

*Dedicated to the memory of James S. Coleman*

## **A fleshpeddler at work: Power, pain, and profit in the prizefighting economy**

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Now every occupation is not one but several activities; some of them are the “dirty work” of that trade.

*Everett C. Hughes*

It is an immense understatement to say that professional boxing is a shady and ill-reputed business, for it elicits odium even among those who make their living off it. The fistic industry, clamors Howard Cosell, America’s leading sportscaster of the seventies, who gained his professional fame hyping Muhammad Ali to television audiences, is nothing more than “a cesspool that calls itself a sport.” With virtual unanimity, fighters, trainers, managers, and promoters readily admit that theirs is a commerce run on manipulation, chicanery, and deceit, an open “meat market” where the strong survive by devouring and discarding the weak.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as powerful and pervasive as these images are, to this day there exists no empirical study demonstrating how such an economy, predicated on distrust, improbity, and the collective expectation of exaction, can hold together.

The following is a sociological report of a segment of the economy of professional boxing in the United States, the first of its kind in the social-science literature. Its purpose is to explicate the sociosymbolic structure and functioning of this “Show Business With Blood” – to invoke Budd Schulberg’s apt expression in his novel *The Harder They Fall*. In addition to being the only sociological study of the pugilistic commerce from the ground up, this article differs from other accounts of the sporting economy in that it is concerned not with aggregate industrial structure, strategy, or performance, but with the processes whereby that economy is assembled and its concrete operation as an ongoing system of collective action and representation.<sup>2</sup>

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This report is one component of an ethnographic study of prizefighting as a subproletarian bodily craft in the American ghetto. It draws on three years of intensive field work in a black gym on the South Side of Chicago, during which I learned to box, worked as a sparring partner and cornerman for my ring mates, and generally observed up-close and in real time the (un)making of the careers of those anonymous “club fighters” who form the backbone of the fistic trade. During my stint as an apprentice at the Stoneland Boys Club, a reputed gym headed by a coach from “the ole school” who took me under his wing and became a virtual surrogate father, I kept an ethnographic diary detailing the actions, events, and dealings that weave the fabric of the pugilistic universe. I also collected life stories of my gym buddies, conducted in-depth interviews with the spectrum of participants in the fistic commerce (boxers, cornermen, managers, promoters, referees, officials, etc.), and sifted through historical and other documentary sources.

As concerns boxing shows more specifically, I attended some fifteen “cards” in the entourage of fighters and trainers, circulating freely among ringside, the bleachers, and backstage areas (including the dressing rooms). I was privy to backroom conversations and private transactions before, during, and after these fights that are normally off-limits to even established insiders and I was able to collect and triangulate the views of key protagonists involved in staging them. Lastly, I taped nearly fifty hours of focused interviews with the main promoters, matchmakers, and managers of the area. As a result, I was able not only to *observe first-hand* most of the practices examined in this article but also to verify information from different – and often antagonistic – sources as well as to compare prospective and retrospective accounts of key turns and stages in the making of fights.<sup>3</sup>

There are two sides to the sociological analysis of the pugilistic economy, that particular space of transactions involving bodies, pain, and money, that looks like a cross among prostitution, the performing arts, soldiering, and bartering. On the supply side, one must explicate the social fabrication of *homo pugilisticus*, the production of the performer: the constitution of the individual fighter as competent practitioner who has both the *ability* and the *desire* to fight, endowed with a conforming pugilistic habitus, that is, a motivated “body-mind complex” re-fashioned in accordance with the specific physical, moral-emotional, and temporal requirements of the craft.<sup>4</sup>

On the demand side, that of the production of the space of consumption, the task at hand is to elucidate the structure of the *pugilistic field*, including the social organization of commercial performances, the rationale of boxing careers and their determinants, and the mechanisms of production of value and of distribution of the resulting streams of material and symbolic profits. Here the focus of analysis shifts from the ghetto as social matrix and the gym as collective machinery geared to the manufacturing of fighters to the multiplex network of objective relations that bind boxers to trainers and managers, promoters, the media, and the public.

One agent is entrusted with effecting, very concretely and methodically, the meeting of supply and demand. That agent is the “matchmaker” – a “fleshpeddler” and a “pimp” according to critics and reprovers of the Sweet science, an honest “businessman like any other” in his own eyes and those of his compatriots. Scrutinizing the trade of the matchmaker reveals a great deal about the prizefighting economy because, as a social hybrid, part-boxing expert and part-merchant, he is like a *miniature-made-man of the pugilistic cosmos*.

The matchmaker is the one who effectuates the mutual *conversion*, and facilitates the *accumulation*, of pugilistic capital and economic capital. He practically reconciles, in and through his person and doings, the two contradictory logics whose inconsonant and contentious interweaving governs the operation of this ruthless commerce: that of bodily skill and that of money, technique and boutique, hot-blooded ring prowess and cold-blooded cash business. The matchmaker concentrates upon himself, and therefore may serve as a living analyzer of, the complex of antipodal forces that crosscut the glitzy and gruesome world of professional boxing.<sup>5</sup>

This article proposes to follow the matchmaker in action in an effort to reconstruct the *practical logic* and the *organizational patterns* that undergird the apparent Brownian movement of his business dealings and thereby dissect the tissue of social relations that both support and arise out of the fistic trade. It may be read at three overlapping levels. As analytic ethnography, it seeks to reconstruct a particular behavioral complex embedded in its relational, cognitive, and cultural matrix. As sociology of work in the mold of the second Chicago school, it offers precise and grounded materials on the “personal and social drama” of a little-known “bastard” occupation.<sup>6</sup> Finally, it is intended as an oblique contribution to the “new economic sociology” in that it attempts to

display in concrete fashion – rather than via mantric incantation – the social construction of a definite economic institution.<sup>7</sup>

On a more methodological note, a lengthy excursus would be necessary to describe the concatenation of social (and epistemological) obstacles that stand in the way of this kind of research inside a closed, secretive, and seemingly “exotic” milieu, terribly mistrusting and apprehensive about the gaze and motives of outsiders. It must be noted briefly that, far from being paranoid, such disquiet among fight people is based upon longstanding experience. As a rule, boxers (and ghetto dwellers more generally) have been of interest to outsiders – journalists, novelists, movie directors, moral entrepreneurs, and even social scientists – mostly if not solely as *precipitates and tokens of social abnormality*.<sup>8</sup> It follows that they have typically been portrayed as either superhuman or subhuman (and sometimes both simultaneously) but almost never as *normal social beings*, i.e., fully conforming with the particular settings that mold and move them.

Suffice it here to register that only persistent *observant participation*, premised upon full personal engagement and deep friendships built over time, enabled me to circumvent these barriers. Only by establishing a bona fide presence in the local pugilistic universe could one hope to relax the manifold censorships, woven into the texture of the social and symbolic figurations that compose it, that systematically truncate the realm of the discoverable and the tellable.<sup>9</sup> Without becoming a “quasi-member” (and paying one’s dues in the ring), one would not have been able to carry out direct, day-to-day observation. And without such naturalistic observation, the interview materials could not have been substantiated, filtered, and properly interpreted, let alone produced in the first instance.

One final caveat: this article relies on a fine-grained analysis of *one* matchmaker to document and illumine the social practices, cultural mores, and economic dynamics of a highly *peculiar* professional and commercial universe, prizefighting. But the problems that this or any matchmaker must resolve *qua middleman*, the divergent or contradictory demands he strives to mesh, the information gaps he labors to enlarge or bridge, the temporal uncertainties and social risks he manages, the calculated gambles he makes day in and day out: these are common to many other exchange scenes – strategies of alliance between lineages or firms, party and parliamentary maneuverings, the publishing industry, and the commerce of art works and sex readily

come to mind. When it is properly constructed analytically, in-depth study of a singular case in a well-bounded empirical context can help us ferret out invariant processes, generic mechanisms, and recurrent dilemmas present in vastly different types of settings.<sup>10</sup>

### **“I’m like someone buying or selling stock”**

“A matchmaker is a guy who starts fights and then gets out of the way.” This is how Teddy Brenner, arguably the most famous matchmaker in modern boxing history, tersely defines his occupation.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, a matchmaker’s job is to hire out bodies for boxing shows called “cards,” featuring a “main event” (in ten rounds) preceded by up to five “preliminary” bouts (four- to eight-round contests) composing the “undercard,” and to match them in ways that are satisfying from both athletic and financial standpoints. He is a *broker*,<sup>12</sup> a crucial intermediary between boxers, managers, and promoters, as well as the hidden master of ceremony on fight night.

Consider Mack, the matchmaker who dominates the fistic market in the greater Chicagoland area. A fifty-year old college graduate and former owner-operator of a dry cleaners chain, of Jewish Russian descent, Mack has been active in this capacity for fifteen years and organizes between three-hundred and five-hundred bouts in any given year. His main pursuit is to *fill the undercard* of boxing shows put on by local promoters (or managers who seek to provide “work” for their charges), which means finding suitable rivals for the fighters scheduled to step into the “squared circle” that night:

A promoter tells you there’s going to be a fight on April the 23rd at such and such a place. I want to use Louis Morelli, I want to use Lorenzo Lynch, I want to use Tony Ebony: find opponents *for these*, at four rounds, six rounds, eight or ten rounds level – whatever the case may be – and enough fights who either satisfy the needs of the show and satisfy the requirements of the State Athletic Commission in whatever place we’re having them. And then whatever else makes sense to you: can you help me, who do you think would be good to make the other fights?

Held in old movie theaters, restaurant parking lots, and high-school gyms, most “club shows” in the Midwest (as elsewhere in the United States) are initiated and bankrolled by the managers of local boxers in need of income and ring experience. Typically, the latter organize these shows under the license of an absentee promotion company and

hire out Mack's services as both matchmaker and production coordinator.<sup>13</sup>

Mack also acts as an independent *booking agent* for a number of Midwestern fighters and their managers, that is, he advertises or sells their services on the regional, national, and foreign markets when contacted by other matchmakers: "There are fighters that are looking for fights, not making a specific show but making a fight. For example, three or four phone calls yesterday and Benny Hamza's now gonna fight on USA Cable [a weekly televised show] on the 10th of September in Miami. 'Cause his people were *desperately* looking for a bout for him so I made some appropriate phone calls.'"

The portfolio of any matchmaker comprises three main species of fighters. At the top are "protected" fighters – *prospects* and *contenders* – who must be carefully matched against weaker opponents to assemble long strings of victories that eventually lead up to title bouts and sizable "purses." Next are *journeymen*, pugs who fight often and capably but can be relied upon to lose if properly (over)matched and whose main role is to help build the record and career of protected fighters.<sup>14</sup> At the bottom of the pugilistic totem pole stand the ill-reputed but ubiquitous *bums* and assorted "tomato cans," "stiffs," and "trial horses": inept, out-of-shape, and older, "washed-up" boxers who get in the ring merely to "pick up a paycheck" and serve as cannon fodder and fill-ins. A subcategory among the bums are "divers," known to take a fall and feign being knocked out as soon as they get hit. They are shunned if possible because they make the fight crowd mad and are living violations of the gladiatorial ethic of the fistic profession (indeed, their purses can be withheld if it is determined that they did not fight properly).<sup>15</sup>

***The journeyman: "He serves a definite purpose on the show"***

A *journeyman* is a fellow that, in all likelihood, will never be a champion but he's capable of fighting almost anyone and will win on a given day and may lose on a given day. Because they will win once a while and make money. And put up a good fight if they're capable.

I'm not talking about somebody who's just [with a smirk of disdain] a *diver* and who's gonna go here and get knocked out in the first round and then show up someplace else and get knocked out in the first round again. I'm not talking about those – those are *bums*, that's something that really has no place in boxing although they seem to succeed.

But the journeymen, the guys who go around and they win some and they lose some, there's a need for them: everybody can't be, everybody can't win every fight, so you've got to have this – *it's a fact of life*. But even your journeyman fighters have different levels of ability. Some of these guys are six-round journeymen. Like that Ron Lewin [a valiant but talentless pug from a small town in rural Michigan whom Mack uses frequently on his shows]. Ron Lewin, he usually gives a good account of himself. [lowering his voice] He's not a winning fighter. If he got in good shape and good gym activities, maybe he would be a better fighter 'cause he knows how to fight, he's had amateur experience and professional. He boxes well enough, he's not getting hurt. He loses more than he wins but he *serves a definite purpose on the show*. Uh, these guys are needed at the six-round level. Maybe an occasional eight-rounder, then he'll turn around and he'll beat other guys that have *been* good fighters but perhaps have slipped enough that they're no longer top-ten or top-twenty. But they're still capable winners, their reputation is such that it means a little something in the boxing fraternity. *There's room for them too*.

In the process of ferreting out appropriate opponents for hometown pugilists, Mack enters into a series of nested negotiations with matchmakers and managers who furnish him with the needed bodies and who themselves are looking for fitting adversaries for their own fighters:

*It's like a shopping list:* I'm looking for this and that and something else; by the same token, you call me and maybe I'm looking for something else or we have things that match and [with a slight frown] *the economics of the fight makes sense*. Like, we're not going to bring a four-round fighter from the Island of Tonga to fight in Gary so you've got them to make sense economically....

I'm calling people, people are calling me. It's *a network*. It's a number of people that are agents for fighters in addition to being matchmakers and, or promoters as I am. And they are booking for people in other areas.... So that's really what I'm doing: I'm sitting, I'm almost like someone *buying or selling stock if you will*. Or perhaps a bookie taking bets on horses. Yes, it's almost like someone in the commodities business, buying-and-selling, that's basically what I'm doing [the tone is very matter-of-fact, even gentle]. I have people that have needs, you have people that have needs, and we try to match it up to make sense.

Concretely, the typical day of a matchmaker takes the form of a seamless web of ramifying phone negotiations, personal appointments, business visits, and conversations in the backroom of boxing gyms and in nearby eateries. Mack operates mainly from the study, kitchen, or living room of his home, a spacious apartment on the twenty-ninth floor of an upper-middle class tower overlooking Lake Michigan (“I

find the lake very resting”). His indispensable tools of work: the telephone (two lines, four receivers, and two answering machines), a fax transmitter, and yellow legal-size notepads in which he scribbles the information gleaned and the transactions struck through the day.

Mack gets up at six o’clock daily and makes phone calls all morning until 11 a.m., starting with his European and East coast correspondents – other matchmakers, promoters, managers, officials, more rarely boxers and media people. The middle part of the day is devoted to visiting boxing clubs in and around the city, wherein he chats with trainers, holds private conferences with managers, and generally keeps up with the gym scene (which fighter is hard in training, in tip-top shape, ready and willing for an imminent card, which is slacking off or drifting away from the ring, etc.). Once his daily inspection of the gyms is completed, Mack returns home for another batch of phone calls, this time to the West Coast: “The phone doesn’t stop ringing until nine-nine-thirty in the evening, and it may go on until around twelve o’clock. I’m sitting looking at television, eating ice cream, drinking pop – doing whatever I’m doing, or listening to old jazz records, *and doing my business.*”

When he is not home working the phones or hanging around the city’s boxing gyms, Mack takes to the road: he spends an average of sixty days a year traveling to shows he has organized in whole or part in other towns, including six to eight trips overseas as the matchmaker and production assistant for a major South American promoter.

### **Constraints and clients**

To manufacture a successful card, the matchmaker must take into account and reconcile three different sets of constraints. The most immediate, and the most readily circumvented, are *bureaucratic constraints*: the matchmaker must abide by the official rules and regulations of the “Boxing Commission” of the state where the show takes place, fill in the requisite paperwork, compile medical certificates and minimal financial documentation for payments, and ensure that the boxers and their seconds are eligible and properly licensed to fight in that state (for instance, a boxer who gets knocked out is suspended and theoretically forbidden from entering the ring for 45 days).

These requirements are easily met or sidestepped altogether, for “despite the appearance of a modern, bureaucratic system in control of the sport, prizefighting [is] conducted under barbaric conditions and control [is] lax or nonexistent.”<sup>16</sup> Oversight is minimal even in the more regulated states such as New York, New Jersey, and Nevada – where “bigtime” shows sponsored by casinos attract heavy media scrutiny. Forty-two of the fifty American states have Commissions (staffed by political appointees of the Governor who generally “can’t tell a left hook from a fish hook”) that oversee pro boxing alongside with professional wrestling. But many are empty shells devoid of resource and authority while others languish under the jurisdiction of the Veterinarian or Dog Licencing Agency or the Bureau of Consumer Affairs. Each Commission also sets its own rules and standards, with little regard or knowledge of how the others operate. The result is bureaucratic cacophony and regulatory ineptitude, the cost of which is born by boxers, who are assuredly the least protected of all professional athletes in the modern era.

***“This fight shouldn’t be”***

I have worked in places where ... there’s mismatches I could see it ahead of time. Or sometimes when I worked on the Commission I saw a mismatch I tell the referee, [whispering intently] “Be careful, *this fight shouldn’t be.*” Maybe I didn’t approve the match, but the supervisor went over my head and they said yeah and okayed it. Lotta matches I won’t approve, but somebody else would go over – ahead of me, a higher authority would okay it....

But y’know, [the matchmaker] has things ... he’s got *the ticket seller*, Tony LaRussa or whoever he may be, because he’s got a ticket seller that he’s gotta use, yeah. It’s a shame that, say your fighter’s a class B fighter, they can’t find a class C fighter for him instead of a class D fighter, y’know. I mean somebody that’s not gonna win but at least put up a good fight. Instead they go, y’know, *D minus* fighter: they get a guy they gotta *dig up outa the ground* [taps his foot on the floor, exclaiming wearily], that’s terrible.

*Referee, 50, former boxer with 24 pro fights*

In addition, matchmakers typically know members of the Commission on a first-name basis so that they routinely get away with even grievous violations of the rules. One example: on paper, Commissions are supposed to reject blatantly uneven bouts, such as between an up-and-

coming star with a 17-and-0 record and a worn-out ringhorse with 10 defeats in 12 fights. Reality, however, is that glaring “mismatches” are frequent and eleventh-hour substitutions with inadequately prepared or unfit fighters are common fare, as are improper or fictitious physicals, forged licenses and unenforced suspensions, manipulation of the fighter’s record and ranking, weight and age falsification, and name switching.<sup>17</sup> It is no secret that many full-time “opponents” (i.e., pugs willing to take any bout on the road strictly for money) compete under different aliases in different locations so as to evade rules:<sup>18</sup> “They get knocked out on Tuesday in Indiana and they go to Illinois on Thursday and get knocked out and they go to Wisconsin on Saturday and get knocked out,” winces a referee who served on the Illinois Boxing Commission for years and laments the fact that the latter has no means of checking a fighter’s identity since licenses do not bear pictures.

Next come *economic constraints*: a club-level matchmaker must stay within a provisional budget, ensure that expenses are properly handled, help stimulate sales, and assist if necessary with publicity and other promotional activities (such as interviews with the town press and commercial sponsorship if any is to be garnered) in order to maximize the gate and other revenues. This requires a great deal of business intelligence because the pugilistic environment is one in which uncertainty is pervasive, opportunism runs rampant, and few parameters hold steady for very long.

Budgets for boxing cards vary enormously depending on the level, repute, and venue of the event. World-title fights with mass-media appeal staged by major promoters in the casinos of Las Vegas and Atlantic City are multi-million-dollar affairs.<sup>19</sup> A “club show” in the Midwest is an altogether different undertaking: it costs between 10,000 and 15,000 dollars and generates on average half to two thirds of that sum in revenues. Most boxing shows do not break even on account of the meager crowds they attract, unless they are “subsidized” by television monies. As we shall see below, the resulting financial losses are absorbed by the promoter or manager(s) who organize the card (and then write them off as business expenses), not by the matchmaker who receives a flat fee and/or a percentage of the purses. The main item on the books is the purses for the fighters, followed by insurance premiums, the rental costs for the hall, ring, and related equipment and personnel (ushers and security); then come public-relations expenses and fees for the Commission, judges, referees, ring doctor, and paramedics, not to

forget the “card girls” who exhibit their alluring physiques in between rounds (for 25 to 100 dollars each, “and not necessarily by the beauty of the girl”).

Last, but not least, the matchmaker faces *pugilistic constraints*: he must pair boxers in terms of style, competence, and experience so as to produce entertaining bouts. “We want to make *fights that are competitive*. We’re not trying to.... We don’t want a bunch of one-round knock-outs. We don’t want six fights, [in a disgruntled voice] the show starts at eight o’clock and at 8:50 you’re on your way home.”<sup>20</sup> A well-known boxing adage has it that “styles make fights”: a “slugger” versus a “scientific boxer” or a “brawler” against a “counterpuncher” are likely to yield visually exciting contests. But a face-off between two “counterpunchers” will likely turn into a long and tedious bout while awkward, defensive-minded, boxers with enough ring savvy can make any adversary look bad.

It’s up to me, a number of fighters, to know their style or be able to speak to someone who does know their style, to make a match that’s going to be pleasing. We don’t always succeed. Sometimes we have last minute substitutions [in a soft, rustling voice] where you’re looking *for bodies* more than you are abilities. But you really try to make all good fights....

I’ve got to know, uh, some fighters they take fights and they pull out all the time. I’ve got to know the people that are *reputable*, that I can deal with. And I’ve got to be aware that, hey! [taking on a dead-serious tone for emphasis] the fighter didn’t get knocked out last week in Biloxi, Mississippi, ’cause that would be against all the rules.

At the same time, however, the matchmaker must protect the “house fighter” and those boxers whose careers, should they develop, will spawn significant income of which he stands to reap a percentage. Tipping the scale in favor of his own men (or those of the promoter who hired him to bring in opponents) works against making even matches, especially considering that the matchmakers on the other side of the fence are out to achieve much the same objective. The end-result, all too often, is a series of grossly lopsided contests in which seasoned pugilists administer brutal beatings to nondescript pugs who “can’t spell fight.” One winter when I was out of town, a coach from Stoneland described to me a card held at a North Side night club in those words: “It was a *saaad affair*. Dorry had a bad fight, they gave ’im a decision but, really, he lost it. Him and his brother, they two *fat hogs* – outa shape, they got no biz’ness bein’ in the ring.... Then they had Pat Dolan, he fought a guy, *they found ’im in a tavern*. [That same

evening?] Yeah. That's how sad it was. So he sat down in the fourth [round], he didn' have no gas 'cause he didn't even train."

When these different parameters come into conflict, as they are wont to do, financial considerations invariably prevail: "Boxing is no charity," the manager of a comrade from Stoneland once lectured me after one of his weekly afternoon meetings with Mack in the backroom of the gym. "*We're in the business of making money outa fights*, we're not in here for any other reason." Having a "ticket seller" on the card is ultimately a more pressing concern than making equitable fights, even if that means matching him with a talentless foe who "can't break an egg." Finding cheap and disposable opponents to showcase the hometown fighter and help him "pad" his record will always hold priority over pairing two solid boxers against each another – and why would the latter want to face one another for "pocket change" anyway? This explains why, paradoxically, mediocre fighters out of form and contention with long losing records find it easier to get on cards than their more proficient compatriots. A young light-heavyweight from the Fuller Park gym on the city's South Side mulls: "Your bums, man, they the ones tha's makin' the goo' fighters" from the standpoint of the matchmaker, "so they're workin' more so that I am, so tha's the source of they're makin' money, man. Like Goodtime Floyd an' all those guys, y'know, he use to fight his butt off, man, an' they were *usin'* him."

Given the marketing premium put on being undefeated, a hometown fighter looking for a "tune-up fight" before a serious "money fight" would be foolish to risk tarnishing his record by stepping into the ring with a "live opponent" (i.e., an inferior but capable fighter with a reasonable chance of pulling an upset) when he can make short work of a "shot" fighter long past his retirement day. On top of it, most fight fans are "squares" who can hardly tell the difference between a skilled ring gladiator and a "workhorse" or a street brawler, so why worry?

#### ***Why "bums" get in the ring***

Financial difficulties, pay that rent, put food on d'table, when they have no other means of supportin' they rather go in an' get *they head beat off* for two hundred dollars than uh, go to jail for robbin' a store. [Really, these guys are that desperate?] They're doin' somethin' that they don't wanna do but they gotta.... It's a paycheck. If they get hurt too serious, they know how to take a dive then – we got lots of 'em in Chicago that do that.

*Jeremy, black cruiserweight, 34, 10-year pro*

It's still the fact that, when they're out in that ring, they're *somebody*. On the streets, nobody, you know, they're *nothin'*, nobody looks up to 'em, and so forth. Even with that 3 [victories] and 16 [defeats] record, which you carry into the ring, *you're still*, [extra emphatic] *a MAN*, you know, when you step into that ring.

*Ken, black middleweight, 29, 3-year pro*

That's all they know: boxing. And that's a good way to make money. They like *professional losers*, that's more or less what they are, professional losers, just to make a paycheck. [Even for that little 150 or 200 bucks that they get?] Why, for, how you say it, you go four rounds, less than 30 minutes, you gonna make 400 bucks, okay, right? *You can't beat that paycheck nowhere*. (clamorously) *You don't even make that much money! As a school teacher! You don't make 400 bucks for 30 minutes. [LW: I wish I did!]* (We both laugh)

*Mario, black welterweight, 37, 2-year pro*

The search for and pairing of fighters work in cascade-like subsequences, one negotiation leading to another, the conclusion of a deal paving the way for other transactions. Decisions are highly “indexical” in the ethnomethodological sense<sup>21</sup> because all the variables – who to fight, were, when, how, for how much money, and at what risk – must be grasped synthetically in the concrete pragmatic context of which they are so many interrelated expressions (what Husserl called “occasional expressions”). They are also highly “path-dependent” as well as projective: like a good chess player, a good matchmaker is always thinking and strategizing two or three fights ahead of the present one and taking into account future options he avails himself or forecloses when selecting a given path.

To reduce the scope and cost of data gathering, matchmakers resort to the *clientelization* of particular gyms who become steady suppliers of fighters and of promoters who offer regular outlets for them on their shows.<sup>22</sup> A trainer from Stoneland explains: “That’s why you see Mack comin’ t’our gym, ’cuz we got fighters ready to go ev’ry month. (nodding heavily) *E-ve-ry month*. You want three fighters? Boom! we got ’em here. They can depend on us. (Whereas in other gyms?) They see the guys disappear, they don’t stay in d’gym. That’s one reputation [coach] Richie an’ me [are] known [for]: we keep fighters. *We keep ’em*.” Resilient chains of permutation of information, bodies, and monies are thereby

constituted, centered on, and activated by the matchmaker, that take on many of the properties of “quasi-firms”<sup>23</sup> and facilitate market coverage, quality control, and commercial surveillance. In addition to stabilizing circuits of supply and demand, clientelization allows the matchmaker to acquire the “goodwill” – defined as those “sentiments of friendship and the sense of diffuse personal obligation which accrue between individuals engaged in recurrent contractual economic exchange”<sup>24</sup> – that enable him to call on the assistance of a broad array of parties in his everyday dealings as well as in situations of crisis. He can call on them to replace a “main-event” fighter who gets injured (or reneges on his engagement because a more profitable offer has materialized elsewhere) on the eve of the show, or when one of the preliminary opponents fails to turn up or insists on getting more purse money at the footsteps of the ring.

### **“Grinding out deals every kinda way”: The fine art of haggling**

In most cases, a matchmaker who intends to sign a boxer on a particular card bargains not with him but with his manager, his agent, or eventually his trainer. Protocol dictates avoiding direct contact with fighters to obviate the suspicion of “tampering” (that is, maneuvering to pry a boxer away from his managerial team). Dealing with an intermediary has the added advantage of inserting an emotional and socioeconomic buffer between transactors. But many club fighters are “unattached” and most managers today are novices shorn of pugilistic competency and connections, who in effect abdicate strategic decision-making to their matchmaker.

The typical manager is an impenitent enthusiast of the Manly art with an entrepreneurial background (60 percent of managers in Illinois are small-business owners and another 25 percent professionals such as lawyers and physicians specializing in sports and entertainment) but little boxing experience. He knows next to nothing about the technical and economic aspects of the trade and he cannot but rely heavily on the expertise and advice of matchmakers (and trainers). Thus it is that Mack exerts a commanding influence over the destiny of those pugilists who strive to make a name for themselves in and around Chicago. Indeed, for many of them, he is *de facto* manager or co-manager inasmuch as he sets the direction, form, and pace of their career trajectory by deciding how and how often to use them on his and other cards – without being formally accountable for it before either the fighter or the Commission.

Like most independent matchmakers, Mack does not have a rationalized filing system for systematically reviewing and weighing his options. Rather, he relies on informal listings of fighters (with their weight class, record, and the phone number of their trainer or manager) featured on his past cards and on various semi-official boxing registers such as *The American Record Book*.<sup>25</sup> Mack is acquainted with great many more boxers from watching shows (live and on television) and keeping abreast of the boxing press; others he knows of *ex auditu*. He also routinely calls upon his colleagues and on the state Commission (which compiles partial and often outdated records) and requests customized information from Ralph Citro, a renowned New Jersey cutman-publicist who will fax records for a fee out of a computerized data bank he has compiled on a moment's notice. For further scanning or detail, Mack gets on the boxing grapevine. Given his extensive connections, it does not take him long to piece together basic data on the style, build, mindset, reliability, and track record (wins, losses, and percentage knockouts) of a potential customer. Due to the heterogeneity of products, information search and negotiation are *intensive* in Rees's understanding of the notion:<sup>26</sup> they entail ascertaining, and agreeing upon, many facets of the fight(er) under consideration rather than fully scouting out possible competing alternatives.

The purse paid for a "preliminary" bout is set, at the lower end, by customary rates and, at the upper end, by the budget allotted to the "undercard" by the promoter. Boxers fighting four, six, and eight rounders in the Chicago area typically make between 150 and 500 dollars, while "main event" fighters collect two to eight times this much. There is little room for give-and-take there but everything else is up for grabs: "*There are no rules: it's whatever you can work out. We're just gonna make the fight happen.*" The exact identity and proficiency of the opponent, the number of rounds, the weight range, whether travel, accommodation, and food expenses will be reimbursed (and for how many persons), the mode of remuneration, future fight considerations: because nothing is prepackaged and little is formally regulated, the spirit of bargaining infects all dimensions of any one deal.

*It depends on everything.* It depends on so many variables that it's very, very difficult to say.... It's not like you go to the book and see, "this is what it is." It's not like, you can get your car fixed at a dealer's: the dealer's gonna open the book, [snaps his fingers] "well, yes, to put in a new water pump is gonta cost X dollars in labor and the water pump cost so much, thus this job is gonta cost you so many dollars." It's not like that. You're *grinding out deals every kinda way*.<sup>27</sup>

For example, as regards payment, some fighters elect to receive a percentage of the tickets they sell to friends and supporters in lieu of a purse because they hope to make more that way – this is notably the case of a couple of white fighters with large and devoted followings. Others get their managers to put up part or all of their purse (and/or sometimes the purse of their opponent!) or agree to forego travel expenses because they are eager to get on the card and “stay sharp” or shake off “ring rust” after a lengthy layoff. Yet others consent to a reduced purse, to facing a heavier or more skilled foe, or to fighting for fewer rounds (which translates into fewer dollars) in the hope of being accorded a good spot on a future card. As Mack puts it, “the deals fluctuate, no deal is the same, every deal is different.” Keeping active and getting exposure to garner name recognition – first locally, then regionally and, for a happy few, nationally – is a critical consideration for club fighters who want to build a career and this makes them pliable partners for the matchmaker who controls local fight opportunities as well as access to the broader market.

The nexus of personal contacts through which communication flows also serves to *extract commitment and to enforce agreements*. For the contract signed on the morning of the fight at the official “weigh-in” is worth about as much as the paper it is printed on. Such disagreements and conflicts as arise are resolved through individual and group pressure, ostracism, and (threat of) boycott – and in some cases physical intimidation. Unlike at the higher reaches of the boxing business, where lawsuits (like personal dragonnade) are prevalent, legal sanctions are rarely resorted to because they are unfit to regulate business relations that are primarily non-contractual.<sup>28</sup>

To hammer out an agreement for a fighter one represents demands an acute sense of the opportune moment, the *kairos* for striking the best possible deal. If the matchmaker accepts an outside offer too quickly, he may undersell his boxer – and himself – by agreeing to a purse below the allowable maximum (or to unfavorable terms for weight, travel, accommodation, etc.). If he persists in trucking and dickering for too long, however, he may lose out to a competitor since the promoter at the other end can turn at any moment to another purveyor of bodies. Reflecting on an attractive offer from a Philadelphia matchmaker to a Chicago fighter that vanished in thin air while the latter’s manager was mulling over the contract, Mack elaborates: “If somebody calls you and you really don’t give them anything of a definite nature, you can’t wait five or six days to do it because the man has to

stop looking: *he's a very poor matchmaker if he would stop looking completely dependent upon this.*" In each and every case, all the variables must be held and weighed together in a timely, accurate, and efficient manner.

Matchmaking thus requires a highly improbable combination of competencies. To be a successful artisan of boxing shows, one must have not only *business acumen* and an excellent *pugilistic eye* to assess the moral and physical qualities, style, career track, and earnings potential of literally hundreds of boxers – one must also display sharp *social skills*, the taste and capacity for accumulating social capital, and a deft sense of how to play upon and cross the social boundaries (between classes, ethnic groups, and business cliques) that transect the pugilistic milieu.<sup>29</sup>

### **Collusion and collision**

Aside from fringe free-lancers who operate intermittently on a local level (as an aside or supplement to another primary occupation) and from colleagues in the salaried employ of large promoters such as the four “majors” who nearly monopolize the upper tier of the boxing business (namely, Don King Productions, Bob Arum’s Top Rank Inc., Main Events led by rock promoter Shelly Finkel and manager-trainer Lou Duva, and Cedric Cushner), there are twelve-odd reputed, national-level matchmakers in the United States today. They share the market among themselves according to an intricate *division of labor that fuses collusion and collision*, multisided cooperation and cut-throat competition. These dozen operators are in ongoing contact with one another and they trade information and favors in a variegated intertwining of mutual obligation, dependence, and (mis)trust. For it is with matchmakers as with the bazaars of the Moroccan market anatomized by Clifford Geertz: “Everything rests finally on a personal confrontation with intimate antagonists. The whole structure of bargaining is determined by this fact: that is it a communication channel evolved to serve the needs of men at once coupled and opposed.”<sup>30</sup>

Certain matchmakers specialize in the European export of “opponents” suitable to continental promoters who seek to “build” their boxers by featuring them against reputed but harmless American pugs. Another, under the label Aztec Productions in Los Angeles, concentrates on the mass import of Mexican fighters “a dime a dozen”

while a colleague targets a particular ethnic niche such as furnishing half-way capable white boxers, who are at a great premium (especially in the heavyweight division) owing to their near-extinct status. The brunt of their activity, though, centers on and around a definite *geographical zone* whose borderline they patrol with equal vigilance and diffidence. This is because fine-grained, up-to-date, personal, on-the-ground knowledge of the gyms, fighters, managers, promoters, and venues of a given area gives any matchmaker a decisive competitive edge over potential rivals.

Similarly grounded connoisseurship of the amateur boxing scene is also a valuable asset since today's amateur gyms and tournaments are the breeding ground of tomorrow's professionals. On this count, Mack shall not be easily outdone. He is one of the co-owners of the Golden Gloves (the most famous annual amateur contest of the region) and actively participates in its marketing every winter. He sits on the Board of Directors of the Illinois Amateur Boxing Association and on several of its committees (including finances and licensing). He is also President of the oversight committee of one of the main gyms of the city run by a charitable organization. And he donates his services as a judge at amateur shows throughout the state, on account that "I feel that somehow I'm repaying a debt."<sup>31</sup>

It is thus unlikely that a competitor will irrupt and successfully challenge Mack on his turf, for the simple reason that "they'll know the market less than me, they're gonna find out they're going to have to come to me. It's almost impossible for them not to." Within his own province, any matchmaker has the inside track when it comes to the "contexting activity"<sup>32</sup> whereby particulars are assembled into a meaningful setting for pugilistic action. But Mack is second to none when it comes to homefield advantage.

***"We're a lil' tight fraternity"***

The main thing, I have to have rapport with a great many people. I'll have an Angelo Dundee [former trainer-manager of Muhammad Ali and Sugar Ray Leonard, who is still active], he may call me up: "Jack, uh, I've got an offer to fight such and such a fighter, I'm not familiar with him. Do you know him?" And we exchange information like that.

Never a day goes by, John Boz, who's the *biggest agent in the world*: Johnny and I speak *every day* if it's only to discuss the fact that, (mirthful)

how many, that he's trying to taper off from drinking so much Coca Cola, 'cause he's getting high off Coke now. We talk, we *socialize* with each other, we talk, it's a lil' tight fraternity. There are three or four agents in the business I talk to every day. Even if we have nothing going, we just talk. I mean, we're personal friends. Mike Akry, who's [Panamanian legend] Roberto Duran's promoter, is a friend of mine. Mike and I talk every day. We plan sometimes the shows where we can get together so we can go have dinner or we can go do things together, go places.

Occupational ideology holds that matchmakers are a “tight little fraternity” who work smoothly with one another. Reality is more complex and ambiguous, for each tries to beat the others to the punch and place his own boxers in the best possible position. In this informational *bellum omnes contra omnium* that is the commerce of fights, one matchmaker will on occasion undercut a rival and “steal a fight” from him or paint a particular offer from a distorting angle. Such behavior, however, is limited by the generalized dependency that binds matchmakers to one another: each needs to secure minimal collaboration from his competitors in order to peddle his wares, and all crave and reward accurate information as well as forthright conduct. Those who violate the accepted code of “antagonistic cooperation” (to recall W. G. Sumner’s felicitous expression) find themselves ostracized and excluded from deals.<sup>33</sup> Their reputation is promptly tarnished by rumor, gossip, and negative recommendations, and their share of the market shrinks accordingly. A bad matchmaker is quickly identified and known as

a fellow that talks of shows that never happen. Or he talks one thing and then the money doesn't come out right or the man has an Athletic Commission that's not on top of the situation. They're *scrambling*, trying to get the money together to pay you. Or the man doesn't keep his word on who the opponent is going to be, or he uses a poor quality hotel for the fighters to stay. It's just a lot of things that go into it. Every little thing adds up.

A *hybrid organizational arrangement* thus takes shape, wherein the top matchmakers form horizontal, “symbiotic cliques,” characterized by more trusting and equal relations, which themselves relate to lower-level operators in the boxing business as vertical, top-down, “parasitic cliques,”<sup>34</sup> engaged in unequal exchange, grafting, and extortion. Along with professional expertise and proficiency, personal acquaintance and friendship help determine who falls where in this complex social structure. Equitable “relational contracting”<sup>35</sup> is facilitated by fraternization and interpersonal affinity but the latter is not an absolute prerequisite:

“It’s much easier to deal with people face-to-face than it is by phone,” acknowledges Mack, but then “there’s some people that you’d rather deal by phone!” Most networks of matchmaking are composite entities:

Some of them have [personal] relationships, some of them are strictly business people. There’s people I’ve dealt with for years, they’re just *voices on telephones*. I’ve never seen them. Yet we’ve dealt over a long period of time.

Q: And you managed to build a level of trust?

It works out, it all works out if you say you’re gonna do something, you’ve gotta do everything in your power to see that it does happen.

Matchmakers who are close confrères will more readily team up to share a deal and join forces to fill a big order, particularly from European promoters hungry for periodic shipments of second-rate American prizefighters. As a rule, the more distant and complementary the geographical and sectoral locus of activity of two matchmakers, the more cooperative and collusive their relationship, and conversely. As Mack remarks, “it’s always a case of *meshing things together*.”

***“We have deals that we split”***

See, there: Bruno Landini in Milan is back working on a series of shows again. He’s an old account that’s come back to life. He’d stopped and now they’re back in the business again. So that’s an account – I made a lotta money with them myself but, (with an appreciative chuckle) Ronnie made *big dollars* with them.

That [phone conversation] was Johnny Boz, my friend agent in Florida, and he and I worked together. He called from Milan to Johnny Boz in Florida and Johnny made a three-way hook-up and I’ll get the passports for the fellahs that we send over, in addition to getting a number of the fighters. Johnny and I will work together. We’ll be sending those guys to Milan and to other cities in Italy....

A lot of the deals that you make, a lot of the agents, we work together. We have deals that we split: we *divide* a number of deals. Mmm, like, when they start out in Italy, the man may need ten or twelve fighters a month. Maybe Johnny Boz will get seven or eight of them, maybe I’ll get four or five. The next month maybe I get seven, and in the meantime (pausing briefly for emphasis) we’re collecting fees.

In the manner of members of a customary exchange ring in a precapitalist community, then, matchmakers are held to common standards of

reciprocity and propriety by the very structure of the transactions that tie them through time and space. Neither authority, nor blind market mechanisms, nor legitimacy holds them in check, but the sheer imbrication of the endless circle of boxing intelligence, (ab)usable bodies, and dollars that connects them to one another in a manner such that “oppositions crosscut cohesions.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Control through fealty**

At the level of club boxing, the “regulation of the market” is effected less by tradition, bureaucratic governance, or legal oversight than by “voluntary action arising from the structure of interests,” a structure in which the matchmaker clearly holds the upper hand since he alone controls the “means of profit-making” (*Erwerbsmittel* in Weber’s lexicon): timely and dependable knowledge of the persons, places, and procedures indispensable to the successful assemblage of pugilistic events and careers.<sup>37</sup>

By virtue of his strategic location at the node of the crisscrossing flows of information and transactions that span the local arena and tie it to outside suppliers and customers, the matchmaker dictates the terms and tempo of performances and thereby of income distribution. “He ha’ the game pretty well locked up,” growls a veteran who has gone to battle around the world since turning pro a decade ago. “If you don’t go *his* way, you don’t dance.” In today’s moribund and shrinking pugilistic market, fight opportunities are a scarce and highly sought-after commodity among preliminary boxers and their managers.<sup>38</sup> It is they who are chasing the chance to get on cards, not the other way around.

In point of fact, a fighter from the Midwest is privileged if he gets to “rumble” every three months or so. To “keep busy” and get winnable bouts, it is essential that he and his manager entertain smooth business relations with the matchmaker. This often means agreeing to fight on terms imposed by (and favorable to) the latter, on pain of being marginalized, nay quarantined and even blacklisted should serious disagreements flare up. To the accusation of monopolistic extortion, Mack responds coolly that no one is forced to take a fight they do not want; that the area’s boxing scene could not accommodate another matchmaker of his grade; and that he delivers the goods: “*I’m competitive* out there in the marketplace: I will hustle hard, I will work hard to make matches and do shows.” The proof of the pugilistic pudding, after all is said and done, he insists, is in the eating:

If somebody wants to come along and give it a try, *fine!* But I don't really think the market will stand it. I think if anybody is going to come in, they're gonna have to be *knowledgeable of boxing*. [with a derisive chuckle] I don't think somebody's gonna just stumble in, get a hold of three phone numbers, and consider themselves to be a matchmaker.

Yet it remains that, if they chafe at their feudal status in the fistic society and voice their disgruntlement too loudly, fighters will get squeezed out of the action. Or they will get stripped of the protection they enjoy, in those cases where the matchmaker categorized them as potential achievers, and get treated instead as just another “piece of meat” on the market. Of a fighter who chose to migrate to Las Vegas to try his chance at the “big time” there over and against his advice, Mack says sententiously: “[picky tone] If he comes back to Chicago, I *might* – I'll *use him*, but I'll use him *jus' as an opponent with somebody else*: if he wins okay, if he loses okay. I mean, [exhaling deeply] *who cares?*”

***“They got that little circuit among each other”***

I did have one fight where I pulled out of it because it wasn't like what I thought it was s'posed to be, you know, at the last minute and so forth. [gesturing in frustration] I was told *this* opponent and *that* opponent and *this* opponent – and then finally I just said, “Forget it!”, you know? And matchmakers pick up the phone and talk to each other: they, [in a harsh voice] “you know this fighter named Dolan? Arrh, he did this-an'-that to me, you know, I wouldn't trust him too much.” You know, they got that *little circuit among each other*. They, *blackball ya, yeah!* It's a very – you know, the fighter has very little say-so in this business. I mean, you can't like run from one to the other.

*Lester, 32, black welterweight, six-year pro*

When it comes to those privileged combatants he does watch after and intends to “build,” Mack exacts exclusive usage of their services by requiring that their managers turn away any business opportunities tendered by rival matchmakers. In the following interview fragment, he repines about a manager who “is flattered people [from out-of-state] who offer him fights and [who] doesn't want to tell anybody no” even though “he doesn't have the knowledge or wisdom to evaluate the good of a fight.”

I can't deal, do anything for a fighter that, on the one hand, I'm assuming that I am going to be responsible for obtaining him the proper fights to try to further his career where, [irritated] while I'm doing one thing, you have a manager that's meddling around doing something else and *Jimbo* [the fighter] *is not that important a cog in MY machine*, that I'm going to just tell him, "hey! go do all of your own business." I'm not telling you I won't use your fighter but I certainly won't make any additional efforts to do that.... That's my feeling and if Jimbo does indeed do this I wash my hands off him completely.

Perhaps the most widespread lamentation among run-of-the-mill boxers after not getting enough fights is that they are not being properly matched so as to be able to grow into the champion they are (virtually all) convinced they can be. It is a harsh but inescapable fact of pugilistic life that only a tiny contingent of the fight corps is building careers; most pugs are being *built upon*, employed as stepping stones in the climb of the successful few to the top. Those who get "thrown to the wolves," "used like dogmeat," and "fed" to higher-gauge foes with virtually no chance of scratching a win cannot help but feel cheated and aggrieved. The structure of the pugilistic field is such that, even if his conduct and personality were impeccably righteous, the vast majority of fighters would still nourish deep-seated resentment at the matchmaker for being the executor of their misshapen fistic fate.

***"They usin' these guys for dogmeat"***

So these promoters ain't really with these guys okay, in Chicago area, unless it's a really-really-really *hot guy*, okay, undefeated record an' he's really hot, but other than that, [bitterly] they usin' these guys for *dogmeat*: when dogs get hungry they feed it to'em, that's what they doin', to better somebody else record.

*Freddie, 30, Jamaican cruiserweight,  
3 victories and 4 defeats, one-year pro*

**Blood money**

Money – whence it comes, where it goes – is the next major source of pervasive friction, suspicion, and conflict in the pugilistic economy. This is no surprise considering that we are dealing here not with "colorless" but with *tainted money*, "blood money," begotten by sweat, pain, and tears, by selling, risking, and eventually ruining, the very

asset that young (sub)proletarian men from the ghetto value the most, namely, their martial, manly body.<sup>39</sup> As with prostitution, which is its structural analogue on the other side of the gender line, the cash nexus in prizefighting carries weighty moral baggage. Try as they may, participants in the fistic commerce hardly treat money as “culturally neutral” and “socially anonymous.”<sup>40</sup>

Another source of brewing disharmony and soreness is the fact that all financial dealings are carried out *sub rosa*. More generally still, a thick veil of secrecy enshrouds pecuniary practices and knowledge in the pugilistic world: boxers, managers, and trainers rarely talk about how much they (hope to) earn, and who gets what from whom, even among themselves. This situation of “pluralistic ignorance” feeds misevaluation and malentendu, particularly over the role and prerogatives of the matchmaker in the financial circuits of prizefighting.

The income of the matchmaker flows from distinct sources that cumulate or compensate each other depending on their periodicity and overlap in time. Here too, the geometry of deals and payment is *context-sensitive, person-dependent, and event-tailored*. As booking agent, Mack collects 10 percent of the purses of the fighters he rents out to promoters (unless they fall below a minimum of around 400 dollars, in which case the boxer gets to retain his entire purse).<sup>41</sup> When he hires opponents for an undercard, Mack’s customary “finder’s fee” is more frequently paid by the promoter. And sometimes the latter will throw in a bonus of a few hundred dollars to help round out a show for which the purses total in the seven-to-ten thousand dollar range.

This configuration is such that the matchmaker can easily connive to get paid on both ends of a deal. This reprobable practice, christened *double dipping*, is not uncommon and virtually impossible to check because boxers almost never encounter promoters in person and they are not apprised of the overall monies turned over for a given show. *Double contracting* is another grafting contrivance that works as follows: a matchmaker receives from an outside promoter a solid offer to feature a local boxer in a semi-main event for a purse of, say, four-thousand dollars; he redrafts the contract and relays it to the fighter’s manager with an amputated purse of twenty-five hundred dollars – and pockets the difference, which, added to his standard cut of 10 percent, yields a gain of 1,750 dollars. Again, boxers have little chance of detecting this type of legerdemain since they rarely so much as see

their final fight contract until the day of the bout and typically do not bother to read it even then. A similar attitude is commonplace among managers, who rarely have any direct contacts with outside promoters anyway. Mack correctly points out that “you’re dealin’ with people that sometimes *on both sides don’t know what the hell the contract is.*”<sup>42</sup>

When he handles the entire “coordination” of a show, bringing in and accommodating fighters from out of town, transportation, food, posters, VIP seating arrangements, gloves, and so on, sometimes even the beer and hot-dog concession, Mack charges a flat fee, negotiated beforehand with the promoter as a function of the caliber of the fights and projected attendance. Thus he recently received \$1,500 for a successful downstate show bringing in a live gate of \$15,000 in which two local fighters headlining the card were paid comparatively high purses of \$2,500 each. But it happens that the card bombs out and then the planned remuneration has to be reduced accordingly: “I’ve had shows that I haven’t collected a fee for doin’ it because the promoter has lost his tail an’ uh, hey! *fine*, I’ll donate my services.” Such generosity is not as disinterested as might appear. For in those cases, as in “relational contracting” more generally,<sup>43</sup> preserving a serene working relation with a promoter takes precedence over obtaining due payment for services. Agreeing to carry an imbalance or absorbing a temporary loss, instead of insisting on settling the account on the spot, is an investment toward future deals. It spawns bonds of obligation and inspires trust among other actual potential customers.<sup>44</sup>

Compensation to and from other matchmakers is similarly arranged on a deal-to-deal basis and differs from one interlocutor to the next. “Some people call me to do something I won’t take a penny from them,” expounds Mack, “others, hey! They owe me *every time I open my mouth* – it depends on the people.” Mack often receives (and sends) small sums from (and to) colleagues, “a hundred bucks for the phone bill” of a matchmaker in Connecticut who helped him round up a handful of four-rounders there, two-hundred dollars from a booking agent in Iowa City who helped to ship a sparring partner to a champion’s “training camp.” The payment matters less for its monetary value than as a gesture of acknowledgment and goodwill. To round things out, Mack begets income from the small “stable” of fighters<sup>45</sup> he manages on the side (despite the conflict of interest this entails when they are featured on a card for which he is the matchmaker) and he holds exclusive promotional rights to a couple of promising Midwest-

ern boxers. The earnings of a matchmaker thus fluctuate from month-to-month and from year-to-year depending on his level of activity and success:

It's the kind of thing where you can make four-hundred dollars this month but be working on things that will bear fruit next month, and next month make six-seven-eight-thousand dollars. And it adds up at the end of the year into *decent dollars*, very decent dollars.

When I asked in what broad income bracket these “very decent dollars” would put him, however, Mack brushed off the question with a joke: “[smiling] *Poverty-stricken!* I don’t know, that’s, that’s an area I don’t really wanna go in: [gesturing with a circular motion toward the ornately decorated living room of his apartment] you see I live reasonably comfortably.” A similar query later met with another rebuff, this time with a touch of exasperation (“It’s a *bad* question an’ I’m not gonna talk about it too long, Louie”) followed by a stern threat to terminate the interview on the spot. Clearly, more than mere concern for privacy is going on here: opaqueness is a requisite for the smooth operation of the pugilistic economy and for a matchmaker to trumpet his earnings would be bad policy as well as in bad taste.

Although matchmakers consistently decline to reveal figures, it is estimated that a solid professional reaps between one-hundred and two-hundred thousand dollars per annum. This is because a matchmaker does not invest his own money into the commercial circuits of boxing but systematically shifts risks and costs onto his partners (local promoters and managers) while keeping his business costs down: other than his time and energy, Mack’s main expenditures are monthly phone bills of four- to six-hundred dollars.

Whatever the amount, it is plain that matchmakers pocket vastly more money than any of the hundreds of run-of-the-ring fighters they employ, which cannot but create endemic strain and recrimination. At the customary rate of fifty dollars a round for preliminary bouts, the overwhelming majority of boxers (88 percent in the state of Illinois) assert that their services are grossly underpaid. They complain bitterly of being remunerated with “peanuts” and “chump change”: “You go to *any other state*, they pay you more than they do in Chicago,” jeers a rising lightweight who has run up seven straight victories. “[irately] I think somebody’s *grabbin’ some money*, puttin’ it in their pocket an’ payin’ you what they wanna pay you, for real.” Asked “who benefits the

most” from the region’s fistic trade, 80 percent of the fighters mention the promoter and matchmaker – well ahead of the Commission with 10 percent, managers with 8 percent, and trainers with 2 percent.<sup>46</sup> “The fighters ain’ makin’ nuttin’, the one makin’ is Mack. See Mack, he git paid jus’ to *look* at fighters,” echoes with indignation one of my gym mates from Stoneland. “Mack an’ them: they ain’ payin’ nobody. It’s *like slavery all over again*: you git one hundred dollar jus’ to get *your brain smacked*.”

**“He drivin’ a BMW and he don’t do nuthin’”**

Promoters, they steal all the money, promoters. They be cheatin’ the shit outa ’em fighters. Have you heard of Mack? He drivin’ a BMW, and he not even married ... [his pitch rising] *he don’t do nuthin’*, ’cept [sarcastically] “hey, man you wanna fight?,” see tha’s all he do! He be gettin’ paid for settin’ up fights, on average, six thousand, seven thousand dollars.

LW: How much do you think he makes?

He probably makes three-four G’s [thousand dollars] a month.

LW: Do you think he makes more than his share?

Ooooh, *too much, too much*, if he be a boxer, *he ain’t no boxer: I’m doin’ all the hard work*, he *cheatin’* me.

*Harry, 30, black lightweight, three-year pro*

**“It’s a business, right?”**

You can’t put Mack down because see boxin’ for him is like everybody else: *it’s a business right?* He’s gettin’ paid to do somethin’ an’ he’s doin’ his job an’ he’s doin’ it well, so he gettin’ *paid well*, you understand.

LW: How much do you think he makes?

*Shiit!* I think Mack make at least a hundred grands [100,000 dollars] a year, I think he does. But you know you can’t put him down for that because it’s a business an’ his business is *to sell you an’ the other guy* an’ if he can sell you an’ the other guy an’ if you’re naive enough to say “okay we’ll fight ’em for that lil’ bit of money,” then he done his job.

*Malcolm, 27, black middleweight, four-year pro*

***“Just like a whore”***

It’s all the same: *you lose, you’re gone*. That’s how it is. *Just like a whore*: you put money in their pocket and that’s it, they move on to the next one you know. That’s why I say I never let my kid box.

*Wilfredo, Puerto-Rican  
lightweight, 24, six-year pro*

***“Everybody’s trying to make money, nobody’s been exploited”***

Uh it’s like any other business. Gas stations, you have a guy that owns a gas station, you have a mechanic, you have a guy that drives the towtruck and the guy that pumps gas and uh everybody has a job. In uh boxing you have the matchmaker, the manager, the boxer, cutman, *everybody’s tryin’ to make money*, uh if there’s a man who’s in a position, if a guy calls Chicago an’ tells a matchmaker, “I need two fighters,” and this guy goes to Jed and Ned an’ says I have this fight for you it pays a thousand dollars, I get 300 you get 700, and Jed says fine, an’ Ned says fine, an’ they go take this fight, and they get their 700 dollars, to me *that’s a fair deal* – nobody’s been exploited.

Now when they don’t get their money [with a disapproving glare], it’s another story: they’ve been mistreated. Uh, but here if this guy had got this call an’ that’s his knowledge. He got the call, he’s, he evidently spent some time an’ effort in getting this position, so if he don’t go to these two guys, *they woulda never got the fight*, they woulda never got to earn the money an’ I don’t consider that exploiting.

*Reggie, 53, restaurant owner and  
manager of three professional fighters,  
two years in the business*

(1) Note the glaring arithmetic discrepancies, not atypical among fighters with extremely low income (outside the ring, Harry derives support from a part-time dish-washer job and from street hustling that put him barely above survival). According to these errant estimates, Mack makes seven thousand dollars per card (as much as all the fighters combined) but only three to four thousand a month, which would give him a rather moderate annual income of some forty thousand dollars, hardly enough for owning a BMW.

The matchmaker’s view of these matters is evidently quite otherwise. As do managers, Mack maintains that club fighters are adequately paid considering the narrowness of the local market and the financial risks and losses taken by promoters. And he protests vehemently that

he does not make any money on “a lot of the booking that I do on some of these minor fights”: “I have fighters that I have obtained for them, either through matchmakin’ or through bookin’, every fight they’ve had in their entire career an’ have never made a penny from them, *nor expected to, nor asked to.*” From his standpoint, the boxing business is a “variable-sum game” of mixed conflict and cooperation<sup>47</sup> in which everyone is better off cooperating – on terms structurally biased in his favor – than sulking and quarreling. Boxers are ill-advised to make claims at once unrealistic and unfounded:

*They try to get you down on your fee.* [with a soft, gentle voice] “Hey, if you don’t have me, you’re getting no money.” And I don’t *gouge* the fighters. I don’t attempt to say, “Look, this fight is good, you gotta give me more money” or anything like that. You try to be forthright with them – if you don’t tell lies, you don’t have to remember what you said later.

The attitude of boxers toward the matchmaker, in turn, is shot through with ambivalence, an ambivalence that expresses the dependent position they occupy in the contradictory system of social relations underlying the fistic economy. On the one hand, they vituperate him as a “fleshpeddler,” a “pimp,” and a “slave driver” who acts in cahoots with unscrupulous managers who will “sell you for a dollar” just to “better they pockets up.” Yet, almost simultaneously, they acknowledge that the matchmaker is only playing his part, “doin’ his job an’ doin’ it well,” which can hardly be held against him. Through the lens of the Hobbesian individualist worldview they hold, fighters are disposed to exculpate Mack on the grounds that exploitation is the “name of the game” and abuse “comes with the territory.” “I guess a lot of ’em, if they weren’t really there, you know, you woul’n’ have a chance,” muses a light-heavy-weight from one of the city’s West Side gyms. “It’s the chance you have to take. *It’s a chance in everythin’.*” Aladin, a 24-year-old middleweight who turned pro a couple of years ago, puts it best when he exclaims:

*Oh, he’s exploitin’ people, tha’s not d’question.* [passionately] Tha’s, tha’s *life, tha’s the American way!!!* You know, gittin’ what you get off som’body’s back: tha’s the American way but I’m sayin’, I don’ fall on ’im tot’ly ’cause that’s the way it’s – [very briskly] if he wadden doin’ it, *someone else be doin’ it.*

Plus, the people *consen’ to it*, y’know what I’m sayin’? If nobody consen’ to it, Mack cain’ be no matchmaker. So, you know, [cooling down] the faul’ is *fifty-fifty though. The fault is fifty-fifty.*

Since by general admission everyone is in the fight game to chase after “that green stuff,” no one can fairly be castigated for demonstrating

greed. Whichever way you look at it, money turns up “as the true *agent of separation* and the true *cementing agent*” in the world of professional boxing. It is verily, to borrow another one of Marx’s vivid phrasings, “the *chemical* power of the [pugilistic] society.”<sup>48</sup>

### **“You don’t love yo’ mama”: Emotion, uncertainty, and taint**

“You don’t love yo’ mama if you a matchmaker,” quipped a veteran trainer when I asked him what it takes to succeed in this shifty and shady trade. “Yep. You gotta be *awful cold-hearted* when you sendin’ guys to get beat, yep.” It is a fact that the ethos of the occupation – Gregory Bateson defines ethos as a “complex of culturally organized emotions”<sup>49</sup> – stresses affective neutrality, aloofness, and a flat sentimental profile to ward off the interference of “hot” interpersonal factors with “cold” business necessities.

#### ***“I don’t fall in love with fighters”***

I don’t wanna hear that your performance was poor because you lost sleep because of something that you shouldn’t have lost sleep over. I don’t believe in it, I don’t fall in love with fighters – *I can’t!* I try to treat them decently and there’s some of them that I genuinely like, and some of them I deal that I generally dislike. But I don’t, I don’t let one thing interfere with the other, *you can’t*. You’re working in an office and you’ve made mistakes that have cost your company several thousand dollars, the boss doesn’t wanta hear it’s because, uh, “my next door neighbor got locked out of his house and I was up until three in the morning helping him get in.” What does one thing have to do with the other?

Much like the boxer in and around the ring, the matchmaker has to exercise continual “expressive control” in action.<sup>50</sup> He needs to keep his emotions under a tight rein, maintain proper distance with his interlocutors, and avoid growing attached to the fighters he uses. (Note that the same rule applies to the trainer who, while he should enjoy the trust and allegiance of his charges, must not “fall in love” with a fighter and “baby” him, lest the latter fails to develop the necessary toughness, resolve, and ring experience). It is imperative that that matchmaker guard his cool and focus at all times, whether it be palavering with managers, haggling with promoters, keeping peace between obstreperous rivals at the weigh-in ceremony, or mopping up

a dressing-room incident on the evening of the show. He will find it invaluable to nurture the capacity to truck and strike agreements even with people he finds individually insufferable as circumstances prescribe: “Some of these fighters I think are nice young men, I try to be helpful with them, I enjoy working with them. Others, I just don’t care to deal with,” proffers Mack, “I just don’t like them, that’s all there is to it. And nothing is going to *make me* like them. But that’s not to say I don’t deal with them. If the situation calls for a deal to be done.”

The overall “‘tone’ of behavior”<sup>51</sup> of the matchmaker, then, is decidedly stolid, unperturbed, to the point of apparent callousness. Yet what might seem like personal insentience and a congenital lack of susceptibility is in truth the product of a painstaking work of self-tailoring to the peculiar “emotional culture” of pugilism.<sup>52</sup> As years pass and he becomes a better professional, fully habituated and attuned to the interactional and psychosensory demands of his craft, the matchmaker learns to domesticate his affect and to deploy *appropriate techniques of emotive detachment*. Mack recalls how, earlier in his career, he made the mistake of getting too close and personal with his clients, and the distracting turbulence that ensued:

I got fighters, when Max Gibson was fighting, [yapping] my God! *I was like the man’s father*: I got involved in everything. I had to do everything. I had to get him outa jail – my wife would say: “Your son called,” which one, Larry [Mack’s son] or Max? [brief laughter] But when I became involved and it became too much, or more than it should be, [sternly] I quickly backed away from it.

On whatever side of the ropes you choose to stand, boxing is not for the tender-hearted. When Mack travels to a show he has helped design or coordinate, he feels like “going to the office, jus’ like goin’ to work: I don’t get excited an’ flustered about a whole lotta things.”<sup>53</sup> His is a business, “a business I chose to do and enjoy doing,” and he advertises himself as “a businessman like any other.” Obviously, his activity differs from other types of commerce in that “it’s a business where you do have people, you are dealin’ with human beings – *you’re not orderin’ fifty tons of somethin’* or three gross of somethin’.” Yet the bottom line is that you are out to put bodies in the ring to make money, and that *the more bodies*, or whatever shape and kind, *the more money*. No deal, it seems, is *infra dignitate* in the fistic trade, as coach Richie, who has known Mack since his childhood days, notes dryly in this conversation excerpt:

Mack be tryin' to fill a card then, he don't give a damn if yo' mama jus' died. Mack don't see – Mack, me and Mack are tight but he's a *cold-hearted, ruthless, no-good bastard*. See, but he's okay with me.

*LW*: Why is that?

*Richie*: Well, me an' him just awright. But his inner self, I know. 'Cause now, you know what? Let 'im need somebody up in Beloit or Green Bay [in Wisconsin, a state without a boxing Commission]: he take *you*!

*LW*: You're serious? If you weren't here, he'd take me up there?

*Richie*: If you would go, [murmuring] yeah.

*LW*: Even though he knows you wouldn't want me to fight pro?

*Richie*: That wouldn't make no diff'rence, yeah: *he gotta fill them cards*. Yeah, he'd take you. [imitating Mack's drawl] "Oh the guy's nothin', y'know, I saw him, you can lick him. If you do this or if you do that..." *Yeah*. Tha's the way he thinks. Tha's the way the business is.

*LW*: You could say that's his job, he can't afford to have no feelings for people.

*Richie*: He don't have none, *uh-uh*.

*LW*: That's the way a matchmaker gotta be?

*Richie*: [matter of factly] Yeah, *yeah*: when you bringin' guys in to get *beat up*, what kindsa feelin's do you have? You seen them bums comin' in here since you been here, so now what did you think, how you think they got here? They got *picked* to come here to get [chuckles] a damn good butt-whippin'.

Emotional self-mastery is all the more necessary since matchmaking is by nature a stressful, high-uncertainty occupation unfit for individuals who wear their feelings on their sleeves and cannot bear pressure. Opportunities for dissension and grounds for hostility abound, given the aleatory nature of fistic production, the wooliness of standards of evaluation, and the contradictory interests that must somehow be reconciled along the way. Relations with managers and promoters are burdened with ingrained sociological ambivalence<sup>54</sup> and bound to generate disputes and discontent. Managers "hate matchmakers: for them, their boxers should be on every card."<sup>55</sup> They want tangible results for *their* fighter and do not care that the matchmaker has other, conflicting, demands on his agenda, or that he did a sterling job of putting

together the undercard when their charge happens to be defeated in combat. Fighters join them in crabbing that they are not getting enough fights, or the right kind of fights, or a fight at the right time. They complain incessantly that they are not being “built up” fast enough and pine for more exposure and more purse money.

At times, enmity and loathing well up to the point where physical menace and aggression become difficult to avoid. A veteran matchmaker from Ohio was once publicly slapped by a disgruntled trainer at a weigh-in in front of all the local fight people (this incident, compounding sexual insult – a slap is a feminine and feminizing form of bodily onslaught – to corporeal injury and loss of face, was making the rounds of Midwestern gyms years after its occurrence). Mack has had tense run-ins and virulent confrontations with more than a few disgruntled customers. One summer I witnessed a near-collision with an aggrieved and out-of-control manager who threatened Mack with serious bodily harm (and worse) if he did not immediately release his boxer from a disputed promotional agreement. On a winter evening at the close of a card in a suburban night club, Mack found the four tires of his car slashed in the parking lot – and the misdeed had not been committed at random.

Not only do animosity and fracas constantly threaten to erupt and disrupt the flow of business. A million things may derail a fight up until the moment when the combatants finally face off between the ropes: one boxer gets injured in training or calls in sick, a second chickens out or fails the physical, a third comes in ten pounds over the weight limit on the morning of the bout and is disqualified – and everything is thrown out of kilter. A reputed ring warrior inexplicably “folds up” in the first round or his opponent proves inept past the point of grotesquerie and the main event flops. In all such cases, it is the matchmaker who is called to account, although he has little or no direct control over these variables.<sup>56</sup>

“Go into any town in America where they have boxing and it’s a good bet you will find the matchmaker is the most unpopular man in town.”<sup>57</sup> Teddy Brenner’s lament highlights the fact that, irrespective of his personality and morality, the matchmaker stands at the *point of convergence and fixation of all the currents of suspicion, diffidence, and disrepute* that traverse the prizefighting economy. For he is the one entrusted with carrying out what Everett C. Hughes calls the “dirty work” of the trade<sup>58</sup> and he must bear the taint associated with com-

mercializing that most sacred of all objects, the (male) body, and for making his living off of the suffering and sacrifice of some of the most vulnerable members of society. No amount of ideological vamping can redefine the profession's tasks and values so as to wash away the opprobrium that befalls those who chose to exercise it. One has no choice but to learn to live with it, as do those other louche entrepreneurs in deceptive material and symbolic goods that Mack mentions in a candid comparison that sounds every bit like an act of self-incrimination:

There's nothing you can do, you can't change people's opinion. [sighing] Ask people's opinion of *politicians and used-car dealers* and in some cases *television religious people*: ask people what they think of those and you'll get different opinions.

## Coda

The matchmaker is an intermediary whose function is to plug communication gaps, connect the supply and demand of bodies, and “oil” the cogs of the pugilistic engine by minimizing disaccord and temporarily propitiating the antagonistic interests of the entangled parties: prospects, journeymen, and bums among fighters, trainers, and managers on the one side, promoters and booking agents on the other, and lastly the consuming public. He does so by garnering information, monopolizing connections, and manipulating knowledge rifts and voids so as to capture (and hide) transaction costs he then turns into personal profit.

Sitting ringside, the matchmaker can proudly watch the product of his dexterous handiwork, as the two fighters he has plucked from the ranks of willing candidates “go to war” on each other. For he is the hidden architect – and chief benefactor – of a “liminal microstructure” à la Victor Turner, a contexture of exchange relations that joins structural simplicity with cultural complexity.<sup>59</sup> Elucidating his competencies and strategies provides an unparalleled avenue for spotlighting salient features of the social organization of the boxing economy *qua* economy, including high levels of fortuity, suspicion, and deception permitted by the absence of “trustees,”<sup>60</sup> the tight overlay of personal engagement and business commitment, the ineradicable disjuncture between actor-level goals and system-level imperatives, and built-in imbalances in the distribution of information and in the structure of

clientship, not to forget the stigma and stench that enshroud all transactions and participants.

In this article, I have endeavored to disclose and explicate the principles whereby lines of action are laid down and assembled into ever-shifting but regular ensembles that form the relational infrastructure of prize-fighting as occupational world and commercial performance. The reader will have noted, perhaps with dismay, that the structure and functioning of the boxing economy can, from this angle, be explicated without attending to the individual boxer as “moral fact” and “psychological being” – as opposed to mere *persona*, a “mask, tragic mask”<sup>61</sup> worn by blank, interchangeable, and servile organisms. Reduced to the level of a commodity (Mack likens him in turn to a race horse, stocks and bonds, an auto part, and featureless cargo), the fighter’s hopes and hurts, his pain and pride, his desires and his dreams appear to be of little import to the matchmaker. Yet it is these desires and dreams that, in the final analysis, provide the fuel for the pugilistic engine. It is the sensual and moral passion that binds the boxer to his trade that propels him within the specific universe and infuses the latter with life.<sup>62</sup>

“Man,” writes Gaston Bachelard in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, “is a creation of desire, not of need.” As with any other economy, a full understanding of the boxing business will require not only to “introduce social structure into economic analysis,”<sup>63</sup> as I attempted here, but to reconstruct its symbolic structure as well. For crosscutting the craftsmanly and crafty commerce of money, blood, and punishment (in the etymological sense of *poena*, pain and penalty) that is professional boxing lies an economy of belief that is no less real than the bodies locked in suffering embrace in the ring.

### **Appendix: Boxer testifies before Congress**

The following is an excerpt from the sworn testimony of Delaware champion David “TNT” Tiberi before the 1992 Senate Hearings on “Corruption in Professional Boxing,” (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1992, pp. 10–11), following the scandalous decision whereby he was deprived of a world title in his bout with IBF middle-weight champion James “Lights Out” Toney. The hearings offer a miniature representation – in both discursive and theatrical senses – of the pugilistic field, from the misshapen “hodge-podge of state regulations” whereby “the regulated have been allowed to rule the regulators” and

the systematic collusion between television and so-called “world federations” (which are little more than racketeering outfits), to promoters invoking the Fifth amendment on each question and ghastly instances of boxer abuse of every imaginable kind. This excerpt gives a highly compressed depiction of the economy of prizefighting from the vantage point of a boxer who has climbed all the rungs of the pugilistic ladder only to lose his faith in the process.

\* \* \*

It wasn't long before I realized the total control that managers, promoters, matchmakers, and others in position of power in the fight game exercise over boxers. Each fighter is at their mercy and soon realizes that if he does not cooperate 100 percent, he will quickly be thrown back out on the street and replaced by an eager, more cooperative and hungry boxer.

I sadly saw how the majority of fighters, depending upon their respective levels of talent, are viewed by their promoters. Some are considered prime ribs, other pork chops, and the least talented scrapple, but rarely are they recognized as human beings.

The ones who are able to keep winning are nurtured to bring in the crowds and dollars. The mediocre are used as cannon fodder, to fill up an evening's match card. And the losers, they are routinely ground up and sacrificed to those lucky few who are being groomed to be champions.

There is never enough compensation for what one endures in and out of the ring. Issues like health and life insurance and medical benefits are not discussed. For those in the boxing world, these things do not exist. Besides, to provide such expenses would cut into the profits of those in control....

[Tiberi then explains how, after twenty-seven pro fights, having won the title bestowed by a marginal “world organization,” the International Boxing Council, he was forced to relinquish his championship belt to get a chance to challenge the champion of the rival, more established, International Boxing Federation, James Toney. As a condition of facing Toney, Tiberi also had to cede the rights for his three subsequent fights to Toney's promoter, Bob Arum, as is common practice in the industry.]

Thinking back on the circumstances, it was like being bought at a slave auction. In fact, as a result of my first-hand experience, I find it very hard to still consider boxing a sport. For many promoters, it has become their private, legalized slave industry.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

1. Cosell is cited by Sam Toperoff in *Sugar Ray Leonard and Other Warriors* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1986, 149). The litany on that theme is endless. Columnist Jimmy Cannon puts the matter succinctly: “The fight racket, since its rotten beginnings, has been the red-light district of sports” (cited in Thomas Hauser, *The Black Lights: Inside the World of Professional Boxing*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986, 58). Canadian journalist Steven Brunt echoes this view thus: boxing is “an open meat-market where those who are useful and make money are lauded for the moment and those who do not are discarded. Corruption is accepted, expected and open. Lying well is a marketable skill” (Steven Brunt, *Mean Business: The Rise and Fall of Shawn O’Sullivan*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, 104).
2. “Economic phenomena are not only material phenomena. They are also collective representations that dictate to members of society their attitude towards material objects” and the patterns of conduct appropriate to them (Marcel Mauss, *Manuel d’ethnographie*, Paris: Editions Payot, [1959] 1967, 123).
3. For more on the conditions, objectives, and methods of this research, see Loïc Wacquant, “Protection, discipline et honneur: une salle de boxe dans le ghetto américain,” *Sociologie et société* 27/1 (Spring 1995): 75–89, and idem, “The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel About Their Trade,” *Theory and Society* 24/4 (August 1995): 489–535. The names of persons and locations as well as incidental details and the timing of some events have been disguised to ensure the anonymity of individual informants.
4. The notion of “body-mind complex” is borrowed from John Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* (Chicago: Open Court, 1929). The collective work of fabrication of the

- pugilistic habitus is detailed in Loïc Wacquant, "Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labor Among Professional Boxers," *Body and Society* 1/1 (March 1995): 65–94.
5. Much as Pierre Bourdieu utilizes Gustave Flaubert, *nomothète* of the modern literary cosmos, as a practical analyzer to uncover the structure and logic of the nascent artistic field in nineteenth-century France (Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992).
  6. Everett C. Hughes, "Work and Self," in *The Sociological Eye: Selected Papers* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, [1951] 1984), 338–347, citation p. 342.
  7. Mark Granovetter, "Economic Institutions as Social Constructions: A Framework for Analysis," *Acta Sociologica* 35/1 (1992): 3–12.
  8. E.g., David Atyeo's tabloid book, *Blood and Guts: Violence in Sports* (New York: Paddington Press, 1979), and, in the realm of film, Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* series and Woody Allen's *Mighty Aphrodite* – the rapprochement is deliberate. For a discussion of "urban Orientalism" in recent scholarly accounts of the ghetto, see Loïc Wacquant, "Three Pernicious Premises in the Study of the American Ghetto," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 20 (June 1997): 341–353.
  9. Loïc Wacquant, "Teoria e etnografia no gueto," paper presented to the Departamento de antropologia, Museu nacional, Universidade do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 1995, and idem, "Un mariage dans le ghetto," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 113 (June 1996), esp. 63–65.
  10. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 75–94 and 224–234. For a stimulating discussion of the pitfalls and potentials of such a "case study" in social science, see Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker, editors, *What Is A Case?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), especially the chapters by John Walton ("Making the Theoretical Case") and Diane Vaughan ("Theory Elaboration: The Heuristics of Case Analysis").
  11. Teddy Brenner and Brian Nagler, *Only the Ring was Square* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 1. The son of a skilled leather-cutter in a Brooklyn shoe factory, Ted Brenner entered boxing as an aficionado at New York's Stillman's Gym in the 1940s before rising to the post of chief matchmaker for the Madison Square Garden. His professional trajectory spans the period of transformation of prizefighting from neighborhood entertainment (centered on small clubs) to corporate business (dominated by big promoters, so-called "world federations," and television programmers).
  12. In anthropological terms, a broker is "a professional manipulator of people and information who brings about communication for profit" (Jeremy Boissevain, *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974, 147–169). In contrast with the "patron," who controls "first-order resources," the broker specializes in those "second-order resources" that make up the strategic networks of access to powerful agents.
  13. For an insider's account of the practical and business organizations of boxing shows, consult Gregory J. Reed, *This Business of Boxing and Its Secrets* (Detroit: New National Publishing Company, 1981).
  14. For a portrait of the journeyman, see John Schulian, *Writers' Fighters and Other Sweet Scientists* (Kansas City: Andrew and MacMeel, 1983), 219–221.
  15. On this ethic and its social bases, Loïc Wacquant, "The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel About Their Trade," *Theory and Society* 24/4 (August 1995): 489–535.

16. Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 254.
17. For a partial compilation of irregularities and horror stories from Ohio and New Jersey, see United States Senate, *Hearings on Corruption in Professional Boxing Before the Permanent Committee on Governmental Affairs, United States Senate, One Hundred Second Congress, August 11–12, 1992* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993), esp. 49–50, 57–63, 67–78, and 185–194.
18. Michael Shapiro, “Opponents,” in Joyce Carol Oates and Daniel Halpern, editor, *Reading the Fights* (New York: Prentice-Hall Press, 1988), 242–249.
19. Dean Allison and Bruce B. Henderson, *Empire of Deceit* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985); Mack Newfield, *Only in America: The Life and Crimes of Don King* (New York: Morrow, 1995).
20. In a revealing parallel that analogizes boxers to race horses, Mack notes that his challenge is similar to that of “a handicapper at the race track which makes the races of the race card there, and he’s weighing some horses heavier than he is others and so on, on a sliding scale. The perfect job of handicapping the horses would be, if you had eight horses in the race, you’d have an eight-horse dead heat. I guess in boxing, I have a six-bout card: the perfect card would be six draws. It wouldn’t be *satisfying to anyone* but that would be perfect.”
21. Aaron V. Cicourel, *Cognitive Sociology* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 99–140.
22. “Clientelization” is a procedure characteristic of – but obviously not limited to – Third-World marketplaces, wherein “it reduces search to manageable proportions and transforms a diffuse mob into a stable collection of familiar antagonists” (Clifford Geertz, “The Bazaar Economy: Information and Search in Peasant Marketing,” *Supplement to the American Economic Review* 68, May 1968: 29; see also Mark Granovetter, “The Nature of Economic Relationships,” in Richard Swedberg, editor, *Explorations in Economic Sociology*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1993, 21–38).
23. Robert G. Eccles, “The Quasifirm in the Construction Industry,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 2 (1981): 335–357.
24. Ronald Dore, “Goodwill and the Spirit of Market Capitalism,” *British Journal of Sociology* 34 (1983): 460.
25. These registers, containing the name and hometown of licensed fighters followed by a chronological listing of their bouts (with place, opponent, weight, and outcome), are privately produced and sold for profit by small boxing operators (managers, matchmakers, or devotees of the Sweet science). There exists no official publication that collates all fights taking place in the country, let alone overseas. Matchmakers salaried with established promotion companies rely on their firm’s computerized data banks, but this is a recent development.
26. A. Rees, “Information Networks in Labor Markets,” in D. M. Lamberton, editor, *Economics of Information and Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971) 109–118.
27. Mack continues: “You make, you make *all kinds a deals*. You make deals, sometimes you forget the deals you made yourself! I booked a fight in South Africa and I forgot, I forgot what the deal was. [amused at the recollection] The promoter and I had to talk, and I don’t want to tell him I don’t remember! But we had to piece it together.”
28. On legal entanglements in the upper tier of the boxing business, see Thomas Hauser, *The Black Lights: Inside the World of Professional Boxing*, and Newfield, *Only in America*; on the non-contractual regulation of economic transactions, see

- Steward Macauley, "Non-contractual Relations in Business: A Preliminary Study," *American Sociological Review* 28 (1963): 55–67.
29. Most fighters are (sub)proletarians of black and Latino extraction while most managers are white entrepreneurs and upper-level professionals. In addition, boxing operators are typically divided among mutually disdainful and diffident factions.
  30. Clifford Geertz, "The Bazaar Economy," 230–231.
  31. This degree of involvement with amateur activities is unusual among professional matchmakers and helps account for Mack's exceptionally penetrating grasp of the dynamics of the local pugilistic arena.
  32. Kenneth Leiter, *A Primer on Ethnomethodology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 100.
  33. William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn, 1940, orig. 1906).
  34. The distinction between parasitic and symbiotic cliques is borrowed from Melville Dalton's classic, *Men Who Manage: Fusions of Feeling and Theory in Administration* (New York: Wiley, 1959: chapter 3). To put it differently: horizontal exchange among close-knit, top-level matchmakers results from, and in turn maintains, "value-adding partnerships" (R. Johnson and P. Lawrence, "Beyond Vertical Integration: the Rise of the Value-Added Partnership," *Harvard Business Review* 88, 1988: 94–104). By contrast, vertical exchanges form what we might call "value-appropriating partnerships" that transfer money and opportunities from lower- to higher-level transactors.
  35. Victor Goldberg, "Relational exchange: Economics and Complex Contracts," *American Behavioral Scientist* 23 (1980): 337–342.
  36. Marcel Mauss, "La cohésion sociale dans les sociétés polysegmentaires (1931)," in *Oeuvres*. Vol. 3: *Cohésion sociale et divisions de la sociologie* (edited by Victor Karady, Paris: Minuit, 1968), 19.
  37. "This type of regulation tends to develop when certain participants in the market are, by virtue of their totally or approximately exclusive control of the possession of or opportunities to acquire certain utilities – that is, of their monopolistic powers – in a position to influence the market situation in such a way as actually to abolish the market freedom of others" (Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Berkeley: University of California Press, [1918–20] 1978, 2 vols., 83). At the higher reaches of the fistic business, a handful of promoters likewise wield oligopolistic power. See the appendix for a view of this structure of control from the boxer's standpoint.
  38. The sport is periodically diagnosed in the last stages of agony, as it winds down another one of its long depressive cycles. In Chicago, the lack of good amateur-training programs, the dearth of hometown "marquee names" (recent heavyweight titlist Oliver McCall hails from the Windy City but he has trained and resided out of state for years), and the absence of a nationally active promoter have combined to reduce the boxing scene to a pale caricature of its olden glory days, "one of the fight racket's ghost towns" (Schulian, *Writers' Fighters and Other Sweet Scientists*, 215). On the national level, the boxing business is sustained almost solely by Hispanic fans and the heavyweight division.
  39. On "colorless" currency, see Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978 [1900]); on the crafting and valuing of the fighter's body, Loïc Wacquant, "Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labor Among Professional Boxers." *Body and Society* 1/1 (March 1995): 65–94.
  40. Viviana Zelizer, "Making Multiple Monies," in Swedberg, editor, *Explorations in*

- Economic Sociology*, 197; John Parry and Maurice Bloch, editors, *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
41. The fighter then shares the resulting amount with his trainer, who receives ten percent (or a few twenties, when the purse is at the low end), and his manager (if he has one), who is entitled to between one third and one half of the purse depending on the kind and level of backing he supplies.
  42. Many simply accept as a given of the business that the matchmaker will take a surreptitious bite out of their paycheck whenever a lucrative offer comes their way and that they should not meddle with the matter. A ring-worn trainer tells of a recent trip to Italy for a televised bout Mack had negotiated on behalf of his fighter: “We’re fightin’ in Turin, y’know, we’re gettin’ four thousand, you know we’re gettin’ more than four thousand, right? [You mean the real purse was more and Mack is keepin’ the difference?] Oh sure, oh sure! [Why don’t you call the Italian promoter then?] No, *I know he’s makin’ money*, [excitedly] *what do I care*, I mean what-do-I-care, *if I’m happy with four thousand?* You know, if I sell you this pair of pants for ten dollars, [with alacrity] *you don’t care how much I’m makin’, you want ‘em*, maybe, maybe I’m pickin’ up two dollars, what do you know? You want the pants for ten, you take it, you don’t say ‘how much you makin’ – none of your business what I’m makin’.”
  43. I. Macneil, “Contracts: Adjustment of Long-Term Economic Relations Under Classical, Neo-Classical, and Relational Contract Law,” *Northwestern Law Review* 72 (1978): 854–906.
  44. Jeffrey L. Bradrach and Robert G. Eccles, “Price, Authority, and Trust: From Ideal Types to Plural Forms,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 15 (1989): 107–108.
  45. The term “team” has recently been substituted for “stable” by image-conscious promoters but the reality connoted by the older terminology has not changed much.
  46. These figures come from a survey of all fifty professional fighters active in the state of Illinois conducted in the summer of 1991.
  47. R. D. Luce and H. Raiffa, *Games and Decisions* (New York: Wiley, 1957).
  48. Karl Marx, “The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” in *Early Writings* (edited by Quetin Hoare New York: Vintage, 1975), 377.
  49. Gregory Bateson, *Naven* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958 [1936]), 119.
  50. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957); on expressive control among fighters, Wacquant, “Pugs at Work.”
  51. Bateson, *Naven*, 276.
  52. Steven L. Gordon, “The Sociology of Sentiments and Emotions,” in Morris Rosenberg and Ralph Turner, editors, *Social Psychology: Sociological Perspectives* (New York: Basic Books, 1981): 562–592.
  53. In yet another parallel between prizefighting and horse racing, Mack goes on to comment: “You see, I don’t jump up-and-down with too much of anything. I don’t go jump up-and-down at the race tracks when my horse is coming to a photo-finish with the other horses. I don’t jump up-and-down and scream and holler.”
  54. Robert K. Merton and Elinor Berber, “Sociological Ambivalence,” in Edward Tiryakian, editor, *Sociological Theories, Values, and Sociological Change: Essays in Honor of Pitirim A. Sorokin* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 91–120.
  55. Brenner and Nagler, *Only the Ring was Square*, 22.
  56. “A matchmaker never knows what he’s got until the fighters he has matched are in the ring and throwing punches. Like the fighters themselves, *he is always on edge*, because he is never sure that both fighters will get through their training grinds in

good shape and then put on a real good fight” (Brenner and Nagler, *Only the Ring was Square*, 112, emphasis added). What is more, “if a fight you put in is good, the fighters get the credit. If it is bad, the matchmaker gets the blame” (Brenner and Nagler, *ibid.*, 45).

57. Brenner and Nagler, *Only the Ring was Square*, 22.
58. Everett C. Hughes, “Work and Self,” in *The Sociological Eye: Selected Papers* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, [1951] 1984), 338–347.
59. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).
60. Susan Shapiro, “The Social Control of Impersonal Trust,” *American Journal of Sociology* 93 (1987): 623–658.
61. Marcel Mauss, “Une catégorie de l’esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de ‘moi,’ un plan de travail,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 68 (1938): 263–281.
62. Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” esp. 501–502, 507–520.
63. James S. Coleman, “Introducing Social Structure in Economic Analysis,” *American Economic Review* 74 (1984): 84–88, and *idem*, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), *passim*.