

# ANALYSING THE PHYSICAL: AN ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL STUDY OF BOXING

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## Abstract

The aims of this paper are primarily methodological. This paper seeks to examine the question as to how researchers are to analyse physical activity as a form of social action. In order to do this I shall be using the example of boxing as an interactionally co-ordinated and 'locally accomplished' form of social action. The data collected for analysis is in the form of video taped recordings of boxing bouts. This paper will highlight the need for and problems of video analysis. Up until now the use of video for analysis has centred on talk/verbal communication or body movement/non-verbal communication, or the combination of both, and largely based in psychological perspectives.

The theoretical context of this paper will examine two sociological research traditions the first is Kinesics by Birdwhistell (1952, 1973). The second tradition is that of Garfinkel (1967) and Ethnomethodology. I will draw on the theoretical resources appropriate to the empirical analysis of boxing as a physio-social activity.

## Introduction

Previous studies of boxing seek to investigate and try to explain the reasons why such a violent sport as boxing continues to flourish despite repeated calls for its abolition or why men, and increasingly women, take up the sport. The answers they give to these types of questions are remarkably consistent. It is invariably suggested that it is a way out of poverty for young working class men, offers discipline and keeps young men out of trouble etc. However, it can be

argued that questions such as this are inclined to 'jump the gun' in other words how sociology has pre-suppositions about 'the social' as to how daily life is organised, in that it reports on the social without possessing an adequate description of what the phenomenon is and how it is available in the first place, i.e. social action is taken for granted. Before we can contemplate what sort of explanation might be applicable, we have first to identify what it is that is to be explained.

*'Ethnomethodology sets itself apart by its resolute refusal to make the phenomena it studies 'sociologically interesting', to justify its investigation of social phenomena by seeking to demonstrate that the activities under study are relevant to the discussion and resolution of those themes which are currently the foci of professional sociological debate' (Francis & Sharrock 1993 p.16)*

The sociology of boxing that currently exists just rehearses the same old arguments. It tells us nothing new, nothing that we did not already know or had not drawn our own conclusions with respect to the various issues surrounding the sport. Boxing is yet another locus of standard social forces, and its sociological features are said to amount to nothing more than these forces working themselves out. Sociology overall takes the strategy of generalised description, thus a description of an activity consists in allocating it to some scheme of sociological types. In doing so, sociological researchers gloss over the distinctive detail of the activity.

*'Garfinkel introduced his proposal to study the 'missing what' of organised complexes of activity by crediting Harvey Sacks with an insight to the effect that virtually all the studies in the social and administrative sciences literatures 'miss' the interactional 'what' of the occupations studied: Studies of bureaucratic case workers 'miss' how such officials constitute the specification of a 'case' over the course of a series of interactions with a stream of clients; studies in medical sociology 'miss' how diagnostic categories are constituted in clinical encounters; and studies of the military 'miss' just how stable ranks and lines of communication are articulated in and as interactional work'. (Lynch 1993, p. 271)*

The analysis of purely physical action or 'non-verbal' behaviour has been concentrated largely on communication in interaction and body language in the psychological tradition. The studies of expressive behaviour using film have included categorising movements into different types, examples of which are to be found in gestures, gaze direction, patterns of body movement in relation to speech, accounts of the occurrence of various types of hand and other bodily movements, and body language generally. There is a long-standing tradition in social anthropology of 'interaction analysis' using recorded data which emerged in the early 1950s. Especially influential was the work of Reusch & Bateson (1951) which led to studies by Birdwhistell (1952, 1973), Schefflen (1966, 1973) & Kendon (1970). In the psychological tradition, conceiving physical action as communication, the influence of linguistics has been particularly strong, as in the case of Kinesics.

## **Kinesics**

Kinesics is the study of body movements and body motion communication. The body motion is analysed to allow a researcher to see and measure significant patterns in the communication process. Birdwhistell (1952, 1970) attempted to create a science of Kinesics analogous to phonetics, defining movement units within a hierarchically organised code determined by cultural convention and learning. It was Birdwhistell, an anthropologist by training, who developed the view that bodily movement is organised into patterns which function in regular, customary sequences. The methodology developed by structural linguists heavily influenced Birdwhistell and he introduced it to the analysis of movement behaviour. Kinesics is built upon the premise that body movements can attach additional meaning to spoken words, so the emphasis is placed on the non-verbal cues in social encounters.

Birdwhistell's work had an influence conceptually and methodologically on the analysis of non-verbal interaction but generated little empirical research. It precipitated the micro-analysis of filmed behaviour, cinematic techniques, using slow motion and frame by frame analysis. Birdwhistell went on to develop a transcription system, which was the first instance of an attempt to provide an exhaustive symbolic transcription of non-verbal behaviour.

Birdwhistell attempted to create a transcription system for body movement gestures. The scheme developed by Birdwhistell is to construct a descriptive language for

representing the content of physical movement, just as natural language can be used to represent the content of talk in Conversation Analysis transcription. The problem is that, precisely because the 'language' so constructed is artificial and has no 'natural' use (beyond its technical purpose), it is fundamentally arbitrary - e.g. one has to look back to the video to interpret what the symbols mean this time and one has to do that every time. This explanation may benefit from the use of an analogy. It is a similar scenario if one were to try and use Chinese in order to understand and describe what was going on when one does not speak Chinese. Therefore one would continually have to translate the Chinese words back into English in order to understand what they could possibly be describing. The other related problem is that representing physical movement by itself makes it impossible to recover intentionality (i.e. meaning) and therefore losing the social action. Birdwhistell wanted to isolate a system which could then be extracted and applied to all encounters.

*The symbolic transcription system developed by Birdwhistell was criticised because of its basis on structural linguistics and it was argued that non-verbal behaviour lacks the discrete quality of linguistic units. The 'language analogy' is one which Birdwhistell wanted to take literally. This system has never been used extensively, only for illustrative purposes on very short behaviour samples. It did however have an impact on discussions about transcription and analysis of non-verbal behaviour (see Kendon in Scherer & Ekman 1982, p.443).*

The point is that from Kinesics onwards any analysis of the physical has been focused around questions of communication in its crudest form - how we communicate with our bodies i.e. the

psychological perspective of body language. Therefore there is the key question of whether 'bodily communication forms' e.g. gestures etc. are independent of verbal communication or interdependent with it - either subordinate or a supplement to bodily communication. This argument has been the subject of continuous debate. However, none of this addresses the question of interaction which is strictly physical, as structured social action. The problem of the linguistics approach to body movement was just how structural units are identified and how a hierarchical organisation is decided upon is not made clear. There is no evidence that these systems are exhaustive and they contain no explicit statements about how their investigator decided what to include in the system.

*The use of a symbolic transcription system other than natural language or the use of categorisation scheme is problematic for the study policies of Ethnomethodology, with regard to action and meanings. The actions will be dependent upon the context due to the 'indexical' character of action. Members draw on their stock of knowledge for known actions which can be identified but only as the 'here and now' of the setting or situation. We do share some understanding and knowledge of situations as well as having different experiences. However, every member is going to have a different range of known actions at their disposal. The previous studies are not denying that there are numerous forms of action but are applying a limited number of categories, so all actions are slotted into preformulated categories of meaning, and that this can be done independently without recourse to the event. Ethnomethodology would argue the different forms of action cannot be limited to a number of categories of*

meaning to be applied to all encounters as what is important is the 'indexical' character and local 'in situ' context of social action.

There are a limited number of physical actions in boxing which are identifiable (jabs, hook etc). They can be identified in all boxing matches but not without recourse to that particular bout or setting the action as to how it is applied, in what sequence, and the quality of action. These actions can be identified within a range of quality of action, some boxers will be better than others, i.e. have a good right hook. There is a structure or stable features to boxing but the course of action is improvised. What is important is the 'there and then' of the event i.e. the local accomplishment.

*'Whereas the category systems used are quantitatively biased in that they were organised for frequency counts of types of acts thereby willing to sacrifice the understanding of locally situated meanings'. (Psathas 1979:8)*

The advantage held by Conversation Analysts over others is that they devised a transcription system based on natural language which is widely used and the system is held in common rather than in varying schemes. The use and means of transcription should represent the data as closely as possible and avoid coding or categorisation schemes. Transcriptions by symbolic notation for physical activity have been adapted from areas such as dance notation, for example, the Laban system in Dance. However, there is no general culturally available system for symbolically representing the physical - i.e. no equivalent to writing for the verbal - the only representation systems available are for specialised purposes - e.g. dance notation.

### **Language and Action: The 'Accountable' Character of Social Action**

*"To talk of social actions as accountable is to talk of them as observable and reportable, to say that they are such that people can see them for what they are and can tell each other about them".  
(Sharrock & Anderson 1986:56)*

The point I am making here is the important role of language in boxing. It is a physical activity but also it is linguistically constituted. As a socially organised activity, boxing is 'accountable' in and through language, take away 'the language' and there could be no activity or institution. The organisation of a sparring session and its features are such that it is reportable. The participants are organised in a way that we can report on what they do. For example, what would a boxer or layperson's response be if asked to account for what a boxer does? It would be difficult to articulate into a step by step approach or formal set of rules, as with anything, because they just do it without thinking of the step by step procedure or are rarely asked to account for their actions. However, the answer may be something about the types of punches, the level of fitness, co-ordination and strength required. It is these features, the recognisable and accountable character of 'moves' (types of punch, etc) which organise and make reportable the activity of boxing. The co-ordination of actions in boxing is accomplished in and as the fight's course - split second sequences of action and reactions are done 'without thinking'. It is physical activity and not mental.

There are formal rules to boxing but these do not account for or are not used procedurally in a fight, rather it is on an ad hoc basis - the activity of boxing is learned through repetitive training and mastering of moves but it then has to be applied within the actual fight situation. The fight is the ongoing and emergent co-ordination of these 'this time' which refers back to Garfinkel's argument on indexicality. The fighter will use his stock of knowledge of previous fights or 'experience' whatever that may be. Every fight is different so subsequently is the context but there are stable features and known actions to draw on. The formal rules of boxing can not account for every eventuality or context, for example, the boxer who bit his opponents ear or the boxer who kept his arms down by his side and turned away from his opponent refusing to throw punches. The boxer can be equipped with the formal rules and the set of punches but the fight itself will be worked out over and during the course of the bout. The physical action of boxing is improvised, produced by members engaged in the activity and locally accomplished.

*'Though the course of a conversation typically follows that of an orderly, structured succession, nonetheless the way in which this is accomplished has an essentially improvised character character.'* (Francis & Sharrock 1993:27)

### **Towards an Ethnomethodological Analysis on Boxing**

The following quote has been extracted from Wacquant's (1995) paper on the Pugilistic Point of View to illustrate the methodological problems this dissertation has been raising and attempts also to address, in particular, the 'missing whatness': how the phenomena under study can disappear. The way in which

the distinctive detail is glossed over and how through the use of video and an Ethnomethodological approach to analyse physical action this may be overcome.

*'Because a bout is a quintessentially strategic and interactive contest, mastering the basic punches (jab, hook, cross, uppercuts) and moves (feints and parries, pivots, blocks, and so on) and being versed in the intricacies of ring generalship is far from sufficient. A fighter must also develop the ability to combine and integrate these elements afresh during each bout to resolve the practical conundrum posed by his opponent's repertoire of physical, technical, and tactical tools. Once between the ropes, you must instantaneously identify the strengths and weaknesses of your antagonist, adjust to (or disrupt) his rhythm and decide, in a matter of a split second, "how you execute punches, when you're gonna do it, what timin'...It's not like two chicken fightin'," insists Jeff, a 29 year old white welterweight... (Wacquant 1995, p.503).*

Whilst Wacquant recognises the improvised interactional character of the activity, as characterised in this quote, he does not go on to analyse this as a phenomenon i.e. he is content just to characterise it. The contention raised in this paper is with the nature of description: of how best to describe and account for physical action using the example of boxing. Social description is an activity engaged in by sociologists and lay persons through the use of natural language, for example, radio commentators use language to provide a description of boxing matches which in turn enables a listening audience to visualise the fight. It was because I wished to examine the organisation of action and the identifying detail of the boxing data collected on video that I

opted to consider the methodology of Conversation Analysis. At the outset I would once again emphasise that my findings so far are a first attempt and therefore exploratory. It is for this reason that the initial analysis presented here is limited to just three short subsections on (a) spatial order, (b) action-at-speed and (c) sequentiality.

The data on videotape for analysis was collected as part of an ethnographic project on boxing. The video camera was set up in the gym, focused on the ring and then left to record uninterrupted. The aim was to examine the structured organisation of interaction as this is produced by participants 'spontaneously' and in situ. A few seconds of video was viewed repeatedly and the interplay was analysed along similar lines initially to those of Jordan and Henderson but overall drew largely on CA and an ethnomethodological approach.

A simple summary of impressions was initially noted which I could then expand on. This is a 'starting place' for video tape analysis, recommended by Interactional analysts Jordan and Henderson (1995), which is to first of all identify 'ethnographic chunks'. This involves looking for what seem to be important boundaries that articulate observable phases. The idea is to mark out when 'something new' happens, which can then serve as boundary markers. The events, Jordan and Henderson advise, will have a structure which consist of 'official beginnings' and 'endings'. Through the application of these ideas, in the case of the recorded sparring session, the bell signalled the 'official beginning'.

All the boxers, at the sound of the bell ringing, engage in their individual activities or 'training tasks' and the disengagement from these training tasks can be identified by certain actions when the bell sounds again at the end of three minutes. The disengagement of the

activity in the sparring session is identifiable by the action of the boxers as they relax; dropping their hands by their side, turning away from their opponent and returning to their individual corners. In boxing which is a purely physical action the signals to indicate the turn is over or the 'beginnings' and 'endings' may be the breaking away, the sound of the bell or the separation of fighters. Overall within the bout my initial exploratory findings can be divided into the following three subsections: (a) spatial order in boxing; (b) boxing as 'action-at-speed'; (c) the production of sequentiality in boxing.

### **(A) Spatial Order in Boxing**

The issue of spatial orientation: Jordan and Henderson (1995) Kendon (1990) use spatial orientation as a means of negotiating transition from one segment to the next, having first identified the segments or 'ethnographic chunks'. An examination as to how the boxers orientated to each other. Firstly, the spatial orientation of the two boxers is significant in relation to the sounding of the bell and their starting position in the ring. The boxers keep to their individual corners, or an appropriate distance apart, prior to the start of the sparring session which is signified by the sound of the bell. As soon as the bell rings the boxers meet each other face to face in the centre or 'square up' to begin the fight. The ring is a distinctive spatial location that will be occupied throughout the performance of a boxing match and the boxers take up a distinctive orientation.

During the bout the boxers negotiate and maintain a level of proximity. Ryave and Schenkein (1974) also made reference to proximity as a 'cue' in their study of walking, in particular how maintaining spatial proximity is a

necessary cue for 'walking together'. They examine members' methods for the production and recognition of 'walking alone' and 'walking together' as an on-going situated accomplishment. Ryave & Schenkein (1974) make reference to the various 'cues' which are observed and must be produced by those involved in the activity. The observation of 'cues' include pace, direction, proximity and physical contact. For example, maintaining spatial proximity is necessary for 'walking together'.

Similarly, in the case of boxing, the 'boxing distance' is a members-oriented-to-and-thereby produced and sustained zone. The orientation maintained is the two boxers facing one another and adopting a defensive posture or 'stance' to begin the bout. The stance or posture of the boxer is with their legs astride, with whichever foot the boxer leads with, usually the right, forward towards the opponent. On the data collected the boxer has his arms bent at the elbow with the gloves held up in front of the face. The elbows are held close together, the forearms from the elbow to the fist are held up in front of the upper body to form a guard of protection.

The boxers face one another and the spatial orientation has to be maintained in close proximity as they move around the ring in unison. It is 'focused interaction' as the opponent is within 'reach', the distance between them is an arm's length apart. The 'boxing distance' is important because they must maintain a suitable level of proximity in order to carry out the actions. The boxers must remain facing each other and should not turn their back on their opponent but instead side step or move backwards and forwards in tandem. It is transparent when two boxers are 'too far apart', notably beyond arm's length, and also when they are too close for a punch to be thrown. This is a standard tactic of

'crowding' your opponent.

There were other tactics and manoeuvres noted from the video how, over a short time span, one boxer remained central to the ring as he kept his opponent on the periphery and they circled around the ring clockwise. The opponent, on the outer edges of the ring can be identified as following the lead of the other but at the same time is attempting to regain control, to lead. The manoeuvres that are made will, at times, compensate for the move of the other opponent. For instance, these manoeuvres are: moving to a new position in the ring or stepping back from the opponent, leaning on the ropes, holding on to the opponent in order to gain some recovery time and the distancing that takes place within the ring.

The 'footwork' actions of the boxers are peculiar to boxing. Those boxers who lead with the left foot are called 'southpaw' fighters. One of the boxers on the video is a southpaw fighter. A boxer has to be light on his feet, keeping on his toes and always moving. As boxers 'dance' on their toes they must transfer their weight from one foot to the other and combine their foot movements with the execution of a punch. The fact that a boxer has to keep moving as opposed to standing still is very much part of boxing and how it is recognisable as such. The very idea that boxers do keep moving, dance about on their toes and throw punches is how we identify it as boxing.

In order to describe what is happening the technical language of boxing can be used, terms such as ducking, weaving and bobbing are all body movements used to avoid punches. The different types of punches, jabs, cross, hooks, uppercuts etc. indicate the different types of moves available. A continuous right jab

action is identifiable from the video and the recipient boxer can be seen to 'bob' under the jab of the opponent not only to avoid the punch but also to counteract by throwing body shots around the outside namely a 'hook'. As punches are thrown there is a lunging forward movement as the boxer leans over from the waist. Also a bending action at the knees can be seen as the boxer 'ducks' from blows and 'bobs' from left to right. From the video it can also be observed that one arm will be lifted up slightly higher in a 'bouncing' motion to protect the eyes/temple area top of the head and to block blows.

The left arm it is noted will, on occasion, 'pretend' or imitate going for a shot but will then actually throw the punch from the right. The punches are not thrown just anywhere but specifically aimed at the upper body there is a set target e.g. upper body shots and shots to the head. A successful punch is one which is on target and makes contact with the upper body or head. The aim is not to be hit and to land blows. The blows are landed to the upper body only and a hit which is 'off target' is either below the belt or completely misses the opponent and is considered unsuccessful. The punches can be delivered in combinations made up of the basics which include the left jab and hook, right cross, straight right hand and uppercut. For a punch to be thrown perfectly numerous conditions must be met in terms of body positioning and technique.

*An effective jab requires, among other conditions, the correct placement of feet, hips, shoulders, and arms; one must 'pump' one's left arm out at the right time, turn the wrist clockwise a half turn at the moment of impact but no sooner, and transfer one's body weight alternately to the front and to the back leg, all the time holding one's right hand close by the cheekbone ready to block or*

*parry the opponent's encounter. (Wacquant 1992, p.239)*

All of these things outlined in the above quote are done 'spontaneously' and in one movement. It is also important to remember that these are not just any physical moves. It is a move which is recognised as boxing and therefore it is impossible to do just any type of move i.e. swing an arm back and forth. There are certain moves or forms of action which are recognisable and constitutive of boxing such as the types of punches and posture adopted. If you were to ask someone to imitate a boxer they would more than likely dance about on their toes hands held up in front of them, fists clenched, protecting the face and upper body, whilst punching the air in front of them or something similar. That is a very loose description as to what we understand as boxing.

In order to box, boxers are trained to punch. It is something they routinely practice everyday for hours at a time. They train by punching heavy punch bags, which hang from the ceiling in the gym and speedballs which hang from a fixture attached to the wall. They will also practice their moves in front of mirrors and shadowbox. The technique or punching action has to be mastered to perfection. The aim is to be able to perform the actions to a higher standard than other boxers, to obtain a certain level or quality of action. The punching actions can be identified as a series of different moves which are administered with either the right or left arm. In addition to the various punches, three different lines of attack can be distinguished - underneath when the action is brought up between the two boxers, on the outside which is a hook and when the arm is extended straight ahead which is the jab action. Once the actions have been mastered and perfected the boxer has to be able



to formulate and combine them at speed in order to box.

### **(B) Boxing as “Action-at-Speed”**

The movement combinations are quick and complex. The boxer must focus and concentrate on his opponent in order to respond and retaliate in time. The speed of reflex action and co-ordination is an essential part of boxing. The boxer attacks by throwing punches and defends by using his gloves to block punches thrown by his opponent. Following an attacking punch there is often a return to the defensive posture. The ‘defence’ position, which is the same as the starting ‘stance’, of the arms covering the head precedes an attacking move which can be any one of the punches such as a jab. A jab is the straight, in front, extension of the arm forward. The two moves of defence and attack are inextricably bound. The movement of switching from defence to attack is done at speed and difficult to separate. To identify the singular moves as recognisable requires some technical understanding or knowledge of boxing.

These moves are learned directly from the trainer and from watching other boxers, through imitation and repetition. The training routine undertaken by boxers consists of action sequences which involve repetitively executed tasks, continually rehearsing the individual punches against hanging punch bags. Once the movements are learnt they can then be transferred as sparring skills into the ring. The two boxers know what they have to do in order to produce the activity of sparring because they have been learned and can be interpreted by the boxers. The boxer can anticipate the moves that may be made and therefore they have to do in order to produce the activity of sparring because they have been learned and can be interpreted by the boxers. The boxer can anticipate the moves that may be

made and therefore take the appropriate strategic action. It is in this sense of anticipating moves (anticipation and projection – next section) that the game of chess has been used as an analogy to the sport of Boxing. However, the game of Chess is considerably different in other ways. Boxing is ‘action-at-speed’ whereas chess is the opposite. Chess, of course, is not ‘physical’ and each move is ‘rule-constituted’. That is to say the rules of the game define precisely what is an allowed move and what is not. Therefore at any point the player is in a ‘choice’ situation, choosing between the repertoire of allowable moves available (given the position of the pieces at this point) as ‘next move’. A key to this decision is what any given move will mean regarding the opponents choice of moves at ‘move after next’, and what his possible move then will mean for one’s choice of ‘2nd after next’ and so on. This is what makes chess a game of strategy which boxing, in this sense, is not. In Boxing like Chess and other games there are explicit rules which are the formalised rules to carrying out the sport as a whole: these are very simple and mainly concerned with excluding illegitimate targets, how many bouts, where you can hit etc. However, there are no formalised rules to learning the actions of boxing. These are passed down through observation, imitation, repetition and experience.

Another further example is the activity of a handshake which we are all familiar with but there are no formalised rules to this activity, yet we know how to do it. So consider the actions which must be performed and interrelated to accomplish a handshake and the same can be applied to a boxer’s handshake. On the video after the first bout had ended the two boxers performed a gestural tapping of their boxing gloves above and below, or just a simple tap - a

boxer's handshake. There are no formalised rules to the activity of this handshake but it is possible to consider what actions have to be undertaken in order to carry out and recognise the activity, whether it is a handshake or 'sparring'.

The actions to be performed and interrelated would consist of; the two boxers being close enough to have contact, having the necessary equipment, being oriented to one another properly, co-operating with one another, negotiating the use of space, being able to recognise each others movements and sharing a common goal of accomplishing 'sparring'. Another way of considering what ultimately may be obvious and straightforward is to think of what they would have to do so that it would not be recognised as 'sparring'. For instance if the boxers stood side by side, stood still, did not throw punches, kept their hands behind their back and did not keep the appropriate 'boxing distance'. A handshake or sparring is carried out without thinking about any of the above, it is just done.

My own knowledge of boxing was limited, informal, and I was viewing the video tape without recourse to the formal rules to see just what could be learned about the interactional features of boxing and how it is organised and accomplished. The physical movements of boxing, which are communicated through a flow of actions, are worked out over its course, in this case during a bout of three minutes. In a sense it is an improvised activity similar to that of conversation which is devised as it is carried out, except in boxing there is no clear turn taking as in conversation but simultaneous gestures or overlaps.

The treatment of utterances as a form of action in CA can be applied to the form of physical action in boxing. The way in which a person shapes their actions and reactions in and as the ongoing course of interaction, using

(drawing upon) known forms of action to do so. Whereas in CA the interaction is verbal and the actions are 'utterances' in the data I looked at the interaction is non-verbal and the actions are physical. In a fight how a bout will develop over its course can not be worked out in advance. The boxer will have prepared, planned and trained for the fight but how it will develop cannot be predicted even though boxing is not a random implosion of punches as say in street fighting it still develops over its course. It has been prepared for in terms of fitness and is approached strategically but its preparation and planning can not account for how it will develop during its course.

### **(C) The Production of Sequentiality in Boxing**

This section explores the role of anticipation and projection (attack and defence) in Boxing. This is similar to Conversation Analysis how the 'paired' nature of speech actions were identified, with larger 3 and 4 part structures built up from pairs, to enable participants to project next action. The participants in conversation do this as speakers and as hearers, in the case of boxing the participants are recipients as opposed to hearers. The paired nature of speech actions in conversation refers to a participant as a speaker can produce a 1st pair part and anticipate its response which is the 2nd part. An example of this would be in the case of greetings (hello-hello) or summons-answer pair. This also works in reverse in that the recipient/hearer as well as the speaker can recognise something as a first part and what sort of response is appropriate - Hello, how are you? -Fine thank you is a common summons-answer pair. Similarly the 'paired' nature of attack and defence in boxing is central. One boxer executes the

punches while the other defends until they can find the counter attack and the role is reversed, the boxer previously defending has control of the attacking position. This results in 'extended turns' taking place which another feature identified in CA. In conversation, asking a question is a prefix to gaining 'extended speaker' turn whereas in boxing a breakthrough in the opponent's defence has to be achieved in order to take control. Overall, the sustained eye contact assists in co-ordinating these activities in much the same way it does in any focused interaction.

This action of anticipation and projection also applies to boxing in the sense that there is something similar in the punch and counter punch. A boxer recognises a particular type of punch and knows what type of punch is the appropriate one to respond with. There are pairs of punches/moves, e.g. left hook is an appropriate response to a right jab. This enables the boxer to anticipate and evade boxing moves. hence, a good counter-puncher will know instinctively the best counter to throw in response, anticipating the action before it has been completed will allow the boxer to produce a defensive response.

A difference with conversation structurally is to do with 'openings'. This has a very different sense in boxing than in Conversation Analysis. The 'openings' in conversation refer to the business of getting a conversation started and getting to the topic as in telephone openings. Whereas 'openings' in Boxing is the dancing around on your toes looking for an opening within the opponent's defence to throw a punch. There are various ways in which a boxer can find an 'opening' within the opponent's defence. For example it is possible to surprise them with a punch, the boxer will look as if he is going to throw one but does not carry it through. This is how the element of surprise is constituted, to know whether or not to

expect the shot, you defend anyway and the opponent makes the attack. The idea is to make the other guy miss, while hitting him with your shot i.e. feigning a punch using the speed of the jab. If you can make an opponent miss, by dodging or ducking, their right shot then a counter attack is on the left hand side.

Another technique is jabbing with one arm, a continuous tap without making contact, to keep the opponent away as it causes them to move backwards. The opponent in response is trying to avoid this by moving, dodging or blocking with his gloves held up in front of his face. For the receiving opponent it is distracting and they need to be able to see past the jabbing in order to counterattack. When the defences are broken down an attack can form a flurry of punches coming from both arms left and right repeatedly and simultaneously. This usually happens whilst held in a corner of the ring or on the ropes which supports the receiving boxer in an upright position.

The use of 'extended turns', briefly referred to earlier, is not turn taking in the sense that one boxer throws one punch and the opponent throws a punch in response. There is no turn taking in this sense but there is a form of sequential organisation in comparison to talk in extended turns. One boxer who has punching control continues to jab albeit relatively gently. It is important to note that different levels of force are used in sparring than in a boxing bout. The main purpose of sparring is for training and practice not to win. In the recorded sparring session there is tentative jabbing at times whilst the other defends until he is able to win control and return with punches for an extended period- the attack position. How long these periods last for, obviously counts for one of the reasons as to who is the better boxer

and is winning. Whilst a boxer attacks the other must defend and will seek an opening to regain control to attack and so on. So the roles are reversed throughout the bout. You must as a boxer be able to defend well and stamina is required for long periods in order to keeping going for the full 12 rounds, if necessary, but that alone will not win points. Some action is demanded in that a boxer must throw successful punches which land on his opponent. It is not enough to just defend and receive blows.

In boxing, it can be said there are two levels of action which are, loosely, 'fencing for openings' and 'throwing punches (fending off punches)' Where the second comes out of the first these are the inextricably bound actions of attack and defence. This does not always happen so there are times when no punches are being thrown. When there are no punches being thrown the spectators then begin to demand the action, which is boxing.

## Conclusion

The approach taken in this paper has stemmed from a methodological question: how to analyse a physical activity as a form of social action. To take any physical activity such as boxing and consider how to analyse it, as a form of social action, is to give oneself an analytically demanding task. However, I do believe it has uncovered some interesting areas of analysis. I do not claim to have 'answers' in the form of instructions as to how exactly researchers should analyse the physical. Instead I have sought to consider the various ways of how analysis of the physical had previously been undertaken and raise some of the surrounding contentious issues which are problematic. The data I had collected of boxers previously as part of an ethnographic project was equally

opportunistic in this sense. Ethnomethodological analysis has provided an alternate way of studying boxing and the problems of action and order to those existing sociological accounts.

*'social actions are irreducibly events-in-a-social order and then cannot therefore be adequately identified independently of the social order in which they are embedded. Neither on the other hand, can the social order in which the actions are sited be itself identified independently of the actions themselves'* (Button 1993:7)

However, should I wish to continue the study of boxing in this vein there are amendments that I would wish to make. Firstly, I have been limited in the standard of equipment I had at my disposal that was very basic and did not possess the facilities, which would have enabled finer analysis. The generic question of how to analyse a physical activity as a form of social action remains unresolved and within the constraints of this paper I have only been able to provide 'sketches' of my first observations. One further final point is the advantage of collaborative analysis in video work. The use of videotape is a useful way to record data of any activity but imperative for physical action. The videotape of the original recording of the empirical data can be retained and the problem of what Garfinkel refers to as the 'missing whatness' is overcome by the data being available for repeated viewing to analyse the structured situated action of boxing.

To describe the data the researcher should rely on the use of natural language as opposed to one that is unfamiliar or arbitrary. If the use of coding systems for transcription

purposes fail to capture the detailed order of the phenomenon they are worse than useless. Transcription therefore is not considered necessary instead what is preferable is to stick with the video itself, and live with its 'non-reproducibility' on the printed page. Whilst it is non-reproducible on the printed page, the footage is retained as permanent data to be seen by anyone, if they wish, to compare the analysis with the original record. Bearing all these points in mind, what I hope to have shown is the potential for the description and analysis of physical action as data.

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