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Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer by Loic Wacquant

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This story of a heroic President battling evil Republicans probably would have been more effective if it were not for the Lewinsky affair. Because every reader knows that this plot twist is coming, the effect is to introduce significant elements of comedy into the story Clinton is trying to tell. Despite the fact that the memoir fails to mention Lewinski during the account of the 1995 government shutdown (Pp. 681-694), when the affair began, the reader knows that Clinton's destiny is to be undone by this most embarrassing of sexual trysts. The comedic impulse builds in intensity for the next hundred pages, as the protagonist pursues his goals in complete ignorance of his ultimate fate, until all is revealed during his deposition in the Paula Jones lawsuit (Pp. 773-774).

It is difficult to see how Clinton can continue the same narrative after Lewinski has entered the plot, since this most public of humiliations derailed his presidency and limited his political effectiveness in such a fundamental way. And it is unconvincing when he tries. Thus, when Clinton bemoans that "Finally, after years of dry holes, I had given them something to work with" (p. 776), it seems too self-serving. When he tries to blame the affair on his childhood need to keep secrets, the therapeutic language seems inauthentic – particularly when the putative quest for psychological self-understanding also includes an attempt "to figure out why my adversaries were so consumed with hatred." (p. 847) And when Clinton dispatches with Lewinski affair, to return to a final 100-page chronicle of policy achievements, the reader remembers that this is, after all, a *political* autobiography, and not a comedy. Unfortunately, if the *alazon's* self-deception continues even after his public humiliation, then the narrative tends to read as a tragic tale of hubris and lost opportunity. The reader does recognize the pathos in Bill Clinton's story, though perhaps not for the reasons he might have wished.

Reviewer: Ronald N. Jacobs, *University at Albany, State University of New York*

Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer

By Loic Wacquant

Oxford University Press, 2004. 274 pages. \$25 (cloth)

Over two decades ago in his seminal "Program for a Sociology of Sport," Pierre Bourdieu (1988 [1982]) identified the primary challenge confronting the enterprise. On the one hand, Bourdieu wrote, those who know the most about sport tend to lack the inclination or ability to appreciate (much less be critical of) its broader social connections and significance; on the other hand, those who possess the requisite skills to analyze its forms and social functions generally dismiss sport as unworthy of serious scientific investigation. Scholarly research and writing on sport has progressed a great deal in the last twenty years, but it is not until now, with the appearance of Loic Wacquant's dazzling ethnographic journey into the world of an inner-city Chicago boxing gym, that I would say for certain that Bourdieu's challenge has been answered. As serious about the sweet science of boxing as Wacquant is practiced in the craft of sociology, *Body and 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.

The book is divided into three parts, each having a distinctive purpose and style. The first and most extensive is "The Street and the Ring." Set in the context of Chicago's Southside, it is an attempt to make sense of the gym and the culture of boxing more generally. Wacquant's starting point and primary insight is that the discipline boxing requires stands in symbiotic relationship to the disorder and decline of the American ghetto – for inner-city young men of color, in short, the gym is "an island of order and virtue" (p. 17). These chapters

detail the many facets of the social logic of boxing – the psychological and sociological makeup of recruits; the daily dedication and high technique that training demands; the regimented diet; the control, mutual respect and tacit understandings necessary for actual fist-to-fist competition. Working at “the very edge of that which can be intellectually grasped and communicated” (p. 59), Wacquant demonstrates that “being” a boxer is a practical synthesis of thought and action, pain and pleasure, regimen and innovation, indeed body and soul. This analysis of the “pugilistic habitus” will be familiar to those who know Wacquant’s previous work, and his writing is eloquent and electric as always. But the way Wacquant uses the book form to weave together field notes, interview transcripts, and theoretical exegesis (not to mention dozens of photographs – most taken by Wacquant himself, some taken of him) endows his thinking with unprecedented depth and power and feeling.

This vision is given further depth and shape in the second and third parts of the book. The second is a day-in-the-life account of a promising young boxer from Wacquant’s gym preparing for a boxing “card” at a working-class tavern in the city. In minute detail, we follow Curtis Strong and his trainer Dee-Dee from the morning weigh-in to the post-fight festivities, meeting the various people who compose their world: the matchmakers and promoters, the training-partners and cut-men, state officials, fans, friends, and other hangers-on. Along the way, we observe the small talk and interplay that constitutes the regular daily life of boxers in the ghetto (and presumably other inner-city residents as well). These pages have a genuine humanity and literary quality about them, not to mention a dramatic tension that builds as we come to care about Curtis and wonder how his bout will go. Imaginatively conceived and brilliantly executed, *Body and Soul* takes us on the journey of inquiry and discovery that is ethnographic practice. Fittingly, the ethnographer himself takes center stage in the conclusion where “Busy Louie” recounts his first and last Golden Gloves fight. The chapter like the book is as much of an aesthetic as it is intellectual achievement. My only concern is that Wacquant’s ideas and methods will be taken to apply only to athletic pursuits like boxing when, in fact, the embodied logic of sporting practice that Wacquant describes could and perhaps should serve as a model for analyzing all manner of social phenomenon, as it did for Bourdieu or Norbert Elias before him.

Of course, Wacquant’s treatment will not satisfy every reader. For instance, those who felt the sting of his notorious critique of urban ethnography will almost certainly be vindicated to discover that *Body and Soul* does not provide a comprehensive portrait of inner-city life. But even if Wacquant set this (his original) goal aside in order to focus on the subculture of boxing, I daresay that his exhaustive, grounded approach provides a window onto ghetto culture that may draw in readers who ordinarily would not be interested in urban sociology. Other concerns will be more substantive. The masculinity and sexuality that pervade the boxing world Wacquant describes do not receive the same theoretical attention as other topics, and I personally would have liked to see more on the racialized cultural structure of boxing both in Chicago and as a sporting form more generally. (As a white guy who has done a bit of fieldwork among young African American men on the Southside, I also couldn’t help but wonder if Wacquant’s access and informants were as open and unfiltered and complete as he assumes). But these are not questions about the book so much as questions raised by the richness of the book, and we will probably see them more than answered in Wacquant’s planned sequel, “The Passion of the Pugilist.”

One day when I was sitting at my son’s football practice trying to figure out how to do justice to this extraordinary volume, another father, an African American construction worker and aspiring boxer, spied the book I held in my hands. Immediately skeptical, he asked me if “this guy” had ever been in a boxing ring. In response, I read him a few passages from Wacquant’s account of his first official sparring session (Pp. 71-77). “Oh yeah,” he nodded, “this guy *is* a boxer, he really gets it. That’s just what it is like. I’ve got to buy that book.” I don’t

know if my boxer friend ever followed through on that plan. (I actually cautioned him that the descriptions and pictures he liked so much were accompanied by fairly dense theory and technical language.) Combined with the myriad scholarly contributions highlighted above, however, I can think of no better recommendation and endorsement.

Reference:

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1988 [1982]. "Program for a Sociology of Sport." *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5: 153-161.

Reviewer: Douglas Hartmann, *University of Minnesota, Department of Sociology*

The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency

By Martha Albertson Fineman

The New Press, 2004. 387 pages. \$25.95 (cloth), \$18.95 (paper)

In an era when "the autonomy myth" is proliferating – most recently, through the promotion of "personal or private accounts" for Social Security – this is a timely, important, and ambitious book. Fineman is concerned about our collective failure to take responsibility for those in need and their caretakers, because of a simplistic grasp of autonomy that undermines substantive equality. Although "family" is missing from the title, this book pivots on a comprehensive redefinition of family that would require structural realignments among family, state, and market. Toward that end she not only critiques current ideologies and arrangements, but also proposes a "theory of dependency." As she states in the introduction: "the theory of dependency I set forth develops a claim of 'right' or entitlement to support and accommodation from the state and its institutions on the part of caretakers – those who care for dependents." (p. xv)

She illustrates how our current ideologies and institutions thwart our ability to provide substantive equality to people, partly because current law and social policy delegate care to the "marital couple" family. As Fineman explains, our practice has been to privatize our collective responsibility for care: given changes in both social and family structures, however, the married couple family is decreasingly able to provide it such care. This paradigm has been justified by a concept of autonomy, which denies how dependency is a universal and inevitable condition and overlooks how we all benefit from the caretaking labor of others. In spite of our illusions to the contrary, Fineman argues that we are all, at some point, either subject to dependency or the derivative dependency that caretaking entails. Thus, we need an alternative paradigm. Her theory of dependency compels a redefinition of family from the 'marital couple' form to its 'caretaking' function and alters our understanding of what individuals and institutions owe to one another in a society.

The book is organized in four parts – with Part One and Part Four being most significant in this reader's view. The first two chapters provide a critical analysis of "foundational myths" that inform our conception of society in the United States, including our notions of autonomy, equality and "private and public" spheres. She reveals how these notions have regularly obscured the universal fact of human dependence and prevented remedies for injustice. Here, she anticipates key changes in reinterpreting these core concepts, and anticipates the significant institutional overhaul required to attain substantive rather than formal equality. This part of the book is truly compelling – particularly her argument concerning the "social debt" we owe to caretakers, without whom our society would collapse.