



Delft University of Technology

Loïc Wacquant 2004: **Body and Soul. Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer.** Oxford: Oxford University Press

Reinders, LG AJ

**DOI**

[10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00878\\_7.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00878_7.x)

**Publication date**

2009

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

International Journal of Urban and Regional Research

**Citation (APA)**

Reinders, LG AJ. (2009). Loïc Wacquant 2004: *Body and Soul. Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33(2), 586-587.  
[https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00878\\_7.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2009.00878_7.x)

**Important note**

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).

Please check the document version above.

**Copyright**

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

**Takedown policy**

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.

We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**Green Open Access added to [TU Delft Institutional Repository](#)  
as part of the Taverne amendment.**

More information about this copyright law amendment  
can be found at <https://www.openaccess.nl>.

Otherwise as indicated in the copyright section:  
the publisher is the copyright holder of this work and the  
author uses the Dutch legislation to make this work public.

cover. This also acts as a good metaphor for the basic and important story of how lines were deliberately and fruitfully blurred between national and international designers, as well as municipal- and state-level bodies. The author does not flinch from narrating the relocation of residents from their demolished neighbourhoods — making way for new 'highest and best use' structures — to high-rise apartments with modern features. The author assumes that since the government is responsible for acting in the people's best interest that is what was done; the degree of involvement by, or consultation with, the affected citizens is dealt with in greater depth elsewhere.

This study is taken mainly from the planner's viewpoint. The price paid for adoption of zoned concentrations of similar developments, resulting in overly separated functional areas that have obliterated the organically created interaction of residents with services, retail and employment areas, led to a lack of '*renqi*' (p. 280), or liveliness, that Western planners strive to recapture in 'back-to-the-future' or 'Smart Growth' integrated development.

This study's best contribution comes from the detailed description of the chosen mechanisms and processes used for the transformation of greater Shanghai. Informed by the author's previous experience with a municipal planning body in China, the construction of the political and legal framework for this mammoth undertaking is described, along with the ensuing construction of Pudong. Adaptation of public-private partnerships, build-to-own and other mechanisms familiar in more fully marketized economies need to be reconstrued in an evolving Chinese political economy.

A common shortcoming of case studies lies in their failure to acknowledge or assess the role played by timing in shaping the features and outcomes being examined. The case of Pudong shows both what can happen when local and global forces are both out of, and then in, sync — wide streets and open fields, set aside when China decided to develop, remained empty until financial markets deemed the time ripe to complete investments, followed by the over-building boom. To her credit, the author concludes by pointing out Pudong's unique aspects as a designated model for China's urban future (though downplaying its role as a regional balance to the Pearl River delta). The prowess of this particular developmental state to create a new urban form remains remarkable; this book offers one insider's interesting contribution to how it was accomplished.

**Susan M. Walcott**, University of North Carolina Greensboro

Loïc Wacquant 2004: *Body and soul. Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Body and Soul* is a sociological and ethnographic treatise on the social art of boxing in the Woodlawn Boys Club, a boxing gym in the South Side of Chicago. The book sets out to translate the bodily and kinetic practice of boxing, its 'carnal existence', in academic writing. Wacquant claims that the 'pugilistic art' of boxing can only be apprehended in the action itself, the body being actively used as a research instrument and object of analysis.

In order to capture the sociological relevance and bodily experience of prize fighting, the book is divided into three types of texts. Part one, 'The street and the ring', is a sociological treatise on the social universe of the gym. It sets the gym within the 'desolate landscape' of the ghetto in post-Fordist America, where, according to one of the informants, 'everybody is on drugs, dead or in jail'. The second part, 'Fight night at Studio 104', describes a day in boxing life, from daytime preparations to a series of prizefights in a late night event. The third part, ' "Busy" Louie at the Golden Gloves', is a short confessional tale about the first official boxing match of the author himself. By dividing the book into three parts, the book shifts between narratives of sociological analysis, ethnographic description and self-reflective short story.

The book has the gym as its main scene of action. The author here follows Bourdieu's notion of the research setting as a living laboratory, as Wacquant has elaborated on in an

earlier journal article (Wacquant, 2004). Variously described in terms such as institution, habitus, universe, sanctuary and castle, the gym is referred to as a self-enclosed space, an 'island of stability and order', which offers closure and confinement. The gym ultimately is 'the club that beats the street', existing in a relation of 'symbiosis and opposition' to the ghetto outside. This self-enclosed ambiance of the gym translates in its physical layout and its social and moral life. People in the gym are fully occupied with urging members to leave their statuses, daily problems and obligations at home or on the street. Mixing peer-group solidarity and individual ambitions, the social world of the gym is constrained by a 'pact of nonaggression', which pacifies and domesticates the ghetto subject. Being a boxer requires a regular and disciplined daily life and a physical and mental 'asceticism' that is at odds with the social-economic conditions of the ghetto. Although the gym itself also is a divided space, segregating men and women as well as amateurs and professionals, the culture of the gym is marked by an egalitarianism that treats people as equal. Moreover, boxers are mainly recruited from those working-class segments of ghetto society that are closed to social-economic integration into mainstream society.

Next to the opposition between the spaces of ghetto and gym, a second crucial feature of the social life of boxing is the interplay of 'inner surveillance' and 'external signaling'. Cultivating the instinct and socializing the beast inside, boxing essentially centers on the collective development of individual skills. In this sense, Wacquant sees the gym as a 'moral community' (Durkheim) and 'little milieu' (Weber), supervised by the coach Deedee, one of the main informants and characters in the book. The codified and ritualistic social interactions of the gym are most notable in the practice of 'sparring', during which boxers are actively taking part in social networks of reciprocal relationships. As in Goffman's interactive rituals, sparring is seen as a way of working out consensus by speaking with fists.

The book goes at length to sketch the micro-sociological underpinnings of boxing life in a Chicago gym, as, for example, in the interplay between trainer, cornerman, boxer and manager. But it falls short with regard to extrapolating the social and individual lives of boxers within the gym to the larger strata of society. In one of the weakest parts of the book, Wacquant transmits the personal characteristics of two boxers to their social backgrounds and class origins. Butch, being stable, sober and economic, is characterized as a proletarian. Curtis, a catlike, impulsive, aggressive and irregular personage, is seen as embodying a typical member of the sub-proletariat. The book here has a rather limited focus on the gym and almost totally neglects the ghetto that surrounds it. As the book focuses more and more on the corporeal practice and experience of boxing itself, the social and geographical backgrounds of the boxers themselves are left out of view.

Despite these missing links, however, the book succeeds in translating the extreme sensual experience of gym life in academic writing. The book contains many detailed descriptions of the rhythmic smells and touches, punches and footsteps, and the heated gasps, sniffs and growls of the boxers. Wacquant eventually does not get inside 'their heads', as the New Journalists of the 1960s would have it, but rather captures the total experience of a social practice via the body, mind and soul of the researcher himself. Wacquant also goes to some length to show how he, getting 'the graft pounded in', gradually progresses in acquiring the specific 'eye' and the specific skills of a prize fighter. The book stands out, not as a detached analysis of life in the gym, but rather as a self-conscious, affectionate and sensuous book on the social art of boxing.

**Leeke Reinders**, Delft University of Technology

Wacquant, L.J.D. (2004) Following Pierre Bourdieu into the field. *Ethnography* 5.4, 387–414.