Tales from the Field

Ethnography

Ruination in the ring: Habitus in the making of a professional "opponent"

Ethnography
2022, Vol. 0(0) 1–25

DOI: 10.1177/14661381221114069
journals.sagepub.com/home/eth
SAGE

Loïc Wacquant
University of California, USA; Centre de sociologie européenne, Paris, France

Abstract

Backed by 3 years of apprenticeship in a boxing gym of Chicago's hyperghetto and in-depth life-story interviews with fifty professional boxers, this article reconstructs the social biography and ring career of a professional "opponent" as a living analyzer of the social, economic, mental, and emotional wheels and cogs of prizefighting careers. An "opponent" like Jake "The Snake" Valliance is a boxer determined and skilled enough to give a good account of himself in the ring, but willing to travel for quick money and be overmatched to serve as a stepping stone in the careers of rising fighters. He fights often, loses nearly as often, but maintains enough occupational pride that he keeps going, always hoping to turn his ship around, thus playing a key role in the pugilistic market. The article dissects the genesis, feeding, and fading of the *libido pugilistica* that explains the opponent's continued investment in the economy of pain, love, and deceit that is professional boxing. It throws light on the material and symbolic logics of a skilled bodily craft and, beyond it, on the workings of habitus as cognitive cog, trained capacity and socialized desire driving social action.

Keywords

body, boxing, habitus, libido, emotions, desire, deceit, symbolic economy

In the pandemic winter of 2021, while preparing the expanded anniversary edition of *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* and a book of historical photo-ethnography on the craft of prizefighting in the black American ghetto (Wacquant, 2022a; 2022b), I put on my detective's hat and patiently tracked down my ring mates from the Woodlawn Boys Club in Chicago where I had learned the craft 30 years earlier. I

Corresponding author:
Loïc Wacquant, University of California, Berkeley; and Centre de sociologie européenne, Paris, France.
Email: loic@berkeley.edu

interviewed them at length over the phone about their tribulations in and out of the ring, recapitulating their pugilistic careers and their social fates. Surprisingly, the latter ranged all over the occupational spectrum: one had become a clerk's assistant at the local criminal court, another had died from a heroin overdose; one had retired from his job as a firefighter and opened a barbershop, another had cycled through a dozen "slave jobs" in the service economy, experienced multiple stints in prison, and was borderline homeless; two had become boxing coaches with the city's Park District while two brothers had gone into the military and the police. Most had remained or become deeply religious. All proved viscerally and nostalgically attached to their identity as (past) pugilist and none regretted "gloving up" even as they had failed to realize their career ambitions and to accrue significant ring earnings.

These conversations were joyous, lush, and energizing. They stimulated me to plunge back into the vast textual, aural, and visual archive I had constituted while apprenticing in the sweet science between August 1988 and November 1991, including a 2,300-page field notebook, some 1,800 photographic slides, and another 1,500 pages of transcripts of interview with fighters, trainers, managers, cornermen, and matchmakers, and field documents (posters, fight programs, scorecards, maps, etc.). It is on this occasion that I discovered the internet site Boxrec.com which contains the complete records of all professional boxing cards staged during the past five decades in the United States. These records made it possible to reconstruct in granular detail the dual structure of the pugilistic economy, with its *sponsored track* for "name" boxers, protected and built by promoters to rise and reach the top of the industry, and *contest track* for "club fighters," the run-of-the-mill pugs who populate the lower reaches of the pugilistic economy and serve as stepping stones for the careers of the name fighters (Wacquant, 2022a: 346–357). These records also brought to light the role of the "opponent," a skilled boxer carefully overmatched to build "prospects" and "contenders," as human hinge between these two career tracks.

One of my gym mates from Woodlawn, sadly, had become an "opponent," fighting as a professional for 18 years and travelling extensively across the United States and Western Europe to amass a stupendous record of 32 victories and 78 defeats. Combing through my fieldnotes and transcripts to reconstruct his pugilistic journey, I came across my 1991 interview with Jake "the Snake" Valliance, a middleweight based in Gary, Indiana, who, I then remembered, had been trained by my coach DeeDee early in his career and later annointed as the archtypical "opponent" by a 1989 article in *Sports Illustrated* entitled, "You Can Count Them Out: palookas, tomato cans, 'opponents.' Whatever they're called, these are the fighters who go down so that the hometown heroes can go up" (Reilly, 1989). Piqued by his story and flush with reminiscences, I searched my notebooks and other interviews for additional information on his character and career. Soon I assembled the pieces of a sociological jigsaw puzzle picturing the formation, infusion, and dissipation of *libido pugilistica*, the drive and desire for pugilistic stakes--pride, prestige, and purses--that pull the fighter into the gym and push him into the squared circle.

Heeding Pierre Bourdieu's (1997) call to *sociologize and pluralize libido*, I set out to reconstruct the "socialized affects" that account for Jake's irresistible attraction to, extended infatuation with, and gradual ruination in the ring.[1] The case of Jake is especially instructive empirically and productive analytically due to the unusual length and

positional span of his career, covering the stages of "prospect," "opponent" and "journeyman," and for the diversity of causal factors that propel it and data sources I can triangulate. Jake is an *ideal-type incarnate* through which we can discern the logics of the prizefighting economy at work as if through a magnifying glass and capture the *aisthesis* of prizefighting that is so crucial to the magnetism it exerts over its practitioners.[2]

But why publish this account 30 years after the facts? Ethnographers see themselves as "navigators of the contemporary," to use the title of David Westbrook's (2008) invitation to fieldwork, and the vast majority of ethnographic articles and monographs are published contemporaneously with the phenomenon they study. But ethnographers also weave lifestories with their field observations and commonly bring the past, reconstructed through documents and interviews, within their ambit. Moreover, there is a real sense in which a field observation, once inscribed in a notebook or computer file, *eo ipso* becomes a historical record of a past action or cognition that may have vanished without for that losing its scientific value. One stellar illustration: by the time Philippe Bourgois (1995) published his justly celebrated field study of the crack economy in Spanish Harlem, a decade had elapsed and that economy had collapsed (Contreras, 2013). This collapse took nothing away from the validity of his account and the latter's pertinence endures even as the social world he describes has not. So much to say that fieldnotes are idiosyncratic if methodical archives of sorts; *ethnographers are field historians of an ever-changing present*. The practitioners of "microhistory" in the mould of Carlo Ginzburg ([1976] 1980) and of *Alltagsgeschichte* following Alf Lüdtke (1995) demonstrate this, who read archives ethnographically.

The present article is, on a first reading, an empirical contribution to such historical ethnography, the meticulous field-based depiction of the social and symbolic makeup of a world bygone. The landscape of boxing has, on the face of it, changed in myriad ways over the past three decades. I delve into these transformations in the postface to *Body and Soul* (Wacquant, 2022a: 355–69), including mounting Hispanic immigration, the influx of fighters from the former Soviet Union, the efflorescence of women's fighting and "white-collar" boxing, the rise of Mixed Martial Arts, changes in broadcast technology (with diffusion of pay-per-view shows), and the role of the internet and social-media driven events. Yet none of these changes have altered the fundamentals of the social fabrication of the pugilist as *skilled and suffering being* and none have derailed the economy of pain, love, and deceit that is professional boxing. Belying its narrative and historical cast, then, the purpose of this old tale from the field resides in the *analytic present*: to throw light on the material and symbolic logics of a plebeian bodily craft and, beyond it, on the invariant genesis and workings of habitus as cognitive cog, trained capacity, and socialized desire.[3]

The portrait that follows triangulates data from three sources: a two-and-a-half hour interview with Jake conducted in September 1991 at the gym of the Gary Police Athletic League covering his social and pugilistic trajectory, aspirations, and expectations; the long article devoted to Jake and other "opponents" in the country's leading sports weekly, *Sports Illustrated* (Reilly, 1989); and information gleaned from gym mates, matchmakers and trainers, including coach DeeDee, my main informant, who knew Jake very well coming out of the amateurs and was his cornerman for a dozen fights at the start of his career ("Oh, I coulda did *that* interview"). It is also informed by the detailed study of the

ring tribulations of the leading "opponent" coming out of the Woodlawn gym (Wacquant, 2022a: 319–322), the reconstruction of the careers of all fifty professional boxers of varied ranks active in the greater Chicagoland in summer of 1991, and by myriad conversations with DeeDee and matchmaker Jack Cowen about the role and predicament of the "opponent" and his cousin the "journeyman" in the boxing economy.

*

A dark-skinned, broad-shouldered, African American with searching eyes and a slight stutter, Jake "the Snake" Torrance resides in a depressed neighborhood of the depressed industrial town of East Chicago, Indiana. He rents an unfinished basement in the house of a friend where he lives alone (at age 32, he is single with no known children) and all of his belongings fit in a couple of suitcases. He is 3 months behind on his rent and he cannot drive because his licence has been suspended. Jake has not held a steady job for three full years; instead, he makes his living in the ring, fighting regularly once a month, sometimes twice, and nearly always out of town. He takes odd jobs on the side, moving furniture or cleaning work sites for a day-labor agency that used to remunerate him in kind by letting him stay in a room gratis, but no longer. His only on-the-books prior employment was garbageman for the city of Gary for 7 years, a patronage job paying the solid hourly wage of $5.80 (almost twice the minimum wage) that he got as a personal favor from the mayor, to allow him to pursue what was once a promising career in the ring, and which he promptly lost after the mayor got voted out of office.

For our interview at the gym of the Gary Police Athletic League on a warm September afternoon, Jake is wearing a black T-shirt "The Big Apple," black burlap pants, beat-up black shoes and black ankle socks. The outfit showcases his svelte and muscular body: at 155 lbs on a sturdy 5"7' frame with broad shoulders, he fights in the junior middleweight division. He bears the marks of his trade on his face in the form of a flattened nose, cut marks to his large forehead, and scar tissue around his narrow eyes and across his thick eyebrows. Throughout our extended conversation, Jake is fidgetty and hesitant, his delivery choppy; he speaks barely above a whisper and slides from word to word and sentence to sentence as if on a slippery slope, often mumbling or half-talking to himself.[4] His persona exudes sorrow more than any other sentiment. If nothing else, the ring has taken its toll.

Jake was born and raised in the notorious north side of St. Louis, Missouri, at a time when the city was vying for the title of murder capital of the United States. He is the oldest of nine children (seven brothers and two sisters) and grew up with his siblings and his mother, a hospital maid with a high-school education, after she separated from his father, a steel-mill worker who did not finish high school, himself the son of carpenter who migrated north from Mississippi in search of racial solace and economic betterment.[5] Because his father had a stable factory job and his parents never received welfare, whereas neighbors barely eked out a living, Jake considers his family "very middle-class, really," even though they did not own their home, had no wealth to transmit, and no one held a college degree. Of his siblings old enough to work, the best job and highest education were achieved by a sister working as a secretary and studying for her bachelor of arts at a small Michigan college. Jake's relative sense of privilege is validated by the fact that his close childhood friends and relatives of his generation have gone on to become "really *industrial peoples*," working in

factories and government jobs with at least a modicum of economic security. His family stood squarely on the respectable side of the black working class.[6]

Jake's childhood neighborhood was rough: "It was like a typical *ghetto area* where black peoples had a fight among themselves," rife with drugs, prostitution, and shootings, where social jealousy was rampant, and people settled grudges and disputes by resort to force. Clocking in daily at the gym from his early teens on, Jake avoided entanglement in street culture and crime ("If I didn't be sussessful boxer, I knew I *probably would* wind up bein' a drug dealer"), even as he was involved in street fracas just about weekly to "kinda hold my own."[7] He got shot once and, although he belonged to a tight neighborhood-based set of youths, they did not have a named public identity and so he hesitates to call them a gang, noting that "we *stood our ground*" but that "it was nothin' real treacherous." Jake personally witnessed several killings, related to drug trafficking, but he has never sojourned in jail or prison. His only tussles with the law have involved court appearances to deal with recurrent traffic violations that led to the suspension of his driving licence. He muses that "if I wasn't careful, had good *judgement*, I be inside a penitenciary right now. See, I'm over 30 years old. In fact, if I can reach thirty, you know I *gotta have a little sense, to reach thirty.*"

Jake started learning the sweet science at the tender age of 12 after becoming entranced by Muhammad Ali on television, and he was gifted for the ring and dedicated to his craft. By his late teens he had developed into a top regional and then national fighter. Daily training in the gym, boxing in tournaments around town and across the country, and a part-time job as a cook at McDonald's kept him busy outside the classroom. Jake "liked school a lot" but school did not much like him and he struggled to complete his secondary education ("I'm not a bright student, I'mma *common-sense person*"). And so he stopped his studies after graduating to pursue his pugilistic career full time, turning professional and migrating to northwest Indiana after his nineteenth birthday: "I wanted to pursue into boxin' 'cause at that time boxin' was my *upswing*. I was lookin' for a *piece of the rock* (chuckles), I *wanted a piece of the gold*. So I put *all my interest into boxin'*." He readily concedes that "I'm not really sussessful, I'm jus' on the *limb*, jus' there, jus' *in motion*, know what I mean? But at that time, I wanted to be sussessful, I wanted to be a well-loved boxer. An' my goal was to be *a champ* an' I had *the tools* to be a champion."

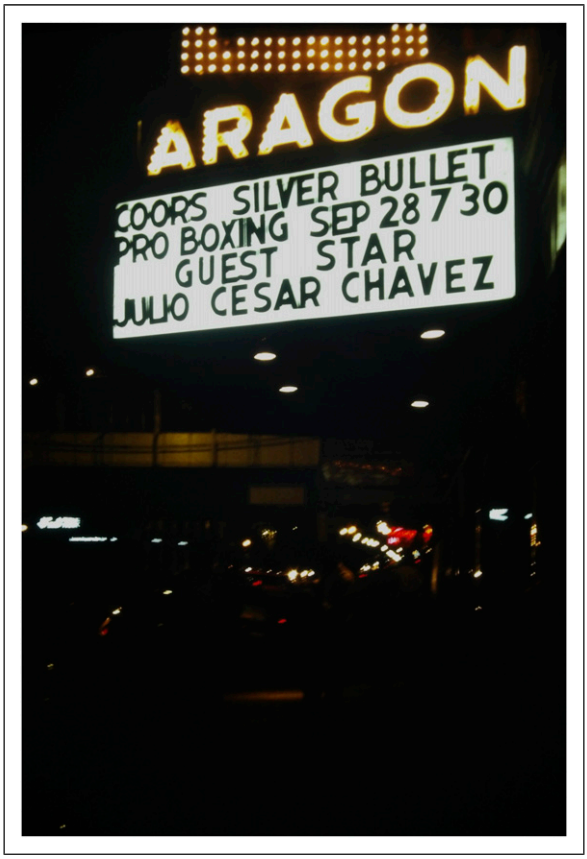
Indeed, Jake had a brilliant career as an amateur. He accrued an exceptional record of 210 victories for only 10 defeats over a 7-year stretch earning him a number-one ranking in the country in his weight division. He narrowly missed making the US Olympic team in 1980 because of illness and was considered the equal to future star Donald "The Cobra" Curry (who won the welterweight gold medal at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 and would go on to hold several world titles as a pro). So when he turned professional, he was a highly experienced and proficient fighter from the get-go--although he also carried significant "wear and tear" from the sheer number of bouts accumulated (most amateurs turn pro having fought 40 to 60 bouts, with a low of 15 and a high around one hundred). Jake was considered a "hot prospect" and attracted the interest of the Chicago promoter Ernie Terrell (the former world heavyweight contender who famously clashed with Ali in 1967) who had high hopes for him. Jake started off by meeting those expectations and more, winning his first seven fights with coach DeeDee in his corner.[8] A gym mate reminisces that Jake was unique for "his style, his grace, his movement--he was so good,

folks could not hit him: his technique, his rhythm, man, he was a true snake. He was smooth, because of his knowledge of boxing."

But, then, from a record of 7-and-0, Jake went to 10-and-3, 11-and-6, and 13-and-12 by his fifth year. From there he compiled an avalanche of losses: after a decade in the ring his record stood at 18 victories for 41 defeats. The more he lost and the more he fought because, paradoxically, his losing record made him a more attractive adversary for up-and-coming fighters looking to run up their record and gain ring experience against a proficient foe willing to travel and posing a minimal risk of losing. Jake had morphed into what every rising boxer dreads becoming: a *professional "opponent*," a skilled and resilient pug who can be counted on to put up a good fight and, more often than not, be defeated because he is defense-minded, lacks punching power, and agrees to fight on his opponent's turf, thus exposing himself to a disfavorable "hometown decision." After a while, opponents also lose the sense of near-invicibility that every fighter must have to step into the squared circle and evolve the mentality of a loser, which further decreases their chance of an upset victory, despite their ring abilities.

In 1991, the year I interviewed him at the mid-point of what would be a twenty-year career, Jake's record stood at 20 wins and 47 losses; he fought twelve times that year, losing 9 matches, in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Arkansas, France (twice), Switzerland, and Spain. All but one of his opponents had a lopsided winning record; they included boxers with tallies such as 62-and-2, 54-and-0, 35-and-2, 21-and-0, and 11-and-0. During that stretch, Jake competed in three main events in ten rounds but also preliminary bouts in four and six rounds, thus serving the gamut of needs of matchmakers and ensuring in turn a steady supply of future bouts to take. His upset win over the Italian welterweight champion Romolo Casamonica, who was 28-2-and-2 and had just fought for the European title, proves that Jake still had considerable skills: he won the bout on points in eight rounds at the Palacio de los Deportes in Madrid (for which fight he received the princely purse of $1,500). Says DeeDee: "Now, Jake wins every now an' then. Jake knows he can upset you. *As bad as his record is*, Jake Torrance was (huffing for emphasis) *championship material*."

Boxers who go on to become champions almost always take the slow upward route of the "protected fighter" (also known in boxing linguo as the "name fighter," "house fighter" or "A fighter" set up to win), from prospect to contender, by careful choosing matches to pad their records and gain ring experience until the time comes to fight the division's better competitors for a worthwhile "payday" or a title. By contrast, Jake took the fast downward path from prospect to "opponent" (the "B fighter," expected to lose) and eventually "journeyman."[9] Three factors conspired to derail his career in this direction after only seven fights. First, Jake developed or escalated a drug habit, mostly cocaine, which had a deleterious influence on his ring preparedness and was a clear contributing factor to his other troubles, managerial and mental, as well as to his pressing need for cash. He concedes as much in our interview by candidly noting that staying away from drugs and alcohol is the single most difficult "sacrifice" that a professional boxer has to make (when other fighters flag the trinity of food, social life, and sex), and that he had bad experiences with narcotics: "I'm not really a *drug addict*, I'm really gettin' away from drugs, I don't mess with drugs anymore, I don't miss it."[10]

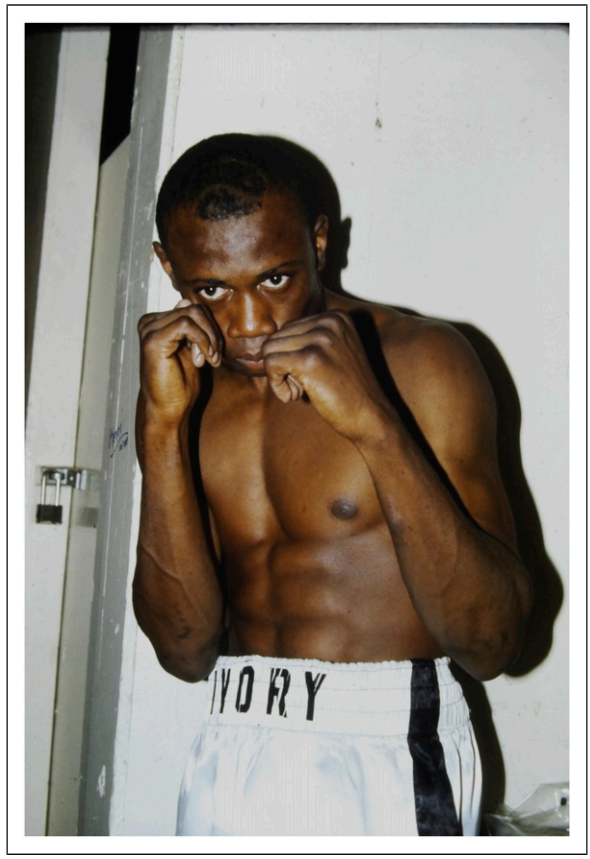


Second, instead of sticking with the plan laid out by his initial Chicago promoter and backed up by the sage ring counsel of DeeDee, Jake "ran off with the drunk white man" (in DeeDee's words), Lionel Towers, a businessman from Gary who had loaned him a car, paid his rent, and promised to buy him a condominium, give his girlfriend a car and send her to college (none of which promises materialized). To add to the confusion, Jake also signed a 3-year managerial contract with Jerry Mullins, the wealthy owner of a catering and limousine service in downtown Chicago who agreed to pay him a 200-dollar weekly salary (against a 50-percent cut of his future purses, instead of the usual 33 percent), but quickly "cut him loose" after he started piling up losses. DeeDee, who counts Jake among the missed economic opportunities of his own career, observes bitterly: "He got contracts *everywhere* an' nobody never said nuthin' about it."

Last and relatedly, Jake suffered from abrupt mood swings in and out of the ring, likely caused by his use of cocaine, but perhaps owing to a separate mental health condition that emerged under the stress of launching a professional career. It is possible also that this was a physiological effect of the accumulation of blows received during his amateur career, but it is unlikely because Jake was an unusually elusive fighter who could go a whole fight

without getting touched and so he never suffered beat-downs, and the mental change was sudden. Recalls DeeDee: "He lost his *mind*, anyhow. He had a mind problem, somethin' happened to him, I dunno what it was. But he *changed overnight*… You *couldn't trust 'im*. See, some nights Jake would fight, some nights he *won't fight*. Just *the way his head is*… Say, 'Jake why don't you go out and whip that fool?' (tentative and embarrassed) 'Huh, mister DeeDee, I don't know.'"[11]

And thus Jake turned from "one of the hottest prospects in the country" into a second-tier fighter reduced to live flesh served up to "build" the career of other fighters who enjoyed the managerial guidance and promotional protection he had lost or forsaken. DeeDee again: "Yeah, Jake went off then after that, it was *downhill*… He win a bout, not long ago, he went overseas, upset somebody, 'cause he ain't gonna git hurt. Too skilled. With *natural skill*. Then he got to foolin' around, *fast life an' shit*. Oh boy! I wish you coulda saw 'im! He fought a boy down in d'hotel one night, the [boxing] commission wrote him, says: 'Jake Torrance put on *a boxin' clinic*.'… But he *lost his mind*. An' it might not have been to drugs. Some people don't have to have drugs to, y'know, to be *off*. So, one of 'em things."



From "prospect" to "opponent" to "journeyman"

The arc of Jake's twenty-year career between the ropes took him from hot "prospect" in his first year to high-level "opponent" for the first decade to low-level "opponent" to mere "journeyman" in the second decade, spanning nearly the whole spectrum of a *negative career*. It attests to the rarity and fragility of the mix needed to reach the world championship level: *bodily capital* (somatic endowment, technical and tactical prowess), *moral capital* (capacity to "sacrifice," mental preparedness and emotional focus, and "heart"), and *social capital* (brought by a conversant and well-connected combo of trainer, manager and promoter). During his initial year as a pro, Jake possessed this combination and ran up seven straight victories to fight a ten-round main event in only his tenth fight. Seven of his first ten fights were in and around Chicago. He seemed to be on a gliding path to success.

But, for the combination of reasons discussed above, drugs, a confused managerial situation, and mental instability, this combo came unglued and Jake agreed to take tough fights on the road for more money and he quickly tallied up long strings of losses during a decade. He was "fed" to superior adversaries and future world champions Donald "The Cobra" Curry (then 12-and-0), Julian "The Hawk" Jackson (11-and-0), Buddy McGirt (13-and-0), Darrin "Schoolboy" Van Horn (37-and-0), Gianfranco Rosi (44-and-3), Carl "The Squirrel" Daniels (18-and-0), and Frenchmen Laurent Boudouani (12-and-0) and Gilbert Dele (17-and-0), as well as to a dozen rising contenders and challengers to world champions. Jake lost all these bouts but he fought mostly 10 rounders, either as a main event or as a supporting fight on a televised title card, indicating that he was a proficient and resilient fighter, even as he was carefully overmatched by the promoters hiring his services. For instance, during years two and three, 13 of his 17 bouts were ten-rounders, which means that his purses were in the one-to-two thousand-dollar range (equivalent to two to 4 months of salary at the minimum wage).

Then Jake's skills, desire, and endurance, along with his value on the pugilistic market, abruptly deteriorated during his second decade between the ropes: only 5 of his 45 bouts between 1991 and 2000 were ten-rounders and he rumbled about every other month. In his final 6 years, he fought only four- and six-rounders, preliminary contests in marginal venues, typically reserved for novices, "stiffs" and "bums." He had lapsed to the level of a low-cost "journeyman" who travels to cities in his region of residence (often at his own cost, for he is not worth spending much on transportation and accomodation by the promoter), where he does little more than pick up a paltry paycheck (of $200 to $300 per fight). At the end of the road, even pugilistic pride runs out, as recounted in 2022 by a gym comrade who knew Jake well at the sunset of the latter's career: "(enthusiastic) He fought them all and, guess what? They didn't hurt him and they didn't hit him. His movement, his ability to counter. (turning sullen with disapproval) *He threw fights*. He was still so slick, they wouldn't knock him out or anything: guess what, he would *quit in the corner*. The

referee questioned him, (dejected) 'Nah I don't wanna go back out'. But they couldn't lay a glove on him. He was that slick."

*

When he turned professional, Jake's goal was to become the welterweight champion of the world and to "be sussessful, buy beautiful different things, different clothes, different homes, stuff like that." In his case, this was not an unrealistic ambition, given his ranking among the country's best amateurs, but a world title is a prevalent aspiration for beginning prizefighters--75% of pros in Chicago nourish it--, no matter their skill level and objective prospects.[12] Indeed, boxing is unique among professional sports in that the vast majority of novices hope to become, not just a proficient practicioner, but a global star. Such wishful yearning is fed by the absence of barriers to entry into the profession (some states do not even require having fought in the amateurs) and the sense of personal invincibility that boxers must nurture to enter and endure in the ring. It is also subtended by the fuzziness and seeming continuity of the pugilistic hierarchy, stretching from obscure "club fighters" all the way to charismatic world titlists, and the easy accessibility of the latter at boxing venues, whether gyms or arenas. Every boxer knows first-hand a boxer who has gone to battle with a world champion, be it in a "warm-up fight" or a "tune-up bout," so who is to say you could not also get your crack at a "name fighter" and score an upset victory to suddenly vault into the rankings?[13]

From the start, Jake had his mind set on the sum of $100,000 as his desired purse and he "wanted to be *a millionaire*: bein' a millionaire is always a *personal dream*!" But prizefighters in the Chicagoland of the 1980s made $50 a round for preliminary bouts and around $1000 for a main event at home, and their purses were often paid by their own managers to keep them busy and prevent "ring rust." By going on the road, Jake earned more but at the cost of registering extended series of defeats, which effectively capped his future gains, and still nowhere close to his target. His best purse over a decade was a measly $3500 to fight world champion Darrin Van Horn in an eight-rounder on the undercard of a world title fight in Monte Carlo.[14]

Jake trains on his own three to five times a week at the North Gleason Park Pavillion. He takes the bus to the gym of the Gary Police Athletic League for sparring sessions. He does not have a manager and gets his fights directly from the Chicago matchmaker Jack Cowen and from his colleague and friend, based in Indianapolis, the matchmaker Pete Susans who effectively act as his "booking agents."[15] The one covers Chicagoland and the upper Midwest, the other the Upper South, the Great Lakes, and the Mid-Atlantic region. Both of them know that Jake is reliable and available: he stays in shape and he will give a good account of himself between the ropes, even on an off-night when he can always rely on his elusiveness and ring guile to make it through the match without getting hurt.

Cowen and Susans call Jake directly or reach out to his trainer Johnny Taylor, a portly black lieutenant in the Gary police force, who serves as his de facto manager. Taylor counsels Jake on his fight offers, goes on the road with him, driving to venues as far as North Dakota and Arkansas, propping up his morale, and serving as a liaison with local promoters for practical matters (food, accomodation, licencing, equipment, payment, etc.). For each outing, the matchmaker takes a standard cut of 10% of the purse and Taylor takes another trainer cut of 10%, leaving Jake with 80% of the sum earned in the ring. Cowen is the one who selects his fights. Jake considers the bout based on the purse, in a take-it or leave-it formula; he typically knows next to nothing about his adversary of the night, not even his stance, style and record ("really, I got enough experience that I really don't care, know what I mean? It's take it as it is"). This setup is rife for chicanery: the booking agent can receive a query from a European promoter for a fight with a purse of $2,500 and relay that offer to Jake as a $1,500-fight, thus pocketing the difference of one thousand dollars in addition to his 10% fee unbeknownst to Jake.[16]

Coach Taylor's role is deeply ambiguous: he acts as an advisor to Jake and also frequently loans him petty cash, but he has a vested interest in keeping him going in the ring, for the measly monies, distinctive thrills, and the active involvement in the pugilistic scene this affords him. He also gets paid time off his duties as a policeman when he goes on the road. But Taylor also genuinely believes in Jake's fast-diminishing capacities and in the possibility, however remote, of turning the ship around. It is possible that his judgment is clouded: according to DeeDee, Taylor, himself a former fighter, is "punch drunk." But it is also part of the occupational habitus of the trainer to be positive, to always boost the ego of his fighter, and the trainer who knows the boxer best is the least likely to tell him to hang up his gloves when it is time because he knows this would amount to a kind of social death for his charge.[17] Taylor waxes eloquent about "the voodoo moves and that electric combination" that Jake can unleash in the ring at any time and he insists that his next victory could be the start of an unlikely "run for the title" (Reilly, 1989).[18] And Taylor shows the same optimistic willfulness when it comes to sending his fighters to work as sparring partners at the training camp of champions, insisting that the chance to be slotted on the undercard of a future show is worth the risk of serious punishment absorbed in sparring sessions.

Going on the road for small fights in second-tier cities is neither glorious nor fun. It can entail a long and tiring car drive on the eve of the bout; getting to the location deep into the night to sleep just a few hours before the morning weigh-in; staying at a dive hotel and eating bad food grabbed at a 24-h convenience store; changing in a public bathroom or an RV sitting on the parking lot of the venue, bar, theater, outdoor restaurant, instead of a locker room; fighting on a substandard ring with rubber in lieu of canvas, and facing last minute changes in the weight allowed, number of rounds, even opponent, and conditions of payment. It is night and day from the higher-level bouts taking place in casino resorts or reputed venues such as the Felt Forum in New York, the Blue Horizon in Philadelphia, and the Boston Garden, which often put up fighters in top hotels with posh bedrooms, buffet dining, in-house gyms and steam rooms, all of which gives travelling boxers a taste of the luxury that might be theirs one day with a title

victory. A fight out of town can also be a welcome break from the humdrum of everyday life. Even something as seemingly banal as flying on an airplane or driving a brand new rental car paid for by the inviting promoter to get to the fight city, rather than one's hooptie, adds to the excitement of a fight outing. There is also the small exaltation of being interviewed on the fly by the local newspaper for an article on the hometown star whom the "opponent" will face that evening, and being stopped by patrons at the arena, gym, or theater where the card is held who ogle you with admiration and sometimes ask to take pictures with you or an autograph, on the mistaken belief that you are a rising star of the ring.

A significant chunk of the action for a high-level opponent comes from foreign lands. Chicago matchmaker Jack Cowen is plugged into the French, German, and Italian markets and he gets requests for regular shipments of solid American pugs suited to filling the undercard of European shows. The typical purse for an overseas fight is considerably

higher than stateside, about a thousand to fiften hundred dollars for an eight-rounder, three to five thousands for a main event, which Jake thinks "is not enough money, but I just need the money, I'll just take it an' *go there an' get it*." But travelling across the ocean to take on a European boxer can be treacherous: you have to contend with jet lag (which makes you fatigued, sleepy, and "kills your legs"), get used to foreign food, get over the lack of company (Jake typically journeys alone, or with Jack Cowen when the latter takes a trip to burnish his overseas social capital), hire a cornerman and a cutman on the spot who do not know you, and do without emotional support with all the forces of the bout arrayed against you on fight night, the crowd, the judges, and even the referee.[19] By Jake's own admission, doing "real good" in the rings of Europe means, not winning, but giving his French, Italian, or German counterpart of the evening a creditable fistic repartee, such that he gets hired again by the foreign promoter to come lose another bout: "If I do *real good*, they tell me 'we gonna use you on this card, be ready this date,' they talk to me. Then I got another payday."[20]

Jake has also labored stateside as a paid sparring partner at the camps of champions. The promoter of John "The Beast" Mugabi recently contacted matchmaker Jack Cowen, who in turn contacted trainer John Taylor with an offer for Jake to serve as sparring partner for the Ugandan slugger in Tampa, Florida, during three weeks, for which Jake was paid $250 a week in cash (about twice the minimum wage) plus free transportation, room, and board. Jake also picked up work in Kentucky with the Van Horne camp for three weeks and in Canada with the camp of Matthew Hilton near Québec City for two. Trainer Taylor notes approvingly that, in Kentucky, "Jake would be out there in the camp with [world champion] Darrin Van Horn, *no girls, no alcohol, no nothin'*." The camp is run by Van Horne's father near in his hometown of Lexington and "he takes care of his son, he don't allow nobody to mess around." Boxing at these camps, Jake gets a bitter taste of what could have been his professional life had he fulfilled his ring promise.

*

The *theme of deceit, or love betrayed, is a leitmotif* of our interview and it indelibly stamps Jake's retrospective account of his career. Deceit at the very start, as he feels that he "got kinda *tricked* into the sport" by the allure and aura of Ali. "I seen the sports hero at that time was Muhammad Ali, right? What happen is, after I seen him, on the network, *his image* came *onto me*, an' I kinda *dreamed to be somethin' like him*, know what I mean?... He was a hero-type guy, an' that kinda thrilled me a lil' bit. *But* what happen was, that *thrill* messed my mind up a little bit." Since his hopes for fame and wealth in the ring did not pan out, Jake now regrets that he did not follow his childhood love for baseball instead: "Baseball was the sport I shoulda pursueded in, I was a *good* second-baseman, man, whoo man!.. I probably woulda had a better life if I'd done baseball. 'Cause I got kinda *tricked* into the sport [of boxing] an' I kinda fell in love with it… But I wanted to be a *sports hero*, I wanteda be a professional athlete."

Deceit was also involved, in Jake's rendering, when his managers lured him with promises of materials benefits that did not come to pass and he found himself being *offered* the quick money fights rather than the carefully crafted sequence of bouts fit to building his record and allowing him to bide his time for a shot at good "payday." But what is striking, at this juncture, is that Jake ran off from his original promotional team who wanted to "move him" and *took* those money fights. He was a victim of his own desire or need for quick cash more so than of the incompetence or deception of his first manager. When I tell DeeDee that Jake complained about the promotional team initially assembled by Ernie Terrell, which included DeeDee as a trainer and cornerman, the old coach rails: "I wish I'dda been there when he said that. I'dda reached over an' *slapped* that *bucket-head* bastard. Tellin' them damn lies!"

But there is more: Jake is most indignant when it comes to the open secret of the *structural deceit* at the foundation of the pugilistic economy, whereby *sponsored* fighters--those whose career is being "built" over the long term by picking suitable adversaries--consume the pugilistic capital of *contest* fighters, who participate in a short-term game without the protection of a promoter and must thus take on all comers.[21] He denounces thus this *built-in corruption of the craft by the industry,* of which the opponent is the living incarnation:

> It's a lot of *snakes on the ground*. Axtually, you got a lotta people who's uh, (very softly, almost whispering) boxin's really is a *scandal too* you know--it's more of *a business than it is a sport* now. You got people that's *set up* to win, know what I mean, like it's a *fixed sport*, in a sense--but then in some cases they have the challenger win an' then the champion be *dethroned.* But *overall*, it's really more of a business than anything… But like you gotta have a good manager to win, an' then they gotta *like* you also to win. So it's a sport where y'know, some people get lucky an' knock guys out. But for you to *continue to win*, somebody gotta care for you, put you in a *business area*.

The final deceit is when the promoters misrepresent Jake's lopsided record to the public, presenting him as a rising fighter with a winning tally--especially overseas where it is routinely announced as something like 42-and-13 or 35-and-10.[22] But Jake himself insists that his official record of 20 wins, 47 losses and one draw is "not real," by which he means that it does not reflect his pugilistic valor. In his mind, his record is somewhere around 42 victories and 10 defeats. Likewise, he maintains that he has never been knocked out ("not *cold*, no"); he only acts like it, he says, faking a KO when he grows despondent that a tough fight is going to be taken from him on a "hometown decision." He takes solace in the fact that he does not get cut often and has never suffered a serious injury in the ring, and he believes it is unlikely he will ("no I don't *never think that*: I'm too good to think that way"). Jake insists that his professional standing is best assessed by the fact that "I'mma *international* fighter, I been fightin' all over the world, I'm a world-class fighter." Most of his losses, he insists, were victories but he was "robbed" by the judges favoring the house fighter. He reluctantly recognizes that "they got me matched as *opponent* now," a tainted status that should not obviate recognition of his achievements: "When I go outa the game, *man*, they always say Jake The Snake Torrance was a *durable fighter*, that's

what everybody can say: durable fighter... not really *a great* fighter, but a fighter that was *very very capable* of bein' a fighter that's got *good skills*, that's what it is. But I got cheated outa lotta bad decisions."

The fundamental inequity arising from the predominance of industry over craft, boutique over technique, blood money over ring artistry, is reinforced by what Jake perceives as a *racial skew* taking three closely correlated forms. First, he avers that black fighters must win by knock-out lest their fight is stolen from them on points to placate the preference of the public for white and Latino fighters. Since Jake does not pack much punching power, he suffers from this structural disadvantage. Next, African Americans do not support African-American fighters because they lack ethnic solidarity and collective pride: "See black peoples, they got a tendency to *bring each other down*, see, *our race* is jealous of each other," and this jealousy undercuts careers and popularity in the squared circle. This is evident in the denial of succor from his family: appalled that his son would continue to fight while steadily losing, his mother put him out of her house two years earlier and told him not to return so long as he keeps on boxing. Last and relatedly, Jake sees the paucity of purses as an effect of race: "I think it's a *color thing* too 'cause, it's some fighters, like your [LW's] color will get more money *than a black person*, so everybody don't get treated the same." But then he acknowledges in the same sentence that white fighters get paid more because they draw better crowds, which takes us back to in-bred black jealousy: "You prob'ly get a lil' more 'cause your people *come behind* you," buy tickets for the show and press the judges to give you a favorable decision.[23]

In the end, Jake's is a world governed by the deadly confluence of deception, privilege, and chance. In his fatalistic vision, getting the right fights is like finding a job is like advancing in society: "It depends on who you know, some people get the breaks, some people don't: *some people win, some people lose*." When I ask him what accounts for the difference between his career and that of world champion Donald Curry, his great rival from their amateur days, he answers: "I guess he just got a better break than I did."[24] But Jake's vision is not delusional or paranoid; rather, it shines a murky light on the *cannibalistic architecture of the prizefighting economy.* This architecture does *deceive* its participants and public. It does grant *privilege* to the "protected fighter": it enables him to "eat" opponents, journeymen and bums to satiate his appetite for victories to be cashed in for fame and riches at the peak of the trade. The sponsored boxer accumulates pugilistic capital by consuming and eroding that of the contest boxer. And only *chance*, in the form of good fortune, allows a professional opponent to "shake up the world" and score an upset victory against a renowned "house fighter." But, and this is the catch of a caste-like social structure of exchange, this victory does not vault him into the ranks of protected fighters; it even demotes him in the parallel hierarchy of opponents since he is now seen by promoters as a more risky match to hire. Once an opponent, always an opponent.[25]

"When I found out I was a opponent"

I was 7-and-0. First fight I lost was to Louis Mateo. That was a close fight. Now, axtually I really *won* the fight, but they didn't wanna *give* it to me 'cause I was, you

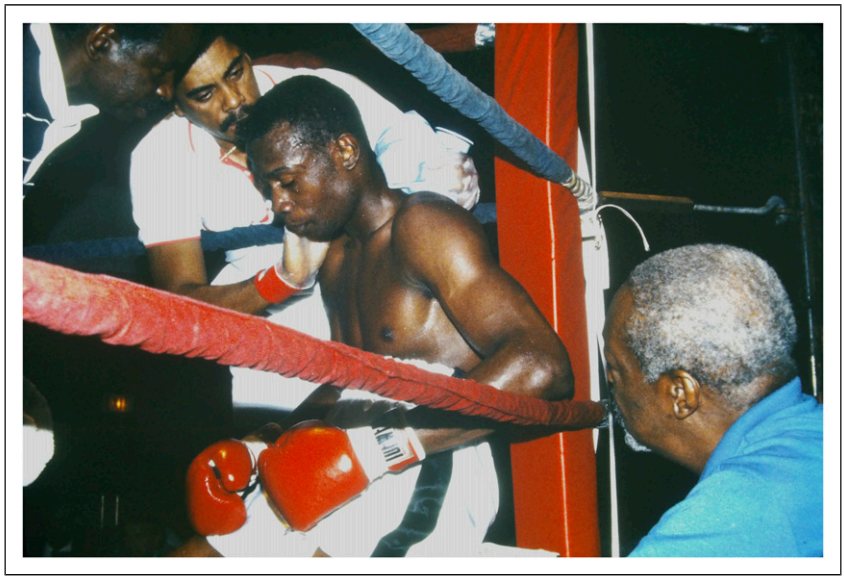
know, black and white--I mean peoples have a judgment of the *colors* of your skin--I mean like you gotta *dominate* (he punches one hand with the other), you know what I mean? A *black boxer* gotta be *awful good*--you gotta be knockin' guys out, you gotta be *real liketable*…. That was one bad decision, and then the second fight I lost was when I lost in Atlantic City, then I fought another guy in Nashville, he beat me in a close decision--*I beat him* but they didn't give me the *decision*…

(sullen) *They stopped me from runnin' the record up*, you know. [LW: Who stopped you?] I think just basically *the game itself*. They figure that, if Jake Valliance gonna be a winner, he gotta knock somebody out, *he black*, he gotta knock him out. An' they started cheatin' me, know what I mean? Because I could run a record up to like 15 and 0, then I could ax for some *big money*…

When I found out I was a opponent, I found out I was only gonna make the lil' fifteen and twenty-five hundred dollars [purses], (in a low voice) well I got *real* disappointed, man! That really (muttering under his breath) *pissed me off*, I couldn't get over five thousand dollars… When my record got *even*, that's when I got real disappointed. But see, they took a lotta decisions from me, they cheated me. See the thing is, I still feel like a *star anyway*, in certain different ways… I got the *talent* an' I'm *professional*, see what I'm sayin'?.. But I *felt*, okay, (surly) *opponent*? I feel comin' to town they have me as a opponent but I feel if I knock this guy out, I can win, so that's what I can go for: I'll *bust 'im up* real real bad, then they have no choice but to give it [the victory] to me."…

I didn't get a million (chuckling bitterly). I didn't get the luxury I's s'posed to have got. [LW: Do you have to explain why to people around you?] They ax me them things, ax me say, "when you gonna *get somethin'*? When you gonna win?" I say, "I dunno, man, I'm jus' hangin' in there right now." See since as boxer I have the talent, I feel that I could *box* a guy an' then get *paid*, an' then *put food on the table*, see what I'm sayin' (suddenly raising voice, as if in incantation) *without even doin' a lotta hard work*! So that's why I kept pursuin' in it, an' that's why I had over fifty fights.

"I got one more good year and that's it. 'Bout one more year, maybe two and that's it. It all depends on how my body feel because *physically* I'm in good shape, but I'm just gettin' too old, I wanna go get me a job, stop boxin'." Before he leaves the ring behind, Jake hopes against hope for the one "good payday" of ten to twenty thousand dollars that would give him a nest egg. He deserves this payday, he avers, because "I been around the fight game a long time"--as if remuneration was pegged on seniority--but he acknowledges that "it all depends on how the promoters feel" and that, given that his "record got messed up," it is unlikely that he would draw such money.[26] He consoles himself by insisting that he did make the fetish sum of one hundred grands if you tally up all his gains from the past dozen years.




Deer

Meanwhile Jake takes solace in the *special pride of the "opponent," which is to endure*: to last until the late rounds when he could fold up mid-fight; to make for a close contest when it could be a one-sided match; and, every once in a while, to upset a rising prospect (proving that one is better than a "trial horse") or defeat a contender caught on an off-night. "Only thing that kept me up is like, I know *I can fight*, I can *compete* with anybody in the field. What kept me up, see I knew I was a *sensational fighter*, but I guess I just didn't have that knockout punch to knock everybody out, but I was always right there till the tenth round and the twelfth round. I always put on a good show." The Gary fighter speaks of his career in the past tense but he will go on to labor between the ropes for another full decade instead of that "one more good year".

Jake's plans for when he hangs up his gloves are nebulous and no more realistic than his dim hope of a final good payday between the ropes: "Prob'ly get a factory job" in a region undergoing brutal deindustrialization and a city awash in mass layoffs; attend acting school to "work on my communication skills" despite his stutter ("I may do some acting down the line"); study business in college to prepare for "running a hotel-motel-restaurant" that he will never have the means of purchasing; or get hired as a stuntman in movies. So many occupations resting not on formal qualifications but on the mastery of a bodily trade. By continuing to box, Jake is simply relying on the one bankable asset he has, the ability to perform skilled controlled violence in the squared circle. "*I box because it's a payday*, it put somethin' in my pocket and add *more luxury to my life*, man… The bad part was I didn' get the money I shoulda gotten, I didn' get the *luxury* that I prob'ly shoulda got when I was comin' up in my twenties. I lost a lotta luxury." Truth is, living in the immediate present angling for a different past does not help Jake discern the future beyond the ring. He is taking it one month at a time: "Right now, it's *hard* for me to get a job 'cause everybody layin' off an' so I hafta go back to my *talent*: I gotta go back to (hammering the words) my *bread-an'-butter*. See boxin's *not all roses*".

In reconstructing and interpreting the making of Jake the professional opponent, we must resist the urge to introduce empirical consistency and to project scholastic clarity into what is *an objectively and subjectively turbid life and messy career*, in which opposites collide and collude, contradictions abound, and opacity reigns.[27] Material and symbolic relations in the pugilistic cosmos are constitutively murky and double-sided, informed by *passion* for the craft, on the one dimension, and *interest* in the industry, on the other. The "opponent" is the carnal materialization of their dynamic and contradictory interweaving and he attests to the gradual erosion of *thrill and skill*, which drive the early, rising, phase of his trajectory, by the power of *money and the payday*, which take over in the later, declining, phase. But all pugilistic action and transaction always operate in these two registers simultaneously, if with different and changing weights over time.

As the career of the opponent unfolds and he regresses to the status of a mere journeyman, the force of desire diminishes and what Marx called "the icy water of egotistical calculation" takes over. But, even near its end point, when economic interest takes over, there still remains a thin stream of *libido pugilistica* and a faint sense of *sacrality* that keep the professional opponent gloving up rather than turning to mundane means of making a living with his body. This is captured in Jake's two-sided view of whether he would want his son to box: "No, I just rather see 'im do somethin' else… But

then again I prob'ly would. [LW: Why something else?] 'Cause I think boxin's is so, too *treacherous*, man." But then again, he holds that boxing "helped me tremendously" in life; that, without prizefighting, "it would have been a disaster," and that, if he had known at the start what he now knows about the trade, no matter the heartache and suffering, he would still take it up.

About the photographs

The pictures, all by the author, chronicle the fight of Anthony "Ice" Ivory of the Woodlawn Boys Club (with a record of 7 victories for 1 defeat at the time) against Mario Olmedo (10-7–1) held at the Aragon Ballroom in Chicago's Uptown on 28 September 1990. Anthony won the ten-rounder by unanimous decision, outsmarting his opponent with his defensive prowess. He then went on to fight until 2006 as the leading "opponent" of Jack Cowen, Chicago's main matchmaker. Anthony was defense-minded and lacked punching power, which means that he was not a threat to his superior adversaries, but he had plenty of heart and he kept going and going. He fought nearly always out of town, including 43 bouts in 13 foreign countries, and racked up a record of 32 victories for 78 losses and 6 draws in 17 years in the squared circle. For more on Anthony's tribulations in and out of the ring, see Wacquant (2022a: 319–322). A fuller photo-ethnographic account of the workday world of the prizefighter is Wacquant (2022b).

Acknowledgements

I am thankful for the perspicacious reactions and suggestions about this text of Jenae Carpenter, Ékédi Mpondo-Dika, Chris Muller, and Victor Shammas. I also benefited from the queries and pointers of the three anonymous reviewers. All names, places and events are real, as per the wish of the participants to this study which took place in and around Chicago between August 1988 and November 1991 (with periodic field revisits during the ensuing decade and an analytic revisit in the winter of 2022 included in the expanded anniversary edition of *Body and Soul*).

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The field component of this research was funded by the Society of Fellows at Harvard University.

ORCID iD

Loïc Wacquant https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4997-0759

Notes

1. "The work of specific socialization tends to foster the transformation of the original libido, that is, of the socialized affects constituted in the domestic field, into one or another form of specific libido, especially through the transference of that libido onto agents or institutions belonging to the field [in question]" (Bourdieu 1997: 237).
2. On the fruitfulness of learning from extreme cases, see the indispensible article by Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research" (2006). Despite trying very hard, I was unable to locate Jake to learn what happened to him in and out of the ring during the two decades after his last fight. Two of his early bouts in 1983 can be viewed on Youtube, against Tony Suero (10-and 3) and Kevin Perry (11-and-4), both in Atlantic City, under the mispelled name Jake Vaillance.
3. For a concise genealogy and anatomy of habitus backing this perspective, see Wacquant (2016). For comparison, see Biagioli (1993) on scientific libido, Bourdieu (2014) on artistic libido, Suaud (1978) on religious libido, and Ollion (2022) on political libido, and the works cited in the call "For a Sociology of Flesh and Blood" (Wacquant, 2015).
4. I have edited the interview excerpts cited herein for clarity and legibility while being careful to not alter the tone and meaning of Jake's responses. The emphases in all the quotations are those of the locutor.
5. A superb account of migration, racial conflict, and black mobilization in postwar St. Louis is George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (1955).

6. The differentiation between "decent" and "street" orientations among the black (sub)proletariat in the hyperghetto is explored by Elijah Anderson in *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City* (1999), chapter 1.
7. On the relation of "symbiotic opposition" between the ghetto and the gym, and the role of boxing as a social shield against the temptations and dangers of the street, see Wacquant (2022a: 17–31, 37–57, and 2022b: 14–21).
8. I reconstructed the career of Jake and other boxers figuring in his pugilistic biography using the database compiled by the website BoxRec.com, which serves as the official registry of the American Association of Boxing Commissions. The database contains the detailed records of every professional fight held in the United States over the past 50 years, and bouts from around the world for the more recent period, including the name, alias, stance, height and weight of boxers, the result of their fights, their tally and that of their opponent at the time of the contest, and information on the venues, judges, referees, scores, and the full listing of the card on which each bout was featured.
9. The distinction between the "opponent" and the "journeyman" is not a hard and fast one. These two folk constructs overlap and sometimes merge. Observers of the boxing scene often confuse them and sometimes confuse both with the "bum," which is a category error.
10. When I relay to DeeDee that Jake admitted to using drugs *in the past*, the old coach snickers, "Oh, at one time, he don't have that no more, *really*?" implying that the Gary fighter had a continuing narcotics addiction.
11. DeeDee recounts a typical conversation before the bout: "'Jake, what you gonna do tonight?' I say, 'I sure would like to put about fifty bucks on it.' He says, 'Mister DeeDee, bet yer money.' He says, 'that's the way I'm gonna fight: I'm gonna give this fool a boxin' lesson, he ain't gonna touch me,' but you *couldn't trust him*. See, some nights Jake would fight, some nights he *won't fight*. Just t*he way his head is*."
12. This figure comes from interviews with all 50 professional boxers (33 blacks, 11 whites and 6 Latinos) active in the Greater Chicagoland in the summer of 1991.
13. A *warm-up fight* is an easy bout set to "keep a fighter busy" or to allow a boxer who just suffered a defeat to regain confidence and rebuild his record. It is typically slotted against a "journeyman" or even a "bum" to ensure a trouble-free victory. A *tune-up fight* is a match against an "opponent" chosen because his style (southpaw, stocky brawler, elusive counter-puncher, etc.) approximates that of an adversary the boxer is due to fight in the future; it offers the latter a chance to practice against that style in a real bout (rather than just in sparring).
14. Jake fought Van Horn twice in eight-rounders, at the Memorial Coliseum in Van Horne's hometown of Lexington, Kentucky, in 1988 and at Loew's Casino in Monte Carlo in 1990, and he lost both bouts on points. The first time Van Horne was 37-and-0 and Jake 17-and-24; by the second bout Van Horne had won an additional 8 matches while Jake had lost an additional 9 matches. The first contest was a "warm-up fight" for Van Horne to get ready to challenge for the world title that he would win by unanimous decision in Atlantic City five months later. After the first bout, Jake was also hired as a paid sparring partner at the training camp ran by Van Horn's father.
15. Both matchmakers are white, most of their recruits are black and Latino. See Wacquant (1998) for a analysis of the dynamic web of relations of competition and cooperation between matchmakers controlling regional markets and sharing foreign markets opportunities.

16. This practice, known as "double-dipping," is common at the lower end of the pugilistic trade, where boxers or their managers are in a position of supplicant toward the local matchmaker. For more on this point, see Wacquant (1998).
17. A stimulative analysis of the social structures of uncontrolled optimism is Karen Cerulo's *Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst* (2006).
18. Taylor's role about sparring partner work is similarly ambiguous: he benefits financially from his fighters going to training camps and he gambles that they will obtain undercard fights which will generate purses on which he will take his ten-percent cut.
19. Not having one's trainer and habitual cutman in the corner is a major disadvantage. The trainer knows his fighter's proclivities and abilities, he detects what he is doing right and wrong, and so he can best help adjust ring strategy and tactics from round to round. He also knows how to elicit the right emotions at the right time in his boxer. The cutman knows how the latter's face responds to punches and provides reassurance that any cut, welt, swelling, bleeding or other facial injury will be kept under control. But, by now, Jake has become inured to fighting without his personal corner: "It don't affect me, it's jus' somethin' that I *get paid* to do it." The key role of the trainer-cutman combo in the drama of the fight is documented by Fried (1993).
20. For example, when Jake travelled to Madrid for an eight-rounder against the Italian welterweight Romolo Casamonica (who was 28-2-and-2 at the time, while Jake was 18-and-47), on the undercard of a superbantam weight world title fight, he did not know his opponent was the national champion in his country. He flew to Madrid on his own, stayed in town only 4 days (which means he was badly jet-lagged on the evening of the bout), and hired two travelling American and English trainers in his corner. All of this for a purse of $1,500. Jake ensured that the Spanish promoter Diego Aleman would not hire him again soon when he won the fight on points in a major upset.
21. For an extended discussion of the bifurcation of boxing careers into "sponsored mobility" and "contest mobility" tracks, an analytic designation (and not a folk duo) borrowed from the sociology of educational stratification, see Wacquant (2022a: 346–357).
22. When I tell DeeDee that promoters overseas change Jake's to a winning record, the old coach exclaims: "They shoulda said 'here's a fool that don' know whether he goin' or comin'.' Then *some nights*, somewhere he'll get up a good fight. I dunno how he does it. Once in a while he come up with a good fight."
23. At this point Jake's trainer interjects to remind us of the iron law of commercial success: "If you put people in the house, then you get paid. If you come out there, you can't sell but three tickets, you're ain't gonna get nothin', you're not gonna get paid. *Jus' like any other business*. You gotta watch, though, a guy like Jack the Hammer, in Hammond: he'll *pack a house*, he'll sell two thousand dollars in tickets. They can sell five thousand dollars of tickets. So the promoter gotta pay him to sell tickets–it's a business!"
24. DeeDee is merciless in his berating of boxers who wail that they "didn't get the breaks." For him, any boxer with the raw talent and discipline will have some success if he "sacrifices" and shows "heart" in the ring. Moreover, a professional boxer should not be allowed to step into the ring if he will not show valor: "Sucker don't wanna fight, *keep his monkey ass at home*. The name of the game is *fight*. I give a guy, I can give *a loser* credit: he did his best, so he gits credit. But a sucker git in dere jus' to pick up a *few crumbs*, not enough money to wipe his butt with, yeah! Shiiit! Wouldn't give 'im *nothin*'!

25. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule but they are exceedingly rare (even among heavyweights, who always carry some punching power). Yet they are salient in the oral boxing lore and fighters are quick to invoke them as proof that it is possible to escape one's condition as an "opponent" (or journeyman). Even the "bums," at the bottom of the pugilistic hierarchy, believe and proclaim that they can rise above their pariah status.
26. Even though Jake finds that the article on him in *Sports Illustrated* was "bad" and left a sour taste in his mouth (he collaborated fully with its author, doing an interview, posing for pictures, allowing the journalist to follow him on a fight outing), he believes that being featured thus "nationally" worked in his favor by putting his name out there for promoters and matchmakers to know.
27. An urgent theoretical warning to that effect is Bourdieu (1990 and 1997: ch. 1).

References

Anderson E (1999) *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. New York: Norton.

Biagioli M (1993) *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu P (1990) The scholastic point of view. *Cultural Anthropology* 5(4): 380–391.

Bourdieu P (1997) *Méditations pascaliennes*. Paris: Seuil.

Bourdieu P (2014) *Manet, une révolution symbolique. Cours au Collège de France 1998-2000*. Paris: Seuil et Raisons d'agir Éditions.

Bourgois P (1995). *Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*. Second edition 2002. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cerulo KA (2006) *Never Saw it Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Contreras R (2013) *The Stickup Kids: Race, Drugs, Violence, and the American Dream*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Flyvbjerg B (2006) Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(2): 219–245.

Fried RK (1993) *Corner Men: Great Boxing Trainers*. New York: Da Capo.

Ginzburg C [1976] (1980) *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lipsitz G (1955) *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Lüdtke A (ed) (1995) *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ollion É (2022) *Les Candidats. Novices et professionnels en politique*. Paris: PUF.

Suaud C (1978) *La Vocation. Conversion et reconversion des prêtres ruraux*. Paris: Minuit.

Wacquant L (1998) A fleshpeddler at work: power, pain, and profit in the prizefighting economy. *Theory & Society* 27(1): 1–42.

Wacquant L (2015) For a sociology of flesh and blood. *Qualitative Sociology* 38(1): 1–11.

Wacquant L (2016) A concise genealogy and anatomy of habitus. *The Sociological Review* 64(1): 64–72.

Wacquant L (2022a) *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Expanded anniversary edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wacquant L (2022b) *Voyage au Pays des boxeurs*. Paris: La Découverte.

Wacquant L (2022c) Carnal concepts in action. In: Vandebroeck D (ed) *Talking Theory*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Westbrook DA (2008) *Navigators of the Contemporary: Why Ethnography Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Author Biography

Loïc Wacquant is professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, and Researcher at the Centre de sociologie européenne, Paris. His recent books include *The Invention of the Underclass: A Study in the Politics of Knowledge* (2022), *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (expanded anniversary edition, 2022), and *Voyage au pays des boxeurs* (2022), a historical photoethnography of his journey in the land of pug. He recently completed the field observation of prosecutors, public defenders, and judges at work in two counties of Northern California as basis for the study of "Fast-Food Justice: The Social Life of the County Criminal Court."