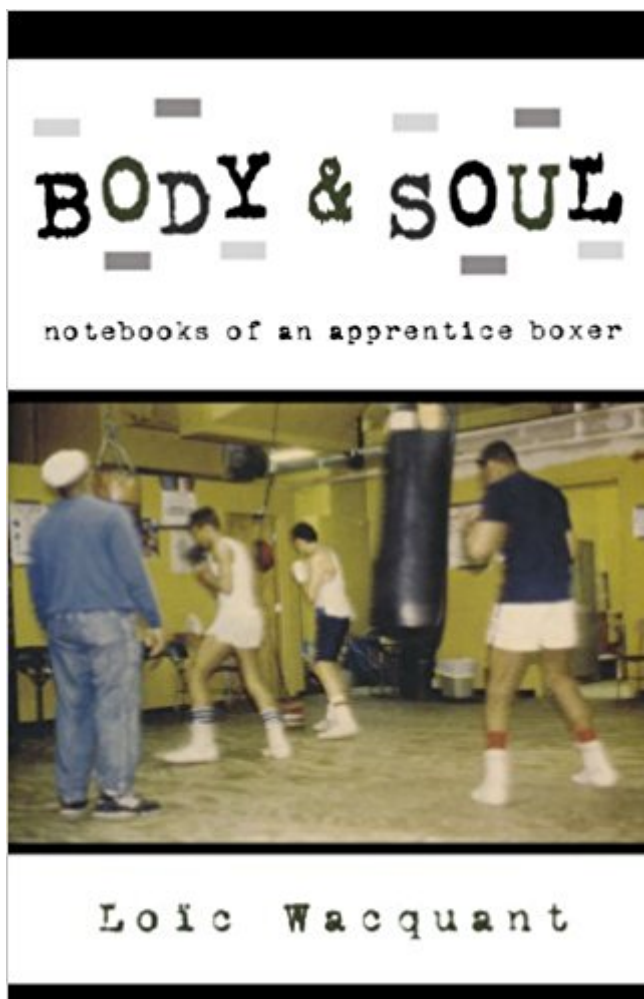


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# Body & Soul: Notebooks Of An Apprentice Boxer



## Synopsis

When French sociologist Loïc Wacquant signed up at a boxing gym in a black neighborhood of Chicago's South Side, he had never contemplated getting close to a ring, let alone climbing into it. Yet for three years he immersed himself among local fighters, amateur and professional. He learned the sweet science of bruising, participating in all phases of the pugilist's strenuous preparation, from shadow-boxing drills to sparring to fighting in the Golden Gloves tournament. In this experimental ethnography of incandescent intensity, the scholar-turned-boxer fleshes out Pierre Bourdieu's signal concept of habitus, deepening our theoretical grasp of human practice. And he supplies a model for a "carnal sociology" capable of capturing "the taste and ache of action." *Body & Soul* marries the analytic rigor of the sociologist with the stylistic grace of the novelist to offer a compelling portrait of a bodily craft and of life and labor in the black American ghetto at century's end.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this challenging work, French sociologist (and MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Fellow) Wacquant engagingly writes about his participation in a previously foreign social milieu. For Wacquant, it is the world of a famous (and now defunct) Chicago boxing gym in the tough black neighborhood of Woodlawn, just south of the predominantly white University of Chicago neighborhood of Hyde Park, where Wacquant was teaching and living. For three years he "trained alongside local boxers, both amateur and professional, at the rate of three to six sessions a week, assiduously applying myself to every phase of their rigorous preparation," from shadowboxing to sparring in the ring. The result is a

detailed and compelling narrative divided into three equally entertaining and distinct parts. The first and most dense, "The Street and the Ring," is an explication of the "social space" of the gym that balances a hardcore theoretical look at the gym as "a complex and polysemous institution" with excellent interviews with the gym's tough-talking owner DeeDee Armour that reveal how the "controlled violence" of the gym stands as an option to the violent street culture on Chicago's South Side. Two shorter essays are less academic in style and show Wacquant to be an excellent reporter. In one, he describes in depth one of the more than 30 boxing tournaments he attended in various nightclubs, movie theaters and sports arenas. In the other, after he is completely accepted by gym patrons, who have named him "Busy Louie," he thrillingly details his own successful competition in the Chicago Golden Gloves, the city's most prestigious amateur tournament.

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"[R]eveals a remarkable ethnographic and theatrical eye...a model account of a personal, embodied sociology..." --American Journal of Sociology "Body & Soul not only sets a new standard for scholarly research and writing on sport. It is a virtuoso performance that could--if properly read and disseminated and emulated--put the study of sport at the center of all sociological theorizing and analysis." --Social Forces "[A] sociological tour de force...sure to be widely used as an exemplar of how to conduct participant observation research.... It is packed with fruitful conceptual and theoretical discussions." --Qualitative Sociology "A fresh and authoritative treatment." --The Ring: The Bible of Boxing "Body & Soul will pull you into the deep rhythms of boxing and should certainly earn a place in the canon of literature in the ring." --Los Angeles Times "[R]eveals a remarkable ethnographic and theatrical eye...a model account of a personal, embodied sociology..." --American Journal of Sociology "...a provocative, exhilarating, maddening, and profoundly idiosyncratic effort." --Contemporary Sociology "Body & Soul not only sets a new standard for scholarly research and writing on sport. It is a virtuoso performance that could--if properly read and disseminated and emulated--put the study of sport at the center of all sociological theorizing and analysis."--Social Forces "[A] sociological tour de force...sure to be widely used as an exemplar of how to conduct participant observation research.... It is packed with fruitful conceptual and theoretical discussions." --Qualitative Sociology "A fresh and authoritative treatment." --The Ring: The Bible of Boxing "Body & Soul will pull you into the deep rhythms of boxing and should certainly earn a place in the canon of literature in the ring." --Los Angeles Times "Loic Wacquant's Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer is perhaps the best yet sociology of the body---its theorizing is less explicit than is

the acuteness of the observations." --Contemporary Sociology

A wonderful story and sociological analysis of young black men learning the skills and discipline of boxing in a gym in Chicago's ghetto. The author, a French grad student who joined them to study the "sweet science of bruising," shows insight and compassion. Although the academic insights are significant, he tells a good story without weighing it down with unnecessary jargon. As in any other pursuit, boxing requires discipline, and the more successful students have it. As their wise old trainer notes, "The gym is to boxing what the church is to religion." Some good writers have studied boxing, including A. J. Liebling and Joyce Carol Oates. This author joins their ranks.

For anyone interested in the life of a boxer, the training and the overall effort involved, this is a must read. Having boxed as an amateur myself I will vouch for the authentic nature of this writer's detailed observations, and the feel of place and time in a lower income world in which this gym and these fighters exist. For me it was in a less than wealthy area in downtown Los Angeles, and here we read of Chicago's South Side, but the similarities are striking. There is very scholarly sociological input along with first-hand descriptions of the training routine, the hopes, the friendships, the sparring, the lead-up to a tournament bout, and the actual boxing.

It was very intriguing to be inside the mind of a disabled person. It gave the able bodied a new prospective on how to view these individuals and that they are capable of anything and everything they just have to go about it in a different way.

I have just pre-read the chapters. Will finish book soon. But having loved and participated in the sweet science for many years, I have to say that so far Wacquant's treatment of the culture becoming a boxer is excellent. My only gripe with the book is the small print size. should've suggested ordering a microscope to read it with.

One of the things that I really like about authors that operate in the same framework as Wacquant is that they are both academic but also very accessible. This book certainly fits the bill because Wacquant does a great job of describing the Woodlawn neighborhood and the boxing culture that exists in the area. His experience and talent as a writer makes reading the book a joy. My only critique is that I wish I would have heard more from other fighters/people who participated in boxing with Wacquant. To elaborate a bit further, Wacquant was the sole writer/creator of the experiences

he was describing--which was slightly biased. Still, this is a great book for anyone interested in actual lived sociological research.

I had Professor Wacquant for one of my classes and I have to say he is an excellent professor who has amazing ideas about today's society. In this book, he argues against the mainstream idea of the underclass and he also explains how the boxing gym is a force in opposition to the forces of the ghetto. Very well written, the book is a very good read. It has been very interesting for me, as I am studying sociology as a college student and I box in my spare time.

Put simply: if you want to get a decent look at the inner-city boxing phenomenon, buy this. But if you are in academia, be warned: Wacquant is far from the detached observer he swears he is. A good example of what NOT to do in ethnographic research.

Having searched and read close to what I can find on the subject featured in this book, I can honestly say that it covers close to everything I was looking for. It is well written, a page-turner (which I rarely find a "scientific" book to be), in depth, and has a nice personal touch. Wacquant shows great understanding for the sport, as well as the interpersonal and mystified aspects of the gym, and is able to put this together in sociological terms and aspects. I have myself traveled around the world, and in several major cities (and small towns) visited different gyms with the purpose of training. But also because I am interested in the differences of the gyms and the people there. I can relate to Woodlawn Boys Club because I spent a few weeks in Minneapolis, and frequented a "similar" kind of gym there, and I find great interest in reading about his findings in "his" gym. One of the main reasons I read - and liked - this book, is my search for validating boxing as professional youth work, and I discovered many findings, which can also be applied in my small country, which is totally different when it comes to the urban life. The principles are nevertheless the same. So for every person interested in boxing, youth work or/and the mystique surrounding the sport and the gym (as a phenomena) this is a must. Or if you merely want interesting reading from a modern and gutsy sociologist, you will probably like it as well. Enjoy!

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