

## Book Review

### Towards a Carnal Sociology, Towards a Carnal Urban Studies?

Michael J. Lorr

Wacquant, Loic. 2006. *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wacquant, a skinny French wannabe boxer, delivers an ethnographic account of Chicago's ghetto by describing the sport of boxing and analyzing it as a mirror image of the street. Wacquant uses this mirror imagery similar to the way his mentor Pierre Bourdieu analyzes the *chiasmatic* nature of social structures. In other words, Wacquant outlines how the disciplined practice of boxing reflects life on the street of the ghetto. Remember that mirror images are inverted—simply put boxing is order, street-life is disorder. Furthermore, Wacquant describes boxing and his own experience learning boxing in a neighborhood gym as the development of a *pugilistic habitus*. Wacquant again utilizes a term, *habitus*, from mentor Pierre Bourdieu to distinguish how the logic of practice is imbued in actual human bodies. Inspired by how bodies learn boxing in a Chicago ghetto gym, Wacquant calls for a carnal sociology. This type of sociology illuminates how general policies and discourse become inscribed in human bodies.

*Body & Soul* is written in three parts. Wacquant uses the first to explain how one trains in the gym to become a boxer and how the *pugilistic habitus* is imbibed and embodied as a form of pedagogy. Part two is about observing an entire fight day from the night before weigh-in until the celebrations and ride home after the fight. This second section also explains various important supporting-role fight jobs, like cut-man and matchmaker. The third and final part of *Body & Soul* is about Wacquant's experience boxing in a Golden Glove Tournament. At this point in the book the reader is as invested in Wacquant's amateur boxing status as he is. After having vicariously experienced the

training and fighting, readers of this book become amateur students of boxing and carnal sociology.

Wacquant's methodology is particularly interesting considering the dominant academic discourse focuses on and very definitely privileges quantitative studies over qualitative studies. It also favors the deductive side of the scientific method while glossing over the inductive side. *Body & Soul* is an upper cut against this lopsided condition in the academy. The intent of Wacquant's method is to focus on how macro and microstructures come together. In other words, using a qualitative, inductive method, carnal sociology asks the researcher to constantly be aware of how the individual body is affected by social structures. For Wacquant, it is his skinny French body, learning from literally punching and being punched by the social structure of the gym and the larger Chicago ghetto.

While it would be hard to argue that Wacquant's carnal sociology resolves the tensions between qualitative and quantitative methods, *Body & Soul* is an accessible, enjoyable read for those interested in the connection between the structure of the Chicago ghetto and the pursuit of the manly art, boxing. And at the same time Wacquant's work does point in some important directions, mainly refocusing the social sciences on the connections between personal troubles and social issues and micro and macro structures and how they may be analyzed by understanding how society is inscribed in and on the human body. Finally, *Body & Soul* leaves the reader wondering whether carnal sociology is just a jab at auto-ethnography or if it is intended as a knockout punch leading to a significant "turn-to-body" in the social sciences; and if so, how would this "carnal" method be applied to future urban studies?