

## PREFACE

Over the years the boxing ring and the gym have emerged as a central concern for ethnographic sociology. Loïc Wacquant is arguably the dominant figure. He is surrounded by much admired studies by accomplished sociologists like Elise Paradis, John Sugden, Lucia Trimbur and Kath Woodward. Beyond such published scholars, a trip to Google Scholar will turn up a wealth of theses and conference papers, many of these an initial foray into sociological research by graduate students around the world. But what exactly is the attraction? And do we really need yet another boxing ethnography?

In Goffman's terms, boxing is a place "where the action is." It is where reputations, identities and fate come together. So do material bodies and immaterial ideas. This is an arena that is thick with circulating meanings about gender, race and biography, and heavy with resentment, pride and hope. In the working out of such elements, both reflexively and in their carnal expression, there is an almost magical amplification and crystallization. This is what the ethnographer sees. This is why sociologists feel compelled to return to the gym time and time again.

Jérôme Beauchez captures this nexus with unprecedented clarity and subtlety. His text goes deep into the meanings of the boxers' milieu and uncovers the passions that animate the life world of the fighter. Shuffling between the gym and the *banlieue*, between the fight and the life course, between individuals and their social context, this book goes further than any other study in capturing the densely layered cultural, emotional and material structures through which the mark of the fist comes to stamp

the lives of the socially marginal. In so doing, Beauchez shows that while concepts such as resistance, *habitus*, and so on—what we might think of as the stock in trade of critical ethnography—have some traction, they need to be both reconsidered and made supple. Only with the assistance of a truly cultural phenomenology that takes members' experiences rather than our theoretical agendas as a point of departure can the ethnographer get close to the heart of the matter.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-56028-1>

Boxing, the Gym, and Men

The Mark of the Fist

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2018, XXVI, 240 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-56028-1