip-hop and rap lyrics blaring on any given day in urban boxing gyms throughout the US to hear references not merely to physical violence but also to the causes and alienating effects of structural violence.

Towards the end of my time at Authentic, *College Dropout* (2004), a Kanye West disc, was played almost daily. On one track, 'All Falls Down', West poignantly thematized the reifying power of structural violence:

> It seems we livin' the American dream,
> But the people highest up got the lowest self-esteem.
> The prettiest people do the ugliest things
> For the road to riches and diamond rings.
> We shine because they hate us,
> Floss cause' they degrade us.
> We tryin' to buy back our 40 acres.
> And for that paper,
> Look how low we a' stoop.
> Even if you in a Benz
> You still a nigga in a coupe.

Such lyrics resonated with gym members precisely because they expressed an understanding of the struggle for autonomy and recognition within the limits of a life informed by structural violence. More generally, the local popularity of West's lyrics also unmasks the ideology of the race-transcending rags to riches story-line attached to boxing in the US – a story-line, one might add, that even a successful American boxer like Larry Holmes seemed to believe when he responded tersely to a question about his race by saying, 'I was black once, when I was poor'. What both Kanye West and the professional boxers in places like Authentic who sing his rhymes day in and day out know all too well is that, in the face of structural violence, style and 'shine' – even the kind of lavish display of status enabled by economic success – are never quite enough. In the US, a black man in a Mercedes-Benz is still just a 'nigga in a coupe'.

While there are many ways to explain how and why an individual becomes a boxer, one of the things that always struck me while I was in the gym was how a boxing club functions – almost magnetically – as the locus for the pursuit of freedom and recognition within constraints that individuals have actually chosen for themselves.[4] For in voluntarily submitting themselves to membership in the gym, individuals deliberately choose to impose a wide and seemingly endless variety of limits on their habits of mind and body. Taboos on street-fighting, dietary restrictions, limits on sexual activities during training, continual adjustments to individual responses to pain, fear, and threat of harm in the ring, and the collaborative work of sparring – all these, as I came to understand first-hand in my years at Authentic, are about establishing freely chosen limits on one's own agency. In these and countless other *self*-imposed ways, boxers assert the kind of relative autonomy vis-à-vis constraints that is characteristically put out of reach by the constraints of structural violence in the US urban milieu.[5]

In other words, we might, at least in the US urban context, be justified in thinking of boxing as the *sweet science of constraints*.[6] In boxing, victims of structural violence manage to wrestle a realm of freedom, however limited, from a realm of painful necessity. Electing to adhere to the constraints of boxing – stepping into the gym and becoming, that is to say, a boxer – lends form and content to a unique identity that distinguishes an individual from others within the urban milieu. In the American urban

context, a boxer is not merely someone who fights by the rules and is good with his or her hands – a skilled athlete – but also someone to be recognized as having achieved a certain kind of autonomous urban self. Put differently, the sweetness of the sweet science of boxing lies in how the elective adoption of its constraints enables the reflexive accomplishment and recognition of a form of agency and identity all too scarcely realized in 'the hood'.

In sum, from my vantage point the culture of boxing in US urban settings has little to do with physical violence or even so-called cultures of violence. Instead, American boxers take up a highly reflexive relationship with the durable but elusive constraints tacitly imposed by the force of structural violence in their own urban milieu and opt to pursue a different path in constituting their identities. To be sure, in opting to become boxers, individuals are undoubtedly churned, as it were, in accordance with the economic logic of the sport. But their self-understandings and identities as professional boxers are not reducible to that economic logic. On the contrary, American boxers undertake to constrain themselves in ways that enable unique presentations of self in a world where the conditions of possibility of such a presentation are strictly limited. Such a stylized understanding and presentation of self does not, of course, allow American boxers to escape 'the hood'; autonomy is always relative autonomy. But it does enable them to inhabit and be recognized in that location in a profoundly different way.

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[1] In an insightful boxing ethnography, Loic Wacquant makes a similar point when he suggests that '…boxers decisively realign the structure and texture of their entire existence – its temporal flow, its cognitive and sentient profile, its psychological and social complexion – in ways that put them in a unique position to assert their agency' (Wacquant, 1995: 510). Such a realignment of the 'structure and texture' of an 'entire existence' is, or so I want to suggest here, at the heart of boxing culture in the US.

[2] In this regard, and as Wacquant rightly points out, 'against the backdrop of such a harsh urban environment, boxing can hardly seem particularly violent' (Wacquant, 1995: 497) to those local residents who opt to engage in the sport.

[3] The phrase appears first in Galtung and Hoivik (1971), but is developed more fully in Farmer (2003).

[4] Of course boxing is also, as Wacquant (1995; 2003) has suggested, a profoundly working-class endeavour; boxers understand and typically characterize their practice as 'work', a 'job', a 'living' and so on. But the culture of American boxing, as I hope to have demonstrated here, is less about supplementing low-wage incomes than it is about the reflexive pursuit of autonomy and recognition within a given urban context.

[5] On this point see also Wacquant, who alludes to the appeal of the enabling constraints of boxing when he says that 'for boxers, it [prizefighting] represents the potential means for carving out a margin of autonomy from their oppressive circumstances and for expressing their ability to seize their own fate and remake it in accordance with their inner wishes' (Wacquant, 1995: 501).

[6] In a related but different vein, I have pursued this characterization of boxing in pieces devoted to the philosophy of sport (2007) and Olympic boxing (2012).